A study of successful principal leadership: Moving from success to sustainability.

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Abstract

As part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) the researcher revisited successful school principals five years after the initial study. This paper reports on three of these principals in Victoria, Australia and examines the extent to which they were able to maintain both the success of their school and their success as a leader. It focuses particularly on their attitudes to change, how this influences their leadership practice, and ultimately its contribution to improving school performance. A multiple perspective case study methodology was used. Data were collected through individual or group interviews the principal, members of the school board, president, senior staff, teachers, support staff, students and parents. The researcher attended several school functions, examined school documents and shadowed each of the principals for four days. The study found that sustainability of success was an outcome of the principals’ personal qualities, their attitude to change and the strategic interventions they made in response to external and internal environmental influences. These principals demonstrated different attitudes to change both in their capacity to continue to improve the school and to promote exemplary development. As leaders of change, the three principals were characterised as restorer-builder, strategic-builder, and visionary-driver. Whilst all principals were found to have continued to lead successful schools, their attitudes to change were found to influence the pathway of success.
Statement of original authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signature
Preface

Sections of Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of this thesis have appeared in the following published works and presentations:


Presentations at International Conferences


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Finally I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, my father, the late Jim O’Donoghue, and my mother, Sal O’Donoghue, who selflessly gave me opportunities for education.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGS</td>
<td>Associated Grammar Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITSL</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austudy</td>
<td>Financial support for students aged 16-24 who are full time students and not in receipt of student allowance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Central Business District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census day</td>
<td>Date on which school numbers are finalised and funding calculated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Casual Relief Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEECD</td>
<td>Department of Education and Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Department</td>
<td>State education authority. Formerly DEECD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELC</td>
<td>Early Learning Centre (children 3-4 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Education Maintenance Allowance (financial support for families in need)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>A year may students take between finishing school and starting university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>Index of Community, Social Educational Advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSPP</td>
<td>International Successful School Principalship Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISV</td>
<td>Independent Schools Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBOTE</td>
<td>Language Background other than English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOLSO</td>
<td>Leadership for Organisational Learning and Improved Student Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSG</td>
<td>Like School Group - a classification of schools based on ICSEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RiSE</td>
<td>Re-imagining Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>Special Development School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>VCAL</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (an alternative to VCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIT</td>
<td>Victorian Institute of Teaching</td>
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<td>VPAC</td>
<td>Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The thesis explores the impact of principal leadership on sustaining school performance. This chapter outlines the background to the study and its significance. The research questions are identified, an outline of the methodology used, including the limitations and delimitations, and a summary of the chapters.

1.2 Significance of the study

School leadership has been the focus of a large number of empirical studies (e.g. Leithwood & Reihl, 2003, Marzano, Waters & McNulty 2005, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins 2008). The influence of school leadership on a variety of dependent variables, such as achievement orientation, school culture, job satisfaction and other teacher variables has been analysed (e.g. Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2008, Hattie, 2009). Few authors to date have focused on sustainability of success, either of principals or of schools.

This research is significant in three areas.

1. The issue of sustainability in performance has attracted the attention of researchers recently. It is one of the emerging ‘hot ideas’ in educational leadership. The area of sustainable educational leadership needs far more research, and the findings from this study have the potential to make an important contribution.

2. The study has implication for school leadership preparation and support, leading to better quality applicants for principal positions, and principals who are better able to sustain leadership and school performance.

3. There are few longitudinal studies on leadership, or on sustained success in leadership, identified in Australia or in other developed countries.

1.3 Background to the study

The study builds on the knowledge base established in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) that identified the characteristics, processes and effects of successful
school principalship in over 15 countries. The Australian research (Gurr & Drysdale, 2003; Gurr & Drysdale, 2007; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006) found that principals made a significant contribution to school success. The successful schools were characterised by not only high academic performance, but also an excellent reputation in the community, high staff morale, positive student attitudes to the school, good parent opinion, and high community involvement. Successful principals were those who were able to influence events through their strategic change initiatives (interventions), personal qualities, strong relationships with stakeholders, and an appropriate leadership style. To see if the schools were able to sustain their success over time, this researcher revisited three principals who were still in their schools five years after the initial research. The same methodology as the original research was used (multi-perspective case studies based on multiple interviews, and document search) with an addition of collecting observational data through shadowing the principal for four days and attending a number of school events. This is the first time all three of the principals have been reported on together. This study reports on sustainability in school performance and concludes with a key finding that while personal qualities remained very important, what influenced the level of sustainability of success was the principals’ attitude to change and their capacity to strategically intervene in response to external and internal influences.

1.4 Research Question

‘How can successful school principals maintain success and improve school performance over time?’

The focus of this thesis was to investigate:

1. How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance.

2. The personal qualities, characteristics and practices of the principal that contributed to the success.

1.5 Methodology

A qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate methodology to investigate the research questions and to provide an opportunity to evaluate the evidence offered by a group of schools that were responding to a changing environment. The qualitative approach was based on the protocols established for the International Successful School Principals Project.
This study focused on the following issues— the changes and challenges facing the school, the principals’ leadership, the school’s performance over time and practices adopted by the principals and the school. However, the design was flexible enough to allow new sources of information to be collected. Thus, the design was both fixed and emergent. This had the disadvantage of making comparison between schools more challenging, but better reflected the poor state of prior knowledge about sustainability and leadership. Information was collected by:

1. Individual or group semi-structured interviews with key people who represented different levels of responsibility within the school: policy level (members of the school board); management level (principal/assistant principals); professional level (staff), students and parents.

2. Collection of relevant documents including policy manuals, strategic plans, annual review reports, prospectus’, newsletters, websites, curriculum documents, and student performance data.

3. Observation of the life of the school and the work of the principal through attending relevant school functions and shadowing the principal for four days.

Analysis followed the qualitative methodology espoused by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994), incorporating ‘data reduction’, ‘data display’ and ‘conclusions: drawing/verifying’ with appropriate trustworthiness procedures built into the design. The interactive model of data analysis as described in Miles and Huberman (1994:12) was used to examine the evidence provided and explore what was happening in the schools in relation to the research questions.

Each school has been presented as a discrete study, set out in a consistent manner to allow detailed analysis of the results.

1.6 Summary of the chapters

Chapter One covers the significance and background of the thesis. The study is placed in the context of a rapidly changing and more competitive environment where school principals are reacting to the pressure to maintain or improve school performance.

Chapter Two discusses the related theory, literature and research on leadership and sustainability of school performance. The definition of sustainability and the literature of sustaining school performance are outlined.
Chapter Three reiterates the purpose of the study and the research questions. A qualitative methodology for the gathering and analysis of data from the case study schools is described in detail. This includes the design of the interview questions, the selection of schools and participants. Approaches to the use of data matrices are described. Issues of reliability and validity using the concept of trustworthiness are addressed and limitations and delimitations of this study are presented.

Chapters Four to Six report each of three case studies. The format of each chapter includes key elements of the school profile, context and a summary of previous research findings on the characteristics of successful principal leadership. New data are reported in terms of each of the key research questions examining successful school leadership, sustainability and leadership characteristics and interventions. A summary of the leadership approach, using an emergent framework identified in the literature, is presented for each case study.

In Chapter Seven the three case studies are compared and major the themes discussed. The conceptual framework and the themes that emerged from the findings provide the basis for comparison, and discussion between the schools. Implications of the study are explored. The key findings are related to the literature for confirmation and contrast. Recommendations for future research are outlined. A model of leadership of sustainability is outlined and applied to the research findings. The chapter concludes with a summary of the thesis findings.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of historical and current literature on leadership and sustainability. It is framed by the following areas which provide a lens for exploring the topics and sections for discussion:

2.2 The International Successful School Principalship Project

2.3 A historical overview of leadership theories

2.4 The three big ideas underpinning contemporary leadership
    2.4.1 Instructional
    2.4.2 Transformational
    2.4.3 Distributed

2.5 Successful school leadership

2.6 Sustainability
    2.6.1 A broad overview
    2.6.2 Sustainability of school success
    2.6.3 Sustainability of leader success
    2.6.4 Sustainability of educational change
    2.6.5 Sustainability of student learning
    2.6.6 Sustainability through building staff capacity
    2.6.7 Sustainability of culture
    2.6.8 Conclusion.

2.2 International Successful School Principalship Project

This thesis is located within a larger international study, that of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) which began in 2001. The study was stimulated by the success of an earlier study by Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford (2000). Initially seven countries: Australia, United States of America, China, Denmark, Norway, England and Sweden conducted multiple perspective case studies on the leadership of principals in successful schools. Findings from the initial case studies were published in a special issue of the Journal of Educational Administration (2005), in an edited book (Day and Leithwood, 2007) and in a number of individual papers. Another edited book
(Ylimaki and Jacobson, 2011) provided further exploration of these case studies by reflecting on key themes which had emerged. These themes were:

- sustaining passionate commitment and personal accountability;
- maintaining moral purpose and managing tensions and dilemmas;
- being ‘other centred’ and focusing on learning and development;
- making emotional and rational investment; and
- emphasising the personal and the functional aspects. These two aspects should be interdependent in that the functional is the means by which the personal expresses itself.

Other findings include the importance of instructional leadership, organisational learning and culturally responsive practices. While principals in this study had different starting points, they were similar in that they all had a strong vision. Other findings from the project suggested successful leadership requires a combination of cognitive and emotional understandings, including a passion for people and education and a clear set of values and standards.

Phase two of the project, saw the researchers revisit the original principals five years later to see to what extent personal and school success had been sustained. Findings from some of these studies were reported in a third book (Moos, Johansson and Day, 2011). This study adds to the study of two Australian schools reported in (Drysdale, Goode and Gurr, 2009).

The concept of leadership was core to this thesis. The investigation attempted to identify the leadership characteristics (values, qualities and behaviours) of the school principals that impacted on, or contributed to the schools’ ability to sustain its performance over time. In this study the researcher returned to investigate the leadership of three principals who were initially identified as successful principals, that is, they were recognised as having a major impact on the success of their school, to determine if, and how, they were able to maintain or improve the school’s performance over time.

### 2.3 A historical overview of leadership theories

In this section the concept of controversy and theories of leadership will be discussed. The concept of leadership itself and the usefulness and relevance of the term have been challenged by many academics. Despite attempts to define leadership over many decades, academics remain divided and a single definition of leadership remains elusive, notwithstanding the myriad of definitions that have been offered in the literature of the past five decades. Bass and Bass (2008) noted that the definition
of leadership used in a particular study of leadership depended on the purpose of the study. Leadership as a concept has dissolved into small and discrete meanings, as found by Burns (1978) whose seminal study identified 130 definitions. Stogdill (1974) noted there were as many definitions of leadership as there were people who have attempted to define it and, as with words such as democracy, love and peace, leadership can have different meanings for different people (Stogdill, 1974:7). Burns (1978:2) stated that ‘Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.’ and that the concept of leadership has exercised the imagination for the past 2000 years. Early conceptions of leadership gave the name leader to those who ‘dominate and command’ (Tead, 1935:20). Burns agreed that leadership was mainly defined as the ‘ruler’ (Burns, 1978:2).

Burns (1978:425) defined leadership as ‘the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict in order to realise goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers’.

Stogdill’s (1974) research on trait studies noted that researchers had identified some common characteristics of leaders such as initiative, social dominance and persistence but he found that there was no common list of specific leadership traits that distinguished leaders from followers. He concluded, "A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities, and goals of the followers" (Stogdill, 1948:64). In 1974, Stogdill completed a follow-up survey of traits from 1948 to 1970 and compared the results. This research found that personality traits appeared to differentiate leaders from followers and successful from unsuccessful leaders. He argued that there was not one single characteristic or trait but a combination of traits that can produce personality patterns that can be advantageous to the person as a leader (Stogdill, 1974).

Burns (1978) differentiated between leaders and followers suggesting that while we know much about leaders, we do not know as much about leadership. By defining leadership in terms of a person’s status within an organisation, i.e., formal authority, he distinguished leaders from followers defining leadership as an aspect of power but also a process within itself (Burns, 1978). Because leadership is a form of power, he argued, to understand leadership, we need to understand power and that there are two types of power: position power which is derived from rank or office and personal power which is power leaders are ascribed by followers because of their likeability or competence. Leadership over
human beings, Burns (1978:18) maintained, is exercised ‘when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition of conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers’.

Northouse (2010) also defines power as personal power, arguing that power is the capacity or potential to influence and that influence through personal power, is often ascribed to transforming leaders. Burns (1978) posited that leadership is an aspect of power, whether it is personal or positional, because its central function is achieving purpose. He identified two basic types of leadership: the transactional and the transforming (Burns, 1978). While the relationships between most leaders and followers are transactional, it is transforming leadership which is more potent because transforming leaders look for potential in their followers. ‘Transforming leaders induce followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations …of both leaders and followers’ (Burns, 1978:19).

In this way leaders ‘engage the full person of the follower (and) the result is a relationship of mutual stimulation...that converts followers into leaders’ (Burns, 1978:4). ‘They raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality ...and their purposes become fused’ (Burns, 1978:20). Because of this, transforming leadership becomes moral; it transforms by raising the level of human conduct. This, he argues, is the power of leadership. Northouse (2010) agrees. He believes that leaders have an ethical or moral responsibility to attend to the needs and concerns of followers.

Among the many definitions of leadership, the notion of leadership as a process of social influence is present in nearly every scholarly definition (e.g., Yukl, 2010). One of the early attempts to define leadership as influence was Tead (1935:20) who defined it as ‘the activity of influencing people to cooperate toward some goal which they come to find desirable’ Similarly, Chemers (2001:376) defined leadership as ‘a process of social influence through which an individual enlists and mobilizes the aid of others in the attainment of a collective goal’. Northouse (2010), too, believes that without influence, leadership does not exist. He agrees that leadership is ‘a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal’ (Northouse, 2010:3).

Hallinger and Heck (1996a) argue that definitions of leadership have evolved over time. Leithwood and Duke (1999) agree that as a complex human phenomena, leadership appears to be difficult to define. Mulford (2008:iv) implies this with his critique of ‘adjectival’ leadership suggesting that what the leadership adjectives do is offer a monocular view of leadership, by taking just one slice of what
leaders do and implying that this is the whole of leadership. Mulford offers a relatively broad sweep
of the issues which face school leaders today and tomorrow. Leadership, he maintains, is all about
behaviour, action and practice. He repeatedly calls for a ‘broadening of what counts for good
schooling’ (Mulford 2008:iv) and wants to see a wider range of measures adopted to encompass
excellence and equity, cognitive and non-cognitive and personal and social skills. His research suggests
that leaders who make a difference to the pupils they serve invariably attend to all of these skill areas,
but their schools are only evaluated on a narrow set of cognitive learning outcome measures.

While there is a range of adjectival leadership: ‘democratic’ leadership, ‘strategic’ leadership,
‘breakthrough’ leadership, and so on, Harris, Moos, Moller, Robertson and Spillane (2007) suggest
that leadership does not automatically take on a new meaning simply when a new adjective precedes
the term. There remains a predominant view that successful leadership is linked with context and that
the ‘right’ leadership style, if found, practised and implemented, in a strong, unequivocal manner will
make all the difference (Harris et al., 2007). Nevertheless, there have been three main leadership
approaches in education in recent times, including the now traditional instructional and
transformational orientations (Leithwood and Duke, 1999) and more recent developments in
distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008).

2.4 The three big ideas underpinning contemporary leadership

Over the last three decades, debate over what is the most suitable leadership role for school leaders
has been dominated by the three conceptual models of instructional, transformational and distributed
leadership.

2.4.1 Instructional

Hallinger (2005) has arguably done more than any other researcher since the early 1980s to put
instructional leadership on the map, and he describes it as a passing fancy that refuses to go away. In
the 1980s instructional leadership emerged with the effective schools movement as principals were
urged to focus on curriculum and instruction/pedagogy (Barth, 1986; Cuban, 1988; Hallinger &
Murphy, 1985a; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982 ). Initially instructional leadership was regarded as
‘top down’ with the principal as the instructional leader (Copland, 2001; Lambert, 2002) but Hallinger’s
research (2003B, 2005) suggests that a more participatory model has evolved in distributed
leadership. While not new, Gronn (2008:45) believes that instructional leadership is a ‘concept whose
time has come’. 
Hallinger and Heck’s (1996a) initial work sought to demonstrate that principals could be instructional leaders by aligning school structures with the school’s mission and in that way, they could influence student outcomes. Hallinger’s (2003b) later research confirmed that by shaping the purpose of the school a principal’s role was influential in terms of influencing school effectiveness and student achievement. His reviews of the literature in the area suggest that increasingly principals see themselves as accountable for instructional leadership, regardless of whether or not they feel competent to perform it. The findings by Day and Sammon (2013) noted instructional or pedagogical leaders focused on improving and monitoring the provision of a quality teaching and learning program. To do this, the leader needs to establish clear educational goals; consider staffing and the allocation of staff, evaluate teaching and learning, provide teaching support, monitor school activity and buffer staff from excessive distractions to their core work. Moos, et al. (2011:9) in their findings from the ISSPP study, reported:

In the first phase of the project, an important feature of the leadership for student success was the close attention which principals placed on developing, monitoring and feeding back on teachers’ practice in classrooms, where the core business of schooling takes place. This is often called instructional leadership … (they) found it to be only one part of a combination of leadership strategies employed by principals … principals set and continuously raised standards and expectations and produced classroom and whole school improvement plans.

Hallinger (2003b) proposed a broad concept of instructional leadership with three dimensions of instructional leadership and within these dimensions, ten functions. They are:

1. **Defining a school’s mission**, comprised of the two functions of:
   a. framing the school’s goals
   b. communicating the school’s goals

2. **Managing the instructional program**, comprising of the three functions of:
   a. supervising and evaluating instruction
   b. coordinating curriculum
   c. monitoring student progress

3. **Promoting a positive school learning climate**, comprising the five functions of:
   a. protecting instructional time
   b. promoting professional development
   c. maintaining high visibility
   d. providing incentives for teachers
   e. developing high expectations and standards, and providing incentives for learning
He reported that researchers such as Mortimore (1993), and Purkey and Smith (1984), found that instructional leaders were ‘culture builders’ in that they fostered high expectations and standards for both staff and students. Instructional leaders influenced the quality of school outcomes through the alignment of school structures and culture, especially a climate of continuous improvement and high expectations and by modelling rather than through direct supervision and evaluation of teaching. On the basis of her review of the quantitative research literature between 1985 and 2006, Robinson (2007) suggests that the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes is considerably greater than that of transformational leadership. Her research found five dimensions of instructional leadership which had a particularly powerful impact on students. These were:

1. establishing goals and expectations
2. strategic resourcing
3. planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
4. promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
5. ensuring an orderly and supportive environment

While it is unrealistic that principals should have expertise in all areas of teaching and learning, particularly at the secondary level, Spillane and Louis (2005) contend that principals should have a knowledge of what is necessary for teachers to teach well, therefore they should have an understanding of pedagogy, learning and broad content knowledge if they are able to effectively monitor instruction and support teacher development.

Reporting on an independent study into school leadership in England and Wales by PricewaterhouseCoopers, (Hallinger 2007) suggests that instructional leadership seeks to influence first-order variables in the change process, conditions that directly impact the quality of instruction delivered to students in classrooms. To the extent that teachers perceive principals’ instructional leadership behaviours to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement and willingness to innovate. In this sense, instructional leadership can itself be transformational. Hallinger (2007) argued that the substantive similarities between instructional and transformational leadership are more significant than the differences. Both models focus on:

- creating a shared sense of purpose in the school;
- developing a climate of high expectations, innovation and improvement;
- providing staff intellectual stimulation and continuous development; and
- the leader acting as a model.
On the other hand, the empirical research of Robinson (2007) suggested that there were more differences than similarities between instructional and transformational leadership. Her findings suggest the importance of an instructional leader had a more of a direct impact on student learning; that the more the leader focused on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater the impact of student outcomes and she identified five dimensions of leadership (see above) had a moderate to large effect size on student learning. Transformational leaders, by comparison have more of an indirect effect. In the annual lecture she, (Robinson, 2013), gave in London she argued that many leaders are deemed successful because they have a reputation of being innovative or introducing 21st century approaches to learning but this did not make them instructional leaders.

Hallinger (2003b) sought to differentiate between instructional and transformational leadership suggesting that instructional leadership focused on a top down approach to school improvement whereas transformational leadership had more of a bottom up focus; that instructional leadership was a first order change whereas transformational aimed to engender second order change, and finally that instructional leadership was more managerial or transactional whereas transformational focused on building relationships with staff and creating communities where change was more likely to be sustained.

Finally, Hallinger’s (2010) review of the conceptual and empirical development of the models of instructional and transformational leadership concluded that definitions of these models continue to evolve in response to the changing needs of schools within a global context. The common themes that the research has shown is that instructional leaders have a clear vision and generate shared goals (Bambung and Andrews, 1990; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt, 1997); they work with teachers on curriculum and instruction (Cuban, 1984; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985); they establish high expectations for students and teachers (Leithwood et al., 1997; Mortimore, 1993; Purkey & Smith, 1983); they build a positive school climate or culture (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1998); and they providing intellectual stimulation through professional development (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1997).
Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) and Southworth (2002) suggest a link between instructional and transformational leadership as they both focus explicitly on how educational leadership is exercised to bring about improved student learning outcomes. In an article on transformational leadership Leithwood and Jantzi (2005:31) contend that transformational approaches to leadership differ in that they emphasize emotions and values and aim to build staff capacity and personal commitment to organisational goals with a belief that such practices will, in turn, lead to higher levels of commitment and productivity. Transformational leadership focuses on developing an organisation’s capacity to innovate to support the development of changed practices which will lead to changes in teaching and learning. Transformational leadership, Hallinger (2003c), argues can also be seen to be distributed because it involves developing a shared vision and commitment to change.

The roots of transformational leadership are often attributed to Burn’s (1978) Pulitzer-winning book, *Leadership*. Burns argued that leadership was ascribed to leaders who engaged with others to raise intrinsic motivation, rather than the more common view of the day which involved an exchange relationship (transactional leadership) based on followers’ individual, typically monetary, extrinsic interests. Transformational leadership was first presented as a theory in leadership literature by Bass (1997) and Howell and Avolio (1993). Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b) subsequently conducted extensive research using a transformational model they had developed. Bass and Steidlmeier’s, (1998) formulation and survey-based measure of transformational leadership became the focus of attention over several decades. For Bass (1997), transformational leadership consisted of the four dimensions of charisma, inspirational motivation, individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation. While he acknowledged that charismatic leaders have great power and influence, he believed there was far more to transformational leadership. While it may be a necessary ingredient, by itself, charisma could not account for the transformational process. Building on this historical generic leadership base, writers such as Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003, 2005 and Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000, 2005, have done the most to conceptualise and collect research evidence on transformational leadership in schools. Leithwood’s early conceptualisation in the area (Leithwood, et al., 1999) identified six dimensions of transformational leadership: vision and goals; culture; structure; intellectual stimulation; individual support and performance expectation. Later Leithwood and Riehl, (2003:41) redesigned the work and identified four major dimensions of transformational leadership in schools: setting directions; developing people; building collaborative cultures and staffing the programs. Each of these dimensions includes three or four more specific sets of practices:
1. Setting directions
   – Building a shared vision
   – Fostering acceptance of group goals
   – High performance expectations
2. Understanding and developing people
   – Providing individual support and consideration
   – Intellectual stimulation
   – Providing an appropriate model
   – Redesigning the organisation
3. Redesigning the organisation and building collaborative cultures
   – Restructuring
   – Building productive relationships with families and communities
   – Connecting the school to its wider environment
   – Redesigning the organisation
4. Managing the instructional program
   – Staffing the program
   – Providing instructional support
   – Monitoring school activity
   – Buffering staff from distractions to their work.

Following on from their previous empirical studies (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; 1999; 2000) Leithwood’s and Jantzi’s (2005:38) suggested that transformational leadership in schools is unique in that it does not depend on the particular leader’s characteristics or charismatic practices model; it assumes distribution of practices across a number of roles; focuses on both building staff capacity and motivating them; creates opportunities for collaborative work among staff and problem solves to enable this to happen; acknowledges interdependence between leadership and management roles and provides opportunities for parents and community members as co-producers of student learning. Research around the apparent conceptual dichotomy of transactional and transformational leadership has, according to Hallinger (2003c:338), determined that ‘effective leadership requires both transformational and transactional elements, that is, both leadership and management’.

Reporting on findings from the ISSPP (Gurr, 2015:3) suggested that ‘there is not a model that dominates the work of …leaders …they are not transformational or instructional but show elements of both’. Caldwell’s (2007) conference paper identified a concern with the complexity of leadership in strengthening and aligning resources to achieve school transformation. He found that intellectual
(knowledge and skill), social (partnerships and networks), spiritual (moral purpose and coherence), and financial attributes (capital resources) were required for transformation to occur, and that these forms of capital needed to be aligned with each other.

Barnett and McCormick (2004) conducted interviews with principals and 11 teachers from schools where the principal had been perceived by teachers to exhibit the transformational leadership characteristics of individual concern and vision. The findings reinforce the relative importance of principals beginning their leadership by building relationships and showing individual concern, as opposed to starting with trying to build vision for the school. Successful school leaders will move their focus from the operational to the people agenda, to first develop community with, and leadership in, others (Barnett & McCormick, 2003: 68).

Just as transactional leaders tend use strategies which focus on extrinsic rewards and personal power, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) argue that transformational leaders appeal to the personal goals and values of their colleagues within the organisation and that it is the collective interests and goals and values of the organisation which are the focus. This helps to reduce teacher stress and build teacher efficacy.

### 2.4.3 Distributed

Boldren’s (2011) review of the theory and research on distributed leadership concluded that the term ‘distributed leadership’ is used loosely and interchangeably with shared leadership, collective leadership, collaborative leadership with its usage often varying between countries and sectors. Harris (2013a:141) suggests that the concept of distributed leadership has caused ‘much controversy, angst and debate’. Whatever name it is given it is a model of leadership which helps address the challenges faced by principals today (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, 2006).

Concepts such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership have emerged with school restructuring but the notion of distributed leadership is much older. Gronn (2008:45) believes that distributed leadership is simply a concept whose time has come. He believes it has always been part of the work of leaders and managers and cites examples of distributed leadership arising out of a need to achieve ‘a workable balance between central control and local discretion’. While Gibbs first used the term in 1954, Benne and Sheats (1948:41) had written earlier that ideally ‘the concept of leadership ...is that of a multilaterally shared responsibility’. Gibb
(1968b:94) suggested that leadership was ‘best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group’. Katz and Kahn (1978:571) suggested that leadership was more likely to be effective when it was distributed or shared because it was likely to strengthen commitment to decisions and to improve the quality of decision making. Schein (1988) also concluded that an effective group is one where functions are distributed.

Interpretations as to exactly what distributed leadership is or looks like vary. Harris (2013:12) broadly defined distributed leadership as ‘leadership that is shared within, between and across organisations’. Schmoker (2011), for example, maintains that there is no blueprint for developing a model of distributed leadership. Bennett, Wise and Woods (2003:2) suggest rather than distributed leadership being a technique or practice, it is simply another way ‘of thinking about leadership’ which is characterised as a ‘form of collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working together. From their research, they (Bennett, Wise & Woods in Mulford, 2008:44) found seven principal leadership attributes and practices which they summarised as ‘dimensions of distributed leadership. These were:

1. seeing leadership as an outcome of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships rather than individual action,
2. trust and openness as a basis of interpersonal relationships,
3. ‘letting go’ by senior staff rather than simply delegating tasks,
4. extending the boundaries of leadership, not just within the teaching community but to other communities within the school, creating a team culture throughout the school,
5. not mandating leadership into existence but growing it,
6. recognising expertise rather than formal position as the basis of leadership roles within groups; and
7. seeing leadership as fluid rather than located in specific formal roles or positions, blurring the distinction between ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’.

Harris and Lambert (2003:16), taking a constructivist position towards distributed leadership, see it as a reciprocal process that enables individuals to ‘construct knowledge and meaning together’. Dufour and Fullan (2013) also argue for the importance of distributing leadership saying that sustaining improvement requires an integrated approach with numerous leaders at every level who can support and learn from each other. They note that not only does this help share the workload but it builds the capacity of teachers and leaders and provides for succession planning. Brown and
Lauder (2001) use the term, ‘collective intelligence’ to describe the practice of teachers working together. Its strength, according to Gronn (2008) is that distributed leadership lays the ground for ‘voice’ and in doing so has widened the influence of employees or participants.

Effective distributed leadership is dependent on trust. Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) identified five key factors of trust:

1. values and attitudes: that people cared for their students and would work hard for their benefit particularly if allowed to pursue objectives they were committed to;
2. a disposition to trust, having experience of the benefits derived from previous trusting relationships;
3. demonstrating trustworthiness and this being recognised by others;
4. repeated acts of trust: enabling the increasing distribution of leadership roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, and the broadening of stakeholder participation;
5. building and reinforcing individual relational and organisation trust through interactions, structures and strategies that demonstrated consistency in values and vision and resulted in success.

The strength of this concept in education is also in its potential for understanding new models of school level decision making. While Lambert (1998) considers leadership to often be synonymous with a person in authority she believes school leadership needs to be a broad concept separated from a person, a role or a set of behaviours. It is not delegated leadership. Engaging many people in leadership activity is distributed leadership in action, according to Lambert (2002), and when we equate leadership and leader, we are reverting to the trait theory of leadership (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Lord, DeVader & Alliger, 1986; Mann 1959; Stogdill, 1948, 1974; and Zaccaro, Kemp & Bader, 2004) that leaders are born and that there are five major leadership traits: intelligence, self confidence, determination, integrity and socialability. Lambert’s (1998:8) concept of leadership is based on five key assumptions: (1) that leadership and leader are not the same; (2) that leadership is about learning that leads to constructive change; (3) that everyone has the potential and the right to lead; (4) that leadership is a shared endeavour with a shared purpose; and (5) that leadership requires a redistribution of power and authority. Lambert (2002:37) contends that

the days of the lone instructional leader are over. We can no longer believe the one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for the entire school without the substantial participation of other educators.

Day et al. (2009:14) believe that this distribution of leadership or authority usually depends on ‘quite intentional intervention on the part of those in formal authority’. Day et al. (2009) agree with Lambert
that distributed leadership does not remove the need for strong individuals but these individuals are inspirational, rather than charismatic; they get others to believe in what they can achieve. Lambert (2002) sees an overlap between distributed and transformational leadership.

Southworth (2007) agrees that leadership should be distributed. Reporting on the work of the English National College of School Leadership on leadership succession planning he outlined ways in which capacity for leadership might be built arguing strongly for learning communities as they have, he believes, the potential to enhance the talent of new leaders. Furthermore he posits, challenging the traditional perception of headship to more of a concept of shared leadership may in turn make the role of headship more desirable and hence support leadership succession. Hargreaves (2005) equates considered continuity through succession planning as a moral obligation of leaders, that they should look to build success not for their own glory but build success that will endure long after they have left the school.

This sits comfortably with the concept used by Spillane et al. (2001:13) that leadership is a ‘practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation’. Furthermore, Spillane and Diamond (2007) argue that one of the core elements of distributed leadership is the emphasis on practice, rather than traditional leadership as a role or responsibility. The emphasis should be on interactions rather than actions.

The themes of vision and values in developing distributed leadership are explored through a number of case studies in Blankstein, Houston and Cole’s (2009) book ‘Building Sustainable Leadership Capacity’. Louise Stoll and David Jackson (2009) in ‘Liberating Leadership Potential: Design for Leadership Growth’, like Lambert (2002), maintain that the challenges of change today are too great for any one leader, but that challenges can be solved through learning communities. A study by Pascal (2009:162) exploring how success can be sustained found that when leadership was distributed, job description and responsibility ‘gave way to blurred lines between roles,…(and) interdependence and mutual accountability to other team members …became the norm’.

Regardless of the term used, these writers all agree that distributed leadership is important in today’s schools. As to its impact on improving student outcomes there is no agreement between writers.

Work by Silins and Mulford (2002), for example, concluded that student outcomes were more likely to improve when leadership sources were distributed and teachers empowered in areas of importance and expertise to them, while Elmore (2000) described distributed leadership as the ‘glue’ which
improves instruction. The impact of distributing leadership was found to be a contributing factor in the sustaining of success in schools which were part of the longitudinal ISSPP:

One key element in and across the case studies was the association between the capacity of the organisation to engage in change for improvement and the sharing of responsibilities and accountabilities among all staff (Moos, et al., 2011:224).

Distributed leadership was assumed. Principals in this study agreed that the success of their school was due to the leadership of many and they genuinely valued the contribution of teachers, non teaching staff, parents and students.

In-depth case studies in five successful Tasmanian and nine successful Victorian schools reported by Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2005) not only highlight the importance and contribution of the principal to quality education but found factors that needed to be taken into consideration in successful school principalship included distributed leadership.

Gurr (2015) points out that an important and consistent finding of the ISSPP research is that in terms of the conception of leadership, no one model dominates the work of these leaders. Successful leaders show elements of distributed, transformational and instructional leadership and although they may not be ‘hands on’ instructional leaders, they are great educational leaders because they have a focus on improving curriculum practices, pedagogy and assessment and work with other leaders to influence teacher practice. These leaders genuinely value the contribution of others, be they teachers, parents or students and this was an important component of their capacity to sustain success.

Other research, too, supports the belief that distributed leadership does have a positive impact on student learning outcomes. Harris (2009) identified a number of studies (e.g. Graetz, 2000; Iandoli and Zollo, 2008; Stoll and Louis, 2007) which indicated a positive relationship between distributed leadership and improved school performance.

In a later study, Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) building on the findings from the Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project in Philadelphia in 2004, posited the belief that this project was successful because it was supported by leadership coaching, the development of school wide professional learning communities and routines which focused on the needs of the schools, in this case instructional
improvement. Building the capacity and capability of leaders in the schools through a program of rigorous intervention culminated in a positive outcome.

A number of other studies, (Harris & Muijs, 2004; Hulpia & Devos, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; and Silins & Mulford, 2002) indicate a positive relationship between distributed leadership and improved school performance but the effect was indirect more than direct. Research by Day et al. (2009) also pointed to a more direct effect, concluding that a positive outcome of distributed leadership was improved staff morale which impacted positively on student behaviour and student learning.

While Schmoker (2011) believes that there is no blue print for developing a model of distributed leadership, he does argue that to be successful, it must be supported by an infrastructure, hence an indirect effect. He does argue that this infrastructure should focus on learning, not only on what is taught and how it is taught, but that the infrastructure can provide assurance that teaching is purposeful and authentic. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2009b:1) suggest that distributing leadership per se is not necessarily beneficial. What is important is how it is distributed so that student outcomes benefit. They, (Leithwood et al., 2009c), believe that at present it would be unrealistic to define a significant relationship between distributed leadership and performance outcomes.

While Mayrowetz (2008:24) found there was ‘no strong link between distributed leadership...and school improvement and leadership development’, supporting earlier work by York-Barr and Duke, (2004) who had also concluded there was little evidence of direct impact on student learning outcomes, most writers would agree that there is a relationship between distributed leadership and student outcomes and it remains a practical concept (Hargreaves, 2016; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2016; Harris 2011; Harris 2013). However, it will remain the subject of further research and Harris (2016:144) argues for more evidence on the actual practice of distributed leadership suggesting that while current empirical evidence is encouraging, it is not conclusive. In an earlier study Harris (2013 a) challenges the proposition that distributed leadership is inherently good or automatically leads to improved outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2009), too, gathered empirical data which confirmed that distributed leadership becomes a force for positive organisational change only under the right conditions. It is about how it is shared, how it is enacted and how it is received. Hargreaves and Fink (2009) agree arguing that under the wrong conditions distributed leadership can simply be a mode of communication for delivering top down policies and practices.
Successful school leaders do not use one model of leadership but rather employ aspects of all three: instructional, transformational and distributed.

2.5 Successful School Leadership

Discussion around successful leadership is often linked to discussion between leadership and management. Chester Barnard (1948) inferred that leadership implies critical experience rather than routine practice and argued that the apparatus of administration is overestimated compared with the importance of leadership. This theme was extended when Halpin (1969:308) noted the difference between leadership and administration and suggested:

...far too many principals allow their responsibilities to become obscured by trivia, with the result that they abdicate their leadership role and allow themselves to degenerate into mere functionaries. Routine and perfunctory activities have a specious attractiveness because they often allay anxieties that are inherent in the principal's leadership role. But we must avoid the mistake of confusing sheer routine activity with the productivity and creativity required for effective leadership.

Kotter (1990) argues that leader and managers are different. Leaders set direction, align people and motivate and inspire, whereas managers plan and budget, organise and staff, control and problem solve. Leadership, he maintains, is about promoting change while management is about preserving the status quo.

Other writers take a different view. (Bass, 1990:383) argued that the concepts of leadership and management overlap, but they are not the same:

Leaders manage and managers lead, but the two activities are not synonymous.... Management functions can potentially provide leadership; leadership activities can contribute to managing. Nevertheless, some managers do not lead, and some leaders do not manage.

Bennis (1997) reasoned that management and leadership were significantly different although both were important: managers administer while leaders innovate. Leaders are interested in direction, vision, goals, objectives, effectiveness and purpose while managers are interested in efficiency, both day-to-day and short-term.

Spillane, Camburn and Pareja (2007:105) found from their studies on principals at work that in fact ‘leadership and management happen in tandem and are often intertwined’. Day and Sammons (2013:11) made a distinction between leadership and management by defining different foci. They identified ‘leading concerns’, such as vision, strategy, transformation, people, the end and doing the
right thing, and ‘managing concerns’ such as implementation, operational issues, transactions, means rather than ends, and systems.

In defining leadership Selznick (1957) acknowledges the impact of leadership, both direct and indirect. Leadership, he maintains, is a kind of work done to meet the needs of a social situation; it is not equivalent to office-holding, high prestige or authority or decision making. He looks at leadership from a different perspective, referring to the ‘the default of leadership’, ie distinguishing leadership from its presence to its absence, that is, knowing know when it is missing. Fullan (2001) suggests that the absence of effective leadership relegates a school to, at best, a mediocre performance.

In terms of school improvement, there is consistency in the literature that leadership makes a critical difference (Hargreaves, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Beare, 2006; Harris, 2008; Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Mazano et al., 2005; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003a; Leithwood, 1994). Successful leaders have a clear moral purpose to improve student learning outcomes and opportunities, strong interpersonal skills, an understanding of organisational change and taking others on the journey of change, and the courage to challenge the status quo.

Selected empirical studies of research on transformational leadership by Leithwood, et al. (2006) found that principals were central to school improvement and second only to classroom teachers in their influence upon student outcomes. Hallinger’s (2010) research found that most writers (eg Hallinger, 1989; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1998; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003) agreed that the effect of instructional or educational leadership was indirect because it was mediated by other people, by events and by organisational and cultural factors. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) agreed that leadership was mainly indirect because it was essentially a process of influence, of educational or instructional leaders influencing others to achieve the organisation’s goals. Hattie (2009), too agrees that in schools, leaders have more of an indirect influence on student achievement through their creation of the learning environment and culture, rather than a direct influence on learning. The work of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006:5) suggested that while school leaders could have some direct effect through, for example, recruitment and building staff capacity, ‘the strongest influences were on providing supporting conditions that impacted on staff motivation, commitment and beliefs’.

Successful school leadership is defined by collaboration but time and professional isolation can be major barriers to collaborative endeavours. One time dimension is the number of years change
requires to be bedded down in a school before active leadership can be readily implemented. Dinham’s conference paper (2007:37) involved his research examining teams in 38 New South Wales schools that achieved outstanding educational outcomes in Years 7 to 10. He found that ‘the turning-around and lifting-up processes can take around six to seven years to accomplish’. He found the larger the school, the more challenging it was for the leader. Leaders in larger schools often had fewer opportunities for relationship building or shared problem solving. While one leadership style or approach may work well for some leaders, in practice most adopt a range of leadership styles. Successful leaders adapt and adopt their leadership practice to meet the changing needs of circumstances in which they find themselves. As schools develop and change, different leadership approaches will inevitably be required and different sources of leadership will be needed so that the development work keeps moving. Any single one-size-fits-all or adjectival approach to leadership, or checklists of leadership attributes, is superficially attractive but will limit, restrict and distort leadership behaviour in ways not conducive to school development and improvement (Dinham 2007).

Day and Sammons (2013) completed a review of international literature on successful leadership. They concluded that it is a combination of instructional/pedagogical and transformational strategies that is most beneficial in ensuring school success. They identified nine characteristics of successful leadership, including Leithwood and Riehl’s (2003) four dimensions. Their key characteristics were:

1. defining vision, goals and direction;
2. improving conditions for learning and teaching;
3. redesigning the organisation to align roles and responsibilities;
4. enhancing teaching and learning;
5. redesigning and enriching the curriculum;
6. enhancing teacher quality (and building succession planning);
7. building relationships in the school community;
8. building relationships out of the school community; and
9. placing an emphasis on common values.

(Day and Sammons 2013:2)

Their research found that leadership operates indirectly to promote student learning outcomes by supporting and enhancing conditions that directly impact on teachers and their work and that successful school leaders create a positive school culture and a proactive mindset.

Despite the apparent singularity of much of the literature, in practice proponents of instructional, transformational and distributed have, over time, moved well away from the exclusivity of the one-
size-fits-all, charismatic, heroic model of school leadership. While in the ISSPP research, there is some evidence of heroic leadership in the way successful principals are prepared to challenge the status quo and fight for the best opportunities for their students, it is a heroic leadership which is inclusive. Successful principals do not act alone. They realise that leading a school successfully requires collaboration (Day and Leithwood, 2007). The literature now incorporates an expanded understanding of leadership to include aspects of the context, of antecedent conditions, the school mission and culture, and also a reinforcing structure and instructional program. For example, Hallinger (2007) calls for an integrative model of educational leadership that links leadership to the needs of the school context and focuses on the role of social context and socio-cultural factors on achievement motivation.

Evidence from the ISSPP and Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO, Mulford and Silins 2003, 2007) research projects show that there are three major, sequential and aligned elements of practice in leadership for improving student learning. The first element relates to how people are communicated with and treated. It is about community. Success is more likely to be an outcome when people act rather than react; are empowered, involved in decision making through a transparent, facilitative and supportive structure; and are trusted, respected, encouraged and valued. The second element concerns the development of a community of professionals. A community of professionals involves shared norms and values, including valuing difference and diversity, a focus on implementation and continuous enhancement of learning for all students, de-privatisation of practice, collaboration and critical reflective dialogue especially that based on performance data. The final element relates to the presence of a capacity for change, learning and innovation. This closely relates to the second element, the community of professional learners.

Mulford (2007) argued that to improve student learning, these elements remain the same. The transitioning between them is best facilitated by an ongoing, optimistic, caring leadership. Research (eg Moos, et al. 2011; Duignan and Gurr, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004; Fullan, 2003a, 2003b; Hallinger and Heck, 1998;) confirms that quality school leadership is a critical element in the creation of successful schools as successful school leadership impacts on students’ academic and social outcomes. Leithwood and Riehl (2003:7) confirm the importance of leadership in improving student learning outcomes arguing that leadership is second only to teaching in terms of impact on student learning because leaders ‘mobilise and work with others to articulate and achieve shared intentions.’ Moos, et al., (2011:6) reporting on the findings of the ISSPP described the influence of principals through school improvement ‘...and thus
(on) student learning and ...through the sustained application of their values, intra and interpersonal qualities, (and) individual, relational and whole school strategies with staff (and) community’.

Context also matters. Mulford and Silins (2003) found that socio economic status, the home education environment and school size have interactive effects on principal leadership, school performance and student achievement.

School leaders need to be contextually literate. Through the ISSPP research, Drysdale and Gurr (2011) and Gurr (2014) found that successful school leaders are contextually sensitive, however, they are less constrained by context than are less successful principals, and seem able to work within and across contextual constraints (Gurr, 2014). These leaders have a knowledge of different models of leading and are able therefore to adapt to changing environmental conditions without disadvantaging their organisations. The ways in which principals apply leadership practices, not the practices themselves, and how they demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work are the factors that enable them to be successful (Leithwood et al., 2006).

A context involving rapid advances in science and technology, increased globalisation, changes in demography including the nature of work, and pressures on the environment argues for educational leaders achieving balances between and/or choosing between competing forces, a broadening of what counts for good schooling and broadening the ways schools are organised and run. Choices between competing forces make the most sense when they foster stability in the form of a school’s collective capacity to learn for change, to be independent rather than dependent, a community rather than individualistic, and heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011) found that successful school leadership was context sensitive but not context driven. Successful leaders were able to fine tune their responses to the context and culture to optimise school success. Day and Schmidt (2007:68) commented that successful principals were not confined by the contexts in which they work. They do not comply, subvert or overtly oppose. Rather they actively mediate and moderate their set of core values and practices which transcend narrowly conceived improvement agendas.

The importance of context is not new. Bossert, et al. (1982:38) found no single style of management seems appropriate for all schools...principals must find the style and structures most suited to their...local situation...studies of effective schools...suggest that certain principal behaviours have different effects in different organisational settings.
The work of McKinsey and Company in *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep getting Better* (Mourshed, et al., 2010) found that school systems that improved and continued to do so, all appeared to ‘adopt a similar set of interventions…appropriate to their stage of the journey’, and that while context was important ultimately it ‘is secondary to getting the fundamentals right’ (Mourshed, 2010:11). These fundamentals are identifying where the school is currently at; what interventions are needed to move to the next stage and adapting the interventions to the context.

Relationship skills were found to be embedded in the leadership dimensions of all the contemporary conceptual models. The importance of relationships in successful school leadership was confirmed in the experiences of Boris-Schacter (2007) and Dinham (2007) in their conference papers. Drawing on his own school leadership research and the parenting research of others, Dinham argued the need for two fundamental dimensions in relationships – *responsiveness*, meaning warmth and supportiveness, and *demandingness* or high expectations and structural capacity.

Leithwood, et al., (2006b) found that successful leaders are not charismatic in the traditional sense; however, they possess a number of common traits (for example flexibility, openness, fairness), strong relationships are fundamental and their work is informed and driven by strong, clearly articulated moral and ethical values which are shared by their colleagues.

Gurr and Day (2014) provide a summary of significant findings from the 13 years of research and this provides an appropriate reflection on the significant work of the ISSPP and what is known about successful school leaders. In summary, successful school leaders:

- have high expectations of all
- employ multiple conceptions of leadership and utilise a core set of practices focused on setting direction, developing people, leading change and improving teaching and learning
- model leadership that is both heroic and inclusive
- foster collaboration and collective endeavour
- acknowledge and embrace their symbolic role
- display integrity, trust and transparency
- are people centred
- focus their efforts on the development of others are able to lead in challenging contexts and view challenges as obstacles to overcome rather than problems that are insurmountable
- develop a range of appropriate personal qualities, with appropriate core values and beliefs articulated and lived (such as a belief that all can learn)
Much is known about what successful school leadership is, and these findings are supported by, for example, the work of Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu and Brown (2010) exploring headteachers in England, Dinham and Rowe’s (2009) Australian research on middle-level school leaders, Mulford and Silins’ (2011) Australian organizational learning leadership model, and Robinson, et al.’s (2009) review of quantitative research linking school leadership to student outcomes. There is also a small but robust literature on the leadership of turnaround schools (e.g. Murphy and Meyers, 2008; Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010) that emphasises the importance of principal leadership and change over time, and research on leading schools in challenging contexts (e.g. Leithwood and Steinbach, 2003) that highlights the need to connect with and influence family educational culture and social capital to achieve extraordinary results.

Successful leaders set up processes to enable their schools to function effectively. They understand the difference between leadership and management and are able to balance these because they set direction, understand and develop people, redesign their organisations to build collaborative cultures and manage the instructional program (Leithwood and Riehl 2003). They lead effectively to the degree that they can influence. They demonstrate strong relation building skills and they are driven by strong moral and ethical values which underpin their vision.

2.6 Sustainability

The term sustainability is used for so many different purposes that it can be applied to almost anything and everything. We talk about environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, socio-political sustainability, and corporate sustainability, personal sustainability as examples. In this study, sustainability of school success and of leadership was the focus.

2.6.1 A broad overview

In the organisational and management theory literature the notion of sustainability has mostly been associated with organisational change. For decades the focus has been on aspects of change such as organisational transformational (Dunphy, 1981), cultural change (Kanter, 1983; Peters and Waterman, 1982), organisational renewal (Pascale, 1990; Waterman, 1987); organisational reengineering (Hammer, 1996; Pappas, 1996) strategic change (Ansoff, 1965; Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Mintzberg and Quinn, 1988) leading change (Collins, 2001; Hamel, 2002), and personal change (Covey, 2004).
Although the term *sustainability* is not always used explicitly, the concept is implicit in all of these studies.

The underlying assumption of change management is that organisations will somehow respond to changes in the environment in order to survive, adapt or grow. Whether the responses are reactive or pre-emptive, the major question is ‘Can the change be fully implemented and then maintained?’ Robbins, Waters-March, Cacioppe, and Millett (1994) note that surveys indicate that between 66 – 80 percent of change efforts fail to be fully implemented or remain.

Over the past thirty years there has been a considerable body of literature on change management. The focus has been on initiating, implementing and maintaining change. The notion of sustainability has been embedded in the literature whether it is to deal with general problems with change (Fullan, 1982; Sarason, 1972), teacher resistance to change (Datnow, 2000; Gitlin and Margonis, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin and Hall, 1987; Huberman, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989), large scale district change (Elmore and Burney, 1997); system level change (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, 1998); and change at the national level (Whitty, Power, and Halpin, 1998). The major issue implicitly or explicitly associated with all the change initiatives is ‘How can it last?’ (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998).

### 2.6.2 Sustainability of school success

In 2011, Moos, Johansson and Day edited a book ‘How Principals Sustain Success over Time’ recording the findings from six countries and eight educational systems over a period of five or more years. They found that the values, qualities, skills and knowledge that these principals held and applied had enabled them to achieve success and to sustain it. Of importance, too, was that these principals continued their own professional learning. Additionally, the schools they led remained successful because they were able to influence teacher practice and students’ learning and achievement through practices such as emotional understanding, distribution of influence through the use of teams, utilising both transformational and instructional practices and managing external accountability expectations. These principals who had sustained school success viewed obstacles as challenges rather than insurmountable problems and constantly sought to improve the learning environment. They were driven to provide the best educational environment they could for all students.

In times of increased accountability and an emphasis on school improvement and improved student outcomes, Hargreaves (2003) and Elmore (2000) believe sustained change is more likely to result from
longer term investments, such as collaboration, professional learning and creating communities of practice rather than restructuring. Change is more likely to come from cultural change rather than structural change.

The work of Harris and Lambert (2003) reiterates that school improvement rests on a number of assumptions: that schools have the capability to improve themselves; that school improvement involves cultural change; that there are school-level and classroom-level conditions for change and that school improvement is concerned with building greater capacity for change. Furthermore, their studies found that fundamental to sustaining school improvement and success is the building of trusting environments and good relationships.

Jacobson (2011), reporting on schools in the US as part of the ISSPP, found that direction setting, developing people and redesigning the organization were practices common to successful principals in all contexts, including those in challenging, high-poverty schools, although how they manifested themselves was different. He cites the importance of distributed teacher leadership and professional self-renewal as processes central to sustaining success, and, in at least one US case, a change in organizational governance was necessary to allow these processes to continue over time.

In another study of a high need, low performing school, sustained success for students was found to be an outcome of practices and people (Reeves, 2007). By initiating practices such as school wide dedication and consistency of practices, with ‘sacred time’ for learning, ie ‘quarantined’ time for Literacy, and also for teacher collaboration, ie., for teachers to meet to focus on the analysis of data, student achievement, content and teaching strategies, this school was able to build emotional confidence through a lived belief that all students can thrive. Furthermore, as Jacobson’s (2011) research found, although there were changes in staff, success was sustained because of succession had been planned planning and the school appointed hard working professional people.

Leithwood, Bauer and Riedlinger (2007) used their research on an innovative principal development and support program (the Greater New Orleans School Leadership) to provide guidelines for developing and sustaining principal leadership. Guidelines included building a community of leaders, that is distributing leadership and responsibility, and using inspiring leadership to recruit new leaders. Hargreaves (2005) believes that leadership succession must be planned if school success is to be sustained. Using the interrelationship of continuity and planning, Hargreaves (2005:180) suggests that successful succession planning requires better planning than at present, longer tenures or grooming
of good successors (Hargreaves, 2005: 180). He argues that ‘sustainable leadership captures, develops and retains deep pools of leaders of learning in all our systems and schools. (Hargreaves, 2005:177).

Fullan and Sharratt (2007) offer four propositions that they believe drive success and sustain it in schools. Included in these propositions to maintain continuous student improvement is the relationship between the school and the system. They, (Fullan and Sharratt, 2007:7) argue that ‘Sustainability is a two way street’. They also raise another issue, that of the challenge of sustainability when district or state leadership changes or when leadership within a school changes. Sustainability, long term, is supported by building the capacity of others in the school to continue to lead the change. Hopkins (2007) focuses on system level change and sustainability with four drivers for sustained improvement described: personalised learning, professionalised teacher networks, accountability and intelligent accountability. He argues for the importance of social justice, of using our most capable leaders to ‘help deliver a ... system in which every child has the opportunity to achieve to their full potential (Hopkins, 2007:173). Deal (2007) takes a different position and argues that education has a remarkable capacity for sustaining the status quo. The downside of succession planning can be accepting the status quo rather than challenging it so that improvement is continuous and practices are evaluated within the changing contexts.

Findings from the ISSPP (Moos, Johansson & Day, 2011:195) suggested several dimensions to principals’ leadership which helped sustain school success. These included school stability, personal experiences including leadership preparation, a set of values and principles which guided their actions, a love of children, education and learning, and strong support or mentoring experiences. Schools in this study were found to sustain success not only because of the principals’ values, qualities, skills and knowledge but because these principals were able to influence teachers’ teaching and students’ learning. Relationships were found to be a key factor in sustaining success, both relationships within the organisation and beyond. These successful principals were prepared to restructure and re-culture their organisations in response to changing political and policy environments by shifting the focus from leaders to leadership and diverse forms of distributed leadership with more focus on relations and communities (Moos, et al., 2011:224).

While Leithwood and Riehl’s (2003) four leadership dimensions of setting direction, developing people, developing the school and improving teaching and learning were evident in the practices of these successful principals, their personal commitment, their experience and their community engagement were crucial in their ability to sustain success over time.
The notion of sustainability has also been applied to educational leadership by a number of other writers including Fullan (2005) Fullan and Sharratt (2007) and Hargreaves and Fink (2003, 2006). To maintain and extend gains and at the same time go deeper into more fundamental reform in the education system as a whole, Fullan (2005) argues the need for sustainable leadership, or what he calls ‘system thinkers in action’. These are leaders who work intensively in their own schools and at the same time connect with, and participate in, the ‘bigger picture’ of the system and its context. Changing schools and school systems requires leaders who have experience in linking to other parts of the system. The principal acting just as an instructional leader in a school is now too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the reforms. Fullan (2005) asserts that sustainability is the capacity of an education system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement in ways consistent with deep values of human purpose. He identifies the eight elements of sustainability as follows:

1. A commitment to raising the bar and closing the gap of student achievement, treating people with respect and oriented to improving the environment, including other schools.
2. Commitment to changing context at all levels.
4. New vertical relationships that are co-dependent, encompassing both capacity building and accountability, especially through self-evaluation.
5. Deep learning through exchange of good ideas and collaborative cultures of inquiry.
7. Cyclical energising (because the set of strategies that brings initial success may not be the ones to take us to higher levels).
8. A long lever of leadership to put in place the seven previous elements simultaneously, and have them feeding/working on each other.

Fullan and Sharratt (2007) use their work on a district-wide literacy reform to argue for the importance of sustaining leadership as a continuous force for improvement. Hargreaves and Fink (2006), too, link sustainability and sustainable leadership together. They argue that ‘sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership’ (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:1). They suggest that educators should explore the lessons from sustainable companies in the business world such as exemplified by the research by Collins and Porras (2002) and lament over the un-sustainability of a raft of educational reforms. Furthermore, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) cite the core components of sustainable improvements and leadership from around the world as reducing the excess of standard testing, becoming less punitive toward school underperformance, restoring educational diversity, working harder to attract and retain high-quality teachers, and putting a premium on leadership in visible
initiatives that support and give status to leadership and to all leaders in education throughout their careers.

They suggest that sustainability is based on seven principles and that how we relate to people is similar to how we relate to the planet. Their seven principles of sustainability are *depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness and conservation*. Furthermore they argue the first three, are the key dimensions of sustainability. Sustainable leadership preserves, protects and promotes deep and broad learning but within a relationship of care and therefore a moral purpose. They argue, too, that sustainable leadership lasts because it preserves and advances the most valuable aspect of learning and life not only over time but also from one leader to the next. They also contend that ‘sustainability is a meal, not a menu. You can’t pick and choose. All the principles fit together’ (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:251).

For success to be sustainable it must matter, last, spread, do no harm and actively improve the environment, promote cohesive diversity, develop resources, particularly human resources and honour and learn from the past to create a better future. (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:18-20) Furthermore they argue that these principles are supported by five actions: *activism, vigilance, patience, transparency and design* (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:256). Starratt (2005:70) adds the dimension of school success being sustained by a leader who is ethical, who ‘engages the hearts and souls of his teachers and students as well as their intellects in the work of teaching and learning’.

In their book on *Leading School Turnaround*, Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) focused on the practices that support turnaround schools and make the point that improvement is likely to be non linear and more commonly an uneven progression through stages. They defined sustainability as establishing conditions for high student performance. They assert that strong leadership is required to take the school through stages for performance to be sustainable. They (Leithwood et al. 2010:2018) argue that research shows that sustainable improvement is largely achieved ‘thought deeply rooted cultural change that focuses the organisation on both individual and collective capacity development’. They refer to two approaches to change: Theory E and Theory O. Although not acknowledged by Leithwood, et al. (2010), Beer and Nohria (2000), initially developed the concept of Theory E and Theory O. Beer and Nohria (2000) described Theory E as being associated with the ‘hard’ approach to human resource management, while Theory O is associated with the ‘soft ‘approach. They argued that to maintain sustainability most organisations used a combination of both theories. The difficulty was to determine what combination was appropriate. Their research showed that
pairing the two theories was problematic because the theories were so different. To successfully sustain change in the long term they proposed that organisations should continually re-configure the combination of Theory E and Theory O based on the changing environment and organisational needs.

Leithwood et al. (2010) suggest that Theory E (Economic Value) is the structural approach to change and can be effective in the short term but not necessarily in the medium or long term. In contrast Theory O is about building capacity and an appropriate culture to sustain change for the long term. They noted that the ISSPP supported the notion that principal leadership contributes significantly to success and it was the ‘sustained application of their values, intra and interpersonal qualities, individual, relational and whole school strategies with staff, community, and school environment upon them ’ (Moos, et al., 2011;7). While the findings are set within the framework of Leithwood, et al., (2006) four practices of setting direction, understanding people designing and managing communities; managing teaching and learning, an additional practice, leading the environment was added.

Leithwood, et al. (2010: 229-233) declared that there were eight lessons that leaders should reflect about sustaining high performance:

1. Sustaining performance depends on continuous regeneration.
2. Continuous efforts to regenerate are rooted in key cultural norms.
3. School-to-school collaboration and networking is essential for sustaining performance.
4. Trust in and among schools is a key strategy for sustaining high performance.
5. Only coherent change succeeds.
7. Paying attention to detail is crucial.
8. Collaboration is key.

Zbar (2013) adds to the body of knowledge on sustainability arguing that school improvement can be sustained through a sated process. The first step is to embed pre-conditions: strong leadership with a clear vision and direction, high expectations for all students, an orderly environment where students are known and a focus on what matters most. The key driver to improvement is leadership: vision, passion, commitment, a culture of learning and the building and distribution of leadership. He cites sustaining factors as enhancing teacher and leader expertise, building appropriate teacher structures to support student learning, a culture of shared responsibility, setting initiatives to align with the direction of the school and establishing pride within the school.
2.6.3 Sustainability of leader success

Dwight Eisenhower said (Goldsworthy, 2002:176):

In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible...His teachings and actions must square with each other.

The values, qualities and behaviours of the principal were found to not only impact on the schools’ success but on their ability to sustain the success over time. Research by the ISSPP found that the leader was pivotal in the sustainability of a school’s success. Gurr (2014) found that no one model of leadership dominated in studies of successful school leaders. That being said, a discussion of leadership styles and an exploration of leadership behaviours does provide a lens to better understand the practices that successful principals employ to lead their schools and communities. The findings of Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) and Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2006) confirm that the variety and number of leadership types and practices merely reflects the diversity and complexity of the role and the successful leader is able to adapt and adopt attributes and skills according to the differing contexts in which they work.

The research of Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011) found that principals were able to sustain their success as leaders through the interaction of their values, their capacity to influence and through their emotional and intellectual qualities. These personal qualities, beliefs, values and dispositions, evident in initial case studies of successful principals, were fundamental to their capacity to sustain their success. They were strongly relational and people-centred and demonstrated trust, optimism, persistence, empathy, resilience, humility, honesty, openness and respectfulness. In addition they continued to display high levels of physical and mental energy and were good at balancing individual and collective care.

Day, Johannson and Moller (2011) found resilience was a key factor in the capacity of the leaders, who were revisited in the ISSPP, to sustain success. This resilience went beyond the standard definition of a capacity to bounce back from adversity. They found resilience in this instance meant ‘resolute persistence and commitment’ (Day, et al., 2011:173) and that the social construction of leadership resilience needed to acknowledge the personal, professional and situational pressures, for example responding proactively to externally initiated reforms. They identified four qualities of resilience associated with success. These were a willingness to take calculated risks based on their clear educational values, trust, a sense of hope and a sense of academic optimism, ie that teachers can teach and students can learn (Day et al., 2011:175). Resilience as an attribute of sustaining success,
Day et al. (2011) contend, must have a moral purpose and must be seen in conjunction with commitment, competence, self-reflection, trust, hope, and academic optimism.


2.6.3.1 Personal

Leithwood, (2005) and Leithwood and Riehl (2003) identified a strong self-belief as a necessary personal attribute. This self-belief of a principal, that they can make a difference to the lives of their students, staff and the community, was found to be an enabler of sustaining success. Successful leaders In the ISSPP studies (Day, et al., 2011) displayed passion, persistence, optimism and enthusiasm. These behaviours were underpinned by strong, clearly articulated and lived values, especially the values of equity and social justice. These leaders engaged in critical, reflective practice and encouraged feedback from those with whom they interacted. Goleman, et al., (2002:163) state that ‘leadership is intrinsically stressful’. Therefore principals need to have well developed emotional intelligence, resilience, maintain a sense of humour and a capacity to remain calm in adversity. Successful leaders, Goleman et al. (2002) maintain, cultivate relationships of trust, candor and support which help them sustain personal success but more importantly, professional success.

2.6.3.2 Relational

Trust is the social glue that binds individuals and groups together for the purposes of action (Day, et al., 2011; Kaiser & Halbert, 2009; Covey, 2004; Dinham, 2005; Duigan, Kelleher, & Spry, 2003). Tschannen-Moran (2004) defines trust within a school setting as the shared understanding that the staff and the individuals within the staff, are reliable. She suggests that there are five facets of trust: benevolence, honesty (integrity), openness, reliability and competence.

Day and Gurr (2014) found that successful leaders were people centred and work with the strengths and weaknesses of their staff. They build trust by modelling trustworthiness. Gurr (2014) found that successful leaders have a trusting disposition. They invest in modelling and developing trust within and across the school community. By cultivating organisational trust a positive school climate is fostered together with collective teacher efficacy, openness to change and subsequently, an improvement in student outcomes (Day, et al., 2011; Kaiser & Halbert, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2005; Mulford & Silins, 2003).
Trust is earned. Greenleaf (1970:7), too, confirmed its importance:

Leaders do not elicit trust unless one has confidence in their values and their competence (including judgement) and unless they have a sustaining spirit that will support the tenacious pursuit of a goal.

Successful leaders act with fairness, transparency, integrity and care for others. They have strong communication skills. They are able to listen, and to see situations from another’s perspective. At the same time, they are able to make difficult decisions because that is being fair; and they can manage conflict successfully. Importantly, they acknowledge the contributions of others, support staff in their individual aspirations and help them through processes of change (Gurr, et al., 2006; Gurr, 2014).

2.6.3.3 Organisational

Successful school leaders are adept at combining both leadership and management skills. They are able to implement systems and processes to enable the school to move in the planned direction. They interact with stakeholders to bring them on the journey of improvement. Most importantly, they scan the environment and so learn to manage their immediate and extended contexts and think and act contingently. While they are aware of the external environment, for example government policies and practices, they are not bound by the external environment but rather balance competing priorities with their core values and vision (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001). They think strategically to advantage their school.

Successful school leaders positively manage change (Duignan, et al., 2003; Leithwood, Steinbach and Jantzi, 2002). They helped teachers understand change by alerting them to the problems the school faced, and helped them either accept the change or learn to live with it. They are selective about the internal and external pressures they respond to and comfortable with their decisions because these are based on the school’s vision, mission and values.

2.6.3.4 Professional

Successful leaders are learners. They engage in double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1976, 1978, 1996) through formal learning, networking, mentoring, coaching, self-reflection and the use of peer and follower feedback. ‘They model teacher learning, being prepared to learn from teachers, students and others’ (Dinham, 2005: 252).
Hargreaves (2005), lists ten principles of sustainable leadership, a number of which have been quoted elsewhere in this thesis, for example, leadership must matter, be socially just and spread. In Davies (2007), Hargreaves argues that for both leadership and improvement to be sustainable, a leader must have courage, courage to stand up for what they believes is right, just and moral (Hargreaves 2007:177). For this reason, Beatty (2002b) suggests, leaders must be emotionally mature. Building on the work of Hochschild (1983), Greenberg and Paivio (1997) and Jeffrey and Woods (1996), she says that if emotional responsiveness is impaired, psychological and physical illness can result. Leaders are frequently under 'emotional labour' having to mask their actual feelings to support the feelings and responses of others (Beatty, 2005).

Successful leaders who sustain their success adopt some of the behaviours of servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970). They develop what he calls ‘systematic neglect’ – a capacity to withdraw, reflect, reorient and identify what is urgent and what is important.

An early study by Tead (1935) identified ten qualities that together made a comprehensive picture of desirable qualities of leaders. These were: physical and nervous energy; a sense of purpose and direction; enthusiasm; friendliness and affection; integrity; technical mastery; decisiveness; intelligence; teaching skill and faith. Building on his trait theory, Stogdill (1974) completed a follow-up survey of traits in 1970 and compared the results with 1948. He argued that there was not one single characteristic or trait but a combination of traits that can produce personality patterns that can be advantageous to a person.

Starratt (2005) explores the ethical dimension of leadership in his work and laments that too often, ethics are ignored in educational administration. He believes that what helps sustain a leader’s success is his moral leadership, who he is and what he does, because if people in a school honour and respect one another, they work together for the greater good and it is this working together and relational component of leadership that makes leadership sustainable. Being an ethical and moral leader also equates with being proactive and optimistic and looking for opportunities to sustain success for all. Starratt (2004) names three virtues, the cultivation of which will energise and sustain the ethics of an educational leader. There are the virtues of responsibility, authenticity and presence.

Leaders who are able to sustain success demonstrate many of the characteristics of a ‘servant leader’. Spears (2010) building on the earlier work of Greenleaf (1970) on servant leadership, identified ten
characteristics of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people and building community.

In 2007, Davies edited a book *Developing Sustainable Leadership*. In this book, one of the contributors, Brian Caldwell, presented findings from his research on what he termed ‘exhilarating leadership’. From this research, he established six factors which he believed led to sustained success. These are personal factors, professional factors, resource factors, autonomy, community, recognition and networking (Caldwell, 2007:4). Hargreaves and Fink, too, contributed to this body of evidence building on their earlier work on sustainable leadership. They argue passionately for the combination of the building of trust, confidence and happiness as the source of human resourcefulness as ‘productive educational change can only be achieved through the teacher as the igniting force’ (Hargreaves and Fink, 2007:4). In an earlier study, Hargreaves (2005) reported that leaders develop sustainability as they go, if they persist with their vision and avoid burning themselves out (Hargreaves, 2005:187).

Fink (2009) in his contribution to Blankstein, Houston and Cole’s (2009) book, contends that what sustains leaders through good times and bad is ‘a set of life-affirming values’ (Fink, 2009:160). Fullan (2005:87) agrees: ‘You cannot move substantially towards sustainability in the absence of widely shared moral purpose’ Building on this concept, Day and Schmidt (2007:87) examine the role of resilience in sustaining successful leadership and conclude that ‘successful headteachers who demonstrate resilient leadership are those whose values cause them to place as much emphasis upon people and processes as they do upon product... (They) demonstrate a clear and abiding concern for learning, care, justice’.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that successful leaders engage with and monitor the environment, are patient and transparent and create systems that are compatible with human capacity. They, (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:272), conclude with an additional condition of sustainable leadership:

Sustainable educational leaders promote and practice sustained learning...sustain others as they pursue this cause together...sustain themselves, attending to their own renewal and not sacrificing themselves too much as they serve their community...{and} stay the course, stay together, stay around and stay alive.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) conclude that sustainable educational leadership and improvement is that which ‘preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts in ways that do no harm and indeed create positive benefit for others around us now and into the future’ (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:694).
Blankstein, Houston and Cole’s (2009) book provides a range of perspectives from a number of contributors. While there is little in common in approach by the contributors, individually they contribute to a broader body of knowledge which is confirmed by the work of Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011), that principals were able to sustain their success through the interaction of their personal qualities, their values, beliefs and dispositions which in turn enable them to influence those with whom they interact. For example, Sparks (2009) argues that sustainability cannot be enduring without teamwork and professional learning. This reinforces the notion that a leader’s sustained success is dependent on his capacity to build strong relationships. Lambert (2009) questions what happens after leaders leave the school. She maintains that success is sustained through reciprocal leadership, learning communities and leading networks, again emphasising the importance of relationships. Fullan (2009) argues that the sustainability of a leader’s success is related to their capacity to maintain their energy and renewal. In a study of principals in the York district of Ontario, Fullan and Sharratt (2009) found that two thirds of their respondents identified personal growth and stimulus through being part of the learning process with others as what sustained them. There was a moral purpose that was translated into reality. Fink (2009) notes that today’s leaders need to cope with outmoded structures and simultaneously lead schools to become learning communities. They need to be courageous. Hargreaves and Fink (2007) question – how can we sustain improvement if we cannot sustain the leaders of improvement? Their responses are energy restraint, energy renewal and energy release. Sustainability through energy restraint means leaders being aware of their personal resources and being prepared and able to conserve some of their personal energy, that is, not deplete personal resources. Sustainability through energy renewal comes from high trust systems and a community working together, through having confidence in oneself and through having choice or belief in one’s control over one’s destiny. They suggest energy release as a factor influencing the sustainability of a leader’s success. When the energy of potential of students is released, it releases the energy of teachers which in turn re-energises leaders.

Finally, Leithwood, Bauer and Riedlinger (2009) reported on what they had learned about sustaining school leaders based on six years work with the Greater New Orleans School Leadership Centre. Sustainability was enhanced when leaders had the opportunity for extended and intensive professional learning, an opportunity to ‘rekindle the spark’ which is sometimes diminished in the busyness of everyday leading. Skill development was relevant to the role of the leader, for example, leaders were being challenged to be data driven but many did not know, and did not feel comfortable to admit, that they actually didn’t know how to analyse data. Providing opportunities for relevant
learning within an environment of mutual respect and autonomy aided long term sustainability of energy and practice. Professional learning was supported with follow up over a period of time. Eventually through a group of principals learning together, a strong network formed and this added to ‘positive dispositions…and a willingness to continue to do the heavy lifting’ (Leithwood, et al., 2009:113).

2.6.4 Sustainability of educational change

Harris and Lambert (2003) connect capacity building with the sustainability of change in organisations. Building on reform literature they write that while in the 1970s capacity building for school improvement meant head teachers creating opportunities for teachers to work in teams and teachers sharing, often publicly, their practices (Harris & Lambert, 2003:24), by the 1990s specific practices aimed at sustaining educational change were identified. These changed practices emerged from necessity. The reform climate had seen a number of externally driven improvement initiatives funded. Lambert and Harris’ (2003) research in England found that the early gains were difficult to convert to year to year improvements unless the internal capacity within schools existed, that is unless capacity had been built ‘through teacher enquiry, shared leadership, collaboration and collective responsibility (Lambert & Harris 2003:23). Pascal (2009:159) suggests that sustainability in education has followed W. Edwards Deming’s (1950) post World War 11 approach of involving workers in decision making and that today a leader needed to let go of the traditional concept of individual responsibility for success or failure and embrace sharing leadership. Blankstein (2009) posited in an interview with Pascal (2009, p.159) that ‘No one leader will have all the abilities needed to deal with the complexities of the job. Therefore one critical component of the leader is to assess others’ strengths and build a team accordingly’. Zbar (2013) writes that success can only be sustained through distributed leadership, through a team with a clear sense of what needs doing and how it can be done. He believes that even if the principal stimulates the change, it can only be sustained if a state of shared leadership is developed.

Studies on change by Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin and Hall, (1987), Hall and Hord (1987), school effectiveness (Edmonds, 1981; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979) and program improvement (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982) found that the skilful leadership of the principal was a key contributing factor in successful change and school improvement and effectiveness. Dweck (2006) suggests the need for principals to have a ‘growth mindset’, a passion for stretching oneself and sticking to one’s direction even during challenging times. Such a mindset supports principals to be
flexible and responsive to change. Sustainable change practices need to be supported by teachers and others in the school who are then empowered to act as change agents (Fullan, 1993). Such practices, however, take time and require the building of trust and mutual respect through strong, collegial relationships.

Shields (2013) takes a slightly different perspective. She suggests ‘transformative leadership’ as the most appropriate way to sustain lasting, socially just change. Transformative leadership recognises the realities of the wider community which can hinder positive sustained change. Shields believes that transformative leadership can succeed above other leadership dispositions because it combines traits of leadership with processes of leadership and specific educational goals. Long term change can be effected by moral, courageous, transformative leaders who are prepared to work together and take a stand to implement change which is deep and equitable.

Sustained change requires double loop learning. Applying Argyris and Schon’s (1976, 1978, 1996) learning theory, single loop learning brings about behavioural change but sustained organisational change requires double loop learning which is deeper and more reflective and enables organisations to challenge their assumptions and beliefs. Furthermore, Goleman, Boyatiz and McKee (2002), focusing on the need for leaders to be emotionally intelligent, believe that change can succeed and be sustained if leaders take into account both the emotional reality and the culture of the organisation.

In exploring the literature on the sustainability of educational change, this study reviewed writers on change management with a focus on sustainability in education who approached the idea of sustainability from two aspects.

2.6.4.1 External change forces

The first approach focuses on internal and external change forces that impact on the school and effect the ability of the school to maintain its change program. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) and Giles and Hargreaves (2006) examined change over time in eight high schools in Canada and US. Their study highlighted the importance of the political, historical, and longitudinal aspects of change. They identify five change forces that have impacted over time. These are waves of reform, changing student demographics, teacher generations, leadership succession, and school interrelations. These changes are significant because they undermine sustainability of change efforts. They call for the necessity for researchers to take into account the historical, political and demographics changes. Giles and
Hargreaves (2006) report on three innovative high schools and question whether the schools can consciously protect against adverse aspects of change by maintaining a learning organisation and professional learning community. They note three factors that have a negative impact on innovative schools to maintain their success: attrition to change, professional envy and pressure from the district and profession, and forces in the external environment such as the large scale standardised reform movements that weaken the school over time and force it to conform. Their findings show that schools as learning organisations and professional learning communities can offset two of the three factors (attrition to change and pressure from other schools). The third factor of standardised reform is likely to undermine the efforts and success of the school. Fullan (2005) argues that in a drive to raise educational standards, the concentration has been on focused curriculum frameworks and testing regimes with success being measured by testing results. These changes have been outcomes of external forces of change. He questions whether, not only results are sustainable, but more importantly, is this focus on results how we enable all students to achieve long term success academically, socially, physically, emotionally and spiritually which is the stated aim of schools.

Deal (2007) comments on the impact of external forces suggesting that most educational reform imposed from the outside fails because it fails to use the talents and skills of those within the organisation. This was also an earlier finding of Lambert and Harris (2003). Hentschke (2007) looks at the impact of external forces from another perspective linking organisational change and behaviour with external forces and arguing that schools are gravitating towards a market environment and that ‘While sustainability may well provide a useful normative framework for improving education its utility as a descriptive framework will likely be lessened as education gravitates morce into a market environment (Hentschke, 2007:151).

Research by Drysdale, Goode and Gurr (2011) found that principals’ attitude to change had an impact on the level and type of school success and certainly on the capacity of the school to sustain change. Moos, et al., (2011) reporting on findings from the ISSPP confirmed that successful principals were aware of and able to respond to changes in political and educational expectations while continuing to assert the ethical and moral purpose of school. Both these studies found that successful principals were not controlled by external forces but rather were able to adapt these forces to suit their own purposes.
2.6.4.2 Internal change forces

There are also internal change forces which impact on school leadership and the ability of the leader(s) to implement and sustain change over time.

Davies (2007) draws from his work on strategic planning and focuses on leadership for the sustainability of successful change. He (Davies, 2007:11) defines sustainable leadership as being made up of key factors that underpin the long term development of the school. It builds a leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all.

Bennis (2015:365) maintained that in the 21st century the transnational challenge to succeed required leaders- not managers. Leaders conquer the context – the volatile, turbulent, ambiguous surroundings that sometimes seen to conspire against us and will surely suffocate us if we let them-while managers surrender to it.

Leithwood, et al., (2002) agree that principals influence student outcomes indirectly, through their selection, timing, combination and accumulation of strategies and actions which are appropriate to individual, organisational and external social and policy contexts. Hallinger (2003c) concludes that the suitability of effectiveness of a particular leadership model is linked to both factors in the external environment, and to the local context of the school.

There is a growing body of evidence which links sustainable educational change with distributed leadership (Harris, 2005) and a focus on leaders rather than leadership. Distributed leadership encourages the involvement of teachers in the change process through collaborative practices. Hargreaves (2005) warns that sustainability should not be confused with maintainability, that is how to make change last. ‘(Sustainability) addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others’ (Hargreaves, 2005:176). Sustainable change respects the past but must also be vigilant and looking to the future. It connects the actions of leaders both to their predecessors and to those who will follow after them, their successors, hence he makes the link between sustainability and succession planning.

In Australia recent research on sustainability has been through the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP). Research by Goode, Drysdale and Gurr (2009) show the important interaction between internal and external change forces and the role of the principal as a precursor to sustainability. Their research, of which this study is a part, indicates that change forces can be
overpowering, but the leadership of the principals can be a significant intervening factor that can continue to promote success. Internal and external changes challenge past success but successful principals are able to accommodate the impact of these changes and sustain successful performance.

Crippen (2005), in describing democratic schools, found that successful leaders often assume the characteristics of Greenleaf’s (1970) servant leader. In times of change, the servant leader creates sustainability of their leadership and their school by building the capacity of others to serve and lead into the future.

Fullan (2009) uses the agenda change of the education system in Ontario, Canada, as an example of sustaining educational change arguing that there are six secrets which have been tested against both business and educational literature. The first secret is *Love your employees as much as your customers*. Fullan (2009:36) states

> There is powerful evidence that investing in your employees...can be enormously profitable. The key is enabling employees to learn continuously...to find meaning in their work...in relationship to co-workers and to the organisation.

His second secret is *connecting with peers*. He suggests embedding strategies to foster peer interaction help sustain success. Collaborating peers no longer refer to ‘my students’ but rather to ‘our students’ and this in turn enhances commitment and spreads effective practices.

His third secret is capacity building. Leaders who invest in individuals, both as individuals and as a group, encourage new competencies but also renewed motivation. The fourth secret is *Learning on the job*. Fullan (2009) maintains that effective organisations avoid one off short courses and workshops in favour of learning within the work setting. His work with Hill and Crevola (Fullan, Hill and Crevola, 2006) found that improved practices in supporting student learning were an outcome of teachers learning together on a daily basis.

His fifth secret pertains to *transparency*, meaning transparency of data and the use of data as a positive pressure for change rather than as a punitive measure. Finally, he believes that *systems learn from themselves* when knowledge and commitment are constantly cultivated and that this collaborative culture produces leaders and therefore confirms renewal or sustainability of the school or the system.
2.6.5 Sustainability of student learning

While it is difficult to develop a coherent approach to the role of leadership in sustaining change, there appears to be a strong link between leadership and student learning. Davies (2007), in his book ‘Developing Sustainable Leadership’, introduces a number of writers who contribute their perspective on sustainability. It appears that each contributor applies the concept to their own research agenda and knowledge. Davies (2007:11) defines sustainable leadership as ‘the key factor that underpins the longer-term development of the school. It builds a leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all.’ Davies, (2007:3) suggests nine factors that should lead to sustainable improvement in student learning. These are (1) measuring outcomes and not just inputs, (2) balancing short and long term objectives, (3) thinking in terms of processes not plans – the way that leaders involve their colleagues is more important than the documents they write, (4) having a passion for continued improvement and development, (5) developing personal humility and professional will as a means of building long term leadership capacity, (6) practising strategic timing and strategic abandonment, (7) building capacity and creating involvement, (8) developing strategic measures of success and (9) building in sustainability.

Starratt (2005) argues that it is the prime responsibility of educational leaders to sustain learning. It is a moral imperative. It is what he calls ‘responsible leadership’. Harris (2005), too, draws a link between distributed leadership and student success. Reflecting on the work of Silins and Mulford (2002), Harris (2005:161) posits ‘student outcomes are more likely to improve where leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and where teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them. Indeed it would seem that nothing really changes for students and their learning unless there are changes in beliefs, behaviours and practices of teachers and leaders’.

Studies by Leithwood, et al. (2006) found that sustaining student success was often related to context; that while principals of primary and secondary schools in all contexts are able to achieve and sustain successful student outcomes, the degree of success is likely to be influenced by the relative advantage or disadvantage of the communities from which their students are drawn.

School effectiveness research tends to focus on simply improving student outcomes. The research of Day and Sammons (2013) suggests that while student progress and achievement can be an indicator of success, they do not necessarily ensure sustained success. Schools that educate students in the values of compassion, integrity and fairness, a love of learning, citizenship, and personal, social and economic capabilities create the conditions for sustained success.
2.6.6 Sustainability through building staff capacity

Successful school leaders combine pressure and support, high expectations, and independence to build staff capacity through encouraging them to think and innovatively. According to Harris and Lambert (2003:24), capacity building necessitates building an infrastructure of support that is aligned with the work of the school...the philosophy and mission of the school, selection of personnel, resources, teacher training, work structures, polices and outside networks.

They, (Harris & Lambert, 2003:99), describe five leadership assumptions that they believe are the basic premises for building capacity in schools. These are:

1. Leadership and leader are not the same.
2. Leadership is about learning.
3. Everyone has the potential and right to lead.
4. Leadership is a shared endeavour.
5. Leadership requires the redistribution of power and authority.

In an earlier study, Lambert (1998:8) argues that sustainability is linked to the building of staff capacity because sustainability of leadership requires building capacity so that the school community can keep moving when the current leaders leave. Building capacity requires a significant number of skilled teacher leaders who not only understand the vision and direction of the school but are committed to ‘reflection, inquiry, conversation and focused action as part of their daily work’ (Lambert 1998:4). Furthermore, Lambert believes part of building capacity is changing people’s roles. She gives the example of teachers changing classes, arguing that when people change roles or positions, it not only allows for new relationships to develop but enables new skills to be recognised and nurtured. Capacity building is supported by the skilful participation in the work of leadership. It acknowledges the different dispositions, knowledge and skills of leaders and what these skills contribute to the collective learning process. Lambert (1998) stresses the importance of the principal in building the capacity of staff while also acknowledging that some skills such as communication skills, group process facilitation, conflict mediation and dialogue are skills that must be learned and refined ‘on the job’.

One of the participants in a case study on sustainability of change in a school in Illinois, (Pascal, 2009:162), commented

Leadership capacity means that we have identified the critical elements...and a lot of people are committed to them, ensuring that the critical elements for success will endure even as leaders change.

Building capacity is a process. Earlier studies by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) provided descriptions of opportunities teachers could be given to build their capacity to lead learning. These included being
part of decision making, being empowered and having responsibility, being autonomous, having a
voice, having collaborative planning time and having opportunities to problem solve as a staff (Harris,
2005). Schools which sustain success have built communities that are collaborative and empowering.
Harris and Lambert (2003) suggest that these successful schools look for progress indicators of their
journey to building capacity. Such indicators might be talking about teaching and learning in the staff
room; challenging resistance and solving problems; visiting one another’s classrooms and reflecting
with each other on what They have observed; listening to each other and building on each other’s
ideas.

Leithwood, et al., (2006b) found that successful principals build the leadership capacities of colleagues
through the progressive distribution of responsibility with accountability. They place emphasis upon
creating a range of learning and development opportunities for all staff.

Leithwood, Reidlinger, Bauer and Jantzi (2003) reiterate the importance of building the capacity of
staff in improving teaching and learning within the school. It is their indirect influence on staff
motivation and engagement and on the working environment they create which Day et al. (2011)
describe as building collective teacher efficacy and trust so that teachers have confidence in ‘their
ability to organise and implement whatever educational initiatives are required for students to reach
their potential’ (Day, et al., 2011:9).

Based on an earlier model developed in 2003, Drysdale and Gurr’s (2011) revised model, Model 2.1,
shows how successful principals exert an influence on improving student learning outcomes. While
Level 1 interventions have the most direct impact on student learning outcomes, successful principals
intervene most through Level 2: supporting student learning by building the capacity of staff across
four dimensions: personal, professional, organisational and community. Successful leaders focus their
energy on developing people.

Findings from the ISSPP (Day and Gurr, 2014) confirm the importance of building staff capacity through
leaders having high expectations not only of themselves but of their staff. They are ‘very much about
helping individuals achieve their best’ (Gurr, 2015:3). In addition, these successful leaders were found
to be people centred and, as much as they derived satisfaction from seeing students develop, they
were also focused on their staff, on developing them and building their capacity to be better at what
they did.
2.6.7 Sustainability of culture

The culture of an organisation is loosely described as ‘the way we do things around here’ or ‘what happens when no one is watching’. Barth (2002:1) describes a school’s culture as a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions and myths that are deeply ingnained in the very core of the organisation. It is the history transmitted pattern of meaning that wields a strong power in shaping what people think and how they act.

Slater (2011:221) reports that:
Culture exists at multiple levels. [There are differences] between societal and organisational culture. Societal culture is deeply rooted, based on values and taken for granted usually across a whole country. Organisational culture is made up of more malleable practices that leaders can work to change.

The core elements of school culture include: a shared sense of vision and purpose, shared values and beliefs, common rituals, ceremonies and traditions, symbols and shared history (Deal and Petersen, 2009). A challenge to school leaders, then, is not only to change or influence cultural change, but then to enable this change to be sustained respecting the past but looking to the future.
A school’s culture has far more influence on life and learning in the school house than...any other...can ever have...but one can provide forms of leadership that invite others to join as observers of the old and architects of the new (Barth 2002:6).

Schein’s (1992:373) work stresses the critical importance of transparent communication and individuals interacting if cultural change is to be sustained; that it is ‘the primary task of the leader...to create and sustain...a culture which...(may)...feedback to shape the leader’s own assumptions’.

Fullan (2002:16-17), too, looks to culture as part of the reason for sustainability of success suggesting that sustainable cultural change in schools requires a ‘Cultural Change Principal’ who is a conceptual thinker, displays ‘energy, enthusiasm and hope’ and who is focused on the development of teachers’ skills and knowledge, building a professional community and ensuring program coherence and technical resourcing.

Mulford and Silins (2003) in their study of Australian secondary schools, the Leadership for Organisational learning and Improved Student Outcomes (LOLSO), concluded that culture building and organisational learning required establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, and a shared mission which was monitored and revisited as needed. There is a common thread of ongoing reflection, monitoring and support, facilitating the sustainability of cultural change.

The work of Harris and Lambert (2003) found evidence to suggest that there were certain behaviours which lead to cultural change and that in turn, these behaviours supported the sustainability of cultural change. They argue that school improvement succeeds within a context of positive cultural change where shared beliefs, values and assumptions are student centred and teachers are supported with ongoing professional learning that enriches student learning outcomes. A sustainable culture is a culture of enquiry. Through posing questions of relevance, teachers continually re-energise themselves and refocus through ongoing dialogue and action (Lambert & Harris, 2003:93-94) and so build and nurture a professional learning community. Davies (2007) argues that core moral values cannot be separated from the ‘how’ of operating a school; they must underpin it. Creating a culture which values success for all and being members of a caring community are ideals that need to be sustained for success to be maintained.

2.6.8 Conclusion

Elmore (2000) and Hargreaves (2003) suggested that changing the culture of a school was more likely to lead to sustainable change and the further research presented in this chapter supports this
contention. However, there are other factors, such as the extent to which a school leader can react proactively to both the internal and external factors. Successful leaders who sustain the success of their school control the environment rather than be controlled by it. They both lead and manage. They understand when to pull back and when to push forward. They demonstrate the capacity to adapt their practices according to differing contexts. Their personal qualities, their beliefs, and values have also been identified as important contributors to their sustained success. These principals know themselves and continue to build their own skill base and model to others their expectations. Finally, successful leaders who sustain their success are relational. They build strong relationships with staff, students and their communities and they build the capacity of their staff and their school communities.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this study. It outlines the research questions, the ISSPP protocols which informed the methodology of this study, the nature and purpose of qualitative research and case study methodology, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Ethical consideration, authenticity and trustworthiness are discussed as are the limitations and delimitations of the study.

This study contributes to the research of the ISSPP and as such the methodology of this chapter aligns with the ISSPP protocols for data collection.

3.2 Background to the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP)

The ISSPP began in 2001. In the initial research strand, schools and principals were selected in each research site using, whenever possible, evidence of student achievement beyond expectations on state or national tests, principals' exemplary reputations in the community and/or school system, and other indicators of success that were site-specific. In other words, the criteria for selecting principals were based on a range of evidence that the school had been successful during the period of their leadership.

In designing the ISSPP, all the researchers, from the beginning, were guided by agreement on three precepts:

- Multi-perspective data about successful principalship would provide richer, more authentic data than has hitherto been available.
- Such data is best provided by those with close knowledge of the principal i.e. teachers, students, parents, non-teaching members of the school and other community members.
- Collaborative research designed to a set of agreed common protocols across English and non-English speaking countries will provide understandings of and insights into successful principalship and school improvement which will add to existing knowledge.
The ISSPP’s research encompasses five strands:

- **Research Strand 1** Successful school principalship.
- **Research Strand 2** Principals who sustain success that is, successful principals revisited in the same school five years later.
- **Research Strand 3** Visible and invisible under performing schools, meaning schools which, according to the student composition, should be achieving better student results.
- **Research Strand 4** Principal identities.
- **Research Strand 5** Principals of schools of all kinds located in high need rural and urban settings.

The project is the first of its kind in the world and has resulted in the most comprehensive picture of the characteristics and strategies of successful school leaders in primary and secondary schools.

The research itself combines quantitative and qualitative research through survey and multi-perspective and observational case studies. The use of multi-site case study methods is based on the assumption that the concept of ‘success’ when applied to the leadership provided by headteachers ( principals) is a contextualised and relationship construct, as well as an attribution on the part of those who experience such leadership. As such, it was investigated initially by reference to multiple perspectives within schools. Samples of schools in each country were selected which provide a wide range of contexts and leadership challenges. This was done by means of a matrix which was be constructed around four dimensions which will allow for theory-generating case studies (Yin, 1989) to be chosen in the basis of representing ‘extreme cases’ (Walker, 1989) or ‘maximum variation sampling’. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These dimensions are:

- Schools of different sizes operating within different phases of education (i.e. the early years of primary schooling through to upper secondary and including special schools);
- Schools located within a range of economic and socio-cultural settings (i.e. including rural, suburban and inner-urban schools as well as those with mixed catchment areas);
- Schools in which headteachers who are widely acknowledged as being ‘successful’ leaders had spent different amounts of time (i.e. ranging from relatively new to well-established headteachers with many years of experience);
- A range of male/female headteachers.
Given the project’s commitment to collecting new empirical data from a multiplicity of perspective from within school organisations, and in so doing seeking to capture the ‘authentic voices’ of headteachers and other stakeholders, it is inevitable that the field research will centre around some form of interviewing. Semi-structured interviews (Drever, 1995) based upon a series of open questions are by the most effective means of reconciling the aim of encouraging respondents to talk freely about what they perceive to be significant, with the need, in the interests of compatibility, to ensure that topics are considered to be crucial to the research are not neglected. The questions and the sequence in which they are organised, therefore, are designed to provide a common agenda for discussions between different respondents and interviewers across the case study schools.

Each of the questions is accompanied by suggested prompts and supplementary questions or ‘probes’ which an interviewer might use to obtain further details, invite the respondent to elaborate or seek clarification (Patton, 1990).

All of the other respondents shall be interviewed only once. Group interviews may be used with some parents and teachers and with all of the students who participate in the research. These group meetings are likely to last for 45 minutes to an hour, the discussion being based on the same generic questions as those used in the one-to-one interviews. With the permission of the participants, each of the researchers should use an audio-cassette recorder. Transcriptions should be made of the recordings.

In addition, documentary information should be obtained from each of the schools including school development plans, school prospectuses, Inspection Report (if applicable), newsletters and media coverage. These may be used to contextualise the empirical data and in some instances as a means of cross-checking their accuracy and validity.

3.3 Methodology considerations

The methodology for this study was guided by the protocols of the ISSPP and a qualitative approach was chosen. Surveys, which were used by some countries in their research, were not used in these three schools.

Merriam (1998) explains that there are three orientations or paradigms to research: positivist, interpretive, and critical. The three approaches differ in their approach to knowledge. Positivist
orientation, where knowledge is gained through scientific and experimental research, is considered objective and quantifiable. This approach is commonly labelled quantitative research. The main strengths of this approach lie in precision and control through the use of quantitative and reliable measurement and sampling and design. Hypotheses are tested through a deductive approach and statistical analysis is allowed through the use of quantitative data Burns (1997). The interpretive orientation assumes knowledge is based on understanding the meaning of the process or experience. Knowledge is gained through inductive theory generating process (rather than testing or deductive). Individuals construct multiple social realities. Guba and Lincoln (1989) label this approach ‘constructivist’; however, this approach is commonly termed qualitative research.

The third orientation, critical research, takes the perspective that knowledge gained through this research is an ideological critique of power, privilege and oppression in areas of society. Knowledge provides structural and historical insights into inequalities and distribution of power. For example, education is considered to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation. Lincoln and Guba (2000) include an additional paradigm labelled ‘postpositivism’. Like the positivist approach, it accepts that there is a reality; the difference being that it is a critical or ‘real’ reality, which is only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable. Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that it is appropriate to use multiple strategies of qualitative and quantitative methods in this paradigm.

3.4 The nature and purpose of qualitative research

Qualitative data focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings with the influence of the local context being taken into account. There is richness to the experiences that come from the vivid and real context of the settings.

The term ‘qualitative research’ is an umbrella term that covers different types of investigation that aims to provide a better understanding and explanation of social phenomenon. Other terms used include naturalistic inquiry, interpretive research, field study, participant observation, inductive research, case study, and ethnography (Merriam 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) note that the qualitative research crosses several fields, disciplines and historical movements in which its meaning is different. They do, however, offer a generic definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and monos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their naturalistic settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.
Merriam (1998:10-12) highlights five major characteristics of qualitative research:

1. an interest in understanding the meaning people have constructed – how they make sense of the world;
2. the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis compared with using other data collection instruments;
3. it usually involves fieldwork in observing behaviour in a natural setting;
4. it primarily employs an inductive research strategy by building towards theories or hypotheses rather than testing theory; building towards theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained from the field; and
5. the product of qualitative study is richly descriptive – words and pictures, rather than numbers, to convey what has been learned about the phenomenon.

She also lists other common characteristics:
- the design is often emergent and flexible responding to changing circumstances;
- sample selection is usually non-random, purposeful and small; and
- researchers spend significant amounts of time in the natural settings of the study and often in intense contact with participants.

Miles and Huberman (1994: 1) state the usefulness of qualitative research data:

Qualitative data are sexy. They are a source of well grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. Then, too, good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations; they help researchers to go beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks. Finally the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of ‘undeniability’. Words, especially organised into incidents or stories have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, policy maker, a practitioner – than pages of summarised numbers.

Qualitative data focuses on naturally occurring events in natural settings and as a result has some advantages over quantitative research. Miles and Huberman (1994) offer the following points as strengths of qualitative research:
- qualitative data provides a richness and a greater potential for revealing complexity;
- qualitative data is well suited to revealing the perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, presuppositions which people bring to the social world with which they interact; and
• qualitative data is a useful strategy for developing and testing hypotheses and to illuminate or reinterpret quantitative data.

Pure quantitative research relies on the collection of quantitative or numerical data whereas qualitative research relies on the collection of non-numerical data, that is words and pictures (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Johnson & Christensen (2008: 48-50) describe five qualitative research methods: phenomenology; ethnography, case study, grounded research and historical research. In this study case study research was used.

Qualitative methods provide a means for exploring the perceptions individuals and groups attribute to the situation or the person (Creswell, 2009), in this case to the sustainability of the school’s success and the principal’s role in that success. Qualitative researchers collect data through in-depth interviews and observations. O’Leary (2014:130) ascribes value to qualitative research because it draws on ‘both inductive and deductive logic…accepts multiple perspectives…and does not shy away from political agendas.’ Qualitative research provided a strong framework for this study as it enabled sustainability of success to be seen from the perspective not only of the principals but of other stakeholders. Schools are social complexities and qualitative research and qualitative research provides a means of ‘explor(ing) and understand(ing) the interactions, lived experiences and belief systems that are part of individuals, ...(and) groups’ (O’Leary, 2014:130).

Qualitative research does not have a distinct set of methods or practices that are identified entirely as its own. It draws from a variety of practices, methods, approaches and techniques. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) outline the range and variety of empirical materials used in qualitative research to describe the phenomenon under study: case study, personal experiences, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts.
Merriam (1998: 12) categories five common types of qualitative research. These are set out below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Common types of qualitative research in education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of research</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic or Generic</td>
<td>• Includes description, interpretation, and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identifies recurrent patterns in the form of themes or categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May delineate a process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>• Focuses on society and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncovers and describes beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure behaviour of a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>• Is concerned with essence or basic structure of a phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses data that are the participant’s and the investigator’s firsthand experience of the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>• Is designed to inductively build a substantive theory regarding some aspect of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is ‘grounded’ in the real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>• Is intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be combined with any of the above types</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews in qualitative research can be both individual, formal and informal, and focus group discussions. The advantage of qualitative research is that it uses a wide-angle lens and examines behaviour as it occurs, naturally and in detail. Quantitative research allows the researcher to look at behaviour multi-dimensionally by looking at both individual behaviour and behaviour within a group. One of the strengths of qualitative research is that it enables cross-case comparisons and analysis. It can describe in rich detail the impact of local contexts. In studying the social climate and culture of a school, a researcher is able to use move between different modes, using both wide-angle and deep-angle lenses and layers of behaviour. Interviews are usually taped and later transcribed. These data are then analysed and general themes identified. Through observations, a researcher records what she has seen as well as making notes on relevant thoughts and insights.
Stake (1995:63) favours a qualitative approach because it ‘usually means including many repeat observation situations so as to get a representative coverage of relationships’.

### 3.5 Case study methodology

Case study methodology sits within the qualitative research design. The case study is not easy to define. Several writers note its ambiguity. Merriam (1998) explains that there is little consensus on what constitutes a case study. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 360) comment:

> While the literature is replete with references to case studies and with examples of case study reports, there seems to be little agreement about what a case study is.

Burns (1997: 364) notes that case study methodology has ‘been used as a *catch all* category for anything that does not fit into experimental, survey or historical methods’. In this study, case study methodology was selected not only because it was part of the ISSPP protocols but because of the nature of the research questions and its flexibility to gain an intensive, holistic and rich description and analysis of the adoption of a particular phenomenon. In this study, a multiple case design was used. While Yin (2012) comments that the multiple case is more difficult to implement he agrees that the ensuing data provides greater confidence in the findings. Merriam (1998: 11) believes the case study satisfies a common characteristic of all types of qualitative research because

> the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive.

Hamel (1993) argues that the case study has proven to be in complete harmony with the three key words that characterise any qualitative methods: describing, understanding and explaining. More recently, O’Leary (2014:194) agrees, describing case studies as ‘a site of investigation and data gathering.’

Merriam (1998) further expands the case study approach as qualitative research by highlighting the following features: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. These terms are defined in Table 3.2. These attributes (Merriam, 1993) provide a valid reason for selecting the case study method because they can illuminate the phenomenon being studied.
Table 3.2 Attributes of case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particularistic:</th>
<th>Means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon. The case is important about what it reveals. It concentrates on what a particular group confront about specific problem taking a holistic view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>The end product is rich ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon- life like, grounded, exploratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic:</td>
<td>Illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon- being about new learning, extending the reader’s experience or confirming what is known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Merriam (1993)

Yin (1994:25) outlines four different applications of a case study:

The most important is to explain the causal links in real life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. A second application is to describe the real life context on which the intervention has occurred. Third, an evaluation can benefit, again a descriptive mode, from an illustrative case study – even journalistic account – of the intervention itself. Finally, the case study strategy may be used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes.

Gummesson (2000) highlights the importance of generating theory and initiating change as important purposes of case studies. He notes that conventional research methods are scarcely applicable to studies of processes of decision making, implementation, and change in organisations.


- **Descriptive**: a detailed account of the phenomenon under study.
- **Interpretive**: used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate and support, to challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering.
- **Evaluative**: involves description, explanation, and judgement.
- **Theory building**: generating propositions and theories.
Stake (1995:3) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. Intrinsic case studies examine a particular situation for its own sake irrespective of outside concerns. Instrumental case studies research into one or two particular situations in order to try to understand an outside concern.

He, (1995:133) describes a case study approach as an in-depth exploration of a context using largely qualitative methods within interpretative enquiry, that is it can be described as ‘progressively focused’ as the organising concepts can change as the study progresses. In discussing different research methods, Shalveson and Towne (2002) suggest that the method of research used is pertinent to the kind of research question being asked. Because this study asks what Shalveson and Towne refer to as descriptive or explanatory questions they suggest that a case study methodology lends itself to the rich descriptions and insightful explanations that might arise through the study. In this research case study methodology was chosen because it was the methodology used by other ISSPP member countries and so enabled comparative studies to be made. Stake (1995:101) suggests the aim of research is ‘to construct a clearer reality and a more sophisticated reality ‘rather than a new one’.

3.6 Criticisms of case study methodology

While case study methodology may be criticised for its alleged lack of generalisation and description often without emergent theory (Kelvin et al., 2006; Yin, 1994, 2012) or for providing a poor basis for generalisation, in this research the case studies have been studied at length and certain responses came up frequently and hence lent themselves to generalisations. Stake (1995:7) suggest that as a result ‘generalisation is refined...Seldom an entirely new generalisation (is) reached but the refinement of understanding is’. Furthermore, the descriptions in this study have been built into an interpretative approach with the use of thematic categories which support and illustrate the theoretical assumptions. The multiple perspective interviewing, analysis of relevant documentation and the researcher’s observations and reflections add to the rigour of the study.

3.7 Multiple case studies

Multiple case studies are those in which several case studies are completed and compared, and allow for generalisations. Other terms are also used including collective, cross-case, multi-case, multi-site, or comparative case studies (Merriam, 1998). In this study a multiple case study approach was used
to allow for comparisons and generalisations between these case studies and for cross country comparisons. Multiple case designs can have distinct advantages. The evidence from multiple cases studies is often considered more compelling and the study more robust. Miles and Huberman (1994:29) note in reference to multiple case studies:

by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings.

The multiple case is a strategy often used to enhance the external validity and generalisability of the findings (Merriam, 1998).

### 3.8 The research questions

There were two research questions: *How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance* and *The personal qualities, characteristics and practices that contributed to the success.*

A semi-structured interview approach was employed where three broad questions were posed:

1. Can you tell me about the changes to the school that have occurred since the initial study? (Prompts for this question will include context, school structure, culture, student outcomes).
2. Can you tell me how your leadership (the principal’s leadership) has changed or developed over time?
3. The evidence indicates that the school has remained successful. To what do you attribute this? (Prompts for this question include principal’s own leadership, leadership of others, succession planning, systemic initiatives, school council influences, other).

These questions had been agreed to by the ISSPP to provide consistency with all member countries involved with this phase of the project.
3.9 Research sites

The schools in this study were selected according to the ISSPP protocols. They were schools who had been identified as successful as part of the initial study and where the principals had remained in the same school. There were only three schools where the principal had remained.

A summary of the schools, all in Melbourne, Australia, is shown in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Schools in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Principal’s years in school</th>
<th>Approximate size</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialist School</td>
<td>Government Special School</td>
<td>Co-ed 3-18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Inner city bayside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Grammar School</td>
<td>Independent Anglican</td>
<td>All boys 3-18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td>Inner Eastern suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban South</td>
<td>Government Primary</td>
<td>Co-ed 5-12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>Outer Northern suburb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.10 Data collection

Evidence was collected from multiple sources. With qualitative research, a range of methods of data collection can be used to provide contextual insight and understanding. In this study three sources of data collection were used:

- Interview
- Observation and shadowing
- Examination of relevant documentation.

Multi perspective semi-structured individual and group interviews were the primary collection method but as Patton (2002:306) argues ‘no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective’ hence observations, shadowing and a review of documentation was used to construct a richer, more comprehensive picture.
Notes were made during interviews and observations. Hammond and Wellington (2012:91) challenge the rigour of interviews suggesting that they can be co-constructed accounts or ‘unnatural kinds of conversations’. Lichtman (2006:115) views them as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ even though they may appear to be directed by the researcher. Lichtman (2006) and Hammond & Wellington (2012) agree that the strength of the interview as a means of data gathering is in the fact that it becomes a discourse about a topic and that through telling the story the interviewee is frequently making sense of the story, that is the story changes during the telling. In this study, all interviews were recorded and transcripts provided to individual respondents, where possible, for verification. There were no changes noted that impacted on the key emergent themes. The value of recording interviews is contested. For example, Stake (1995:66) suggests ‘getting the exact words of the respondent is not usually very important, it is what they mean that is important’. Recording of interviews was part of the ISSPP protocols but the researcher believed that the strategy of audio recording and then transcribing provided accuracy for reflective analysis and a depth and richness through the tone. Transcripts were compared with the audio recordings to ensure validity. Recording enabled the researcher not to just ‘write furiously’ (Stake, 1995:66) but to listen, reflect and ask for clarification during the interview. Table 3.4 summarises the advantages and disadvantages of audio recording interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides a complete and accurate record of the interview.</td>
<td>Some participants may find the process inhibits their discussion. (This concern was minimised by the guarantee of participant anonymity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher can make brief notes to support later analysis.</td>
<td>Body language and non-verbal data is not recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes a more natural discussion between the researcher and interviewee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases the rapport between the researcher and interviewee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher can listen attentively and pick up cues to explore topics further.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.10.1 Interviews

Interviews were the major source of data collection.

As part of the ISSPP requirements, the following minimum interviews were conducted:
Three individual interviews were conducted with the principal.

Individual interviews were conducted with senior leaders, for example, assistant principal(s), curriculum coordinator, six other teachers (two who had been interviewed for the initial study, two long-serving at the school, one experienced teacher recently appointed to the school and one newly qualified teacher recently appointed to the school), school council president or representative and school council parent member;

Group interviews with parents (preferably two groups of 5-8) and students (two groups of 5-8);

Observation over four days (shadowing and observing key events) of the work of the school principal and aspects of the life of the school;

Collection of documents to confirm the success of the school and to inform the observational and interview data.

The principal arranged each schedule taking into account the protocols of the ISSPP with regard to the personnel being interviewed and the school’s timetable. The researcher made herself available at times which were suitable to the school using times between interviews for informal observations and conversations with students and staff.

Individual and group interviews took a semi-structured interview schedule and ranged between 40 to 60 minutes based on the three broad questions.

- Can you tell me about the changes to the school that have occurred since the initial study?
- Can you tell me how your leadership (the principal’s leadership) has changed or developed over time?
- The evidence indicates that the school has remained successful. To what do you attribute this?
- All individual or pair interviews were recorded, transcribed and checked for accuracy by the respondents. In addition, the researcher took notes during and after each interview.

At the outset, participants were presented with informed consent forms to sign. As part of the introduction, the researcher explained the research, the issue of confidentiality and the way the interview would be conducted. Most interviews were conducted at the school, the two exceptions being two of the school councillors for whom it was more convenient for the researcher to interview in their place of work. In individual interviews, each interviewee was asked to introduce themselves and provide their context within the school, for example, their length of time in the school, roles they had held, experiences in other schools. With parent groups, all were invited to introduce themselves
and nominate their connections with the school, for example, the number of their children who were or had been at the school.

Questions were adapted according to the different contexts of the three schools. Questions of longer serving teachers who had been part of the initial study varied from questions to teachers who were new to the school. Not all participants were asked the same questions in interviews, particularly the interviews with students, as it was assumed that their knowledge and experiences of the school and the principal will be different.

While there were three research questions which guided each interview, a semi structured approach interviewing approach in this study enabled a more free flowing conversation and deviation from a plan if unexpected data emerged. The key questions were provided to interviewees but then used as a reference to strategically direct the conversation and collect the required data. The challenge of this type of interviewing became, as Walliman (2010) posits, the complexity in interpretation and coding as the breadth of the data made these tasks more time consuming.

Sample additional interview questions.

**Questions to longer serving staff at VGS**

- What changes have occurred in the last six years?
- What impact have these changes had?
- How would you describe the success of the school now?
- What elements of success have been sustained? (Compare with original data)
- What has/has not made changes sustainable?
- How do you see Principal’s leadership develop over time?
- How has his leadership style developed or changed?
- The school has remained successful. Why?

**Questions to longer serving staff at Specialist School and Urban South**

- What changes have occurred in the last six years?
- How would you describe the success of the school now?
- What elements of success have been sustained? (Compare with original data)
• How? What have you done to maintain this success?
• What has/has not made changes sustainable?
• Why have the demographics changed? What has the impact been?
• Has the principal’s leadership changed or developed? How?
• What about her leadership style?
• How do people respond to her leadership?
• The school has remained successful. To what do you attribute this?
• What will happen when she leaves? What will be her legacy?

**Questions to new staff at all schools**

• How long have you been at the school?
• Tell me about other schools in which you have taught.
• Why did you apply to teach at this school?
• What did you know about the reputation of the school? Of the principal?
• How does this compare with reality?
• How would you describe the principal’s leadership?

**Questions to parents**

• How long have you been involved with the school?
• Why did you choose this school?
• What did you know about the reputation of the school? Of the principal?
• To what degree has it met with your expectations?
• What have been the achievements of the school?
• What about the principal? What changes have you seen in his/her leadership?
• It has been chosen as a school which has sustained success. To what degree do you believe it has sustained success over the last ....years?
• How would you describe his/her relationship with the parents? With the community?

**Questions to school councillors**

• How long have you been on council?
• Please describe the interaction between the school council and the principal.
• How would you describe the relationship generally?
• What have been the achievements of the school?
• What about the principal? What changes have you seen in his/her leadership?
• It has been chosen as a school which has sustained success. To what degree do you believe it has sustained success over the last ....years?
• How would you describe his/her relationship with the parents? With the community?

**Questions to boys at VGS**

• What changes have you seen at the school?
• In terms of your learning, what has changed?
• What opportunities are there for you to develop leadership?
• What is the Headmaster’s legacy?
• The school has remained successful. Why?

**Questions to students at Urban South**

• Why do you think this is a good school? What makes it special?
• Tell me about your principal. Why do you think she might be seen as a good leader?
• What has changed at the school?
• What are the best things about this school?

Miller and Glassner (1997) argue that through in-depth interviewing, information about the social world can be gathered. Interviewing can provide access to the meaning people attribute to their experience. The researcher found that story was an important feature of each interview, particularly the interviewee’s ability and willingness to tell various stories. While the in-depth formal interviews provided an opportunity for a rapport to develop between the researcher and the principal, the shadowing days enabled a depth to this rapport to develop. On these days the format followed what Yin (2012:12) describes as ‘open ended interviews’ or ‘elite interviews. These interviews provided further insight into how these principals constructed reality. These days also provided additional information, for example more of the principals’ stories. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that life histories when combined with other information provide greater reliability and trustworthiness. This life history perspective provided a depth to a study adding to the meaning making of their leadership and contributing to inductive understanding. Their personal biographies and life experiences helped make sense of the values and philosophies that guided their actions. Establishing relationships with each of the principals encouraged them to feel comfortable to reflect back discussing and even challenging observations at the end of each shadowing day.
As noted, all interviews were recorded on audiotape and the contents transcribed. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) offer a discussion of the benefits and problems of audio-taping interviews. Briefly, the major advantages are that it offers a means of obtaining a full and accurate record of the interview where a more natural conversation style can be developed, and can aid in fostering increased rapport between interviewer and participant. In addition, the interviewer is free to be an attentive and thoughtful listener. Conversely, participants may find the process inhibiting, and there is no recording of non-verbal data. In this study the potential problem of participant inhibition was minimised through the guarantee of school and participant anonymity, and the fact that participants had control of what was included in the final interview transcript used for analysis. Written observations of non-verbal communication were not made during the interviews. Consequently, non-verbal data was not used in this study.

Table 3.4 summarizes the number of participants with whom formal interviews were conducted. No students were able to be interviewed at the Specialist School. During interviews, the researcher focused on listening, hearing, reacting, constructing interpretations and rephrasing when necessary to ensure accuracy. During the shadowing days by the researcher at each school and attendance at school events, a number of informal interactions with parents, staff and students added richness to the data collection.

A list of these events is summarized in Appendix 1.

**Table 3.5 Participants in the study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Deputy Principal(s)</th>
<th>Teacher Leaders</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>School councillor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialist School</td>
<td>1 (ii)</td>
<td>2 (ii)</td>
<td>3 (ii)</td>
<td>4 (ii)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (ii)</td>
<td>1 (ii)</td>
<td>13 (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Grammar School</td>
<td>1 (ii)</td>
<td>2 (ii)</td>
<td>4 (ii)</td>
<td>6 (ii)</td>
<td>4 focus groups (gi)</td>
<td>1 group of 14 (g)</td>
<td>1 (i)</td>
<td>19 (18x(ii) 5x(gi))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban South</td>
<td>1 (ii)</td>
<td>1 (ii)</td>
<td>1 (ii)</td>
<td>5 (gi &amp; ii)</td>
<td>2 focus groups (gi)</td>
<td>1 focus group of 3 (g)</td>
<td>1 (g)</td>
<td>10 (4x(ii) 6x(gi))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Researcher’s note: ii=individual interview; gi=group interview).
3.10.2 Observations

Yin (2012) notes the importance of observation within a case study because ‘direct observations in a field study...can focus on human actions, physical environments or real world events’. Observational data were collected by shadowing the principal in their school for four days, including their participation in meetings, classroom visits and school activities. This enabled the verification of views expressed in interviews about the principal’s leadership and behaviours and the relationships, processes and practices of each school.

3.10.2.1. Examples of observational data.

During the days of shadowing some rich observational data were collected. During observational sessions such as the examples below, the researcher used scripting to record as near as possible the interactions and her responses to these.

**Example 1 Specialist School**

*Morning tea for the parents of children who will begin school the following year. Eve welcomes saying. ‘Make yourselves comfortable. There is no rush’. Tea and coffee are offered. Eve makes these and serves them. Much of the information is general, for example, each of the specialists speaks briefly and explains their role. The AP explains the Arts based curriculum. Parents are encouraged to ask as many questions as they like. ‘We want to be here for you as much as for your child. Ring any of us at any time’. She then encourages them to get to know each other: ‘It’s really important for you to be involved, to get to know each other, have a coffee and ask How was last week for you’. (She later comments to me what a difficult day this is for parents. ‘This is the reality. Their child is not going to a normal school and they struggle with this’).*

*Eve shows parents the uniform, commenting that the blue pants and track pants ‘can be bought cheaply at Dimmeys’. (Again she tells me there is as sensitivity in having a uniform because it looks more like a ‘real’ school). One parent asks about a school bag with a school crest on it. Eve replies ‘No. It’s better if they have different bags so they can learn to identify them’. Again she reminds me it is the parents facing reality and they can find it confronting.*
Example 2 Specialist School

An interaction with a young staff member, one of the occupational therapists. Beforehand, she has a conversation with the Head of Therapy Services who has offered to sit in on the meeting. She tells him ‘I’d like to have a conversation with her. If you are here it might be seen I am reprimanding her’.

When the therapist comes in, Eve looks at the Head of Therapy and with her eyes directs him to the door. (She later comments to me ‘He goes straight in to reprimand mode’).

Eve begins by asking her if she minds my observing. The therapist is new to the school system from a hospital. Eve explains to her ‘We are a school, number 1. We are not a hospital. Occupational Therapy must fit into a school model. As a school it is a luxury for us to have you guys and we appreciate it’. (She explains the funding model to her) and continues ‘We have a collaborative team and goals have to be enmeshed into the education model.’

During this exchange Eve sat informally on an armchair with one leg tucked up and she finished the meeting saying ‘Now go over to the party and tell me when the food is on’. Afterwards she spoke to me and asked ‘Do you think she got it?’

Example 3 Specialist School.

This was the graduation dinner for the students who were turning 18 and therefore needed to move on from the school. It was held at a reception centre, a formal setting. The 12 students were dressed formally as were their parents and families. A table was assigned to each family. All staff were present. Each student was introduced and a video depicting the highlights of their time at the school shown and then presented to them. When the music started students who were able to danced with their parents. Those in wheelchairs seemed to dance with their hands and their eyes. It was a celebration although some parents reported that it was an evening of great sadness as they were concerned about the next stage for their children. Eve commented to me, ‘This is it. These students will never graduate from university, never marry and some of them will not live to have a 21st birthday. That’s why we make this night so special’.

The researcher attended numerous out of school hours events chosen in consultation with the principal (See Appendix 1). Field notes and a reflective journal were used to record observations and responses to events. When possible, the researcher met with one of her supervisors shortly after each of the shadowing experiences to debrief observations and reflections and to discuss other possibilities which might inform understandings and emerging themes and concept development.
Example 4 Victoria Grammar School

A Year 7 Science class which Edward is teaching.

As he walked around the room there were pats on the back accompanying the affirmations of ‘Well done’. ‘Excellent’. ‘Thanks’. He was very animated in his teaching and made learning practical, for example, the capacity of your lungs is 2/3rds of a tennis court; the white blood cells are the army, navy and air force of your body; the capillaries in your body are the distance from Melbourne to Sydney’

High expectations were evident. You will go to university and some of you will do medicine, law, agriculture or science and you will go to tutorials and your tutor will challenge you by saying ‘So what?’ That’s what I am doing with you now. I am going to keep asking you ‘So what’?

At the end of the lesson he modelled expected behaviours, helping boys ensure that all the chairs were pushed in.

Example 5 Victoria Grammar School

The researcher sat through an interview with parents who were considering withdrawing their son from the school because he has had difficulty making friends. They believe it is because he lives quite a distance from the school.

Edward: ‘Cedric is a lovely guy. He’ll do well whatever he does. We just need to make sure that he gets the best education he can’.

He then asks them about their work and more broadly about international investment in Australia as they are both in business. The focus of the conversations is on relationships. He listens as they describe the school they wish to send him to and Edward replies:

‘It’s a very good school but overall the environment is harsh, less friendly. VGS is a gentle school where boys are challenged. Good leadership is modelled. They learn a lot about people. VGS encourages boys to be gentle but strong. The sports program fits in with this theme; it is not just winning or losing but being part of a team’.

At the end of the meeting he says: ‘I just wanted to talk to you. I absolutely support your decision but compare the two schools. Ours is gentle, Christian, sporty. He will work out his friendship group. Leave it for a week. What you decide has to be right’.
This was an interview with a representative from an external refugee support group. In this meeting, Edward began by describing a project in which he was intending to become involved following his retirement.

‘We are looking at the idea of providing a learning and living space in Richmond for indigenous kids. These would be second level kids who may fly under the radar. The purpose would be to learn sufficient literacy and numeracy to enable them to be able to transition into mainstream school. It would be a boarding situation with small numbers and facilities so that parents could be brought down for a week regularly. Noel Pearson (an Australian aboriginal activist) says these kids have to orbit between two culture. If you don’t do this then it is another stolen generation’.

He then moved on to discuss the refugee issue.

‘My wife says we need to be doing more for refugees. I have recently driven four hours from Darwin to Kakadu and there is so much there, so much potential. We have deserts but we have enormous fringe areas. We need to be able to connect with leaders where we can put forward our ideas. We need to have a crack. This government is not bi-partisan but partisan. Refugees have added immeasurably to our culture with the waves of Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese.

Several interactions with boys were observed and leadership dominated as a topic of conversation.

With a group of Year 11 boys he began by saying

‘This is an opportunity for you to think about leadership. You as Year 12 boys will have an enormous impact next year. How will you make the boys in your House feel special? How will you make a disaffected Year 9 boy feel special’?

Having listened to the boys’ responses and chatted he then asked:

‘What does a person who leads well do’?

This encouraged some rich replies such as ‘let’s everyone have a say’; ‘leads by example’.

Think of a person you can remember who demonstrated good leadership. This elicited responses such as ‘showed humility’; ‘tried to establish a relationship with me’; ‘lead differently, be innovative’. He offered advice. ‘You have to have big ideas, not nit picking small ones. It’s the big ideas that will make a difference. It’s having the courage to have the big ideas. You are the future and you have to have the big ideas’.
Edward concluded this discussion with advice on empowering others and building capacity with the statement ‘Eyes on. Hands off’ and reminded them ‘A leader does not start out ready made. He is shaped by those around him’.

At a lunch with a group of Year 8 boys, the Headmaster poured juice for each boy. At a lunch meeting with the School Captain and Vice Captains on another occasion it was noted that one of the boys began by pouring drinks for the others.

Example 7 Urban South (Notes from reflective diary).

The staff room at Urban South. Students have been trained to man the school office and phones during morning recess so the office staff can have morning tea with the teachers. Students come freely into the staffroom with messages for staff. I have not seen that in many staff rooms. This morning I was speaking with Marion and two teachers when a student came in to remind her she was on duty. She immediately jumped up apologising to the student for forgetting.

When Marion came back, another student came in to speak to her. She turned to me at once and said ‘excuse me’ giving her full attention to the student.

I notice that Marion thanks people frequently, publicly and profusely. An example today was thanking the secretary for collecting lunch for Marion and myself. She left her office and sought her out to thank.

My other observation of Marion in the staff room is her habit of moving around from table to table speaking with each member of staff.

In one of the classrooms she chats with the teacher about her dogs, her horse and other personal issues. As we leave the classroom she turns to me and says ‘Not much educational leadership there for you to observe but I believe it is important to know your staff’.

Example 8 Urban South

Marion had organised a meeting with the office staff. She has put new processes in place as the Business Manager has left. She has divided up the tasks so that all jobs are shared, for example, accounts, Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S), buildings and grounds. She tells me that in this way she is building their capacity ‘because part of what you do is build their skill set’. She is wanting to check in with them to see how things are going. She first makes a pot of fresh coffee for them.
When the meeting begins she affirms each one then says ‘Just talk to us if it is getting too busy. I can offer you extra help short term if you need it’. They appear all very happy, very enthusiastic about their work and each one thanks her for this opportunity.

Example 9 Urban South

Observation of Marion’s interaction with students.

We visit a classroom. One little boy runs up to her and hugs her. ‘Good morning, darling’ she says.

In another room she seeks out a boy who was expelled from his previous school. ‘You are doing so well. You are the star of the week’.

To another she comments on her new haircut. In the next room she speaks to a boy who has been in trouble saying ‘How’s your brother going, darling? Tell him I said hello’.

The researcher’s presence in the school and at various school events enabled a rapport to also develop with staff, students and even parents who freely offered their perceptions of why the school had sustained its successful performance and the role the principal played in this sustained success. These perceptions were recorded in the researcher’s journal and added a richness to the data collection.

Being present in the school provided additional data, for example, the entry to the school, the provision of parking for the researcher, the hospitality extended through the provision of lunch and morning and afternoon teas, the initial welcome and friendliness of the staff in the school office, the order of the principal’s office, the artefacts on display both in the front office and around the school and most particularly the interactions between the principal and staff, the principal and students, the principal and parents, staff and staff and staff and students. Of note at VGS was the pride with which the boys wore their uniform both when observed at school and at public places beyond the school gates. These observations added richness to the case stories but the researcher was aware that it was not free from her own expectations, values and biases (Hammond & Wellington, 2012).

Debriefing between the researcher and the principal occurred at the end of each observation day. Principals also sought feedback during these debriefing sessions. Sample questions guiding this feedback were:

- Observe critical incidents and critical influences and feed these back at the end of the day.
• Question the principal: When you did this, why were you doing it? How did this model your beliefs?

• What have you done today to improve success or what are the things that would tell us about the school and your influence in the school?

At all times during both interviews and shadowing, the researcher needed to be conscious of being objective. Hammond and Wellington (2010:119) argue that there is no such thing as researcher objectivity that ‘it is the fact that we have a position that enables us to make sense of a social situation. Observation and interpretation is necessarily theory laden and to do either without a position is not a neural or value free stance but is to exist in a state of mental dissociation and disintegration’.

3.10.3 Documentation sighted

In addition to interviews and observational data, documentation provided a rich source of data. Following Stake’s (1995:68) recommendation the researcher sought clippings of relevant newspaper articles and advertisements and school documents. Each school’s website provided additional data. Relevant documentation from each school was collected and examined. This included school review reports, strategic plans, newsletters, examples of media coverage, survey data and school magazines (See Appendix 2). Some of these data were school based and promotional, for example, prospectus’, but ‘Government statistics and data provided by large, well known organisations (for example ISV) are likely to be authoritative as their continued existence relies on maintaining credibility’ (Walliman, 2010:84). These primary and secondary sources supported the contextualisation of the empirical data and enhanced trustworthiness.

3.11 Analysis and interpretation of data

Each of the three case studies was treated independently. Analysis of the interviews followed the qualitative methodology espoused by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994), incorporating ‘data reduction’, ‘data display’ and ‘conclusions: drawing/verifying’ with appropriate trustworthiness procedures built into the design.

The interactive model of data analysis as described in Miles and Huberman (1994:12) was used to examine the evidence provided to explore what was happening in the schools in relation to the
research questions. In making sense of the data, the researcher alternated between data collection and data analysis, what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as interim analysis.

**Model 3.1 Components of data analysis: Interactive model**

(Miles & Huberman, 1994: 12)

Silverman (1993) highlights the challenges and dilemmas facing interview researchers analysing their data. Silverman (1993:91) suggest that the primary issue for researchers is ‘to generate data which gives an authentic insight into people’s experiences’. Marshall and Rossman (2006:154) agree saying that while the process of analysing data brings order, structure and meaning to a mass of collected data and presents it in a way that others will understand, it is ‘messy, ambiguous,(and) time consuming…; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements…and underlying themes…’ Furthermore they, (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:157) contend, there is no one way of doing this and each researcher is required to find their own way to reach their ‘final destination’.

As the analysis of the data was carried out patterns emerged and some meaningful conclusions could be drawn. A thematic, descriptive approach was used. This thematic analysis looked across all the data to identify the common issues that recurred and the main themes were identified that summarised all the views from participants collected.

Making sense of the data required the researcher to immerse herself in the data, reading, re-reading, and highlighting and making links between transcripts, field notes and documentation. This process of repeated filtering of raw data led to changes in the choice of possible emergent themes. All research depends on interpretation. One of the challenges for qualitative researcher is objectivity. O’Leary (2014:307) recognises that bias can never be totally removed because ‘interpretations are always
intertwined with a researcher’s biases, prejudices and world views’. Stake, too, (1995:41) cautions researchers to be cognisant of their own consciousness when making observations, exercising subjective judgement, analysing and synthesising data.

This cycle of collecting data, analysing data, collecting additional data, analysing those data and so on through the process enabled the researcher to generate and test hypotheses. Johnson and Christensen (2008:531) suggest that using this model a researcher is able to ‘examine and...question their data and then re-enter the field to collect more data to answer their questions’. They summarise the qualitative data collection process in Model 3.2 below, focusing on the centrality of interpretation.

This model of reduction was similar to that used by Tesch (1990), Gurr (1996), Drysdale (2002) and Doherty (2008). It involved segmenting of data into “meaning units”; that is, “a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information” (Tesch, 1990:116), followed by the categorisation of the meaning units into “themes” or “labels given to collections of narrative that appeared to be focused on a common concept” (Gurr, 1996:89). The report of the analysis was then written under each theme.

The researcher considered three approaches based on van Manen’s (1990) alternative approaches to the analysis of phenomenological data. The first approach is a detailed examination of every sentence or sentence cluster for clues that illuminate the phenomenon. The second approach is more selective as it chooses statements and phrases that are considered instructive about the phenomenon being investigated. These are used to reduce the material so that themes can be generated. The third approach is a holistic approach, which focuses on the entire text and attempts to identify the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole. In this study, the selective approach was seen to be more efficient. However, to avoid losing any details, the remaining text was re-examined to see if there were more meaning statements that could be categorized under the existing themes or could result in new themes.
Model 3.2 Data analysis in Qualitative Research

The three case studies were written up in terms of the themes that emerged. Each school has been presented as a discrete study, set out in a consistent manner to allow detailed analysis of the results.

3.12 Major themes

Themes emerged which reflected the literature and some of the initial studies. For example, the initial studies of successful school principals (Drysdale et al., 2009:698) found that evidence that their success was attributed to practices such as ‘ensuring there is a safe environment; having clearly articulated core values; constructed context-sensitive improvement plans; established trust; ensured they were visible in the school; indirectly influenced the instructional program; and, working with the broader context through the building of productive coalitions’.

In this study, three broad common themes emerged across the three studies. These were the leadership style of the principal, the interventions they made in response to external and internal influences, and their personal qualities. In two of the studies, a fourth theme, ‘Other’ emerged.
3.13 Use of matrices

The data identified under the themes was further reduced to sub themes identified by matrices. Following Miles and Huberman’s (1994) methodology, these were constructed to allow the data to be displayed for ease of interpretation and analysis for each case. The use of matrices, which reduced and refined data, was found to be beneficial in the reflective analysis of data in each case study and was used extensively. Matrices provided visual displays that were useful in analysis and enabled the researcher to trace data back into the transcripts if required. They allowed sense to be made of the large volume of rich information that was gathered from each school through interviews and documentation. Table 3.5 is an example of the matrices used.

Table 3.6 Sample matrix of Thematic Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership style</td>
<td>personal philosophy and values</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relational</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social conscience</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a model</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inspiring</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confident</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>servant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff selection, learning &amp; leadership opportunities</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect and gentleness</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practices</td>
<td>shared leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consultative</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>courageous-preparedness to challenge</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>educational</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developments</td>
<td>Relevant learning experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>facilities</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>technology</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student leadership opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>international experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.14 Ethical considerations

As with any research, there are ethical considerations to be addressed. O’Leary (2014) warns that the rights and wellbeing of those involved in the research need to be protected and respected at all times. O’Leary (2014:64) identifies three areas of ethical obligation:

- ensuring participants have given informed consent;
- ensuring no harm comes to participants
- ensuring confidentiality and, if appropriate anonymity.

Every effort was made to ensure these obligations were met.

Before the data collection began, approval from The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee was obtained. An invitation was made to each of the principals and permission sought to conduct the research in their school. In accordance with The University of Melbourne Ethics process, participants were given a plain language statement that outlined the intent of the research and the expectations of participants consenting to take part. All participants signed an informed consent form, understanding that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Each principal introduced the researcher to the whole staff and explained the research that was taking place and the presence of the researcher in the school. Permission to audio tape interviews was made before any interviews commenced and participants were informed of the process. In case any participants had concerns with the conduct of the study at any time, the researcher made her contact details available to participants as well as those of her supervisors. The inclusion of students in the interview process was done with written consent from their parents. Student interviews were conducted in groups with a teacher present.

80
Pseudonyms were used for schools and for principals in the study and other participants were identified only through their roles.

### 3.15 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Bassey (1999) notes that while the concepts of reliability and validity are vital in quantitative research, they are not in case study research. Lincoln and Cuba (1985) identify the concepts of ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ as alternatives to validity and reliability of data. As case study research is a naturalistic research, both Bassey (1999) and Merriam (1998) argue trustworthiness and authenticity are appropriate concepts for qualitative research.

According to O’Leary (2014:54) ‘authenticity indicates that rigour and reflexive practice have assured that conclusions are justified, credible and trustworthy even when truth is dependent on perception’. In this study, the trustworthiness and authenticity are supported by the fact that the research questions, the protocols and procedures are derived from the larger ISSPP study. The use of these materials satisfies Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) and Geertz’ (1988) notion of transferability because the results from this study add to a broader body of knowledge which provides a framework for comparison. In this study the notion of transferability of conclusions was important because this research sits within a broader international study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000) argue that there are ways of stating conclusions derived from one case study and transferring them to other situations. They argue that case studies can produce a working hypothesis that can be used to understand similar cases. They note that the extent to which this can occur will depend on the amount of in-depth detail of the case. Guba and Lincoln (1989:242) argue for thick description to enhance transferability. They contend the researcher is required ‘to provide as complete a data base as humanly possible in order to facilitate transferability judgements on the part of others who may wish to apply the study to their own situation.’ The researcher made every effort to ensure that the data collected was both rich and in depth.

Credibility in qualitative research is important. Guba and Lincoln (1989:237) suggest several techniques for enhancing the credibility of a study which were used by this researcher.
• **Member checking**: interview participants were able to check the interview transcripts for accuracy. Initially a summary of the findings, and finally, a full text of the findings were provided for comments and discussion with the school principal.

• **Prolonged engagement**: these schools had been part of the initial study five years previously so the researcher had had previous contact with the principals and schools prior to the study. The research was conducted over a year. There were initial visits and tours, several days spent days in the schools conducting interviews and returning for shadowing days and by invitation to attend a number of school functions and events.

• **Peer debriefing**: regular meetings throughout the course of the research with the investigator’s academic supervisor and other close colleagues served the purposes of this activity as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985:308-309).

• **Persistent observation**: adequate opportunities were provided by the schools to follow up on aspects of the topic and to attend activities associated with the school.

• **Triangulation**: information was collected from a variety of groups of participants in each case study. This was supported by observation and researcher notes which together with collections of documents and materials such as annual reports, brochures, newsletters, and policy manuals combined to build up and rich account and allowed for ‘multiple sources of data to be compared and contrasted’ (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006:203).

• **Progressive subjectivity**: the researcher’s constructions and questions were outlined and documented prior to data gathering and analysis. Over the course of the study the researcher’s views changed and new proposals emerged after analysis and interpretation of the data. In addition the literature review was ongoing throughout the study and continued long after the data collection and analysis. This was helpful in reshaping the researcher’s view of the case findings and discussion in the final chapter.

### 3.16 Limitations and delimitations

Delimitations in research concern themselves with the assigning of boundaries of the study, whilst limitations are concerned with the restrictions and qualifications that are placed on the findings. Much of the discussion about these two aspects arises from the issues surrounding qualitative research and the case study method in particular.
There can be no pure data as in quantitative research because all data recorded are mediated by the researcher’s paradigms as well as those of the participants, relying heavily on the perceptions of the participants. Subjectivity of participants was lessened by triangulation of the multiple perspectives of the school’s sustained success and the principal’s role in this. Group interviews in qualitative research can pose other limitations, for example, the size of the group. While it was intended that group interviews be for 6-8 participants for reasons beyond the researcher’s control some were smaller and some were quite large, for example the parents group at VGS which was 14. There were therefore opportunities for dominant voices to influence the data and there may have been some voices who were not heard at all. To minimize this limitation, the researcher made herself available after each group interview and offered both her phone number and her email address for further voice to be heard. While only three people availed themselves of this opportunity, some did remain after the interview finished to add further comments. Delimitation refers to the boundaries in a study. In this case it was concerned with the parameters of this study. It examined the sustainability of the success of three schools and the role of the principal in sustaining that success. While there were only three schools and they were all in metropolitan Victoria, Australia, the study satisfied the criteria of the ISSPP protocols, (different sizes, a range of socio-economic settings, male and female heads). While two of the schools were part of the Victorian government education system they were very different in that one was a special school with students aged from 3-18 with severe to very severe physical and intellectual needs, the other a suburban government school with students aged 5-12. The secondary school was part of the independent sector also catering for students 3-18 but for students without the same special needs. The delimitation therefore of the study is that these findings may not be representative of other schools in Australia, either in Victoria or in other states. Nor may they be representative of schools in the Catholic sector which were represented in the initial study but did not form part of this study. The strength of this study is that in spite of there being only three schools and they all being very different, the results contribute to the larger international database.

3.17 Summary

With the objective of exploring the sustainability of success in the performance of the three selected schools and the role of the principal is sustaining this success, this study employed a multiple case study approach. A qualitative approach was selected because this was the method taken by the ISSPP with which this study is aligned. The study’s credibility is enhanced by collection of rich and varied
sources of data and the identification of the beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, perspectives and behaviours of these principals in their specific contexts.
CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY ONE.

SPECIALIST SCHOOL

4.1 Introduction

The leadership of Eve, the principal of the Specialist School is explored here. This chapter outlines the profile of the school and the principal and provides a summary of the findings from the initial study by Di Natale (2005). The chapter then reports on the changes that have occurred since the first research was completed and the extent to which success has been sustained. To answer the research questions of this study, ‘How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance’ and ‘The personal qualities, characteristics and practices that contributed to success’, the findings are organised under the following headings:

4.1 Introduction
4.2 Participants
4.3 School profile
4.4 Principal profile
4.5 Background: previous findings
4.6 Changes since the last visit
4.7 Ability of the principal to maintain or improve performance
4.8 Reasons for sustainability
4.9 Contribution of others
4.10 Summary

Pseudonyms for the school and the principal have been used.

4.2 Participants in the study.

Table 4.1 identifies the thirteen people who interviewed individually for this study. There were a number of informal discussions with other staff and with parents during the shadowing days and at some of the school events attended by the researcher. Given that this was a special school, it was not appropriate to interview students. The researcher spent four days shadowing the principal attending
meetings at the school and a number of school functions and celebrations. These are outlined in more
detail in the methodology, Chapter 3.

Table 4.1 Participants in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Length of service/involvement with school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal - Eve</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal 1</td>
<td>AP 1</td>
<td>4 years. Former consultant. Originally one of the consultants for the new VPAC program then appointed AP to lead this change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal 2</td>
<td>AP 2</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker, member of Leadership</td>
<td>AT 1</td>
<td>At school 3 years. Had previously supported the school through her work in the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Therapy Services member of Leadership</td>
<td>AT 2</td>
<td>10+ years. Part time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team leader - Therapists Professional Learning</td>
<td>TL 1</td>
<td>2 ½ years at the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>T 1</td>
<td>15+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher in Early Education Program</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>17+ years. Now part time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>Mature aged teacher. First appointment but had worked at school as a teacher assistant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum leader at the school</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>4 years. Formerly at local secondary school so had been previously connected with the school through their transition program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
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<td>Child at school 4 years.</td>
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<td>Parent</td>
<td>P 2</td>
<td>Child at school 13 years. Member of Parent support group. (Friends of Port Phillip)</td>
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<td>School Council President</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Child at school 5 years. 3rd year as President.</td>
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4.3 School profile

The Specialist School (TSS) was a government funded specialist school which catered for students who had been diagnosed with intellectual and physical disabilities. It provided for students between the ages of 3, with an Early Education Program, and 18, with a Transition program. The school, located in a bayside south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia, five kilometres from the CBD, attracted
students from a wide catchment area. While the school provided buses to transport children within the neighbouring suburbs, many other students travelled by car from other areas of Melbourne. Enrolment places were keenly sought.

In 1986, the school was established as a Special Development School (SDS). It was located in a small converted suburban house in the same bayside suburb. Six staff were employed and twenty students were enrolled. In 1996, the school relocated to a larger site of a nearby primary school which had been closed. Shortly afterwards, the school became a specialist school which enabled a wider range of students to enrol. Students at the school fell into two categories, those with an IQ below 70 who were considered to be Special School Students and those with an IQ below 50 who were seen as Special Developmental School students. The school essentially catered for students who had a range of complex and interacting impairments that affected learning.

From the time of its relocation and change to a specialist school, the school had continued to grow and at the time of this study in 2008-09, there were 150 students and 68 staff and it was at capacity. Its annual budget was $A4.1m per annum. In addition, the school had been in receipt of over $A6m raised through philanthropic support. It had become the first fully serviced school in Australia, offering a broad range of educational, welfare and medical services. It was unique in that it not only provided personalised learning for each student by integrating education and therapy but, at the time of this study, offered a curriculum based on the visual and performing arts.

As the site was quite landlocked and enrolments had grown, students were now spread over three campuses. The Early Education Program, for three and four-year olds, was conducted in conjunction with a local kindergarten and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been signed with a local community education centre to allow senior students to undertake some Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) units of work. Students throughout the school were organised into groups, Kindergarten, Junior, Middle and Senior, rather than grades.

As the nature and needs of the school had grown so, too, had the staff profile changed. It consisted of special education teachers, therapy staff, teacher assistants and specialist teachers. A number of the staff, including the principal and business manager, were long serving but there were also a number of young staff. Because of professional networks established by the principal, there were links with several universities whereby final year university students were given the opportunity to undertake work placement at the school in areas such as speech pathology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy
and psychology. This had enabled the school to tap into such resources at a minimal cost whilst allowing final year university students to increase their practical experience prior to graduation.

TSS was government funded. As such, the school council, bound by state regulations, was the governing body of the school. This council was made up of four Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) employees from the school, five parent representatives and four co-opted members. The principal was the Executive Officer. Additional financial support for the school was provided by a Foundation, established in 2000 as a charitable institution to raise funds for additional facilities, and a parents and friends organisation, known as Friends of The Special School (FOTSS) who also gave generously of their time and energy to fundraise and build the school community.

4.4 Principal profile

Eve, the principal, had been appointed to the school in 1988, two years after it was established. She had overseen the transformation of the school from a small SDS school in a converted house to a specialist school with state of the art facilities, an innovative curriculum and a worldwide reputation. Eve had trained as a primary teacher then as an educational psychologist. After she became principal of the Specialist School, (TSS), she completed further formal qualifications including a Masters in Education and three Graduate Diplomas: in Student Welfare, Curriculum, and Educational Administration. In 1995, she was awarded a Churchill Fellowship which enabled her to travel overseas to investigate the concept of fully serviced schools. An outcome of her learning from this Fellowship was the establishment of TSS as a fully serviced school. As such, it provided a coordinated approach to the delivery of services by bringing together health, education and welfare services on the one school site ensuring that the daily needs of the students and their families were met and their access to learning opened up.

Over the time of her leadership the school had gained the reputation as being one of Australia’s leading schools catering for students with special needs. Eve’s profile had expanded as she had become extensively involved in the broader community being on various committees and project teams. She had been recognised for her achievements by a number of awards including an Order of Australia (AM) for services to education, CEO of the Year for Not For Profit Organisations, and Fellowships from several educational organisations including the Australian College of Education, the
Australian Principals Centre and the Australian Council of Educational Leaders. She had also been a finalist in the Telstra Business Women’s Award in 2001.

4.5 Background: previous findings

The initial study by Di Natale (2002-2003) had found that it was the principal’s vision, her ability to share her vision and have it accepted by the school community and the commitment of the staff which were the key contributors to the school’s success. Additionally, Di Natale reported that the principal had established excellent networks through which she had been able to attract resources from the wider community. She had also established important partnerships with business groups and tertiary institutions. Through her influence and networking she had developed a comprehensive sponsorship program and established a Foundation to ensure the school’s financial viability well into the future. She was seen as the driving force behind attaining most of the school’s resources and facilities including an indoor swimming pool, a technology centre, a music centre, physiotherapy facilities, and a dental clinic. She had also established a range of innovative and specialist programs such as the transition to work program, technology program and multi-sensory program.

4.6 Changes that had occurred between the initial research and this research

There were many changes that had occurred since the initial study. The key change cited by participants in this study was the change in culture and practice with an emphasis on learning rather than predominantly therapy. It was seen to have become a school, as one participant (AT 1) noted ‘less emotional, more educational’. A new curriculum based on the performing arts had been developed, new facilities had been completed, there were new reporting processes in place, there was greater accountability for all students’ learning to show growth and enrolments had grown. The demographic had changed in several ways. Enrolments increased from 127 to the maximum of 150 and the profile of the students had changed significantly. In the initial study, the majority of the students came from local and low socio-economic status families. This was reflected in 50 percent of students receiving an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or AUSTUDY (financial support for students over 16) each year. At the time of this study the principal described the clientele as ‘approximately one third of students classified as needy, one third middle class and one third very wealthy.’ Many came from outside the local catchment area travelling either by a TSS bus or being driven by parents. It was reported that the nature and severity of student disability had increased. Autism had become a bigger issue with more children being diagnosed on the spectrum at an earlier
age. In addition, the life expectancy of children with special needs had increased because of medical advances. To meet the changing needs of the students, particularly the senior students who had to leave TSS at the age of 18, the school provided access to VCAL programs and had developed programs to incorporate living skills. The Early Education Program, too, had been expanded and changed, moving from a home based model where therapists withdrew children and modelled to parents to a centred based approach where children were integrated into a more mainstream setting with a broader range of students accessing the service. (T2)

There had been changes in staffing, not only in numbers but in type. For example, there were now specialist teachers for Music, Visual and Performing Arts and Drama and Music, as well as Drama and Arts therapists. Speech and Occupational therapists were an important part of the therapy team. The role of therapists had changed dramatically as they worked in the classroom with teachers and students rather than withdrawing students for support. This change had been driven by the introduction of the new curriculum and pedagogy based on learning through the arts (Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum – VPAC). As a result, there was a more professional approach to learning and less what was described as ‘busy work’, activities designed to occupy children rather than to encourage their learning. As one of the Administration Team (AT1) reported ‘It is called a school and they are paid as teachers. Their project is to educate.’

The new curriculum, called the Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum (VPAC) was structured and rigorous. Programs and then units of work were constructed around three areas: Communication (written, verbal and non-verbal), Numeracy and Living Skills. These three areas were the focus of all teaching and learning for all class teachers, specialists and therapists with Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts being used to engage students. These curriculum changes had stimulated other changes. For example, a computer program, called Learning with Purpose, (LWP) translated the new VPAC into an electronic unit planner which was captured on a database. All teachers were expected to use this. Reporting to parents had also changed. It was more specific and rigorous with each student needing to demonstrate growth in each area. Expectations and accountability of staff had increased. Dialogue was expected to be professional and related to students’ learning rather than story telling or anecdotes about students. Changes in staffing and in the profile of these extra staff, for example, more therapists, had necessitated the need for restructuring both the leadership and the organisation of students. The leadership structure had been expanded and processes for communication and decision making refined.
Facilities had developed with a performing arts/multimedia centre, a redeveloped junior playground and the completion of a three bedroom house to support the Transition program. These changes, and the principal’s role in initiating or responding to these changes, will be discussed in more detail in the ‘Reasons for sustainability’ section of this chapter.

4.7 Ability of the principal to maintain or improve performance

In the five years since the initial research there was sufficient evidence to indicate that the school had improved its overall performance.

Table 4.2 provides an overview of both the changes and the principal’s ability to maintain or improve the performance of the school.

Table 4.2: Summary of changes

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<td>VPAC</td>
<td>Tracking student progress and reporting to parents</td>
<td>Class structures</td>
<td>Communication and decision making processes</td>
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Unlike many case studies where researchers can measure success through normative means, (external examination results, student surveys) evidence of maintaining success or improvement using quantitative data was more difficult in this case study because the students were exempt from external national testing and participation in external student surveys. The school review process provided an external, independent assessment of the improvement. Being a government funded school meant that the school was required to undertake an external review process every four years.
Eve had been able to secure a new style of review called a ‘negotiated review’, where the focus of the review was determined by the school and the school chose a critical friend to support them. These reviews in Victoria are available only to schools that were seen to be performing at a higher than expected level and to have a clear plan for the future. This was external evidence that the principal had been able to maintain or improve performance. The Education Department still requires schools undergoing these reviews to collect data which are then assembled centrally from data supplied from all government schools and presented in a School Level Report to each school. Relevant data for this study was staff and parent opinion data. Parent Opinion data at TSS continued to show very high levels of parent satisfaction. Data made available to the researcher showed that parent satisfaction in all variables had trended up over the last three years with results in the fourth quartile and most between 98% and 100%. Staff Opinion results were inconsistent and did not demonstrate the same level of satisfaction or improvement. Many variables in these surveys had trended down and were below the state mean.

The reputation of the school locally, nationally and internationally had grown. AP2 reported:

The name TSS is out there. It is internationally out there, especially after the Symposium. (A very successful symposium hosted by the school in 2008: ‘Re-imagining Special Education through Arts education and Arts therapy’ RiSE). We get people wanting to do international exchanges.

Enrolments had steadily trended up. In 2003, the number was 127; in 2008 the school had an enrolment of 150 and had reached its capacity. There were waiting lists. Examples were also given of families moving into the catchment area in an effort to enrol their child. The school had not limited its student intake to a particular zone; students travelled from all over Melbourne to attend, but as places were more highly sought, an enrolment policy had been enacted.

### 4.8 Reasons for sustainability

Di Natale (2005) and Drysdale (2012) provided evidence of Eve’s role in the school’s success. The return visit to the school confirmed that the school’s sustained success was in a large part due to the principal. Findings are divided into four broad themes of leadership style, interventions, personal qualities and other. Table 4.2 summarises the themes, sub themes and components that arose from the interviews, observations and notes which generated the information.
Table 4.3: Thematic Classification of leadership style, interventions, personal qualities, and other.

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4.8.1 Leadership style

In interviews, many adjectives were used to describe Eve as a leader: entrepreneurial, visionary, relational, determined, tenacious, energetic and tireless. She was also described as decisive, consistent and a presence around the school and community but the data (Table 4.3), suggested the key determinant of her sustained success was her personal philosophy and values.
4.8.1.1 Personal philosophy and values

All participants agreed that it was Eve’s student centred philosophy and vision for what could be for the children at TSS that drove her to succeed and helped her sustain that success.

Her philosophy and values were intrinsically entwined with the needs of student with special needs students and her determination to create the best special school in the world; to put up a model where children don’t fall through the crack. Our mission and vision were clear and we just kept travelling along that path. (Principal)

Her philosophy and beliefs were apparent as evidenced through some of the interviews. For example, the school council president (SC) observed:

The most important thing is the children. There is an uncompromising focus on the child’s welfare and there can be exception around that. She is totally uncompromising about the vision that she sets for the kids.

One of the teachers (T4) agreed:

As long as it is good for the kids and the kids are the basis of it. That’s where Eve’s big thing has been. The kids are the foundation of the school.

She was seen to have created an environment in which excellence can fly and second best is not tolerated. These children need the best they can be, they don’t need mediocrity. (TL1)

Others attributed the success of the school to her:

I think most of it rests with Eve, most of it being 99.9%. She is the one who had the vision to surround herself with people with different sorts of skills. She had the capacity to say this is where I want to go but modify that if the feedback is different. (AT1)

And another long serving staff member, (T1) commented:

Everything that we have is attributed to Eve. She would know exactly what steps she was going to take to get what she wanted and she made it happen. I really mean she did, she has made the school what it is.

And one of the parents (P1) commented that ‘everything is done to a very high standard.’
Success is defined by steady growth by VPAC and by the attraction to the Integrated Services model. Eve is the driving force. She is a big picture person and helps the school towards that vision. The school is forward thinking, keeping up and leading. (TL1)

Eve believed her success in leading the school was an outcome of her vision and determination and to the fact that

I didn’t ever roll over. I stood up for what I believed in. My vision keeps evolving but it develops and then I drive it relentlessly. I wanted to create the best specialist school in the world, to create opportunities for the students that were not available anywhere else and put up a model so that children do not fall through the cracks.

Others agreed, her philosophy was strong, she was determined and she had a vision for what education could be for students with special needs. The school council president (SC) commented ‘Eve has vision and she takes steps to get there’ while a staff member (T1), reiterated ‘She has made the school what it is.

4.8.1.2 Entrepreneurial

Eve’s entrepreneurial skills were an important aspect of her leadership style and a factor in the sustained success of the school. Through her personal and professional networks (discussed later in this chapter) she sought partnerships and sponsorship to provide additional funding. She had honed her natural skills. One of the teachers (T1) described her PR skills as ‘perfect. They couldn’t be better.’ All government funding was spent on staffing, often in excess of recommended student – teacher ratios. The success of TSS was predicated on more than teachers. Eve needed a range of assistants, specialists and therapists to realise her dream. She also needed facilities beyond those provided by government, so she worked tirelessly and successfully to fundraise for the state of the art facilities and anything she could that would improve the opportunities for the students. Her entrepreneurial skills were successful, as noted by the school council president (SC) who claimed

Resourcing is an important part of the ongoing success of TSS and Eve is a great fundraiser. She finds connections and follows through. She draws people in. She exhibits a senior executive skill set, a rare skill set. She builds relationships, and works with people. She gets them to do things they don’t want to do, but she draws people into this journey, which is mutually beneficial.

A teacher, (T1), agreed

‘The resources at TSS are second to none, other than private schools. This is through Eve’s capacity to get sponsorship. You could go to her and say what you needed and she could get
Another example given was funding of the Early Intervention program (the Kindergarten program) which was not government funded. AP2 reported:

Eve had heard of companies or individuals sponsoring kinder kids so she thought why don’t we put this idea into place? You can sponsor a kid’s education for a year for $5000 or $10,000 for two years which is how long we have them. It’s all those things she follows up.

The school council president (SC), concurred: ‘So when you bring it back to the kids you say ok we need the money and Eve says it’s about the kids so we get the money.’

4.8.1.3 Relational

Eve was highly relational. Nine of the participants described her leadership style as relational and it was frequently observed during the researcher’s shadowing days. Relationships within the school were important. She believed in ‘getting key people on board because if they are on board, everyone will be on board.’ AP2 agreed. ‘It’s people who sustain success. It has to be. It’s the people that keep it ticking over.’ Eve was observed to be always available for people: parents, staff, friends. One teacher (T1) acknowledged ‘You may not agree with her but you always knew she was there if you needed her, if you needed to talk to her.’ In interactions with staff, Eve was observed to have the capacity to read people, to know how far they could be challenged when she believed it was necessary. In this way she maintained the respect of staff and maintained good relationships with them. External relationships enabled her to garner support for TSS through philanthropic donations. At Christmas it was observed she acknowledged the support the school had received from sponsors, benefactors, friends, academics and senior people in the Education Department. More than 500 Christmas cards and school magazines were posted. In addition, more than 100 gingerbread houses had been purchased, boxed and were being delivered or posted out. Building relationships had been a cornerstone in gaining resources for the school but it was observed that relationships had enabled success to be sustained. For her growth was not an option; it was a necessity and she understood the importance of involving people in the process.
4.8.1.4 Visionary

Eve was visionary.

You have to be clear and know where you are going; you have to know what you want, and have got to have some direction and know the path that you are on so that you can take everyone else with you. (Principal)

Eight of the participants acknowledged the strength of her vision. One, (T1) commented ‘Her vision and leadership you could not fault.’ Another, (T4), said ‘Her success is due to her knowledge of the staff, the school and where it is going. There is always a forward move and that is carefully judged. We never go back to what it was. We always tweak it and it is always for the benefit of the kids.’

Eve acknowledged that she embraced change and was always on a path of continuous improvement.

In response to a question on what her legacy to the school might be she replied ‘Innovation, change and development. Community connection and philanthropic connection.’ She described the reasons for maintaining success as

There is always something exciting to do. I keep moving the goalposts and keep having high expectations. (Principal)

The school council president, (SC), agreed ‘There is no such thing as a rut at TSS; there is no time when you stop evolving and improving. There is always the next thing.’

Eve’s vision was strong and her priority was clearly articulated:

There is just one priority – children. Everything else is an enabling priority. She accepts no exceptions around the welfare of a child. (SC)

With a swimming pool, a full-time swimming teacher, a hydrotherapy spa, physiotherapists, psychologists, occupational therapists and speech pathologists all on site TSS was no ordinary school. Her vision was focused on the children and what best meet their needs.

The symposium, RiSE, was seen to have had raised the benchmark of success. It was her vision.

That was me, my idea. I went to a conference and there was nothing about special education so I thought we have to do something. I got $20,000, formed a committee and invited people from 13 countries. We are publishing a book. Remember I said you surround yourself with smart people? I contacted X and said ‘your job is to find a publisher. (Principal)

Eve firmly believed that her authenticity was what marked her as a leader, that and her courage to challenge boundaries to always be looking for a better way for students with special needs to learn.
Having decided that the direction of the school needed to change, to become more a ‘school’, people were informed.

We’ve always been one step ahead. I am never afraid to ask for our kids. (Principal)

The school council president (SC) confirmed Eve’s positive attitude to change and continuous improvement, believing that at TSS

There is no point in time in which you stop evolving or aspiring. There is always the next thing with Eve. There’s always forward looking and asking what are we doing?

In a video presentation for an ISSPP conference on successful leaders in times of change held at Nottingham University (May 2010), Eve said

Change is inevitable. Growth is optional. You either choose to grow with it (change) or you shrivel and stay where you are.

Her stimulus for change was looking at the practices of other schools, particularly internationally as part of her Churchill Fellowship, and continually questioning how things could be better for the children at her school. Her attitude to change was described by two people as ‘let’s explore it and see’ or ‘go and find it and bring it back’. ‘When I think of TSS, I think it has been a school of change’ said T4 while another, TL1 commented ‘It’s exhausting working with her but working with anyone else would seem mundane.’ AP2 said ‘Each year she has these projects or something she wants to achieve. It might be a footy clinic or a racing day. These little projects have been happening, well ever since Eve has been here.’

4.8.1.5 Tenacious

There were a number of terms used to describe the strength of Eve’s leadership: strong, determined, decisive, tireless but ‘tenacious’ best sums her up. She acknowledged that it was her determination to drive things forward ‘relentlessly’ that had contributed both to her initial success as well as her capacity to sustain that success.

One of the interviewees, (T4), moved beyond describing Eve’s leadership as ‘strong’, rather describing it as

She was very autocratic. She still is autocratic. She likes to know exactly what is going on and as the principal she has the right to do that. That is her style and that’s what Eve is and that’s why she is where she is.
One of the parents, (P1), commented ‘She just makes things happen. She sets her goals and she gets there.’ AP2 agreed ‘Once she gets something in her mind she is unstoppable.’

Eve believed

It was more about making people excited. Making them feel it was their idea and picking the key people who were most influential with staff and making sure they were on board first. If you knew they were on board you knew other people would come. (Principal)

And one of the teachers, (T1) described her behaviour as ‘She is like a terrier; gets a scent of somebody that might be able to donate this or that and she will not let go until they say yes which has been to our advantage. It’s been fabulous.’

4.8.1.6 Professional

Eve was observed to be very professional. She described that as one of her finest qualities, something she believed marked her apart from many of her peers. It was observed that she was beautifully groomed at all times, gracious, welcoming, hospitable and ensured everything produced by the school was of the highest quality. She employed someone to proof read every external communication; she had a strong relationship with the Deputy Secretary of the Education Department and commented that when she wanted information, she contacted him directly, never the regional people although she maintained good relationships with them. Her professionalism, too, gave her access to the media and to charitable institutions and she used all these contacts to advantage her students.

4.8.1.7 Presence

She also had a presence. One of the parents, (P1), described a morning tea for new parents: ‘Eve spoke and she had a beautiful presence about her. She is always immaculately groomed and she presents the school that way as well. She wants the best for the students.’ During the shadowing days the researcher had the opportunity to observe her welcoming another group of new parents and also hosting a grandparents’ morning tea. She was gracious, warm, welcoming, and very sensitive to her audience. She was also a presence around the school, particularly around the students and was observed always to be available if there was an incident with a child or a distressed child.
4.8.2 Interventions

This section describes the interventions of the principal which enabled her to sustain success. There were several sub-themes: developments, staff selection, developing a culture of learning, leadership practices, accountability, communication and decision-making processes, building the capacity of staff and leadership structures.

4.8.2.1 Developments

Relevant learning experiences

All the participants in this research cited the biggest change and the most significant development, since the initial study, was the focus on learning. Concerned that ‘we were sort of treading water’ (AP2), and believing that these students could learn, Eve formed a partnership with Melbourne University and with an educational consultant. Over a two year period, this group completed an audit of the curriculum and learning at TSS. The outcome was the Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum (VPAC).

The adoption of this curriculum based on visual and performing arts was revolutionary and life changing to the school, the staff and the students. One of the consultants had become one of the assistant principals. He, (AP1), observed

These children can’t learn through abstract thinking and they find it very difficult to follow desk based learning. They learn by doing. As a curriculum it was trying to construct a curriculum that had meaning in terms of the students’ capacity to learn things and this is what we did.

Two other teachers described the change:

The purpose of VPAC was to get the kids to be independent. VPAC recognised that academics are important and that the therapy role can be incorporated through the school. TSS became a good school. (T4) (Participant’s emphasis)

Everybody has really had to make a major adjustment to absolutely everything you’re teaching in class, the way documentation is done, the way you teach. All your goals are set up for each child so that each child can be seen to have made some level of progress. I firmly believe the arts curriculum for this school has been absolutely excellent. I think (pre VPAC) the curriculum was not being well run at all. It was itsy bitsy but with Eve’s vision to move forward, we have something that really works for our students. (T1)
Partnerships and networks

Networks and partnerships were recognised by eleven participants, and observed by the researcher, as one of Eve’s key contributions to the ongoing success of the school. Eve had successful formed partnerships and alliances with business organisations, associations, service groups, community agencies, government departments, universities, hospitals, corporations, and philanthropic organisations.

In her final Principal’s Report in the annual school magazine, Eve listed the achievements of the school over her twenty years as principal:

*The Theiss Independent Living House, the Girta Rose Visual and Performing Arts Centre, the Helen Macpherson Smith Dental Clinic, the Elaine Paul Paramedical Centre and the Josh Sady Honda (Essendon) Multi Sensory Room*

commenting that *none of these would have been possible without the wonderful partnerships developed throughout the years. (PPSS School magazine 2008:8)*

Eve’s networks and partnerships were fundamental to her sustained success. Relationships with different groups enabled her to move outside government guidelines, for example, in providing facilities and tendering for buildings. Her catch cry to government departments was ‘Trust me. I don’t have the money but I have the resources’ and she was consistently proved correct.

The indoor swimming pool, which was able to be used for hydrotherapy sessions, for example, was built for $150,000 rather than a tender quote of $500,000 because of donations from major construction companies. The RiSE Symposium saw events hosted at Government House, Parliament House and Raheen, one of the oldest and most stately homes in Melbourne. Eve was never afraid to ask. She posited that if someone says no, you just ask someone else and you keep asking until you got what you needed.

She had a very strong relationship with the Department of Education (Victoria) and the Deputy Secretary, with the Minister for Education and with the Regional Director. These relationships were crucial, particularly as the school moved outside the boundaries of government school curriculum guidelines. For example, the school adopted the VPAC curriculum and it meant they had to be exempt from teaching the standard, mandated Victorian curriculum. She commented that she managed these relationships with respect, always providing people in authority with detailed feedback so that they
were always very well informed of what was happening at TSS. She also regularly invited them to visit, to talk with students and with teachers. Trust in her was very important.

Growth of enrolments and subsequent challenges for space had initiated other partnerships. For example, senior students who had previously been able to attend the local secondary school until its closure two years before, now attended the Montague Learning Centre with whom a MOU had just been renegotiated; the Early Education program for three and four year olds had seen a stronger partnership with the local Uniting Church kindergarten whereby a teacher and an aide employed by TSS co taught with kindergarten staff. This Early Education program had been made possible through Eve’s efforts. She had sought sponsorship for it and so created new partnerships. This sponsorship was detailed in the section of Eve as an entrepreneur.

While many external partnerships had been sought, and maintained, there was evidence of much stronger partnerships within the school. Assistants were more in partnership with class teachers whereas previously they reported that they had felt their role was subsidiary. The Full Service school approach also meant stronger partnerships between therapists and teachers were needed. This was observed to be still evolving but gaining traction.

**Facilities**

Facilities had developed. A residential accommodation centre as part of the transition program had been completed. An offer by a construction company to support the school was quickly turned into an opportunity with a three-bedroom house with a living area, kitchen, a bathroom and laundry facilities and a landscaped garden, that was now maintained by the students as part of a comprehensive transition program. To support the VPAC, a $2.2 million performing arts/multimedia centre had been built, funded by the state Education Department, the Pratt Foundation and the Port Phillip Foundation, with additional community support. The Junior adventure playground was described, too, as ‘state of the art’ having been designed in conjunction with both occupational therapists and physiotherapists to meet the sensory needs of students. At the time of the research Eve was in the process of planning for a Transitional Learning Centre which would enable senior students to be on site again. The building was envisaged to add an extra five classrooms on the same footprint, provide a safer entry and exit for buses, enable the removal of some old portable classrooms and reclaim additional playing space.
The facilities were often described as ‘state of the art’. Nine of the people interviewed commented on the facilities which had grown significantly to meet both the growth in enrolments and the change in direction, with the emphasis on student learning. In describing the Independent Living Centre, one parent (P1) commented ‘there is nothing like it anywhere.’ It had enriched the transition program for the senior students, teaching them the basics of shopping, cooking and keeping a house. A coffee shop also operated from this centre.

The redevelopment of the junior playground had provided, amongst other things, climbing apparatus and bikes and a bike track. There was also a full time swimming program. Parents were impressed with the environment, describing the facilities as ‘exemplary’. T1 commented ‘Parents think it is fantastic. Lots of art. Happy kids. It doesn’t look like a school’.

4.8.2.2 Staff selection

Since Di Natale’s (2005) study in 2002-3, the number of staff had increased by 50%. Eve prided herself on her selection of staff and eleven people who were interviewed confirmed her capacity to select the right people for the right jobs. The symposium had attracted staff. Getting the right staff had often been a challenge but now it was perceived that the school was attracting better qualified teachers and teacher assistants. People understood what the school was about and were attracted to it. They were also attracted by Eve’s vision and leadership. She had been able to attract people with ‘different strings to their bows’, that is multi-talented, for example, the Music therapist was also a teacher. What all had to have, was an interest in the goals and the culture of the school.

Sustainability is very dependent on having the right people. You employ people who share an ethos and frame everything with professional dialogue. (AT1)

She agreed that staff selection had enabled her to create and sustain a successful school. One teacher, (T4), agreed, saying ‘Eve is incredibly clever at choosing staff. She just knows how to read people and how to pinpoint particular people with particular skills. She always has her ear to the ground.’

As noted earlier in this chapter, the changes to TSS, particularly changes in approaches to learning through the introduction of VPAC, had put the school on the map both locally and internationally but it had also resulted in the loss of some staff.
We lost people who choose not to come on board. We advertise for people with an Arts background and sometimes it is difficult to attract really good people. We are lucky with graduates and the (RISE) symposium has attracted teachers. (AP2)

Staffing was seen to be crucial to the success of VPAC. AT1 commented ‘Sustainability is very dependent on having the right people.’ Eve was known to have an’ ear to the ground’ seeking out graduates, encouraging teaching assistants to train as teachers and always employing dedicated, well qualified staff.

Eve agreed one of the reasons for her success was because ‘you have smart people around you.’ She understood her strengths, but was also able to recognise the strengths of others and whose skill set could complement hers. AT2 commented ‘Eve knows how to push people’s buttons and get the right people for the right job.’

When she decided the leadership team needed to expand and she needed someone to drive the curriculum, she looked to one of the consultants. AP2 observed

He was a natural replacement. He with the intellect; Eve with the money. It is no use having a program without the right people and then the buildings. Her expertise is in attracting the right people and the right funds.

Parents, too, applauded her selection of staff with one, (P1), citing their gifts as being ‘capable, dedicated and approachable’ as well as contactable at any time for problems, absences or to share successes. Another parent (P2), agreed that Eve always made sure she had the right people, that staff are fantastic; if they don’t work out they are gone.’

4.8.2.3 Developing a culture of learning

The culture of the school had changed dramatically since Di Natale’s (2002-2003) initial research. It had moved from a ‘welfare mentality’ to an ‘educative mentality’. It was less emotional and more educational.

There were a lot of anecdotes and it was very, very personal stories. One of the things we needed to do was to develop a more professional aspect to the school. There was a lot of activities. Kids doing stuff to keep them busy but they weren’t doing anything that had an educational rationale behind it. Constructing an arts-based curriculum was a design a means of constructing those educational activities into units of work and unit plans so staff could see there was a professional culture, an ethos that framed everything they did. They (the staff) saw themselves primarily as carers but this is a school, it’s called a school and they are paid as teachers. It’s a colossal change. (AP1)
Eve summed it up as ‘We value the paramedics but we are a school.’

There was still a strong element of care for each student and for their families. The change was from a ‘hospital’ culture to a ‘school’ culture. The Integrated Services model had been refined. It was observed to have become much more integrated, with students not being withdrawn. One teacher, (T4) described that ‘The model has changed, improved in that teachers understand it. ‘A member of the Admin Team explained the change in more detail:

Teachers are given programs that they are asked to apply throughout the day for a kid with speech and language problems. Our strategy is to teach the classroom teachers. If everybody in all the kid’s classes uses the same techniques we’re likely to make more gains. (AT2)

Eve’s integrated services model was described by a staff member (TL1) as a ‘one stop’ shop for students and the ‘way to go’.

By improving opportunities for students to grow, learn and achieve, Eve believed they would be more prepared for the transition into the next phase of their life.

Reporting to parents demonstrated the increased emphasis on learning. Teachers were required to report on students’ individual learning goals. Reports were in the form of a portfolio with pictorial representation of the child’s progress. Each child had to be seen to be making progress; second best was not tolerated.

I think it is a much more professional culture. We actually talk about children and the advances they’ve made in terms of the curriculum we are delivering. (AT1)

4.8.2.4 Leadership practices

Shared leadership

Eve believed that she had become more confident as a leader and in doing so was more prepared to share leadership. The school had also grown and she conceded it was no longer possible for her to do everything. One of her leaders commented ‘She has become more democratic. Initially she was far more directive and she made all the decisions.’ (AT2) One of the teachers, (T2) remarked ‘Her leadership is more distributed, more shared and she is comfortable with that.’ Others commented that she was both directive: ‘Things have to be done her way, no compromises ‘(T1) and empowering ‘She delegates and holds people to account.’ (SC)
Eve agreed ‘I am more than willing to help others come on board. I have to be on top of everything but I have structures that allow it all to happen.’

Eve knew what she wanted for the school and for the students but also understood that she did not have the curriculum knowledge to develop a curriculum such as VPAC. Hence she employed a team of consultants to develop and implement her dream. When an assistant principal position became available, she appointed one of this team to drive the change home, telling him ‘I’ll drive home the physical resources. You drive the curriculum.’

She believed that her strength was leadership and that that should be her focus rather than management. In terms of running the schools she said: ‘It is not the management issues; they can be done with or without you. It is having good people. It is not a one person show.’ She strongly believed and frequently reiterated that it was important to surround yourself with competent people.

I have some fabulous people to work with and I guess the key to always surround myself by people who are smarter than me; people who have more credibility. If you’re going to be successful in any shape or form, surround yourself with smart, capable people and they’ll get you through it. (Principal)

_Educational_

Eve saw herself as an educational leader. The growth of the school and the change in culture was her vision and she was observed, and reported to be, constantly asking ‘How can we make this better for the kids?’ She had also insisted on a change in language, emphasising to staff that ‘they are not your students but a student of the school for whom we all have responsibility.’ One of the parents, (P2), commented ‘She’s on top of everything. She is in touch all the time and wants to know what is going on. If there is a problem in the classroom, she’s in there and saying ‘Right. What’s going on?’

VPAC had continued to evolve. Its success was the fact that it catered for the variety of student learning needs through performing arts. It had provided challenges for some staff. Eve gave the example of one teacher who said to her ‘I am not going to sing and dance to which I replied Fine. I will help you find another job’.

As an educational leader, she agreed that VPAC was still a work in progress. This was confirmed by her assistant principal, (AP1), who commented ‘It will be five or seven years to really embed it.’ One
ongoing challenge was the assessment of students’ learning. Any qualitative assessment to track student learning progress was difficult.

You can steer the direction of the kids. We can’t give our kids an A, B or C but we should be able to measure their performance in curriculum areas. That’s the next step we really need to look at. You can have a visual and performing arts curriculum but if you have no assessment base, well, you can say the kids are enjoying it but that is not really enough. (AP2)

Parents, however, perceived their children’s opportunities differently. They saw that while informal, there was a lot of substance in the assessment and that in terms of reporting a child’s learning progress, ‘the report dwarfs what our daughter gets at a mainstream school.’ (SC) Another parent, (P1) said ‘the reports are quite rigorous and detailed.’

**Strategic**

Eve was strategic. She had a vision but she indicated that she had learned more about herself and how to make a vision a reality. She was strategic in her approach to seeking external support. Her approach could be both subtle and compelling. When outlining how she gained corporate support she said:

Sometimes we just have breakfast at school with maybe half a dozen people who could be key sponsors. We tell them the story. It’s all about knowing “The Story”. Knowing where you’re going and what you’re doing. And if you can hook people into your vision and your story, they’ll often say well what is it I can do to help you. I never, ever, ask anybody for money (with the exception of submissions for grants). I’ve never asked for sponsors. If I have somebody as a guest or to come and visit the school never once have I said, ‘This is what we need’. I say, ‘This is what we’re doing, this is our vision for the future and I know that we will get there’. And often they’ll say, ‘Well, what can I give you? Is there anything I can do? Can I be supportive in any way?’ And that works really well; just by taking them through the school and showing them every little step. (Principal)

In terms of working with staff, Eve believed a leader had to recognise when things need to be ‘kicked along’ but not mandate the change. Her approach had become more invitational. In an interview with the researcher, she shared the example of introducing interactive whiteboards. She had someone demonstrate how they could be used in classrooms and then asked if anyone wanted one. She reported the take up was instant.
Consultative

She noted her leadership style had changed. It was more situational and adaptive and while she could still be very directive, she was more consultative. This was supported directly by four others who were interviewed.

The introduction of the Arts as a means of helping students learn was an example of her increased consultative approach to leading. Having found the Arts as an answer as to how children with special needs learn best, she employed an outside group of consultants with specialisation in both the area of the arts and in arts education. This group of consultants held focus groups for staff but Eve was deliberately never present nor were reports on discussions fed back to her. She allowed staff to have their voice. She reported ‘It took a year. There were two information/focus groups sessions a week and people could go as many times as they liked.’ The success of this consultative practice was reiterated by one of the assistant principals, (AP2) who reported

It was a fantastic process. They (the consultants) used a model where they were involving teachers. Rather than it sitting at admin level, everyone knew it was serious and they spent time being involved in the workshops and one to one interviews.

Interventions such as the movement to a more shared leadership model and the changed leadership structures and decision making processes (discussed later in this chapter) were evidence of a more consultative approach to her leadership.

Courageous—preparedness to challenge

Eve acknowledged that she had become more confident in challenging people, in being more direct with staff. She reported that she ‘used to avoid the hard stuff but had developed the skill of challenging behaviours through coaching and by practising the skill by role playing.’ AP1 agreed: ‘If something’s not working she talks to them and tells then rather than just let it go. She will go into a classroom if something is not working and will do something to make it work.’ The president of school council, (SC), concurred ‘She’s uncompromising. She’s prepared to have uncomfortable conversations and say this is not acceptable.’

Eve explained that she had become more objective and had learn to say things to people without being judgemental. Again, she ascribed these changes in behaviour to observing and to coaching.
The hard stuff, for example the ability to listen and to let people have their say, these are skills I have had to work on. I have watched how others, particularly the counsellors and wellbeing staff, operate, how they do things and I have learned from them.

4.8.2.5 Accountability

The changes in curriculum and delivery had not only increased accountability but had brought about a number of changes in staff. One of the assistant principals (AP2) stated ‘There were clear expectations and behaviours for staff. I think the curriculum has given us accountability. It’s brought our teachers on board in a more professional model and that’s an improvement.’ It was acknowledged that some staff had left because of the curriculum changes, the change in culture and the increased accountability.

This year we had to bring teachers in and we’ve talked about their goals and we’ve sorted those through to make sure they are measurable. We are pushing this, asking so what are you doing in terms of visual and performing arts to achieve this goal? If the goals aren’t clear to everyone, it’s hard to go forward. Setting goals, we’re probably one of the few places that is as meticulous as we are. If you don’t get your goals then everybody does anything they want. If you can get your goals right, the kids get a better outcome. (AT2)

A staff manual clearly outlined behaviours and expectations. Staff had input into this document when it was revised annually. This was observed by the researcher at an end of year staff meeting. The school council president described Eve as ‘having very high expectations’, not only in relation to student learning but also in terms of staff commitment. For example, she believed that ‘every function must be owned by the staff. We must buy and provide resources and functions are one of the ways we raise money.’ It was an expectation that all staff would attend and participate in all fund raising events and school celebrations.

‘She has an uncompromising focus on the child’s welfare and learning and there can be no exception around that, particularly at a special school. She is totally uncompromising about the vision she sets for the kids.’ (SC)

Eve was also more conscious of external accountabilities saying ‘We document every meeting. We have two people in contentious meetings. We support each other in that way.

4.8.2.6 Communication and decision making

A comprehensive set of skills punctuated her personal qualities. She was observed to be an excellent communicator, both orally and in writing. One of the reasons that the school had been able to sustain its success was because Eve had realised that the growth of the school required more formality and
that changes needed to be written down as policy. Teachers reported that all policies were canvassed as part of staff meetings and that there was a much stronger teacher voice. There was never any lack of clarity or purpose for development or change and this, it was reported, had helped Eve sustain her success. ‘Structures are clear about how decisions are made and people are consulted and communicated with.’ (T2) The school council were always kept informed, the president remarking that Eve reported everything to them saying ‘We are doing this because….’ (SC). One of the teachers, (T2), confirmed ‘She is articulate in explaining the reason and the process’.

Decisions were made from the ‘bottom up’: through the subschools (Junior, Middle and Senior) and therapists’ team meetings to the Team Leaders forum and then to the Administration Team. The Team Leaders meeting had become a consultative forum. This teacher voice in decision making was reported to have had been particularly evident in the adoption of VPAC.

When we first implemented the arts based curriculum it was a matter of letting people know the school was changing culture and direction. Communication is an absolute priority, not any old communication, it’s professional dialogue. That’s the communication we want. (AP1)

4.8.2.7 Building capacity of staff

Eve was an educational leader who built the capacity of individuals and of staff teams. Staff was exposed to extensive professional development. They were encouraged to keep up-to-date with the latest educational ideas, undertake formal post graduate qualifications and continually develop new skills. She encouraged staff to develop themselves. For example, one teacher, (T3), originally employed as a teacher assistant, spoke of the encouragement he had been given to go and train as a teacher.

Eve was very much one for people maximising their potential. She has always been very encouraging of people wanting to do additional courses.

On completion of his training Eve encouraged him to spend time in a mainstream school and to work with the government mandated curriculum before employing him at TSS. At the time of this study there were three other teacher assistants completing their formal teacher training while working at the school. A team leader, (TL1), described how she was told by Eve to ‘go out and do presentations. Prepare yourself to take on team leadership.’

Another example of the encouragement Eve gave to her staff to push beyond their comfort zone was evidenced in the Delegate Handbook for the 2008 International Symposium RiSE. Of 53 national and
international presenters, nine were staff from TSS. She was seen to always encourage people and to push people ‘really hard’ with lots of delegation framed by ‘I know you can do it’.

Rather than being a follower of educational trends, Eve set them; for example, developing the first fully serviced school in Australia, a comprehensive integrated service provision, a transition unit to support independent living, and the first Australian school to focus its entire curriculum on the arts. Her current challenge, she noted, was to gain public recognition of the staff so in 2006 Eve nominated two staff for a national teaching award.

The new structures were reported to have supported her in her leadership in that she was seen to no longer be ‘putting out spot fires.’ (AP1) She had continued to build her own capacity. Part of her success was attributed to what she had done for her own growth and development. One parent (P1) explained that through her networks, through participation at and in conferences ‘that the school has benefited. She finds ideas and brings them back.’ Another parent, (P2), agreed that Eve had been able to sustain success ‘She does a lot for her own development.’ Eve believed that she had grown in her leadership and that most importantly that she had ‘found herself’.

4.8.2.8 Leadership structures

As noted earlier in this chapter, there had been change in the leadership structure of the school. This was seen to have come about because, as the school grew, Eve realised she could not do everything and she could not maintain the unrealistic pace she had set herself.

The leadership structure had been expanded to the Principal, two Assistant Principals, one leading curriculum and teaching and learning, and one leading school operations, a social worker, the leader of the paramedics and the business manager. The Admin Team was made up of these leaders but not the principal. Recommendations were made to her following appropriate consultation, that is from the bottom up. The team leaders of each of the sub schools enabled input from all staff and their opinions to be considered. Structures that facilitated communication and accountability of staff to the educational direction of the school had been put in place. One of the assistant principals, (AP2), described it as ‘we now have team leaders that run the junior, middle and transition or senior school as well as the therapists team. Our consultative structure has changed from five years ago.’ One of the Admin team reported that ‘Structures, including meeting structures, were put in place so that
things work.’ (AT2) One of the teachers, (T2), agreed, saying that ‘there are clear structures and processes for decision making and good consultation.’

4.8.3 Personal qualities

Eve displayed a range of personal and interpersonal skills. Five of the personal qualities she are described in this section: compassion, support, optimism, passion and reflectiveness.

4.8.3.1 Compassionate

What Eve had contributed as a leader was clearly acknowledged by staff and the school community but it was her personal qualities which were identified as her great strength. Optimistic, determined, uncompromising and a doer with great energy and passion, resilient, courageous, confidence in what was right, and self-belief were some of Eve’s key qualities.

She was energetic, tireless and passionate and she believed these qualities had contributed to her continuing success at the school. But beneath the vision, drive and determination was a warm, supportive person, a compassionate person who fixed everything and managed families as well as the school. The facilities are excellent but in this setting warmth and support is what is important and she builds relationships with families. (P1)

This relationship building and compassion was observed at a morning tea for grandparents where Eve demonstrated sensitivity by identifying their needs and concerns, sharing that ‘we all have fears’ followed up by offering support:

We have a social worker, two psychologists on Wednesdays, two assistant principals and me. You are welcome to avail yourselves of any of our services individually.

The changes in the organisation of students into more aged-related groups was prompted by parent concern about their child being in a ‘high need’ group. Eve listened to people, reflected and empathised with them, and when appropriate, responded with actions. She demonstrated empathy and compassion towards her staff, explaining to the researcher ‘I think you have to display warmth and empathy towards your staff and show compassion. It’s terribly important in this environment with these sorts of kids.’
4.8.3.2 Supportive

She was very supportive of the staff. She was very conscious of the emotional strain of working with high needs students and their families. In this setting she believed that looking after staff was paramount and while she tried ‘not to be Mum and solve things’ she was aware of staff and staff who might be struggling.

I notice if someone has had a number of days off and I speak with them. I am concerned about you. How can I help? With some I have helped them get another job. It can be too demanding, too stressful for some. (Principal)

She saw herself as a confidante, both to staff and to families, and this was observed during shadowing days on a number of occasions. Parents appreciated her support. One, (P1) explained to the researcher ‘Facilities are excellent but support for families, warmth and support. That is what is needed. Eve is on top of everything and in touch all the time.’

Eve had set up structures to provide support for families in a number of ways. For example, the Friends of TSS was a volunteer group who not only supported the school through fundraising but provided social and emotional support for families of students. Eve and the school also provided financial support when needed. When students reached 18, they ‘graduated’ from TSS. Eve explained ‘For these students, they will not graduate from university, they won’t get married and many will not even have a 21st birthday. This is their moment and that of their families.’ The graduation ceremony was a formal occasion held at an exclusive reception centre when each of the graduates dressed formally and was presented to the school community. Financial support was provided on this occasion by buying a suit for the boys or a party dress for girls if necessary.

Her support of staff was not admired by everyone. For example, one of the assistant principals (AP1) confided that he believed there was ‘too much counselling and too much going out for coffee.’ He believed that staff needed support ‘but while the caring and nurturing is very important here, staff actually have to be protected from themselves. They can get too emotionally involved with parents and kids and it can mean they have no energy left. You have to put some limit on it. There’s got to be a level of consistency and professionalism. There’s got to be a slight difference.’

4.8.3.3 Optimistic

Eve had sustained success because she always saw the glass half full - problems were a challenge and not a barrier. She maintained that ‘if someone says no there is always another door.’ She was very
persuasive and engaging, and able to deliver a compelling argument whether it was with an individual or a group. She was persistent and optimistic as was illustrated her attitude to any rebuff.

If people say no I think that I did not ask that question the right way. Maybe I should have asked it another way. You have to re-phrase the question or the request. I don’t take it as a no. I take it that they did not know what I wanted. (Principal)

She frequently stated, ‘It’s about the kids and there is nothing I wouldn’t do or ask for if it could help them.’

4.8.3.4 Passionate

One quality which had not changed was her passion. She maintained it was her passion that drove her. It was always ‘the kids and how to make things better for them.’ The passion did not diminish because she was finishing at the school at the end of the year. During a final meeting to say good bye with the researcher she shared ideas for the future: for the new Transition building and what it would mean, for demanding that the Admin team go into the classrooms regularly and teach with the teachers. She was retiring as principal but had offered her services free to the school to continue their fundraising, to enable the school’s facilities to keep improving, to enable the best opportunities for these students.

4.8.3.5 Reflective

Eve was reflective. She knew inspiration could come from a wide variety of people and situations and she actively sought these. She liked to have people who could challenge her and the school.

I have learned to talk to colleagues, to seek counsel. Ten years ago I got a coach. There have been a lot of people that I have drawn on – consultants – I’m not afraid to call in a consultant and say, ‘Look, what do you think about the way things are running?’ When we had some issues at school, I got an outside consultant in. I said, ‘Tell me – warts and all’. (Principal)

She believed that by reading, learning, interacting with many and varied people and by seeking counsel she had been able to reflect and improve her practices and this is what had enabled her to sustain success.
4.8.4 Other

4.8.4.1 Reputation

There were two themes related to reputation; that of the school and that of the principal. In some ways, they were difficult to separate.

School

Because of the principal and her reputation, the reputation of the school had grown. The profile of the school and of Eve had risen both nationally and internationally through various avenues, not the least being the very successful symposium, RiSE, hosted by the school in 2008.

Originally the school provided for students in the local area. As the reputation of the school grew, places had become more highly sought as what the school offered for their students was unique. As one teacher commented, (T3), ‘The school’s reputation has grown. It is ‘a flagship in special education.’ Using her relationship with the senior education department personnel, Eve had created and enacted an enrolment policy which allowed for students from all over Melbourne and beyond to be enrolled. Students in need who lived locally were still preferenced and a free bus service was offered to those who lived within the school’s catchment zone. One teacher, T4) described the reputation as

People are dying to get their kids in here. The enrolments are going up and we’ve got kids on the waiting list. Parents come in and they are impressed with the environment, very, very impressed when they walk into the school and into the classrooms. It’s an exciting learning area.

The school had a public profile. Eve believed that it was important to raise the profile of the school, not only to encourage support, but to show what could be achieved for children with special needs with vision, dedication and drive. Publicity, she believed, also enabled her to share the credit for the great work being done by her staff. She used the media and she used the media well. One example shared was the local free magazine, The Emerald Hill Weekly (Feb 11, 2009). It contained an article on children with special needs being ‘segregated’ as against being in mainstream schools. A parent from TSS was interviewed who said he had stumbled across an article on TSS. The article was accompanied by a photo that showed a teacher conducting a dance class and ‘It was a picture that was so joyous, it spoke volumes about the place.’ As a consequence of this, the family moved to the other side of Melbourne to enable their autistic son to attend the school. This parent, who was the current
president of the school council, maintained that the school is highly authentic and ‘everything in the photo is borne out.’

Principal

One of the assistant principals (AP1), summed up Eve’s contribution and her reputation saying She has been the leader for such a long time. The school is intrinsically tied up with Eve: TSS and Eve. She doesn’t even have a surname!

The president of the school council confirmed this saying ‘She has been invited to go and speak about the school in Hong Kong and other places. She did a short course at Harvard, again on invitation.’

4.9 Contribution of others

An unintended finding from this study was that while the evidence would suggest that the principal was pivotal in the sustainability of the success of TSS and her success as the leader of the school, she did not do it alone. While her networks and partnerships continued to play an important role, particularly in terms of fund raising for facilities and programs, she had become more dependent on personnel within the school, particularly among her Admin team. She acknowledged their contribution. For example, the schools she visited on her Churchill Fellowship that had inspired the Full Service school concept, the consultants who paved the way for VPAC, AP1 and his knowledge of the arts and of curriculum, AT1, whose counsel she often sought and on whose interpersonal interactions she modelled herself. She frequently stated to the researcher her need to surround herself with clever people. She did not believe that what she had achieved she had done alone. In this way she was humble although humble was not an adjective used by herself or anyone participating in this study.

4.10 Summary

Eve defined her leadership broadly. She saw herself as juggling several complex roles. But it was her strategic leadership and capacity building that set her apart. She had been described as an educational entrepreneur, marketer, networker, coalition builder, politician and innovator all rolled into one. By building relationships and forming alliances and networks, she had harnessed a well-oiled machine of voluntary workers, voluntary work and valuable sponsorship from numerous groups and
organisations. Every contact, chance meeting, or gathering of people was seen as an opportunity to build a relationship. For example, at any business luncheons she attended she would ask people to give their business card. Invitations to come along to the school would follow. Staff were expected to be warm and welcoming and greet guests. Her open door policy was a genuine attempt to welcome people and highlight both the school’s achievements and the ongoing needs. All staff were encouraged to present the school in the best way and extol the virtues of the school at all times.

As a successful principal, it was her vision for VPAC and her belief that children with disabilities could learn as well as be cared for that helped raise the reputation of the school and sustain Eve’s success as a leader. It was her vision and philosophy that drove her careful selection of staff and her drive to network and fund raise to enable appropriate facilities to be built. Eve embraced change. She changed the culture of the school from one of therapy to one of learning. Her expectations of herself and her staff remained high but always student centred. Finally she was able to reflect, listen and consult and change the structures, communication, and decision making processes to better meet the changing needs of a growing school.

AT1 summed up Eve, her leadership and her legacy.

‘She has created an environment in which excellence can fly and second best is not tolerated. I think the changes that have been introduced are sustainable because people have a different level of professionalism which will endure. The curriculum will endure. The facilities will endure. A lot of it has been linked with her personally but now it’s linked with the organisation and it being a good organisation to brand with.’
CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY TWO.

VICTORIA GRAMMAR SCHOOL

5.1 Introduction

The leadership of the Headmaster of Victoria Grammar School (VGS) is explored here. The chapter initially outlines the school profile, the profile of the principal and a summary of the findings from the initial study by Doherty (2008). The chapter then reports on the changes that have occurred since the first research was completed. As with Chapter 4, to answer the research questions of this study, ‘How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance’ and ‘The personal qualities, characteristics and practices that contributed to success’, the findings are organised under the following headings:

5.1 Introduction
5.2 Participants in the study
5.3 School profile
5.4 Principal profile
5.5 Background: previous findings
5.6 Changes that had occurred between the initial research and this research
5.7 Ability of the principal to maintain or improve performance
5.8 Reasons for sustainability
5.9 Contribution of others
5.10 Summary

The pseudonym for the school used for the previous study has been retained in this chapter.

5.2 Participants in the study.

Table 5.1 identifies the fourteen people who were interviewed individually for this study. Focus groups were held with parents, student leaders and boys at each year level as well as informal discussions with other staff during the shadowing days. The researcher spent four days shadowing the
Headmaster, attending meetings at the school and a number of school functions and celebrations. These are outlined in more detail in Chapter 3.

Table 5.1 Participants in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edward - Headmaster</td>
<td>Headmaster</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Headmaster – Head of Senior School</td>
<td>DHM</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Junior School</td>
<td>E1</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the Headmaster – Daily Administration</td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Headmaster – School Liaison</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the Headmaster – Academic Studies and Professional Learning</td>
<td>E4</td>
<td>4 years but had been previously employed at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other members of the School Executive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Junior School</td>
<td>E1</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the Headmaster – Daily Administration</td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Headmaster – School Liaison</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the Headmaster – Academic Studies and Professional Learning</td>
<td>E4</td>
<td>4 years but had been previously employed at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Master</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>27 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12 coordinator, Head of English</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior school classroom teacher</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Science</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced young teacher</td>
<td>T5</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Commerce</td>
<td>T6</td>
<td>New appointment from an independent girls’ school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of School Council</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Female. Long serving member. Former parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student focus groups</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Year 7/8; Year 9/10; Year 11/12 School leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent focus group</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>14 Senior school parents at an evening meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 School Profile

VGC was a high fee paying, Anglican, independent boys' school located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. VGS, established in 1902, had an Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1190, against an Australian average of 1000. With 78% of families in the 4th (top) quartile for educational advantage, the school community was predominantly middle class and with relatively high socio economic status. The school enjoyed a very strong reputation in the community and an education at VGS was sought after, as evidenced by the extensive waiting lists, particularly at Years 5 and 7. Student academic performance indicated that the school was a high performing school. For example, Year 12 students completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) achieved an average score of 35 against the state set benchmark of 30 and the percentage of scores over 40 (from a maximum of 50) averaged over 20% against a state average of 9%. An open door enrolment policy existed, in that no student was excluded because of learning or other difficulties. In recent years, the school had slowly expanded its intake of students with specific learning or educational needs and, had at the same time, expanded its offerings and support for these students through the use of a referral system. VGS aimed to provide a broad educational experience for boys from 3-18 years of age. Girls were also enrolled in the Early Learning Centre (ELC) which catered for children 3-5 years.

At the time of this study, there were 60 students enrolled in the ELC and more than 1320 students in Prep to Year 12. There were 15 boarders, both country boys and international students. Each year, a number of international GAP (a school leavers exchange program) students spent two to three terms at the school and a number of VGS boys took GAP years at overseas schools, particularly in England, Canada and South Africa. Opportunities existed for some shared classes in Years 11 and 12 with a neighbouring independent girls’ school (School magazine 2013:13). There was evidence that students had exposure to many educational opportunities including a breadth of academic offerings, school sports (the school is a member of the Association of Grammar Schools of Victoria), community services, international sporting and cultural trips, as well as a strong connection with indigenous communities in Central Australia.

There were approximately 144 teaching staff and 93 non teaching staff at VGS. The Headmaster was only the seventh appointment to that role in the school’s history. As in other Australian independent schools, the Headmaster was appointed by the School Council.
The school was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and governed by a Council of up to 14 members. Two of these members were nominated by the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, one nominated by the Parents’ Association and one by the Old Grammarians. The remaining members were nominated by the Council itself. As with other non-government schools in Victoria, VGS received their income predominantly from fees and fundraising but also from state and commonwealth funding. (Source: Independent Schools Victoria) School fees were set by the School Council on the recommendation of the Headmaster and the Business Manager.

There was also a Parents’ Council at VGS whose role was to support the school: promoting the interests of parents and the school, helping parents identify with and become a part of the VGS community, liaising with associated parent bodies and interests both inside and outside the school and providing extra facilities for the teachers and boys through fundraising. There were numerous sub-committees to this Council such as Class Representatives, Communications, Craft Group, Fine Foods, Founders’ Day Fair, Friends of Music, Friends of Art, Friends of Drama, Garden Group, Green and Gold Ball Committee (green and gold being the school colours) and Secondhand Books.

The Old Grammarians Association (OGA), formed in 1909, provided a network of communication for Old Boys. It also fostered support for the school. A committee of 14 organised functions and reunions as well as managing an extensive online communications directory. There was also a ‘Facebook’ social media page. Several Old Boys’ sporting clubs operated under the VGS umbrella and regular Old Grammarian Association (OGA) events were held throughout the year.

5.4 Headmaster (Principal) profile

The principal, Edward, in this context known as the Headmaster, at the time of this research was in the final year of his third five year contract. All but one year of his teaching career had been in high fee paying boys’ school. He brought to VGS experience in senior leadership roles within independent schools including being principal at another school.

Brought up with a strong sense of social justice and firm Christian values, the Headmaster had been educated at an independent, church affiliated school. On the completion of his education, he moved on to The University of Melbourne where he completed a Bachelor of Science with Honours, a Master of Science and a Diploma of Education. Commencing in 1974 as a Science and Biology teacher in a regional Victorian government school, he moved to the independent school sector with a teaching
appointment in 1975 at the secondary campus of one of the oldest and most elite boys’ schools in Australia. In 1977-1978 he participated in a teacher exchange to King’s School, Bruton, Somerset in the United Kingdom. There, he taught Biology at “O” and “A” levels, was a boarding house tutor, and travelled widely in the United Kingdom.

Within the first decade of his career, he gained his first senior leadership role when in 1984 he was appointed Deputy Headmaster (Curriculum) of another high-fee, independent school. Five years later, he became the Principal of a middle-fee, ecumenical, non-denominational independent school established in 1980 in a growth corridor on the outskirts of Melbourne, Victoria. During his eight-year tenure, that school increased in size from 352 in 1989 to 950 in 1997. Under his leadership, he reported, the school enjoyed a period of stability, growth and solid development that laid the foundations for the current three-campus school of more than 3000 students. In 1997 he stepped back from principalship accepting a request by the Headmaster of the school of his first teaching appointment to take up the position of Deputy Headmaster (Head of Senior School). This school was undergoing transformation in a number of areas and he was perceived as a leader who could provide the support needed to lead these changes. Two years later, he was invited by the Council of VGS to become its seventh Headmaster. Again, testament to his integrity, he struggled with the decision to leave his position after only two years, but he was both encouraged and supported by his then Headmaster to accept the invitation and the challenge.

5.5 Background: previous findings.

In 2005-7, Doherty (2008) conducted a study of the same school principal as part of the first phase of the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP) study. Doherty discovered that Edward’s success was an outcome of: his personal qualities, values and beliefs; his professional knowledge, competencies and practices; the nurturing and caring environment of the school; the compatibility of the Headmaster with his role in the school; his capacity to grow and sustain the school community and himself; and his influence on the school’s teaching and learning environment. In addition, Doherty found the traditional culture and identity of the school both impacted upon the principal, and, in turn was impacted upon by his beliefs, values, vision and practices.

Personal qualities and practices supporting effective sustainable leadership by the principal emerged as a key to the school’s success. Doherty found that the principal’s strong sense of self, the importance
he placed on relationships, and his recognition of the need for a leader to be proactive, was what made his leadership successful. (Doherty 2008).

Participants in her study identified possible challenges for the school in the future including:

- a need to consolidate what had been set in place;
- a need to maintain the level of academic and sporting achievement of students;
- a need to continue to develop facilities and to offset the school’s land-locked site;
- a need to continue to develop the teaching and learning program.

As with all non-government schools in Australia, it was recognised in Doherty’s (2008) study that VGS faced the challenge of sustainability should the level of government funding be reduced.

5.6 Changes that had occurred between the initial research and this research.

Since the initial study (Doherty, 2008), there had been a number of changes at VGS. Some of these changes were initiated by the Headmaster and included:

- the school being more clearly positioned as a school of choice;
- a restructure of the leadership team to a more distributive model;
- a more global and strategic approach to leading by the Headmaster;
- more alignment between the junior and senior schools;
- significant physical changes in the form of buildings and land acquisition, including outdoor education properties;
- an increase both in enrolments and in the number of students enrolled who had special learning needs;
• changes to teaching and learning, particularly an additional focus on 21st century learning and the use of technology as a resource supported by the opening of a new Centre for Contemporary Learning;

• a greater emphasis on environmental sustainability;

• refinements to student leadership programs;

• and a more global approach to education with more opportunities for international experiences for students.

Other changes were responses to external influences and included:

• an increase in accountability, both of staff (teacher registration with Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) and appraisal using the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards and student performance, particularly at Year 12, the final year of schooling;

• in addition to league tables published in newspapers, the my school website allowed comparisons of school data including student achievement data.;

• greater external accountabilities with more stringent Occupational Health and Safety requirements;

• changes in the membership and expectations of the School Council.

How the Headmaster responded to these changes was seen to be a contributing factors to the school being able to sustain its success. These are discussed in more detail in the 'Reasons for sustainability' section of this chapter.

There was one other very significant contextual change during this research associated with the leadership of the school. The Headmaster was in the last year of his headship at VGS. At the time of this study, his retirement had been announced. The impact of this was a strong reflective theme emerging through the interviews. Furthermore, the Deputy Headmaster (DHM) had been appointed as principal of another independent school and was also leaving VGS at the end of the school year.
5.7 Ability of the principal to maintain or improve performance.

In the five years since the initial research there was sufficient evidence to indicate that the school had maintained its overall performance. There was no evidence of anything declining.

Table 5.2 provides an overview of both the changes and the school’s ability to maintain or improve performance.

**Table 5.2 Summary of changes**

<table>
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Doherty (2008) provided evidence of the Headmaster’s positive contribution to the school’s success. On a return visit, five years after the initial research, there was significant evidence to indicate that the school had not only maintained its performance but had, in many instances, improved it. The return visit to the school also confirmed the ongoing influence of the Headmaster on the school’s sustained success. He was reported to have continued on a journey ‘of remarkable consistency’. (E3)

The findings from Doherty’s (2008) research suggested that for the school to maintain its success, changes needed to be consolidated, academic and sporting achievements maintained and the ongoing development of facilities and the teaching and learning program should be a focus. The Headmaster had achieved this but the data collected as part of this study suggested that he and the school moved beyond consolidation and maintenance.
There was evidence of improving performance. VGS had always been a high performing school and this had continued as was evidenced by academic results assessed externally, external survey data and responses in many of the interviews.

The open entry policy of the school and the increased number of boys with special learning was reported to have resulted in some decrease in growth in NAPLAN results compared to similar schools in reading and persuasive writing, although not in numeracy. Results in Year 12, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), had remained high with an average study score of an average of 35, (state average 30), and the percentage of scores above 40 between 20 and 24. In 2013, results had been slightly lower. While the all study score had remained at 35, the percentage of scores above 40 had dropped to 18.6% although this was still well above the state mean of 9%.

There was evidence of the school’s practices changing in response to the need to continue to improve results.

We are constantly thinking about how we can be better. We examine the Year 12 results every year, even the Junior School are privy to these. We can analyse the last 10 or 15 years, plot out where they’ve (the students) been, where they’re going, that is to which universities and which courses they’re doing. (T5)

Another teacher, (T1), defended a criticism that results may have been disadvantaged by the open entry policy reporting that he believed VGS ‘is a very tolerant school, a place that caters for individual differences while maintaining its academic rigour at the same time’.

An experienced teacher, (T3), recently appointed to the Junior School, but who had worked in a government school reported that she had encouraged a more rigorous approach to data analysis in the junior years. ‘I analyse the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results for Years 3 and 5 and there is more focus on the outcome and on student preparation for testing.’

More recently the Centre for Contemporary Learning, opened in 2013, challenged not only the concept of learning but also the concept of a library as a resource and learning centre. Boys reported on the positive impact this building had had on their learning.

The reputation of the school had continued to grow with significant waiting lists for entry, particularly at the key entry points of Year 5 and Year 7. For example, there were 350 boys on the waiting list at Year 7 (the school anticipated that this would be the case until 2022), the enrolment in the Junior School had grown from 300-380, and the percentage of students of old boys had increased from 5%
to 10%. Equally important as a success criterion was the retention of boys. For example, (E3) reported that ‘there are 156 boys in Year 7 and by Year 12 we would still have 150 (sic) something of them. Very few boys leave before the end of Year 12’.

Success in sporting achievement had been sustained and had in fact improved with school teams achieving success in interschool competitions. It was reported that ‘I think our sporting results have been significantly improved. We’re a very successful sporting school’. (T1) Evidence to support this, obtained from the college website, was that the school had won premierships in Cricket, Hockey and Tennis in 2007, Rugby, Basketball and Athletics in 2010 and the Associated Grammar Schools Victoria (AGSV) Australian Rules football premiership in 2012.

Other evidence to suggest that success had been both sustained and improved included the additional opportunities that were afforded the boys at VGS. These included a strong emphasis on social justice and opportunities to participate in social justice activities, more international experiences, both sporting and academic, and a broad range of extra curricula activities which will be referred to later in this chapter.

Facilities, too, had continued to improve. In addition to the Centre for Contemporary Learning, 640 acres of land in 2013 in Victoria’s High Country had been purchased to expand the outdoor education program.

5.8 Reasons for sustainability

The return visit to the school confirmed that the school’s sustained success was in a large part due to the Headmaster. Findings are divided into four broad categories of leadership style, interventions, personal qualities, and other. Table 5.3 summarises the themes and sub-themes that arose from the interviews, observations and notes which generated the information.
Table 5.3: Thematic Classification of leadership style, interventions, personal qualities, and other.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<th>Participants</th>
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5.8.1 Leadership Style

This section describes the following characteristics: personal philosophy and values; relational leadership; social conscience; modelling; inspiring; confident; presence; and, servant leadership.

5.8.1.1 Personal Philosophy, Vision and Values

The Headmaster stated that he had a clear philosophy

I have a very strong philosophical belief to education. It’s all about giving to kids, about providing professional offerings to kids. (Headmaster)

This philosophy was consistently reiterated by participants interviewed and was seen to be a significant factor in contributing to the sustainability of his success.

He believed that

academic results are a given. I see results as important but to produce well rounded human beings that can go into the community and make a difference. That’s what education is about’. (Headmaster)

The College Captain reiterated that philosophy saying: ‘Academia is important but subtly he focuses on relationships. He makes sure we leave the school a good person’.

DHM concurred:

Our academic results have been raised and that’s important but it hasn’t happened at the cost of the whole student. The Headmaster has ensured that we have a holistic education. If you have a passion, you can live your dream. We’ll facilitate it. A number of our kids are applying for colleges overseas. Last year we had one go to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and one to Princeton as well. We don’t necessarily have the best results in Victoria but we have the best thinkers. (DHM)

Staff reiterated the Headmaster’s philosophy and vision for the school.

It’s all about the boys and it’s for the boys which is lived out. He expects that to be lived out by staff. What is going to send these young men out as independent, autonomous people who are going to be good citizens in the world. (E4)

It’s knowing boys, valuing boys and that comes first and what programs you can introduce to further that development. (E2)
Our aim is to send these young men out as independent, autonomous people who are going to be good citizens in the world. (E3)

A belief that boys leaving VGS had social obligations was seen to have permeated through the school community. For example, a School Councillor and parent of former students commented that:

He has instilled something that no other Head prior to him would have instilled so strongly. There was not the same sense of being community-minded and a sense of needing to give back that the current group have. (SC)

And a teacher, too, confirmed that

He’s clear about the school’s focus; about how the boys should act. He delivers this not only to staff but the students and parents. That strong vision really falls throughout the school. He shows his core values and the values he expects of every VGS staff member, every student and the parents as well. He does talk about the triangle between the school, the parents and the student and making sure those communication blocks are open. (T5)

Fairness was a value that was seen to guide the Headmaster’s leadership. The growth in demand for places at the school had brought with it challenges, but enrolments were governed by his principles. Offers of financial gifts or support to the school in exchange for a place would not sway his ethics. He cited that being a staff member did not automatically guarantee your son to a place immediately.

It’s got to be fair. Policies are important but you also have to use judgement. (Headmaster)

His judgement was observed during one of the shadowing days. An old collegian who had been living overseas made an appointment with the Headmaster to request a possible place for his son on the family’s imminent return. The Headmaster agreed, commenting later to the researcher that in such circumstances he would always make an exception.

Scholarships, too, had to be fair. Music or General Excellence scholarships provided an opportunity for enrolment but their purpose was to offer an opportunity to a student who could not otherwise afford to come to VGS.

Being relational also meant that he valued being fair in other ways. For example, one of his executive team reported that his fairness did not always sit with everyone who sometimes would like him to be
more ‘hard-nosed’. Some believed he was too forgiving, too tolerant of some boys or some staff, whereas in fact he was living by his beliefs and principles and no door was ever shut.

His strong belief is in the individual and a strong belief in giving students a second or third chance. He really wants to understand what’s in the best interests of the school and each student. But whether people have always agreed with the Headmaster’s decision, they have never thought he wasn’t doing it for the very best interests of the boys. (E2)

5.8.1.2 Relational

In terms of the characteristics of his leadership, most participants in this study, (see Table 5.2) including the Headmaster himself, described it as being relational. He quoted Sir James Darling (a famous former Headmaster of the Geelong Grammar School for 31 years) whose mantra was to know something about every one of his student, saying ‘to know a name is good; to know something about them is better.’

There were numerous examples given as evidence that the sustainability of the school’s academic success and its reputation was enhanced by the Headmaster taking time in a busy schedule to focus on the importance of relationships, on each person feeling special. In an interview, the Headmaster reported that he ‘liked people. My style is a personal one. I glean information by walking around the school talking to people or at the sports ground talking to parents’. To enable himself to be ‘free’ for people, he ensured that all the paper work was to be done before the day began 7.30am or after it finished, whatever the time. He achieved this by being ‘highly disciplined’ and completing two hours paper work before school so ‘the rest of the day, including the evening, is with people’. His personal assistant confirmed this showing the researcher a pile of paperwork on her desk when she arrived in the morning and saying: ‘He is across the school. It’s hands on. All the paper work is done. I don’t know how he does it’. A senior long serving teacher reported:

He is a people’s man with a lot of good will. He doesn’t walk past rubbish, he picks it up. He knows three quarters of the school by name and will stop and chat – he embraces you. He immerses himself in the lives of ‘people’, not teachers, not gardeners. (T1)

Another teacher,(T4), gave a similar description of him saying:

I don’t see the Headmaster as branding someone as a teacher, a gardener – they’re people and heaven knows we need more leaders that treat people as people. (Participant’s emphasis.)
The researcher observed him on several occasions standing on the corner of the street, greeting boys by name as they came to school or at the traffic lights as they waited to cross to other sections of the school during the day.

Parents reported that he ‘knows the names of parents and boys and also knows their story’. Staff commented on the importance he put on relationships saying ‘He brings a position of relational connection so that each person feels valued’ (E5) and ‘People are better people because of the relationships in the school he is leading’. (E4) A representative of the School Council who had observed him on formal and informal occasions over a lengthy period of time reported that ‘He moves around a crowd with great ease. He makes sure he speaks to everyone; he makes time for every individual.’

5.8.1.3 Social Conscience

The Headmaster’s social conscience continued to be a hallmark of his leadership. As with all his leadership, he modelled what he expected of others.

The focus on social justice ultimately stems from his Christian convictions. He’s exemplary in the way he lives that life. (E5)

He has a lifelong commitment to the Indigenous community. He goes to the Oenpelli (indigenous) community for a month every year to work with the community. (SC)

Groups of boys accompanied him to Oenpelli. Again, this was seen to be him modelling what he expected of others. The school had supported this community in other ways. For example,

Four years ago we built a $1 million Science Centre at a remote indigenous centre. It is used every April and September. We have had a program going there for 10 years. He challenges us. Teaching Science in remote communities takes us out of our comfort zone. (T4)

Scholarships had been offered to young aboriginal boys. The Headmaster described these as ‘second tier’ boys meaning that unlike some schools, scholarships had not been offered to boys because of what these boys could contribute to the school, for example, sporting prowess, but rather for what the school might be able to do for them. His social conscience was reflected in his attitude to scholarships, particularly sports scholarships. Sports scholarships of any kind were something to which the Headmaster was vehemently opposed. They had become common practice for many of the independent schools and he believed that had changed the nature and purpose of interschool sport.
I resist sports scholarships. We are a school and we should be playing school sport. Sport is part of learning. There are a whole range of ethical issues around subsidising sports scholarships.  
(Headmaster)

5.8.1.4 Modelling

His actions, he believed, modelled the culture he wanted in the school. In an interview he shared that he believed conversation and relationships were the key reasons for the sustainability of success at VGS. He was consistently identified as a man who lived by his values. He articulated that ‘values are meaningless unless they are modelled’. He strongly believed leadership was about modelling what you believe and living by your values. ‘You have to model 25 ½ hours a day’ was his belief.

All my conversations are about the values I have and the things we do at the school that reflect our beliefs. Senior staff see that modelling and conversations with the little people, then they model that too and you have a whole school of conversations. You don’t have to publish stuff or beat the drum about specific events; you’ve got conversations going on all the time. As a leader once you stop modelling, once you lose your energy, once you stop having meaningful conversations, once you become concerned about position hierarchy and you stop doing what you have to do, then the energy starts to wind down. So it’s a dynamic and you can’t set that up, it is what a school lives by. It’s about conversations and energy. The school is a compendium of energies and ideas and I suppose that all comes from the leader. You’ve got to be that person and you’ve got to continually model what you want people to be.  
(Headmaster)

There was a strong correlation between how he saw himself and how others perceived him. One teacher, (T5), reported: ‘He leads from within. He models his core values. He has clear expectations and he listens’. (T5) One of the student focus groups described his leadership saying:

He leads by example. He dresses neatly and picks up papers. He aims to know everyone’s name. He stands on the corner and greets boys arriving at school. (Year 7 & 8 focus group students)

Other boys interviewed reported that they saw themselves as role models for younger students. It was evidence in their pride of being part of VGS, of wearing the ‘green and gold blazer.’

The member of School Council in an interview described how she saw his leadership.

He’s chosen to lead by his example of truth, goodness and service. It has been through the Headmaster’s leadership that these words (of the school song) have resonated so strongly.
During the interview, she repeated several times the description of ‘truth, goodness and service’ as the way Edward led. The School Council, in preparation for the appointment of a new leader for the school, asked staff, students and parents what values VGS wanted the next Head to have. There was a strong correlation between the three groups: to be community minded and to have a strong sense of social justice, which in part is ‘acting manfully’. (The motto of the College is *Viriliter Agite* – Act Manfully). The phase ‘Acting Manfully’ was used often by the Headmaster, by staff and by boys. It was a motto lived by members of the school community.

The boys know that the three most important things in life are ‘example, example, example.’ (Headmaster)

5.8.1.5 Inspiring

Boys interviewed also spoke highly of him as a leader, not only because he modelled the behaviours he expected of others but he inspired them.

He inspires us. He has made the school run to full efficiency. The school aims to influence each other for the better. Old boys come back to help out, to give back to the community to show how much they have been given. We look up to him as someone we aspire to be. The school is leadership oriented. There are three ways to teach leadership: example, example, example. It is not a position but a choice. He (the Headmaster) says not everyone is a leader but everyone can learn. VGS is a school that wants everyone to be a leader and to stand out from the crowd; stand out in their own way. You don’t have to lead from the front. (Year 9 & 10 focus group students)

During the shadowing days, the researcher had the opportunity to meet with various other groups of boys and attend several lunches with them. One Year 12 boy observed that ‘He inspires us with his leadership. His philosophy is *Leadership is what you do when no one is watching.*”

5.8.1.6 Confident

Reflecting on his leadership over his time at VGS Edward reported that he had become more confident as a leader, particularly speaking in public.

I think I have become more confident and probably stronger at public speaking. I am confident to use humour. I was much more formal and prosaic in my speaking. (Headmaster)

This view was supported by a School Council member who said’ His confidence as a public speaker has skyrocketed.
But Edward was also very conscious of occasion, remarking:

One time I don’t dot point is presentation night. You have 3000 people there and if you get something wrong or leave someone out it’s bad so I write that and try to read it in a readable way. (Headmaster)

5.8.1.7 A presence

He believed in the importance of being a presence and he believed this had helped him sustain success. It was part of being relational. He was observed to be both a presence to the boys and the community by being physically present around at the school, at all events and in the staffroom. Having a teaching commitment, he believed, enabled him to be ‘present’ to staff. He was a presence in another way. He was observed and reported to always be present to people. He cited the importance of hearing, of being present to people, as a foundation of his belief about leadership. Leadership was about people. One parent commented ‘When you see him in a photo with others, he is always listening to people, giving them his undivided attention.’

5.8.1.8 Servant

He was described as a servant leader by the Year 9 & 10 focus groups of boys. This servant leadership was also observed by the researcher on several occasions. At lunch meetings with groups of boys he was observed pouring juice for boys and, after a meeting and after his classes, he was observed pushing in chairs. It was another example of his modelling of expected behaviours and an example of his humility.

4.8.2 Interventions

This section describes interventions by the Headmaster. There were several sub-themes: staff selection, learning and leadership opportunities; culture; leadership practices; developments; accountabilities and leadership structures. These were his responses to changes in the environment

5.8.2.1 Staff selection, learning and leadership opportunities

In the initial study (Doherty, 2008), staff selection and development had reportedly contributed to the success of the school. In the return study, building the leadership capacity of staff had continued to develop. The restructuring of leadership, the additional appointments for positions of responsibility, and the appraisal process was reported by staff to have provided opportunities for them to grow. Recruitment
and leadership were factors which were reported to have contributed to the sustainability of the school’s success. One respondent, (T4), commented: ‘Good recruitment is the key’. Another, (T2), added ‘He hires people who are going to be sympathetic to this culture’. And another staff member (T1), attributed the sustainability of success to recruitment, saying

We have competent staff who are very committed. It was a good school; it is now a good school going forward because of good recruitment.

Another teacher, (T4), added ‘staff selection is excellent and our Heads of Faculty are second to none’.

It was reported that not only did the Headmaster recruit well but he encouraged staff to develop.

One newly appointed teacher, (T3), cited the encouragement she was given to attend a conference in the United States and present on her work. She was told by the Headmaster ‘If you find something you are interested in, put in a submission and you will be supported’.

Another example given, (T5), was ‘We have a swathe of doctors here. The school is willing to put money towards people doing their Masters and will help out’.

Staff believed that the leadership and management of the school were designed to effect continuous improvement:

The Headmaster wants feedback. He wants to know where things can improve. His major responsibility is employing the staff and delegating and he’s done that very well. (E3)

The new leadership structure had also enabled the Headmaster to be less operational but it had also provided a means of building the leadership capacity of staff. For example, offering opportunities for them to step up into temporary leadership position.

The Executive has grown considerably since I have been here so have the leadership positions available. If it’s an acting position for a term you will get a tap on the shoulder; if it’s longer than that they will do it internally. There should always be someone in the waiting lines to step up so they (the Headmaster and Executive) are starting to build the skills, looking at the possibilities for the future. It’s the fostering of leadership which enhances the ethos of the school. (T5)

In every facet of Edward’s leadership, staff reported that there was a strong focus on building the capacity of everyone and modelling the importance of relationships.

He believes that it is really important to understand and talk to each member of staff and to see their point of view. He can act as a listening ear. If you talk about new programmes that could be
instilled and he’ll say *start thinking about it, start organising it and we’ll see what can happen.* That is quite incredible as a leader. (T5)

The capacity of staff was built in other ways. The appraisal and review process had been designed partly for accountability but also to prepare people for their next position. It was a rigorous, three step process which saw the Headmaster meet with every staff member professionally at least once every three years when he acts ‘as a listening ear and offers suggestions. He is an amazing listener, and he acts on it’. (T5)

A tribute to the success of building leadership capacity was the number of teachers who left VGS to assume senior positions in other independent schools.

When I came here I thought I would be one of four or five who were new. There were twenty. The Headmaster said in his first speech – I am so glad this person’s gone off to be Deputy Head and this person has gone to be Head of House at X (another high fee paying school) and this person’s gone to do X, Y and Z. It wasn’t about losing staff members; it was about building people up and allowing them to flourish elsewhere. (T5)

5.8.2.2 Culture

Inclusivity

Edward had created a culture that was inclusive, gentle and respectful. At the same time it was one of high expectations.

His belief in inclusivity and the value of each student was reflected in the school’s open entry enrolment policy. No boy was excluded because of poor academic ability or learning difficulties and significant support was provided to enable each boy to grow. Additional classroom support was available for students with special learning needs from Preparatory (first year at school) to Year 8 and a Referral system tracked students with learning, social or emotional needs through to Year 12. The reputation of the school’s approach to welcoming and supporting these students had seen an increase in the number of special needs students. One of the parents in a focus group had chosen VGS because she had been told that they would provide learning support for her son. She was glowing in her praise of the support he had been given. In terms of the number of enrolments of students with special needs, though, the Headmaster reported that the school was now seen to be ‘on the top edge of what we can cope with. We’ve got to keep a watching brief on that’.
It is one of inclusivity and value of the individual and acceptance. What is espoused in the literature is what actually happens. (T3)

It is the magic of the school and it is really hard to pinpoint what it is. Big bulky Rugby boys crying at graduation and sharing their love for the school. (E1)

It’s a relational connection where each person actually feels valued. (E5)

In examining evidence of the contribution of the Headmaster to the sustainability of the school’s successful performance, the culture, while difficult to define, was cited most frequently as a reason and the keeper of the culture was seen to be the Headmaster. As one member of the Executive (E4), commented: ‘He fits the paradigm of Chaucer’s idea of a gentle, perfect knight.’

*Respect and gentleness*

In comparison to previous heads, one teacher commented:

> The culture is gentler, kinder, more consultative, more emphasis on respect. The Headmaster’s style ‘is one that looks at helping rather than punishing. If that starts at the top then it is naturally going to flow down.’  

(T2)

This opinion was supported by another teacher (T3) who said: ‘There is a culture of respect in the way staff are treated and it just filters down’. A member of the Executive, (E3), described the culture as ‘the feel of the school. It’s intangible. There is a general decorum about the place. There is gentleness.’ And another, (E1), described his first interaction with students as ‘just lovely to talk to. It showed me a true reflection of what the school was about.’

One boy lamented to the researcher the fact that his younger brother was starting at VGS the following year and would not have the privilege of having him as the Headmaster. At the same time everyone interviewed believed that the culture of VGS was very strongly embedded and would not easily be changed by a new head.

*High expectations*

Although ‘All the great things about VGS are not always the things you can measure.’ (E2), there was evidence that the school had high academic expectations of the boys. For example, during a lunch with a group of Year 8 boys the Headmaster remarked ‘I taught you last year. I will be teaching you again this year. I will be teaching you study skills. It’s only three years and you will be in Year 12 so it’s important
that you work hard now’. At an assembly of the whole school attended by the researcher, he again stressed the importance of each boy giving of his best, encouraging them to ‘push yourself to do the best you can in exams’. To emphasise his message of consistency of effort he used the analogy of running a marathon saying that if you stop, then you’ll need to keep stopping. A steady consistent approach was what would achieve success.

As has been noted elsewhere in this chapter, the expectations of appropriate behaviour and of every boy having an obligation to give back to society was a given but frequently reiterated by the Headmaster.

There were high expectations of staff too. ‘It’s all about the boys. It’s for the boys that is lived out and he expects that to be lived out by the staff’. (T1)

5.8.2.3 Leadership practices

Shared leadership

The school was reported to have also sustained success because the Headmaster was able to respond to changes, adapt his leadership style accordingly, and put in place appropriate interventions.

An important intervention was a change in his leadership practices. He reported that leadership ‘was about being professional in everything we do. It is about giving our energies, our understandings, our perspectives and sharing our skills.’

This philosophy of shared leadership was reflected in his leadership practices which had changed, and in the structural changes he had made to leadership in the school. There was evidence of greater delegation, more positions of leadership and a closer and more seamless relationship between the Junior School and the Senior School. One member of the executive, (ES), observed ‘It is actually a better structure. They (the Headmaster and DHM) have enhanced it. It is actually more effective’. Another member of the Executive, (E3), reported: ‘Over the last five years he has delegated more in the Senior School to the DHM and the Junior School to Head of Junior School. He has been more the guiding light’.

In an interview, the Headmaster said that he had learned a lot from the DHM, he was more mindful of the processes and more appreciative of the importance of process, something at which the DHM excelled.
Evidence of this shared leadership was provided by several of the Executive who, perhaps, had the opportunity to witness their work as a team.

Between the two of us we have complementary skills. I am more of a process person so it’s freed the Headmaster up to be more strategic. I could see at my interview that we could work closely together. It’s sort of the Ying and Yang type of thing and it has matured. (DHM)

There was also complementarity between the Headmaster and the two Deputy Heads and this had enhanced leadership generally.

E3 (Head of School Liaisons) and DHM (Head of Senior School) are very different and they complement each other too and bring different strengths. E3’s connection with the community is phenomenal. DHM and the Headmaster are very similar in their values but different in their approaches. As an Executive we don’t always agree on the same things but there’s a respect for each other’s point of view. (E1)

Consultative

The Headmaster believed he had also become more consultative in his leadership, that he had delegated more and this was supported by many of the participants interviewed.

He is consultative but gets the result in the end, for example, the performance management system. He has put a lot of time into it. (E2)

This consultative disposition of leadership was also the basis of Edward’s successful implementation of change. He believed as a leader that

You have to be percolating ideas all the time then you know it’s what to do. You have to have the big idea and then make it work. You have to have courage to put the big idea out there and then do a lot of listening. (Headmaster)

He acknowledged he had become more strategic in bringing about change. He used what he called his ‘emotional thermometer’. By being a presence and interacting with the school community, in the staff room, at Saturday morning sport, around the school grounds, he was able to gauge how receptive people were to an idea and so when to push and when to pull back.

If you impose things they break down when no one is watching; if you embed it, it becomes part of them as people. (Headmaster)

He believed that people expect change, and that with any change there is a lot of emotional baggage that goes with it. He reported that he had learned to be highly sensitive to that emotional thermometer and
to pace change so that the thermometer did not boil over and result in anger or disengagement to the point where people leave. He believed that he had become highly sensitive to people’s response to change and that he had learned that timing and pacing was crucial. He described his approach as

I touch the water and see if it ripples with each group, then I gently seed the idea. I have a vision, a view and I gently creep towards it. (Headmaster)

While he believed that ‘Internally schools must change because teaching means continually reviewing and reflecting on practice’ and that ‘Change is natural in a reflective vibrant society’, he had learned to be a measured and strategic change agent. He had become more aware of processes and of relying more on consensus as a way of moving forward.

He cited the Centre for Contemporary Learning as an example.

It was seven and a half years of changing people’s ideas and aligning them to the future. It takes time to get people aligned. 70% of people were on board before it happened; the other 30% since it finished. After three and a half years I was ready to do the design brief. All those stages take time. (Headmaster)

**Courageous – preparedness to challenge**

As well as being more consultative, the Headmaster believed another way in which his leadership practices had evolved was in his capacity to have difficult conversations. As always, he stated that the needs of the boys were always foundational to these conversations.

We’ve had a couple of teachers and they have lost their energy and we’ve reduced their load, they’ve gone part time but in terms of having a senior role - no way. So those decisions have to be made and they have to be made fairly. But for the good of the school and the good of the boys, they have to be made. (Headmaster)

Tough decisions, though, were seen to be an example of his measured approach to leadership, both to staff and to students, and to his value based leadership.

You never see him waiver from any situation. He’ll always make things work. He’s always got things in play where things are moving along in a positive direction. (E1)

Edward confirmed this need for positivity saying that he believed ‘You should always send people out in a positive way so they are not actually smarting’. (Headmaster) Furthermore, he stated that he believed respecting people and treating them firmly, but fairly, was important because ‘if ripples go through the staff then productivity goes down and that impacts on the boys’. He believed that by building relationships and building trust you had a foundation for when you had to make difficult decisions.
His educational leadership underpinned many of his practices. He was first a teacher and continued the practice of teaching all Year 7’s for one term so effectively he got to know every boy in the Senior School. He reported that ‘I want to demonstrate that I am not just a Headmaster. I am a teacher.’

Edward indicated a number of advantages in teaching some classes, other than the fact that it was his love and his passion. It was an opportunity to model what he expected of others in teaching practices, ie use of technology in the classroom. As a teacher, he participated in the school’s appraisal program and was observed and received feedback on his practice. In this way he believed he showed empathy with teachers. The success of this practice was reflected in comments by staff as ‘never having left the shop floor’. He stated that

Teaching is a unique profession. Every time you go in front of those kids you’ve got to be at the top of your game, you’ve got to be energised, you’ve got to convey ideas, stimulate sharp, robust discussion, seek feedback. (Headmaster)

He was observed in class, engaging with the boys and sharing his passion for Science and for learning. Regular meetings with each of the Heads of Year enabled him to discuss the educational outcomes of boys. One such meeting was observed on a shadowing day. In response to the Head of Year 11’s concern that there were ‘too many happy marks’ in Term 1 reports, the Headmaster agreed that perhaps teachers were being too ‘soft’, claiming that initially ‘I wanted to affirm boys to get them up. Perhaps we need to pull back.’

The importance of challenging students to achieve to their potential was observed as a frequent subject for discussion with teachers who reported that the advice from the Headmaster was always that ‘You must give boys a chance to make choices. Timing is everything. If you push too soon and you will get burnout’. (T2)

School is really important but it’s the journey that is important and more and more kids see it that way. Kids are thinking and therefore being brave and as a result their learning has changed and that whole concept of us being the only people who can get them marks is becoming less and less. (DHM)

The Headmaster supported individual boys’ learning. It was observed by the researcher in ‘catch ups’ with a number of boys with whom he met regularly, for example, because they were not making progress or not working as hard as they should have been. He had also supported an initiative of the School Captain to establish a ‘Captain’s Club’ in response to a discussion about raising academic
results. The Captain’s Club was run by boys and presented opportunities for boys to teach each other. Teachers attended as observers. In 2013, this concept had been extended to include a Captain’s Lectures series, where particular students were invited by the School Captain to lecture on a particular topic within their syllabus. Further examples of his educational leadership were evidenced through the interventions which he put into place to ensure all boys learning experiences were relevant.

5.8.2.4 Developments

The Headmaster’s capacity respond to a changing environment and initiated appropriate interventions was a contribution to the sustainability of his success as a leader. As an educational leader, he had initiated a number of developments, particularly in learning, facility development, technology, leadership, international experiences and outdoor education.

Relevant learning experiences

Students at VGS had a myriad of opportunities to develop the whole person, such as participation in overseas study or sporting tours, extensive outdoor education experiences and leadership development as well as a commitment to community service, both locally and nationally.

The curriculum was seen to be ever evolving with students being offered different learning projects and activities. For example, one of the teachers (T1) described the thesis programme in Year 10 where students were free to explore under guidance and mentoring from staff their own area of interest or expertise. The new Centre for Contemporary Learning had led to changes in pedagogy, with more focus on how students learn rather than just content.

His (the Headmaster’s) vision for providing the boys with a physical facility was a manifestation of what he wanted the school to represent. There’s been an ongoing commitment to what this building represents and its geographical positioning in the heart of the school reflects that the core business of school is learning. I think he is good at recognising that there are changes in learning. He wants to hold fast to what is good but again goes back to boys doing their best and being provided with opportunities. (E4)

The emphasis had moved to ways to facilitate student learning potential. While these changes to pedagogy had challenged teachers in their teaching style the Headmaster acknowledged they were ‘gradually coming on board’.
The Year 8 Learning Journeys program, a personal development program that one Year 8 boy described as putting him ‘in a very uncomfortable position’ had continued to provide an exceptional learning opportunity which reflected the philosophy of the school. This year long program had a three fold focus: to develop yourself, to learn to work and live with others and to challenge yourself, physically at camp and mentally through a project. Each of the focus groups reflected back to their learning through this program. and how it had supported their growth as individuals.

**Technology**

Learning experiences were seen to have become more relevant and the Headmaster had led this.

The Headmaster has a capacity to be innovative in his recognition that the learning of the past – 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and 90’s can in fact be updated and that students do learn well in ways that reflect a 21st century paradigm facilitated by technology. (E4)

The school had been at the forefront in 1993 in bringing technology into teaching and learning with students using a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) system. Since the previous study (Doherty, 2008), the school had moved to a recommended notebook for all students having found that 5% of the computers were causing 95% of the problems. This practice had changed so that all boys had the same hardware. Not only had there been progress in terms of the installation of hardware such as interactive whiteboards, touch screens and projectors in all classrooms but there had been a clear expectation that these devices would be used for learning. To this end it was reported there had been extensive professional learning for all staff, teachers working as computer coaches, a strong technical support crew and the appointment of an ICT expert to support teachers both in their teaching and in using ICT in curriculum development. In a regular meeting between the Headmaster and the Head of ICT, observed by the researcher, the Headmaster reiterated the need for additional technical and learning support for teachers in preparing programs and so planned for the appointment of two additional consultants. It would be an additional expense in the budget but he, (Headmaster), maintained:

I am adamant to keep additional staffing in the budget. Adamant. It’s crucial.

The Head of ICT had also spoken with the researcher earlier explaining: ‘It’s about changing the culture, then the practice. We (the ICT department) have had to document where ICT sits from both a business perspective and professional.’
Another change reported to be introduced to further support student learning was the introduction of an online reporting system. In spite of opposition from the Parents Council, who wanted to maintain the diary as the communication between parents and teachers, the school chose to move with this initiative because, as the Head of ICT noted, ‘it will help student learning. We have made the decision for the right reasons and we will back ourselves.’

**International experiences and partnerships**

Other examples of change since the initial study and interventions to ensure students had relevant learning opportunities were shared by the Headmaster. For example, international partnerships and experiences had been extended. There were language trips to France, Germany and China, a Renaissance tour for History students, opportunities for boys to walk the Kokoda track, overseas cricket tours and opportunities for boys to work in local communities in the Philippines and in remote indigenous communities.

At the time of this study, the feasibility of an exchange program with a school in China was being explored. As another example of a vision for expanding the experiences of all boys, the Headmaster and a small team had been investigating the feasibility of VGS using a Chinese school’s facilities during the long break.

> We are going to do this. We are taking a group of eight teachers to set up then once we get agreement (in terms of use of the facilities) we can shape the curriculum around that.

Another example cited of continuous improvement at the school was the Music program and Music performance. The School Council representative remarked ‘Music in the school has rocketed. It is very professional now’. (SC) The researcher observed the high quality of the Music program on a number of occasions: assembly, Leaders Recognition ceremony, chapel services.

**Facilities**

The sustainability of the school’s success and its focus on learning and engaging boys in their learning had been supported through new facilities; most importantly the Centre for Contemporary Learning, a building in whose design the Headmaster had extraordinary input.
I was prepared to put myself out on a limb. It was to be a 450sq library. It became a 3500 square metre building. I said it’s got to be a building for the future. Kids have to be pulled into this building like a magnet. (Headmaster)

It had been successful. For example, observations indicated that at any lunchtime, there could be up to 300 boys working in there. Senior boys interviewed believed the building had changed their study habits. The design provided a range of furnishings and learning spaces which enabled boys to study individually, in small groups or in tutorials. The building offered unique learning experiences for boys in the way they best learn. It had been designed to encourage boys to be active learners rather than passive recipients of information and from observation it had succeeded.

Other facilities had continued to be developed, always with the needs of the boys and their learning in mind. The Headmaster in reflecting back on his achievements, nominated the Design and Technology Building, opened in 2002 as one of his greatest achievements because ‘it liberated a whole lot of opportunities for kids in the making and doing and relating it to the sciences and to the arts.’

Other facility development included the purchase of 640 acres of land in 2013 in Victoria’s High Country as a resource to expand the outdoor education program.

While the focus of this study was the sustainability of his success as a Headmaster, the school had also moved in terms of environmental sustainability with regard to facilities. The Headmaster had appointed of a consulting firm of engineers who had analysed the current situation at the school. Targets with a sustainability criteria had been built into the Operational Plans since 2008 and sustainability had been included in all briefs for new buildings, for example the new Centre for Contemporary Learning had been built without air conditioning; it is both heated and cooled using sustainable energy. Solar panels had now been installed on the Science and Technology building which had been built in 2002.

We didn’t even consider it in the design brief, much to our shame now. We should have put them on initially. (Headmaster)

*Student leadership opportunities*

Building the capacity of each boy to lead within society had always been a hallmark of the school and the Headmaster was seen to have initiated changes here. It was reported that he had lifted the bar
with more student leadership positions and more empowerment for those students in formal positions leadership.

As part of continuous improvement and responding to feedback, the Headmaster reported that student leadership programs had changed too. One change to practice had been the Year 10 Leadership program. These programs were seen as preparation for school leadership. While all Year 10 boys participated in a leadership program, one, the ‘Leppitt’ program (named after a former Headmaster) was for 60 boys and was by invitation only. It was seen as superior to the other, the ‘Somers’ program, (named after the location of the facility that was used).

All boys do Leppitt or Somers. All your Leppitt leader boys have been selected for the fact that they are keen on leadership. It does mean you have to manage the Somers thing in a much more inclusive way. If you go back 15 years all the (school) captains were Leppitt leaders so Leppit boys became tarred with this brush. If you are not a Leppitt boy then forget leadership.

(Headmaster)

There had been negative feedback about this practice with one boy’s parent saying his son had left the school because he had not been invited to do the Leppitt program (Researcher observation of interview). Data from Year 12 exit interviews also expressed bitterness about the program and the Headmaster had responded to this feedback.

‘You’ve got to get that feedback for it to be genuine. We will further look at it next year as well so there is some sort of equity in both. It’s all about boys at different skill levels having equal opportunity so this year we have tried to make it much more equal; next year more so. Next year’s school captain is a Somers boy; the current school captain was a Somers boy. We encourage growth and we see growth in both programs. (Headmaster)

The school had sustained its success because there had been ongoing evaluation and improvement of other student programs and activities. For example, the induction of school leaders had moved through several phases but at the time of this research had been refined further to become inclusive of all Year 12 boys. While some were appointed to formal leadership positions at the beginning of the year (School Captain, Vice Captains and House Captains) there was an expectation that all Year 12 boys would be leaders and so the Leadership Recognition ceremony was held mid-year when all boys had had the opportunity to demonstrate leadership. The Headmaster had come to believe that

It’s not about locking boys into a role. They need to get out there and continue to grow. It is important for all boys to demonstrate leadership in spite of not having a formal role.
The outcome, observed by the researcher, were three levels of leadership acknowledged at a ceremony which was held in the Melbourne Town Hall more than half-way through the school year. While one third being nominated as prefects, every Year 12 boy was recognised in some way. It’s about recognition, not position. You see all those kids come across the stage It is what we talk about, it’s part of the culture of affirmation. For everyone in the school there is something positive we should be able to say about them. I believe that in the really ordinary kid there is something that is a spark and if you can hook into that and affirm it then the ripples begin to go out and you see it over and over again. Growth is related to affirmation. (Headmaster)

Outdoor education

Other learning opportunities included outdoor education which had been expanded. The school had acquired properties at Licola, at the gateway to the Alpine country in eastern Victoria, and at Lake Nillacoote in northeastern Victoria. Outdoor education and the use of outdoor facilities had remained an important part of the boys’ education in all years of schooling but these new facilities had added another dimension. Parents (Focus group) described the outdoor education program as the ‘best in Australia’ and saw it as one of the Headmaster’s legacies to the school. Students, too, reported that the outdoor education program was part of their learning journey at VGS. In Years 7-9 there is a focus on the outdoors; in 10-12 the focus is on leadership. The growing of the person is the focus. (Year 9 & 10 student focus group)

5.8.2.5 Accountability

Governance/School Council

Another change had been in response to an increase in accountability: from the school, from external sources such as both State and Federal Governments, and from the School Council. There had also been changes in the governance of the school. Changes in governance were reflected in a number changes in the membership of the Council and its altered direction. The Council, it was reported by both the Headmaster and the School Council member interviewed, had become more corporate in its approach with questions to the Headmaster. They were more searching and informed about broader school issues than before. Edward had responded to these changes by encouraging a review and rewriting of the Constitution and Constitutional Guidelines of Council to reflect a more corporate approach, one less operational and more strategic and data driven. The number of subcommittees had been reduced from twelve to six with risk management being added to the finance portfolio. In this way, Edward believed he had been proactive in his approach to an imposed change and he could recount the benefits. Coming
from a scientific background, he applauded the use of data and had pre-empted some of the emphasis on data that was now being imposed externally. For example, beginning in 2001-2002, the Headmaster had devised surveys to measure staff and student satisfaction and used this feedback to inform the direction of the school. As evidence, the Headmaster showed how feedback from students had led to the Year 10 Leadership program being substantially revised and becoming more inclusive, and feedback from parents had resulted in changes in communication between home and school.

In 2007, the school began using surveys developed by Independent School Victoria (ISV) which also gave the school comparative data. To the staff and student surveys were added parent surveys and exit surveys for Year 12 students. These data, which he had carefully analysed, was made available to the researcher. This information began to inform the targets that were set each year and against which the Headmaster reported to Council.

A lot of our targets are related to the management of risk. We have really tightened up with revised booklets outlining processes. With physical facilities you’ll see now much more reference to Occupational Health and Safety. (Headmaster)

Council received reports on the ISV surveys as well the extent to which all targets set in the Operational Plan had been met. A three year cyclical process ensured regular review of all plans and policies. The Council was also reported to be more demanding in their expectations of academic results. There had also been an increased external accountability in relation to both VCE results and the NAPLAN which tested all students at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. This was one of the changes Edward reported was ‘foisted upon us’ but he was seen to have responded positively and supported interventions that enabled the school community to respond positively too. Educationally, data was becoming more important in Victorian schools and accountability had been heightened by the fact that the results of every Australian school results were published on the myschool website, an Australian Government initiative allowing for comparison with national and similar school performance. Because of this, the School Council had become more concerned with results and the academic reputation of the school. For example, in 2012, 36% of boys completing their VCE had scored an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) over 90; the school had set a target for 42% of boys to achieve over 90 so the Council demanded to know why that had not achieved. Without losing sight of his vision for boys leaving the school to be ‘well rounded men who will make a difference in the world’, the Headmaster had responded to these demands of Council. Five years ago, the school had begun supervised study after school. While initially there were 40-50 boys, it was reported that now there were regularly 70-80 boys from both Year 11 and 12. Dinner was provided for them. For the first three years, supervision by staff was voluntary but supervised study now took place in the new learning centre.
with one of the teacher librarians rostered each night to be in charge. Teachers still offered additional support voluntarily.

Staff accountability

Other evidence of increased accountability of staff was the emphasis on the tracking of student progress and analysing results. Boys’ Year 12 (VCE) results were analysed by the whole staff, not just Year 12 teachers. Tracking which courses and which universities students were accessing was also documented and shared to inform priorities and future planning. With this tracking, teachers reported there was increased accountability for results. One, (T5), reported ‘Last year (2012) there was a dip in relation to what was expected and staff had to justify their class’s results’.

There was accountability for the progress of each boy and now consistency of practice between the Junior School and the Senior School. Tracking of students within the school also included not only academic performance, but also social/emotional concerns. Boys were ‘case managed’ through a referral system which included specific teachers, Special Education teachers and school psychologists. Regular meetings between Heads of Year and the Headmaster determined whether boys stayed on the referral list or not. Such meetings were observed by the researcher and again provided evidence of the degree to which the Headmaster had the welfare of each student at the core of his practices and why he had sustained his success as a leader.

To respond positively to increased accountability for teacher professionalism, the Headmaster had introduced a process of reflection and growth in teaching. Using a consultative approach, a teacher appraisal process had been introduced in 2009. This was a three year process beginning with feedback on one’s teaching from a critical friend, then working with a small panel to develop an action plan and then progress interviews with a senior staff member. Over a three year cycle, the Headmaster met with each teacher. Although the system had to be modified in 2013 to meet Victorian Institute of Teaching regulations, the focus had remained on building the capacity of staff, both in their teaching and in their opportunities to lead. As one teacher, (T5), reported, it had been received positively: ‘We are constantly thinking about how we can be better as, not only classroom teachers and deliverers of the curriculum but how we can be better as people and accrue the skills towards management positions’. As part of one of the shadowing days, the researcher had the opportunity to sit in on one of the appraisal meetings between the Headmaster and a teacher and noted the positive experience it was. It was all about affirming and then gently challenging, offering suggestions or opportunities for further development.
There were some challenges with the accountability processes. For example, a challenge faced by the school was the perceived complacency of some teachers. In a welcoming work environment the downside of really good buy-in can be complacency. In appraisal interviews some of them saw themselves doing exactly what they were doing now. That told me they were in comfort space. I felt concern then that we don’t have the academic edge we need. (DHM)

Whilst the Headmaster was known to be very forgiving in nature, a slightly harder edge reportedly had emerged with some teachers who had produced disappointing VCE results being told they would no longer be teaching Year 12 classes. In an interview Edward shared some of the challenging conversations he had had.

There was an example in March. I had to say to a teacher ‘I’m sorry but you won’t be teaching Year 12 next year but I’ve got another job for you, I want you to be involved in (another area) so it’s the old positive thing; preserve their self-esteem. (Headmaster)

He continued saying

These are hard decisions to make for the good of the community and you have got to make those calls and support people for a while but you can’t keep supporting them and when it gets to the black line you have to say ‘I’m sorry’ It is about the boys and what’s best for them. (Headmaster)

He had a similar response to teachers who challenged expectations of them beyond teaching duties. Because there was an expectation that all teachers would be involved in student sporting supervision, the Headmaster reported that from time to time this belief met with resistance. He was unwavering in his belief that all teachers act as coaches and build stronger relationships with the boys. He reported that teachers were recompensed financially for the additional responsibilities and they accepted a position at VGS knowing that this was an expectation. Again, this was further evidenced of Edward’s belief that it was all about the boys.

Saturday sport was compulsory for all boys and was seen as an integral part of lifelong learning. All teachers were expected to be involved and to coach two sporting teams and the Headmaster was immoveable on this. He held a strong belief that sport helps build relationships with the boys and hence influenced their learning.

I believe coaches should be teachers; they should have a relationship with the boys and support them pastorally. They should know a bit about the game but you bring in experts to help as necessary. (Headmaster)
5.8.2.6 Leadership structures

A change in personnel in the Head of Junior School had facilitated structural leadership changes. It was reported that there was now more continuity between the Senior School and the Junior School, that processes for behaviour management, pastoral care and communication had become consistent between the two both schools and the Head of Junior School had become a member of the College Executive.

One of the long serving teachers described their complementarity as

The Headmaster is a very idealist person. The DHM is left to deal with the more pragmatic level of realistic adolescent boys. It’s like having the Man of La Mancha as our Headmaster but having someone who is able to fight in the trenches as Deputy and it works well. (T2)

The Headmaster reported that he had become much more confident with delegating in recent years.

When I first came I used to have to see everyone and it was all about establishing norms and expectations and goals and goal coherence. I found after a while that I could let that go and start delegating. I think I have become more strategic and I’ve now left the day to day organisational stuff to senior staff. (Headmaster)

Others agreed.

In the first eight or nine years, the Headmaster probably took more of a ‘hands on’ role. I think he has been more of a guiding light. (E3)

He has a team around him. He’s enabled it to develop and he’s encouraged and affirmed them in their development. He does want to hear about what they are doing but it is also giving them responsibility. (SC)

Other structural changes initiated by the Headmaster reflect the priorities of the school. The membership of the Executive had been extended to include three Assistant Headmasters, (Academic Studies, Daily Administration and Co curricular), the Business Manager, the two Deputies Headmasters (Head of Senior School and Community Liaison) and the Head of Junior School. The Assistant Head of Academic Studies having responsibility for professional learning was identified as an important tangible priority to support teachers to adopt new pedagogies and practices.

Organisationally, extra duties were recognised through more than 70 positions of responsibility, with varying ranges of both remuneration and responsibility. Through these positions, staff believed they had opportunities to build their leadership capacity.
5.8.3 Personal qualities

Nine qualities displayed by the Headmaster are described in this section.

From the interviews and observations, there was strong evidence that the Headmaster’s personal qualities had contributed to the sustainability of success of this school. One teacher, (T2), summed it up by saying: ‘This school reflects the nature of the man.’ Another, (T1), commented ‘He’s a lovely man. He’s visionary in terms of what he’s wanted to give the school’.

Another added:

There is a magic to the school and it’s really hard to pinpoint what it is. The Headmaster leads it. It’s his personality, it’s what he values, it’s his engagement with the students, and the respect they have for him and the school. (E1)

A teacher who team taught with him in his Year 7 Science classes reflected informally to the researcher at the end of a class ‘he is just adored by staff and students. We would do anything for him because he would do anything for us. We work hard because that is what he does. Look at any photo of him and he is in a group listening.’

A long serving member of the Executive, E3, remarked

I think we have ridden on the coat-tails of the Headmaster. No one speaks a bad word about him and no one should. He is genuinely revered by the teachers, employees. The boys actually like him and would not disappoint him. He is going out as an outstanding Headmaster and I’m hoping that the legacy will have rubbed off on all of us and we’ll be better people for it.

5.8.3.1 Humility

While humility was not a word he would use to describe himself, it was the one most often heard by the researcher when participants were asked to describe him.

He is a very humble man, very respectful, very dignified. There’s no sense of entitlement for the Headmaster. Great tributes are paid to him at the end of each year. He will respond with a sense that it has been his privilege to serve the school. He models humility. He is very respectful and grateful. He has no sense of entitlement. The VGS song includes the words ‘truth, justice and service’ and these qualities shine through his actions. (SC)

He has a sense of humility and we see this more attractive trait as a leader. It is not about him at the front. He is not lauding it over you, just that he has had more experience. He is not arrogant; he is collected and calm and it spills onto the students. He is someone I aim to be. (E5)
In all honesty the Headmaster is one of a kind. He is the most humble, most selfless person around. There is not one person in the school who does not respect him. His qualities and respect rub off on us. (Year 9 & 10 focus group)

There is a gentleness about him. He’s never had to raise his voice, anger or ire. There’s no authoritative presence. (E3)

5.8.3.2 Respectful

The term ‘respectful’ was used by nine participants, as well as student groups, to describe the Headmaster’s personal qualities. Respect for people was observed continually during observations by the researcher during shadowing days. For example, after each meeting the Headmaster walked people out of his office and opened the door, formally farewelling and thanking them.

Respect was something to which the boys attributed the ongoing success of the school. Structures supported their ability to not only respect differences but to embrace them. Co-curricular activities and working with other students both in a vertical model (House system) and horizontal level (year level) provided opportunities to respect each other and each other’s strengths.

Respect beyond the school was modelled. The Headmaster’s deep commitment to the indigenous people of Australia and their culture was reflected in a comment by boys in the Year 9 & 10 focus group that he had ‘great respect for this land, this culture’.

5.8.3.3 Affirming

Another of his personal qualities which had impacted positively on his success as a leader was his positivity. He was described, (E3), as ‘selfless and positive beyond your wildest dreams. He sees the best in everyone.’

An outcome of this was his affirmation of people. He believed that

A culture of affirmation is so important. We never give up. We focus on the positives and in the end it is what turns these kids around. (Headmaster)

It was important, he said, that a school provide ‘meaning in the lives of young people so it was essential to find something where every kid can be affirmed for a strength.’ This was evidenced by the Leadership Recognition ceremony in the Melbourne Town Hall, when for the first time, all Year 12 boys were recognised. A citation was read out for each boy as he came on stage to be presented with a silver school tie, the symbol of being a Year 12.

Staff also confirmed this quality of affirming people.
He affirms people by giving them very clear expectations, presenting them with opportunities, with the implicit assumption that they will step up. And they tend to step up and not want to disappoint him. (E4)

The boys are keen not to let him down and are disappointed if they do. (E1)

The researcher observed this affirmation on numerous occasions: when observing him teaching his Year 7 Science classes and in every encounter with staff during the observation days. Phrases such as ‘Well done’, Good on you’, ‘That’s terrific’, ‘Congratulations on that’ were heard in class and in every encounter with staff and students. To a Year 7 boy who responded to a question in class, he said: ‘Good on you. That is a Year 12 answer’.

At a staff meeting attended by the researcher as part of a shadowing day, he again demonstrated this affirmation. He began by thanking staff for their presence at a sports day the previous Saturday saying ‘Because you were there, you made an impression on the boys and their families and I thank you for that. You make these things happen. It’s a seven day a week job for you!’

5.8.3.4 Passionate

The Headmaster described one of his personal qualities as ‘being passionate’. He demonstrated his passion in his teaching, in his interactions with the boys, and in his quest to make the school the best it could be. He was passionate about social justice, hence his deep involvement in supporting indigenous communities. He was passionate about boys being the best they could be and demonstrated this through encouraging boys to live their dreams and to enjoy education and being at VGS as a journey rather than just focus on the end result, the destination. It was his passion that enabled him to lead. People loved and respected him.

It’s his passion, it’s him saying I really believe in this and it’s up to us to say how are we going to do it? I think that his enthusiasm and passion make him believe so we work to make it happen. There’s passion but there is also drive and that’s how he has been successful. (E2)

In the past years and particularly this year, the Headmaster and I have spoken a number of times about the nature of leadership and I once asked him if he ever regretted the extraordinary lengths he is willing to go to help those around him – if it meant working with a boy once a fortnight (despite his overcrowded schedule), creating a helping link between the School and Oenpelli or going out of his way to visit those who are suffering problems. His response was no less profound than his understanding of leadership. He said “I can’t - that’s who I am and that’s the only way I know how to be a Headmaster.” (E3)
As the retirement from VGS approached, Edward’s passion did not wain, as one member of the Executive, (E4) commented:

The pace had accelerated with intensity, a passion, process and energy. There’s no relinquishing that at all. An outside observer would be amazed if they were told he was leaving.

5.8.3.5 Positive

One of his executive, (E3), summed him up saying: ‘He’s Mr Positive and he’s certainly Mr Collaborative and Mr Supportive. The boys probably model themselves on him’. The Headmaster described himself as positive, always believing the best of people.

I am pretty transparent. What you see is what you get. I expect people to be true. We all make mistakes but we forgive each other and work with each other. (Headmaster)

His secretary commented to the researcher, ‘he is so people oriented and so positive. He is the only person I know who can tell a boy he is expelled and the boy will shake him by the hand!’

In Edward’s final interview with the researcher he was asked what he would like to be remembered for and he answered, ‘To have created an engaging enjoyable environment where boys learned more than they thought they could achieve.’ He believed this was possible when you built relationships, encouraged and listened.

5.8.3.6 Reflective

Respect and trustworthiness, he believed, were essential components of successful leadership. He was reflective and had learned from previous experiences when he had

to deliver a few missives at staff meetings and I got a few of those wrong. I was quite sharp edged and people objected to the way I was hard edged so I had to temper this so people would take things on board. I learned to use words. I also learned that honesty with staff was heckishly important. I learned just to be crucially honest in everything I did so then people could trust you. If they couldn’t trust you it all falls around your ears. (Headmaster)

On reflecting on his tenure as the headmaster of VGS, he again demonstrated reflectiveness, citing that while his enthusiasm had never waned, at one point his energy had. He described his 8th, 9th and 10th years as ‘testing’, realising he had achieved a lot but still had a fair way to go. He took study leave in 2011 to re energise. This included working at the Commonwealth Scientific Research and Industrial Organisation (CSIRO) and travelling overseas to conferences and to visit other schools and gather new
ideas. He also walked the Kokoda Track. In preparing for this he undertook a fitness regime which included climbing a mountain on the outer edge of Melbourne each day. He reported that he had continued to do that without fail each weekend, usually on Sundays because it re energised him and ‘I make better decisions when I am physically fit. I am more resilient and more ready to hold the line with difficult interviews’. This self-discipline, he believed, had enabled him to remain successful and at the ‘top of his game’.

5.8.3.7. Self-disciplined

Just as he demonstrated self-discipline in his physical training and in his time management, so too was he able to corral his family time. In an interview he reflected that he had been able to sustain success as a leader because he had learned more about himself. He was ‘more mindful of processes and less Gung Ho’. In training to walk the Kokoda trail in 2011, he had generated a new level of fitness and discovered that physical fitness generated mental energy. He was self-disciplined in ensuring that every weekend he walked the 1000 steps up to the Mt Dandenong tower. He demonstrated self-discipline in other ways. He walked his dogs every morning and he made time to enjoy his family to whom he was devoted. But he was self-disciplined in his work. He gave himself time, ensuring he was always prepared for meetings and well briefed for interviews so he was not caught unprepared. Giving an example of having to ask a boy to leave the school he demonstrated his measured, disciplined approach saying, ‘In situations where decisions are made very precipitately you get massive kickback. You have to be careful that these things are done well.’

5.8.4 Other

5.8.4.1 Reputation

There were two themes related to reputation; that of the college and of the Headmaster.

College

As reported earlier in this chapter, the growth in the reputation of the college was evidenced by the increase in enrolments and the waiting lists. Parents in the focus group confirmed that their sons had great pride in being part of the VGS community and all reported that the reputation of the college and of the Headmaster were the reasons for choosing this school. Boys interviewed saw themselves as role models for younger students. They strongly believed in the importance of public perception because

‘We have a respect for VGS. We set a positive example because we know it is right.’

(Year 11 student focus group)
Other boys commented ‘There is a pride in going to VGS. It provides many opportunities. He (the Headmaster) has driven these changes.’ (Year 9 & 10 student focus group)

Parents also reported that at sporting events, VGS boys were always gracious and sportsmanlike, whether they won or lost and they, as parents, were proud of being associated with the school. One of the teachers new to the school, (TS), commented ‘I worked in different schools and had my ear to the ground as to which headmasters people enjoyed working with and who had a good reputation. That is what drew me here’.

**Headmaster**

The Headmaster was recognised by his peers and the broader community as a successful leader. His profile beyond the school had reportedly increased. For example, ‘I think he has looked a little more globally, particularly with his involvement with the Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) and other educational organisations. (E3) It was also noted by the School Council representative that he had become a spokesperson. ‘He is a leader in the education world and very much heralded and respected in that sense.’ His reputation as an outstanding headmaster had spread well beyond the school. He was frequently invited by the media to comment on issues pertaining to boys’ education or funding of independent schools. Evidence of his broad reputation was reflected in his being awarded, in 2013, the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his services to education.

An extract from an address on leadership presented at the Leadership Recognition ceremony by the Head of Year 12 provided another insight into his reputation:

> And when I began to ponder the common traits of great leadership, I, too, found them too remote, too distant and in most cases too grandiose to help us understand leadership here today. Then it struck me. Exceptional leadership was right here in front of me, in front of all of us. In his final months after 15 years, the Headmaster’s style, his philosophies, his leadership offer us a real life, real time, and real example of what it means to be a successful leader. So let’s go about contemplating the leadership of a man we have all grown to love and respect whether we are one of the Year 7s who have only known him for about 7 months or some staff – and those Year 12 boys who began at this school as pre-preps 15 years ago - for his full tenure at VGS.

### 5.9 Contribution of others

One of the unintended findings from this study was that while the evidence would suggest the Headmaster played a pivotal role in the sustainability, both of the success of the school, and his success
as the leader of the school, he did not do it alone. This was a significant change from the first study. As noted, the change in personnel in the leadership of the Junior School and the confidence the Headmaster had developed in empowering those with whom he worked encouraged him to move into a more distributed model of leading. While his relationship with the DHM, Head of Senior School, was very close and they met together formally once a week, they also met informally every day after school. With the support of his personal assistant and this deputy, the Headmaster could be confident that he was always fully briefed and able to field any questions from parents or School Council. Also of importance was the second Deputy Head, the Head of School Liaisons. He was seen as bringing another skill set to the team. While there were similarities between the Headmaster and the DHM, the two deputies, (DHM and E3), brought very different strengths to their roles and to the team. E3 described their relationship as one singing Mozart, the other heavy metal but reported ‘We are still singing. We are totally different and that is good.’ Their strengths and differences were seen to be complementary. The Headmaster was applauded for his choice of deputies with one person, (E1), reporting “He knows he doesn’t need two people beneath him who are similar to each other’. Other members of the Executive, too, were valued because of their different skills and their different roles within the school which had brought the breadth of perspective in decision making. This value and breadth of the Executive was evidenced by the fact that they didn’t meet unless all could be present. The Head of Junior School, (E1), described the Executive as a ‘well-oiled machine. Success is a combination of both the structure and the people and that has now happened. It is how our leadership structure has evolved’.

5.10 Summary

The evidence from this study demonstrated that the Headmaster had continued to play a pivotal role in sustaining the success of the school. It appeared that his strong personal values, his philosophy and his capacity to build relationships and the capacity of others in all facets of the school were significant. That he was able to bring the whole community to share his vision also contributed to this sustained success. While always respectful of the traditions of the school, the Headmaster had also challenged some traditions and practices to ensure that at all time the needs of the boys, spiritually, academically, socially and emotionally, were being met. He had grown in his own leadership, extended his capabilities and strategically implemented successful changes. He was an agent of change, a strategic builder who had learned to calculate the pace of change so that it was accepted and became embedded.
Demand for places at the school had increased, and the school had succeeded in continuing to achieve high academic results but to develop ‘well rounded’ boys. The Headmaster had reinforced the importance of leadership and of service both to the school and the broader community. A broader model of leadership had evolved with opportunities for each boy to develop as a leader. There were increased opportunities for boys to participate in a broad range of extra curricular activities including sport, outdoor education, music, and drama as well as intercultural experiences.
CHAPTER SIX: CASE STUDY THREE.

URBAN SOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

6.1 Introduction

The leadership of the principal of Urban South Primary School is explored here. The chapter builds on an article published in the Journal of Educational Administration (Drysdale, Goode and Gurr, 2009). To answer the research questions, ‘How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance’ and ‘The personal qualities, characteristics and practices that contributed to success’, the findings are organised under the following headings:

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Participants in the study
- 6.3 School profile
- 6.4 Principal profile
- 6.5 Background: previous findings
- 6.6 Changes since the last visit
- 6.7 Ability of the principal to maintain or improve performance
- 6.8 Reason for sustainability
- 6.9 Contribution of others
- 6.10 Summary

Pseudonyms for the principal and the school have been used.

6.2 Participants in the study

Table 6.1 identifies the fifteen people who were interviewed at the school. The principal and assistant principal were interviewed separately and together. At the request of the school, the teachers were interviewed in pairs, the students and parents in groups. In addition, the researcher spent four days shadowing the principal and attending school functions and external meetings with her. These are outlined in more detail in Chapter 3.
Table 6.1 Participants in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marion - Principal</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>New to teaching, new to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teacher</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>Experienced teacher new to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of Years 5/6, former Languages Other Than</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>At the school during initial research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Librarian</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>At the school during initial research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of ICT</td>
<td>T5</td>
<td>New to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>T6</td>
<td>Had been on contract, travelled and invited to come back to the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Years 5/6</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>All at school since Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Councillor</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>8 years at school, 3 on School Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Parents and</td>
<td>3 years at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 years at school. 3 children with special needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3 School profile

Urban South Primary school was a co-educational government primary school some 23 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD first established as a rural school in 1877. As a primary school it catered for children from Preparatory to Year 6 within an age range of 5-12 years. The school had remained within a rural and semi rural area until Urban South became part of the rapidly developing corridor of the north east of Melbourne. In 1996, to cope with the increased enrolments emanating from this growth and the large number of housing estates, the school moved to its present site on extensive, well planned and spacious grounds. The buildings were attractive, air conditioned and very well maintained. As the school expanded, additional relocatable classrooms had been added and these had been incorporated into the overall landscape with the use of covered walkways and gardens. In recent years there had been some changes, mostly in terms of enrolments and demographics. The urban sprawl had continued and a number of new government and Catholic schools had opened in the area. Consequently enrolments had fluctuated from 581 in 2004 to 604 in 2006 and then to 545 in 2007 (School Self Evaluation 2007:5). Although there was
a growing diversity in the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of students there were still a relatively small percentage of students with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE). The actual percentage of these students enrolled moved from 0.03 in 2004 to 0.06 in 2007. Government schools in Victoria were categorised according to the degree of poverty (measured by the number of students receiving welfare assistance) and ethnicity (measured by the percentage of children from a non-English speaking background). Schools in Like School Group 1 (LSG 1) would have the lowest level of poverty and/or non-English speaking backgrounds, that is, would be seen to be the most advantaged, whilst schools categorised as Like School Group 9 (LSG 9) would have the highest percentage of students from non-English speaking backgrounds and/or high levels of poverty. The increase in the Student Family Occupation (SFO) from 0.42 in 2004 to 0.46 in 2007 had meant the school had been reclassified from ‘Like School ’5 (LSG 5) to a ‘Like School’ Group 2 (LSG 2) which had implications in terms of a comparison of academic results against other schools. (School Self Evaluation 2007 p.5) LSG 2 schools tend to have better results than LSG 5 schools.

The school offered a broad curriculum with specialist programs in Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Physical Education and Italian, a ‘Bright Futures’ program for gifted children and an ‘Inclusion Program ‘ for students with specific learning needs. Other extra curricula offerings included a keyboard program, a guitar program and a singing program. The principal trained and conducted a school choir. An Out of School Hours program, funded by the Commonwealth, government provided before and after school care for students.

Since 2004 there had been some change in the staffing profile. A reduction in enrolments had seen some staff leave. Several early career and highly regarded teachers had been promoted to positions outside the school. In 2004, there were 52 staff which included the principal and assistant principal, teaching staff, teacher aides, office staff, Out of School Hours staff and cleaners. In 2007, the number of staff had been reduced to 42.7. Staff retention had dropped from 98% in 2005-06 to 84% in 2006-07 (School Level Report, 2007) indicating that there was increasing movement of staff out of the school. The teaching staff profile was increasing in age and experience and the number of permanent teaching staff (97% in 05-06 and 92% in 06-07) remained above the state mean of 91% (School Level Report, 2007). There were budgetary implications associated with this as schools were funded on an average in and out actual basis, which meant more experienced staff was more expensive. There is more discussion on staffing changes later in this chapter.

The school was government funded. As such, the school council, bound by state regulations, was the governing body of the school and the principal was mandated to report to them on a regular basis, usually at a monthly meeting. This council was made up of four Department of Education and Early Childhood
Development (DEECD) representatives who were employed by DEECD, (ie staff) and eight parent representatives. The principal was the Executive Officer. Subcommittees of Projects and Finance, Policy and Planning, Out of Hours care and Canteen provided additional support, and a Parents and Friends Association supported the school through fundraising. It was reported that the relationship between these groups and the principal was very positive.

6.4 Principal profile

The principal, Marion, had been employed in government schools for more than 40 years. She had started her career as a classroom teacher and served in several primary schools where she had taken the opportunity to pursue a number of leadership roles. In an era where there was no credentialing or mandatory professional training for leadership, she had actively sought to develop her knowledge, skills and understandings through formal and informal professional development programs. She completed as many programs, aimed at the principalship, as were available at the time. Many of these were seen as elite programs. For example, a four week intensive residential program, offered by leading management consultancy firm Hay McBer, and another at the Institute of Educational Administration (a semi-autonomous institute designed to provide programs for school principals and aspiring principals).

I wanted to stretch myself a little going beyond one’s comfort zone. In the 1980s I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to do a six week residential program at the Institute of Educational Administration which changed my thinking. I was introduced to leading academics who taught me that I could be a leader. I saw myself as a team player and not a leader. But doing the course and reading I felt that bringing the team together was what leadership was about. I learnt the way to really bring change about was to bring to staff together so that they are a happy cohesive team who enjoy working together and then bringing about change. (Principal)

She was appointed to Urban South in 1999 with the task of improving its performance. The school was her second principalship, the first was also been to a school in challenging circumstances and which she had turned around. Her reputation at transforming this school was the reason she was asked to take over the principalship at Urban South. She had also worked on secondment as a Senior Education Officer in the region.

Marion revealed that she had consistently sought to improve and to learn, taking opportunities to be involved in DEECD central and regional committees and principal networks. Attendance at several of these meetings, by the researcher during the shadowing days, and observing her positive interactions with colleagues, formed part of the observational data used in assessing the sustainability of her success as a principal.
6.5 Background: previous findings

Urban South was identified as a successful school as a result of the systemic external review conducted in 2003. Because of its improved academic results, high staff opinion, growing enrolments, high satisfaction levels in parent opinion surveys and its reputation in the community, it was described as a ‘turnaround’ school and was recommended to be included in the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP). Marion had been appointed in 1999 and much of the school’s improvement was attributed to her leadership. The findings of the initial research undertaken by Drysdale, Goode and Gurr were outlined in an unpublished paper in 2003. (Drysdale, Goode & Gurr 2003; see Appendix 3). These findings were presented at the 9th Values and Leadership Conference in Barbados (2004) and the European Educational Research Conference in Crete (2004).

Prior to the appointment of this principal in late 1999, the school had experienced a considerable decline in performance, especially between 1995 and 1999. Evidence of the school’s performance was noted in the Triennial School Review.

The analysis of student learning at Urban South highlights that many children are working below the expected Curriculum and Standards Framework levels in English and Mathematics. (Review Report 1997:6)

A further decline in performance between 1997 and 1998 was noted in the 2000 Triennial School Review. A major reason for the poor performance was explained by the poor culture which had developed, with the most obvious conflict being between the then principal and staff and parents. This negative culture was attributed to the school’s move to a new site and the previous principal’s management style, particularly the lack of consultation with the staff and the community.

From the time this principal was appointed in late 1999, the school’s performance improved on a number of measures. The Triennial Review showed that:

It is evident that the school has made a significant recovery since 1998 and the new Leadership Team is well placed to tackle the curriculum issues that the school must address over the next Charter period. (Review Report 2000:2)

During this initial study, evidence of improved student performance in Mathematics and English, staff opinion, parent opinion, resource management, school image, and principal reputation and esteem among peers and the school community was noted. This was supported by findings in the 2003 School Review:
Urban South Primary Schools is to be congratulated on continuing its improvement over the triennium. The school provides a stimulating and dynamic curriculum that successfully caters for the needs of the school community. Improvement in all aspects of the school is commendable. (Review Report 2003:2)

The school further identified its success on other ranges of criteria. In addition to improved performance in literacy and numeracy the school noted: development of a clearly defined philosophy; a collaborative, happy, committed staff; a positive and rich learning environment for the children; community support; and a sound reputation in the community as being indicators of success. (Drysdale, Goode & Gurr, 2003)

The principal described her greatest achievement as having the whole community working with her. From the analysis of the data Drysdale, Goode & Gurr identified four core themes that appeared to account for her success – her leadership style, personal philosophy and values, her capacity to build relationships and personal characteristics. In terms of her leadership style she was described as a positive role model, inspirational, and empathetic. Her style was consultative and conciliatory. Her personal philosophy was centred on the whole child and not just academic results.

I have had a long and enduring commitment to all children receiving the best possible range of educational experiences, opportunities to succeed and to reaching their full potential. (Principal)

She had introduced the notion of the school moving from a ‘rules based’ approach to a ‘values based’ approach. Building positive relationships was a corner stone of her approach to improving teacher morale and commitment, and establishing community support. Participants in the study described her personal characteristics as integrity, high energy, sensitivity, enthusiasm, and persistence while she believed ‘there is nothing you cannot achieve and fix if you are persistent, consistent and tenacious.’

Her key strategy had been to build relationships and develop social competencies among the students. She modelled what she expected of others and had established open communication structures where she listened to all stakeholders and asked for feedback on policies and practices. She was consistently in classrooms and had established strong relationships with all the students. Her capacity to select the right combination of staff and to formally and informally acknowledge and affirm their work was also a determining feature in her success. In an interview, she again described her resilience in what was initially a toxic climate. While she described to the researcher, in this current study, how in early days she often went into her office and wept in frustration and disappointment before she went home, no one ever saw this. She appeared consistently positive and upbeat and she believed this had enabled her to break down the resistance of staff, of the school council and the community.
At the end of the initial study she identified some challenges. Not the least among these was to maintain the success she had achieved. Challenges included maintaining the community that now operated so effectively, increasing student achievement and outcomes to reflect higher government benchmarks and standards and becoming a values based school. A values program had been successfully introduced into the school; the challenge was to take it from the school to the whole community.

A challenge is becoming a values based school – it is not yet, but needs time and making this a values based school and then a values based community. We cannot enforce this but to get them to respect our values can be a challenge. The community is more difficult to educate than a school. (Principal)

Finally, Marion perceived a challenge in maintaining the level of enthusiasm and competence in staff. She saw as important the need to provide professional learning opportunities beyond those funded by the system. Success and its sustainability were, she believed, contingent upon maintaining teachers’ passion but also stretching their talents and skills.

6.6 Changes that had occurred between the initial research and this research

When the researcher returned to the school four years later, a number of changes had occurred. Some of these were external, not anticipated and beyond the control of the school.

- The school enrolment had declined from a high of 611 students in 2005 to 500 students in 2008. This resulted in the need to reduce staff through transfer, retirement or non-renewal of those teachers on yearly contracts. Changes in enrolments were largely due to the establishment of two new schools in the area designed to cope with the projected growth in population in this designated Melbourne growth corridor.
- The staff profile showed an older staff, as many of the younger teachers had moved for promotion or their contracts had not been renewed because of a decline in student enrolments.
- The school’s demographic had changed. It had been reclassified from a LSG 5 to a LSG 2. This indicated that the mix of families the school served was changing, becoming more affluent and with fewer English language concerns. Surprisingly, the school also noted that there was an increase in behavioural problems with more students coming from challenging family backgrounds.
- Major DEECD initiatives imposed on the school included implementing a new Curriculum and Standards Framework with increased curriculum demands, new assessment and reporting practices and greater accountability procedures. To implement these successfully had put
increased pressure on staff and on school resources. It was reported by staff that all these initiatives had created more stress for them.

- At the time of the research the principal announced her retirement after ten years as principal. She retired in term 2 of 2008, shortly after this research was completed. Her assistant principal was successful in gaining the principalship.

Some of the other changes that had occurred were related to the challenges identified at the end of the initial study, such as the extension of the values into the community and improving student learning outcomes, while other changes reflected the principal’s capacity to respond to external changes and are discussed in more detail in the section on the reasons for the sustainability of the school’s success.

6.7 Ability to maintain or improve performance.

In the four years since the initial research there was sufficient evidence to indicate that the school had maintained its overall performance.

Table 6.2 provides an overview of the both the changes and how the school responded to these to maintain or improve performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECREASED</th>
<th>Staff opinion surveys</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>Quality of teaching</th>
<th>Student achievement</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Principal’s personal qualities and skills</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAINTAINED</td>
<td>Philosophy and values</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Quality of teaching</td>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>Principal’s personal qualities and skills</td>
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<td>Student behaviour</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>Staff capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXTERNAL CHANGES</td>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Government emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy</td>
<td>More emphasis on ICT</td>
<td>More pressure on staff = higher levels of stress</td>
<td>Higher levels of accountability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>INTERVENTIONS</td>
<td>Leadership structures and practices</td>
<td>Welfare program including introduction of school dogs</td>
<td>Extension of values program into community</td>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Professional learning opportunities for teachers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The 2000 Triennial Review Report stated:

It is evident that the school has made a significant recovery since 1998. (Review Report 2000:2)

By 2003, the Review Report noted:
Urban South Primary School is to be congratulated on continuing its improvement. The school provides a stimulating and dynamic curriculum that successfully caters for the needs of the school community. Improvement in all aspects is commendable. (Review Report 2000:1)

This improvement had continued. The 2007 School Review Report noted in the executive summary: *It is a good school which aims to consistently provide high quality education and continuously improve. It does.* (Review Report 2007:4)

The report listed successful attributes as a strong sense of purpose and community, a high level of collegiality, strong leadership and quality professional learning. It congratulated the school on its initiatives to improve student learning outcomes. Academic results in strands of English appeared to have been maintained rather than improved. Literacy results in the early years (Prep – Year 2) remained well above state benchmarks. (Review Report 2007) Results for other years were more volatile but there was evidence of good performance:

The external (AIM) results for Year 5 have exhibited volatility. However the value added to the matched cohort-Year 3 to Year 5 for the previous three years has mostly been at least 0.9 and up to 1.2 of a Curriculum and Standards Frameworks (CSF) level. This is greater than that of the State value added which is approximately 0.8 of a CSF level. (Review Report 2007:9)

Year 3 students were performing better than Year 5, both in Literacy and Numeracy, but the principal expressed both concern and disappointment about the tapering off of results in Years 4, 5 and 6 with the proportion of students being assessed by teachers at or above the relevant curriculum levels declining. One of the interventions had been a professional learning focus on teacher moderation of students work with the aim of improving consistency of assessment and ensuring the learning outcomes for all students were improving. The principal acknowledged that improving student learning outcomes still had a way to go.

Evidence was provided in the report of improvement in the area of student wellbeing and the quality of school life through a focus on learning, social competencies, student leadership, citizenship, student wellbeing, values development and extracurricular activities.

Behaviour data between 2004 and 2006 showed strong improvement with the number of suspensions down from 11 to 3 and the number of serious consequences down from 481 to 167. This is most commendable and indicates that the teaching styles, the implementation of values and the programs are having the intended impact. (Review Report 2007:21)

As noted in the Review Report, (2007) the number of serious incidents had reduced over the last four years. All incidents were documented and aggregated at the end of each year. The restorative practices process was now understood, as demonstrated by the fact that the principal now handled most incidents within ten minutes whereas previously ‘It used to take at least an hour with both AP and I doing it.’
Student absences remained above the state benchmarks overall (School Level Report 2007) but again there had been improvement with all results being closer to the state benchmark and two year levels being less than the state benchmark.

One area where results were not maintained was staff opinion as this had declined in most variables as reported in the School Level Report (2007). It had still remained high, declining from the 90th percentile to the 70th compared with other Victorian primary schools. Staff sick leave was above the state mean and was seen as an outcome of higher demands and expectations on staff, increased workloads with reduced staff numbers and more accountability. The principal’s ‘child centred’ philosophy had not changed. She reported her concern was always that students were ‘safe, happy and learning’. Students in a focus group reported that the school was a ‘good learning environment’ and that everyone was friendly.

Student behaviour and student motivation were two areas of staff concern. The student survey variable for Student Motivation in 2007 was 64.5 on a 100 point scale against a state mean of 77.9. Staff reported that this was an outcome of the changing demographics as they believed education was not as higher valued by the school community as they would have hoped. The principal commented that ‘The community is challenging in terms of how they value education. For some of our children, motivation is a challenge’. However, there were data that indicated some very positive improvement with student behaviour. The principal reported that ‘The folder of student behaviours has reduced by two thirds from last year. These are not integration children, just those with behavioural difficulties.’ This result was attributed to the interventions which had been put into place, such as the values and welfare programs, and will be discussed in more depth in the reasons for sustainability.

In the initial study, the school had identified its improved reputation in the community as one of its criteria for success. Evidence from interviews suggested that this reputation had been maintained. One of the parents reported:

Eight years ago, many bagged the school. Now 80%-90% of parents say it is a great school. Despite new schools being built, the enrolments are not declining dramatically. My daughter is happy and so am I.

Observations by the researcher confirmed that community support was strong. Parents were in and around the school and interacting with the principal and staff. Community members from various groups were also observed to be in and around the school. Some of these were at the school because of the partnerships which had been developed by the principal, one of the interventions she put in place to sustain the school’s success.
In addition to improved performance in literacy and numeracy, the school had identified other criteria for success. These were a clearly defined philosophy, a collaborative and happy staff, a positive and rich learning environment for students, community support and a sound reputation in the community. (Drysdale, Goode & Gurr, 2009:701)

Again, observations by the researcher, particularly during the days of shadowing the principal, confirmed that the staff continued to be very happy, worked collaboratively and were committed to the school. As one teacher stated ‘staff value my work. I feel needed’ (T 4) and another, (T3), said ‘I am valued as a teacher’. (T3) Another teacher (T5), believed the school had remained successful because of the people. Leadership filters down from the top. We have happy and positive role models at the top and that helps others. We don’t have the best student outcomes data but the kids are happy and motivated. Parents see us as successful and it is a happy place.

Facilities had continued to be maintained and developed with new open plan learning spaces providing a rich learning environment. Externally, the school presented well: the grounds and gardens were maintained through parent working bees and an employed groundsman. The principal believed strongly in the environment being safe as well as attractive and welcoming. Observations during the shadowing days indicated a strong sense of community which was reported to have impacted on the reputation of the school. Students had a presence in the community. For example, their relationship with an aged care facility was viewed as an enhancer of the school’s reputation. Success was also perceived to have been maintained because there continued to be a clearly defined philosophy of education and processes which, participants acknowledged, ensured they all had a clear idea of where they were heading.

6.8 Reason for sustainability

The return visit to the school confirmed that the school’s sustained success was in a large part due to the principal. Findings are divided into three broad categories of leadership style, interventions, and personal qualities, incorporating the themes of the initial study: leadership style, personal characteristics, relationship building and personal philosophy. Table 6. summarises these themes and sub-themes that arose from the interviews, observations and notes which interviews generated the information.
Table 6.3: Thematic Classification of leadership style, interventions, personal qualities, and other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>AP</th>
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6.8.1 Leadership Style

This section describes Marion’s characteristics: her personal philosophy and values; relational leadership; presence and modelling; invitational leadership and strategic leadership. The principal’s leadership was identified as helping the school sustain its current level of performance and promote continuous improvement.

It was reported that her leadership had been ‘consistent’. It was ‘always appropriate’. She maintained that her leadership style hasn’t changed. My focus is on staff, parents and students. I always try for a win-win. (Principal)

Teachers agreed. One (T4) said ‘She came as a great leader and she has been constant. I feel the same about her as I did nine years ago.’

In subsequent interviews and discussions during shadowing days, the principal maintained her belief in ‘win-win’ but acknowledged that she had also learned to adapt her leadership to different situations. For example, challenging the behaviours of staff was something she had learned and was perhaps one way in which her leadership style had changed. This was supported with evidence from two teachers and is discussed later in this chapter as one of her interventions.

6.8.1.1 Personal philosophy and values

The principal had a clear vision. She believed that:

Children grow and develop best in an environment which is supportive and caring and where the attitudes of respecting the rights and differences of others are appreciated and fostered.

She believed one of the reasons for sustaining success, both for the school and for her leadership, was the fact that her philosophy, her values and her vision had not changed in her ten years as principal of Urban South. She reiterated that her decisions were always based on what was right for the students and that holistic education was what was important. As evidence in Table 6.2, there was agreement by many of the participants that her philosophy and its consistency was a contributing factor to her success. The parent group interviewed agreed that ‘the school is about the kids’. The AP, too, agreed that ‘Her basic philosophy has remained the same. It is the development of each individual’. The principal’s holistic education philosophy was reflected in her concept of homework. Believing students worked hard at school during the day, she encouraged homework to be ‘cooking a meal for the family; playing a game
with family or reading to someone.’ Parents were encouraged to sign off activities but with an emphasis on ‘encouraging rather than punishing’ for not doing something.

Learn-that’s what we really want the students to do and that’s how we measure success. The (Education) Department focuses too much on Literacy and Numeracy. They are important but so are the Arts, social competencies and tolerance of others. They (the Department) would see us as a good school. I would see us as a very good school. (Principal)

She was very clear about where her priorities lay

I want to be good but it is more important to have a holistic approach. I wouldn’t want to be the best at the expense of lots of staff. The Department (of Education) sees success in terms of data only but I don’t. I would be really upset if staff left (our school) because they felt unsupported which has happened at other schools where they have been dragged kicking and screaming to improve outcomes.(Principal)

In the end, it was this clash between what she perceived was important in education and what the current government’s priorities were that encouraged her to retire. Her philosophy would not be compromised.

6.8.1.2 Relational

Her focus on students, staff and parents remained central to how she worked. Marion was a presence and one that people enjoyed. She walked around the school with a smile on her face. There was unanimous support from the participants that her focus on relationships, her leadership and her personal qualities were central to the sustainability of the school’s success and her success as the leader of the school. The principal modelled what she expected of others. She was rostered for yard duty and staff room clean up, she modelled the school’s values and used them in conversation.

She built relationships by celebrating success. One of the participants, (T2) identified that she was ‘good at celebrating. At every meeting there is a chance to celebrate. The school acknowledges everyone’s input in a public forum’. In assemblies, a system of rewards for demonstrating values, for showing respect, tolerance and caring was acknowledged. Success was also observed to be celebrated for other achievements, be it for student attendance with an award each month for the class with the best attendance, or attendance of parents at a working bee and the outcomes of a working bee. At staff meetings, at assemblies, in newsletters and reports, staff and students were affirmed. Celebrating was observed to be part of the principal’s relational emphasis in her leadership and a manifestation of her philosophy of building and nurturing relationships. In discussion, the principal confirmed that she believed this was how one got the best from people: set a clear direction and support people on their journey.
The School Review Report (2007) described Urban South as ‘a caring school.’ (p. 22) Throughout all the interviews and observations, this was confirmed. The principal was observed speaking with staff, to know each one’s story and question appropriately. For example, to one teacher who was a single mother with four children she asked ‘Did you manage to get some rest at the weekend?’ Most teachers interviewed as well as parents and students, confirmed that nurturing relationships was something she did well and it was observed on many occasions by the researcher.

Strong, positive relationships were fundamental to her leadership.

I never let anything go—even if a parent is unhappy about a small issue I phone and have a chat before it escalates. (Principal)

The same principle of focusing on building positive relationships was applied to students.

The principal and AP will talk with kids. They use communication rather than sanctions. We have used this to help with behaviour and other issues. (T2)

Marion had developed strong relationships with the students to whom she referred in conversation as ‘darling’ or ‘mate’. When asked in a student focus group what they would miss about the principal, a student replied: ‘Her laughter when she comes into class. She has jokes with us. She organises fun days.’ But they also commented that they would miss her ‘good advice. It is really good and keeps us out of trouble as she wants us to have a good future.’ In classroom visits, the affirmation and relationship nurturing was often observed. For example, to a boy who had been expelled from his previous school she commented ‘You are doing so well. Star of the week!’

She consistently modelled respect; for example, when a student came into the staffroom to speak to the principal she immediately excused herself from whoever she was speaking with and directed her attention to the student. She modelled the school’s values. Equally, she demanded respect. When speaking with students, she demanded they make eye contact with her.

Meetings, particularly at the beginning of a new school year, were observed to always begin with personal comments as the principal inquired after family members, for example ‘How are things going with your son?’ And ‘your husband’s new job?’ The personal comments were then followed by affirmation: ‘You did a great job last year ‘ and ‘You have got off to a great start’. With students she was observed to inquire about their family members, particularly if they had been past students. For example, ‘How’s your brother going? Tell him I said Hi’. The impact was that staff, (eg T4) reported they felt valued and ‘therefore you want to do your best.’
Other examples of behaviours were observed by the researcher which reflected her emphasis on relationships. For example, past students and parents of past students who called in to the school were warmly welcomed, the school had supported a fund raising event for a student with cancer, and she always met with CRTs at the beginning and end of their day.

This acknowledgment and thanking of people: staff, students, anyone who came into the school was consistent and genuine. It was part of who she was. Her manner was always gracious, her language and demeanour always affirming. She reported that she believed she had been successful and sustained this success because she demonstrated always that she was someone who cared about each person, each child and who was prepared to listen.

I see myself as a successful leader. I have total support of the staff, support of the community, support and trust of the children. (Principal)

6.8.1.3 Presence

One important characteristic of the principal’s leadership style was certainly her presence. Although only cited by three participants as a descriptor of her leadership style, she was consistently visible around the school. She visited each classroom several times a week. She did yard duty. She was in the school yard before and after school, always available for parents to chat. It was observed that phone calls always concluded with a ‘Thank you. I appreciate you calling’ and she consistently used people’s names. CRTs were also supported in a way not often observed in other schools. They were treated as invited guests and named by the principal as such. Acknowledging that some classes, particularly Years 5 and 6, could be challenging, the principal and the AP visited these classes where a CRT was to work with students and stressed the need for students to behave appropriately with ‘guests in our school’. They also encouraged these CRTs to report back on students who made ‘poor choices’ or interfered with the learning of others. Feedback to students by the principal on inappropriate behaviour was couched in the values of the school. She was observed to comment ‘I am sorry you students are not living up to our values.’

6.8.1.4 Invitational

Her invitational leadership was described by three staff, including the AP, and observed by the researcher on several occasions. For example, when a church service was being held for teachers and she believed it was important for teachers to attend, rather than deem attendance compulsory, she spoke with each teacher individually and asked ‘Would you come? It is only an hour’ She was observed to encourage teachers to take on extra roles in the same way: approaching and inviting them, often building on
potential she had observed. It was described as always ‘are you interested’ rather than ‘you must’. Similarly in discussion with a specialist teacher she said:

The AP and I were talking. Is this the best way to use your skills? We would love to see you more involved in the classroom. Can you reflect on this for next year? What you do is fabulous and if a change would impact on your job satisfaction then that’s another issue. (Principal)

### 6.8.1.5 Strategic

While no one interviewed described her as a strategic leader, the principal described herself as a strategic thinker and leader, wanting to be involved in committees and to understand what was happening in the school. She insisted she was not a manager, saying ‘I let other people do those ‘dinky’ things.’ It was observed, however, that she demonstrated excellent organisational skills. All meetings had a purpose and an agenda and kept to time. She was observed in meetings to manage time around discussion and know how to wind up discussion strategically to move the meeting on. She reported that she received good feedback from CRTs that the school was both well organised and welcoming and she was affirmed by this.

She saw the need to be strategic particularly in the light of external changes and their impact on the school. One way in which she demonstrated her strategic leadership was through the partnerships she sought. For example, falling enrolments had put pressure on the budget with regard to staffing. Ever conscious of students not being disadvantaged, she used her partnership with an external group, Apprenticeships Plus, to source integration support. The Apprenticeships Plus program enabled three full time aides to work at the school for a year. On successful completion they were awarded a Certificate 3 in Education Traineeship. Through this program, the school received additional classroom support with minimal cost. Budget constraints had also meant that an increase in class sizes was being considered. Falling enrolments and higher staffing costs had put pressure on the budget. An increase in class size would not have been readily accepted by teachers who were reportedly already feeling under stress. Her response to this dilemma attempted to be strategic but transparent, letting staff know that options would be put forward for discussion. She ensured teachers knew it was a budgetary issue, not a philosophical one. Students were always at the centre of decision making.

### 6.8.2 Interventions

This section describes interventions by the principal. There were several sub-themes: a culture of community, the welfare program, the leadership structures, the selection and development of staff, her leadership practices and the partnerships that were created.
In the initial study, the interventions the principal put into place impacted on her capacity to turn the school around. The data obtained from the return visit suggested that one of the contributing factors to the sustaining of success was her ability to respond to changes in both the external and school environment by using appropriate interventions.

6.8.2.1 Culture

The culture of belonging to a community that the principal had created had been maintained. From an initially fragmented community, she had fostered a culture of inclusivity. Inclusivity was observed to be part of her leadership repertoire, not only for staff but also for students and parents. Students were observed to feel very comfortable coming into the staff room with messages. A student was observed coming into the staffroom to remind the principal that she was on yard duty. Parents were welcomed in the staffroom and used it freely for informal Parents and Friends activity planning. The inclusivity was seen to have created a culture of trust. One teacher, (T2), reported:

When I first came here I thought it had a lovely feel, the way people interacted and communicated. I don’t know whether it is the principal’s style or what but I don’t see factions. People move around the staff room. It has a good feel.

The principal believed having high expectations was an essential part of leadership and that she and the AP were always looking to raise the standards. Participants agreed that she had created a culture of high expectations. They believed that they were being driven in the one direction because ‘we have a clear understanding of where we are heading.’ (T2) There were also high expectations of students, especially in terms of living by the values of the school. The language of the values was observed to be used by the principal in challenging student behaviour, for example asking ‘Which values are you not living up to? Tolerance? Caring? Respect?’ or urging them to ‘behave in the way you can and live out our values the way you can.’

In the initial study, (Goode, 2004), the principal had cited the creation of a proud and respectful community as one of her criteria for leading a successful school. At the conclusion of that study, she nominated that maintaining the community that now operated effectively as one of the challenges she faced in sustaining success.

The data collected during the return visit confirmed that Marion had remained a successful community builder. All of the participants interviewed nominated her capacity to build community as one of the reasons for the school’s success and for her ongoing success as a leader. Evidence to support this opinion included one teacher, (T2), who reported ‘her nature and manner encourages community. Most parents
hold her in high esteem and like the way she interacts with them’. Another, (T5), described the further growth in community:

It has changed massively. It’s the general feel. We now have a supportive School Council who have the school at the heart of their decision making and we have a Parents and Friends group who enjoy helping the school. They have raised $A70,000 to apply artificial turf to the playing areas.

Interviews with the principal provided further evidence of the effort she had made to build a strong school community. She reported that she was always willing to confront anything that might affect the school’s reputation. She explained that she was ever alert to behaviours which might disrupt the community which had been so ‘painstakingly created’ maintaining that

I never let anything go. I try not to do damage control. You can never assume the community is reading things in the way you do and so you need to keep them involved. I have been able to bring communities of kids and teachers together and bring resources to create a community of lifelong learning. (Principal)

Further strong partnerships with the school community were noted through the increase in the number of parents attending Parents and Friends meeting where the numbers had grown from what she described as ‘virtually nothing’ to more than 20, and to a Saturday working bee attended by more than 50 families. The principal had used these working bees to build community and a sense of belonging within the school. Each working bee ended with a social component - a very Australian way with a barbecue and a ‘slab of beer’! Not only did working bees keep the school grounds looking well maintained but they created a sense of pride in the school and engendered the sense of community which was so strong in the principal’s philosophy. That a formerly difficult parent had recently walked for two hours to a working bee with three children and a wheelbarrow full of tools was seen by Marion as an outstanding indicator of success in building trust and through that building community. She also defined ‘Happy kids’ as one measure of a successful school community. Students described the school as ‘awesome’ and ‘a good learning environment’ and one of the teachers (T1), commented’ It’s an environment that you like to come to every day and this filters down to the kids.’

6.8.2.2 Welfare Program

Five of the participants interviewed named the welfare program as an important contributor to the ongoing success of the school. The return visit found that it had continued to improve. In 2004, the school had introduced school values. The aim had been to expand the language of these values to the community. This had been done.

The school has turned from a discipline base to one with values. It is followed through and used everyday and I am constantly being told at home by children to use my values. (Parent)
This change was reiterated by a teacher, (T5), who commented that ‘All the kids know our values, they understand them and not just parrot them back.’ Another teacher, (T1) described how she loved ‘our work with values. I have never seen it in any other school.’

To support the emphasis on values, the principal had also introduced a ‘Quality Beginning ‘program at the beginning of each year which focused on the school’s values, clear behavioural expectations, classroom processes and class agreements. Recognising that the social needs of some of the students were still of concern, additional psychologist time, beyond that offered by the Education Department, had been purchased and a relationship with the Psychology faculty at one of the universities had been developed. In keeping with this philosophy of living by your values, ‘Restorative Practices’ were used extensively and very successfully. This was witnessed on several occasions by the researcher. Two physical interventions into the welfare program were noted. One was a Friendship Tree which had been incorporated into the landscaping. This was a designated space for students struggling with social relationships. The other was the introduction of two dogs, King Charles cavalier spaniels. One of these dogs belonged to the principal and spent each day in her office. The other belonged to a teacher and was in the classroom during the day. These shared school pets provided comfort to students experiencing home or school issues. Children were able to go to the principal’s office at each break, put the dog on a lead and take him into the playground.

The dogs are brilliant and good for kids that don’t normally fit into the normal social situations in playgrounds. (T1)

During one of the shadowing days the principal’s management of a disciplinary issue, using her dog, was observed. She brought three boys into her office and left them there sitting with the dog. She explained to the researcher that it was a strategy. It provided a cooling off time before she spoke with them. When she began to speak with them, her body language modelled respect, her voice was firm but gentle and she referred to each boy as ‘mate’ or to them all as ‘guys’. The strategy worked. They appeared calmer. She was observed to move into the language of values. As the issue was resolved she concluded: ‘Everyone has lived up to our value of honesty. Let’s leave it for three weeks and then have a talk.’ There were other examples of this language being used with students. For example: ‘What values were you not living up to?’ and ‘What would be a fair consequence?’ Consequences were now ‘in-school’ detentions, rather than suspensions. With ‘in-school’ detentions, students were removed from class or detained in classrooms during breaks. Again, there were very clear procedures for these detentions which every teacher was expected to follow.
The relational aspect of the principal’s leadership was evidenced in her use of restorative practices in disciplining students. She reported that ‘we want students to go away feeling they have been treated fairly even if they have a consequence.’ Her emphasis on being fair was observed on other occasions. One example was a boy with an IQ of 69 being called to account for misbehaviour. She stated that it was important to be fair. She still used a restorative approach, helping him to understand why he had done wrong and how he might restore the relationship.

6.8.2.3 Leadership Structures

Another intervention observed on the return visit was a new leadership structure. Designed to support a more consultative approach to leadership practices, it provided a framework for improved communication and decision making processes.

Each year level was represented on the Leadership Team: Prep-2, Years 3/4 and Years 5/6. Specialists and school support staff were also represented. The leadership structure encouraged teachers to work cooperatively in teams. Teams which promoted learning together had been established at each year level. Each team set their own goals and were encouraged to try new approaches and learn together. It was reported that the open learning space, in particular, encouraged teachers to learn together.

The new structure reflected the principal’s philosophy and clear vision for the school. She saw education very much as a partnership and the collaborative processes reflected this belief. (T1) agreed saying ‘Processes mean that we all know what we are doing.’ T5 commented: ‘It is a tough community but we want it to be good and so move in the same direction.’

Effective decision making processes were reported to have been put into place so that each issue was dealt with individually. The change in decision making structures had been made in response to a concern that decision making was taking too long so a problem solving process was activated to discuss and resolve it. The outcome was an agreement about the types of decisions that could be made by leadership and those requiring whole staff discussion.

A member of the Leadership Team, (T2), described it as:

We (the Leadership Team) weigh up the overall importance to various groups. When it is an issue that affects the whole staff then it goes to a whole staff meeting. An example of a whole staff decision was in regard to ICT when last year we agreed as a whole staff to focus on ICT. Communication channels are now set up. With these in place you create a happy environment that permeates to the students. Expectations are clear. We have carefully documented processes that people can refer to. We are being driven in one direction because we have a clear understanding of where we are heading.
Staff agreed with one, (T5) saying ‘if there is a problem, we’re told about it’ and another, (T4), commented ‘Glitches are not swept under the carpet.’

The principal was reported to be flexible. Nothing was ever ‘set in concrete’. This was in another teacher’s description of a challenge the school had faced.

Last year we tried to have a lot of support for classroom programs (extension and support) which meant kids were moving a lot. The extra support ended up causing a lot of stress. The principal was attuned to this and we had many open forums to discuss it. Some things changed but not to everyone’s satisfaction. It could have gone the wrong way but because of the principal’s leadership, it was a positive forum conducted in an open way. (T4)

The outcome was that only two extension programs were introduced.

Consultation had enabled the principal to sustain success because teachers believed, as (T1) reported ‘They don’t make decisions without consulting. They listen. Every issue that comes up is discussed.’ There was agreement that consultation and the processes put in place worked. Staff felt heard and believed they had a voice, even though decisions were not always to everyone’s satisfaction.

I have had a voice….even if it doesn’t go your way, every person has a voice and the principal and AP do this well. (T2)

The principal brings all staff into decisions. We always feel we have a say. (T6)

The new leadership structures encouraged teacher voice and participative decision making. All teachers interviewed confirmed that the school had maintained its success because everyone shared, meetings were open and everyone was working towards the same goals. A member of the Leadership Team remarked that ‘meetings are very open and nothing is discussed that can’t be taken back to you team.’ (T4)

6.8.2.4 Staff Selection and Development

Initial success at the school had been supported by the principal’s capacity to select the right staff. She still maintained ‘You get the right staff; the right mix.’ Her capacity to attract staff was a contributing factor to her initial success. Although not able to recruit as many new staff as she had at the time of the initial study, her philosophy remained the same

We recruit for attitude-first of all passionate about teaching, love kids, want to work as part of a team, then skills come second. We don’t recruit one type of person. We have a nice balance of introverts and extroverts. (Principal)
Marion firmly believed that if you recognised potential and challenged people to have a go then with the right support they would succeed. She was quite strategic in her appointment of staff preferring to seek people out or employ people volunteering or already working part-time at the school. She maintained that the problem with advertising was the Department’s policy of schools being compelled to offer positions to teachers who had been declared ‘in excess’ in other schools, therefore not always being the best teachers.

While she admitted in an interview that because of the falling enrolments, ‘we don’t have the new faces coming in like we used to’, she made sure that if she had to lose people, she maintained their trust saying, ‘they know early and I try and find a job for them’.

An important part of staff development was their professional learning. She believed, that, not only was it important to attract the right staff, but that building their capacity was vital to the success of the school. All respondents, except the students, cited this as a reason why the school had remained successful. While staffing had become more of a challenge with falling enrolments and there was less opportunity to employ new staff, her philosophy in encouraging the staff she had to be the best they could be didn’t diminish, nor did the opportunities she offered for professional learning. The principal reported that ‘part of what you do is help people develop a skill set.’ This was evidenced in the Staff Opinion Survey (2007) where 81.3% of staff believed: There are opportunities in this school for developing new skills. In interviews, staff shared that Marion was very supportive of professional learning opportunities. For example, the Maths intervention teacher was both encouraged and supported to pursue further study. Another teacher (T2) reported ‘You are given opportunities to develop your skills if you want to’. Another, (T3) said ‘They support PD initiatives by changing classes or employing CRTs. They go out of their way to support you.’ Other comments included:

I have put my hand up to do gifted education here. They (The principal and AP) have been really supportive and offered PD (professional development) support. (T1)

The principal is always encouraging extra roles either by invitation or building on staff interest. If you are willing, the opportunities are there. If you have an idea you can approach the principal. She brings out the leadership in you. (T5)

The invitational approach to leadership, referred to in the section on the principal’s leadership style, was described, on more than one occasion, with support and challenge for career development always couched in the language of ‘Are you interested?’ A teacher, (T3), who had been a specialist but wanted to move back into the classroom described how the principal helped her change, acknowledging her loss to a specialist area but supporting her wish to renew her generalist classroom teacher skills. She believed the principal provided support by giving her time ‘to make the transition smooth with opportunities for
planning, to attend PD and coming into my classroom to see how I was going, giving me confidence to do a better job.’

Marion selected good staff but also encouraged them in their career development. When two young accomplished teachers left having been promoted to regional positions as coaches within the Education Department, she was ‘genuinely happy for their success despite their loss to the school.’

Marion also provided opportunities for students to develop. For example, students managed the school office during morning recess. There were two reasons for this. One was that it enabled office staff to join the teaching staff for morning tea and hence be part of the staff community; the other was that it gave students’ skills in answering phones and taking messages.

6.8.2.5 Leadership practices

Educational

The principal was both reported and observed to demonstrate educational leadership. While she saw one of the new initiatives of the Education Department, the Curriculum and Standards Framework, as ‘terrific’, she also maintained her belief that a more holistic view was needed, that of the whole child. However, she accepted that accountability for student outcomes was greater:

We are much more data driven and do not focus on excuses but rather engaging with the data and talk about what we need to do to improve. (Principal)

For example, Mathematics results had been a concern at the school so the principal had responded by allocating a teacher to lead Maths intervention for one year, helping with Maths interviews and teaching staff how to analyse data. The teacher was further supported professionally in completing a six day program at university. The outcome was that external test data had shown improvement in Maths. Engaging students, meeting them at their point of learning need and helping them learn how to learn was reported by all teachers as an important strategy in providing relevant learning experiences. Students, too, reported that their learning was ‘fun’ and that teachers were ‘dedicated’ to their learning. As one teacher observed:

We have activities and games. We use multiple intelligences and this helps us filter through the kids. Last year all (my students) were at standard and if they weren’t they were supported. This year I have a group of gifted students. We offer Gateways (a program for gifted students) for which we pay half and the parents pay the other half. (T1)
As noted, the perceived changing demographics had resulted in the school being reclassified which had provided another challenge for the school. This community was not seen to have the same academic aspirations as many other LSG 2 schools in more established suburbs. This was a challenge to the academic reputation of the school because external testing results were compared graphically against LSG 2 schools. Government pressure for improved student outcomes had become more demanding. While the Marion conceded that this pressure was a change and a challenge, her educational philosophy and her direction for the school remained clear.

The (Education) Department focuses too much on Literacy and Numeracy. We know we do well by how well our students do at secondary school. Students win awards and scholarships. Working holistically is the way to go – Literacy and Numeracy is very important but so are the Arts, social competence and tolerance for others. (Principal)

She added

We have a core of ‘helicopter’ parents never wanting their children to experience unhappiness. They are very difficult to motivate and get involved with their children. We try not to get into deficit thinking; it can be hard and tough but that is our challenge as we move into the future. (Principal)

Marion responded to challenges positively. While she expressed disappointment that the academic results were below what she had expected, given the resources and the time and effort that had been put in, she was philosophical believing

We can’t just work in a deficit model and blame the parents. We need to intervene. Start with reading, show parents where students are at and then revisit regularly. (Principal)

Marion believed she demonstrated educational leadership in several ways. She was a consistent presence around the school and in classrooms at least three times a week. She believed this gave her an overview of learning in the school as well as providing support to teachers. There were other examples of educational leadership observed by the researcher, especially during days when she was shadowed. For example, in response to a teacher’s request, she went into a classroom to observe a student who was both underperforming and frequently absent. She observed a while then spoke with the boy, challenging him with: ‘Am I fair when I say you never finish your work? You are away a lot. Why mate?’ As a follow up, she suggested to his teacher that he be assessed, however, she took the responsibility of working within the parameters of the family context, of contacting and speaking with the mother who she perceived might not be supportive. Experience had shown her that it was sometimes necessary to push parents to ‘accept that their child needed help’ and because she believed in the worth of each child, she was always prepared to do that.
Fundamental to her belief in building the leadership capacity of her staff to facilitate learning as being very important, and empowering staff to own the direction the school was taking, Marion had set up opportunities for professional dialogue. The structure, also an intervention, Marion used was that of Professional Action Learning Teams (PALTS). Their stated purpose was to facilitate discussion about learning. Teachers were able to select an area of learning they would like to explore. At the time of this research these areas were teaching and learning, boys’ education, social competencies and technology. All were areas identified as priorities in the school’s strategic plan.

External surveys completed by staff attested to the fact that the focus on teaching and learning was a contributing factor to the sustainability of success. For example, the Staff Opinion Survey (2007) stated that 88.3% of staff believed that they always focus on improving the quality of the school’s teaching and learning practices while 82.5% believed that staff at this school always challenge each other to improve the quality of the school’s teaching and learning practices.

Marion believed she had sustained success through the use of feedback: the use of continuous improvement tools such as feedback stations and focus groups, of students, of staff and of parents. Again, this seeking of feedback was a characteristic of her leadership observed by the researcher but not named by any of the participants in the study. For example, she was observed to receive feedback and demonstrate her openness to learning, for feedback and for continuous improvement. When meeting with a teacher new to the school, she asked her:

Tell me about your induction. Are there any inadequacies? Is there anything that was missing? Is there anything we could be doing better? And how did your (parent teacher) interviews go last night? How do you feel about the school as a whole? (Principal)

She saw being part of this research as a great opportunity for further objective feedback and evaluation of the school and its journey. She demonstrated openness to learning. It was observed, that during a leadership meeting to discuss budget issues, she put forward propositions and sought responses saying ‘Thank you. It is really important I get this feedback’. Similarly, during the days of shadowing, the principal was challenged by a parent who believed an ambulance should have been called when her daughter was injured at school.

I’ll look into it. X is a level 3 in First Aid. She is brilliant. But it’s good to get feedback. We don’t always get it right. (Principal)
The principal’s focus on teaching and learning was clearly evident through participant interviews and from observations. What was reported during the return visit was that her philosophy about learning had not changed. She reiterated that students and learning were central, that ‘My concern is that students are safe, happy and learning’.

The introduction of student portfolios, student led conferencing and three way conversations on learning and achievement between students, parents and teachers was another intervention designed to help students become more responsible for their learning. Evidence of the success of this intervention was demonstrated by parents reporting that the school was ‘far ahead of other schools’, that ‘the school was about kids and how they (the teachers) could do the best for the kids. The success of the three way conferencing was confirmed by externally collected data from the Parent Opinion survey where the Reporting variable at Urban South had risen to be above the state mean of other Victorian Government schools.

Another intervention to make learning more relevant was the significant growth in the use of ICT in teaching. Students reported that money was spent ‘on what we need: computers, Smartboards and play equipment’. In addition, support for teaching staff in implementing ICT into their classroom practice had been supported through the appointment of an ICT specialist and the availability of the AP who was very computer literate. Staff believed they had been provided with professional learning opportunities. Students, too, had been empowered to support ICT in the school. For example, the Review Report (2007:22) acknowledged the role of Years 5/6 students working in classrooms as ‘tech managers’ assisting other students and teachers with ICT issues.

There was a sense, reported by staff, that the curriculum had become too crowded. They believed that attempting to put in interventions to improve Literacy and Numeracy outcomes to meet Government expectations, while also trying to provide a rich, broad curriculum, which was the philosophy of the school was becoming too much of a challenge. Marion was aware of this, reporting that

> There are more extra curricula programs which are wonderful. Music has been run in school time this year but we have had a lot of support programs too and teachers are saying that they are not seeing their children enough. (Principal)

She acknowledged that the pressure to improve student learning and engagement through extra programs was a challenge, especially to some more senior staff who believed they were working to capacity. One of the outcomes of declining enrolments had been fewer new enthusiastic staff, larger classes and the loss of some highly competent staff. There had also been a rise in teacher stress. Marion reported that these factors could have contributed to the rise in teacher stress and staff defending less
than expected student outcomes as the result of larger classes and extracurricular activities which took students out of the classroom. It was a challenge she had not solved and which was causing her some frustration. She and the AP were observed to provide as much support where they could and reported that by being in classrooms, they were able to offer practical support.

The learning environment for students and teachers was seen to have been improved through a building program which saw the opening of an Open Learning Area and the removal of relocatable classrooms. Both teachers and students reported that they enjoyed the open learning space and the opportunities it provided for team teaching and student learning. This sense of community and collegiality in learning was verified by the external reviewer who commented ‘also impressive was the way teachers teamed’. (Triennial Review Report 2007:22)

Shared leadership

As well as being consultative, there was evidence that Marion placed more importance on shared leadership than was observed during the initial study. Six of those interviewed agreed that shared leadership was more evident than it had been in the initial study. Students, too, had been empowered in their managing of the school office during breaks. They were trained by the office staff and then given clear roles and responsibilities. The principal believed that it not only built their capacity to be responsible and gave them extra skills, but it enabled the office staff to join the teaching staff in the staff room and so created a greater sense of community.

Because she had a very good knowledge of herself, her strengths and her shortcomings Marion was able to empower others who could complement her leadership. This was indicated in the shared leadership role with the AP.

You need to know yourself-what you are good at, what you like. You then recruit people to do the other things. I work with people better than technology but the AP has led us to be at the forefront of ICT use. (Principal)

She is better at the personal and emotional intelligence side and I have skills which she doesn’t have. The principal sees the two of us as a partnership. (AP)

The principal consistently used the pronoun ‘we’ in conversation with everyone, usually referring to the fact that she and the assistant principal were a team. While she acknowledged the success of the school had been largely her work initially, and she ‘did turn this school around quickly’, she also acknowledged that sustaining success was a challenge and one of which she and the AP were aware.
It’s about not letting go of the momentum. We never let go and so we never relax. We always remain alert and aware. (Principal)

One of the teachers, (T2) agreed saying ‘the principal and the assistant principal are always looking for ways to raise the standards of staff and students – achievement, attendance, behaviour’. Staff described the principal and the AP as being supportive of them but in different ways, that the principal is ‘mum’ and the AP is more curriculum focused. Marion was seen as the communicator who was able to articulate the vision and build relationships, while the AP was the curriculum leader whose expertise was teaching and learning and on using data to drive improvement. The partnership was viewed as complementary.

The principal, you can approach for a supportive issue, whilst the AP has the timetable knowledge to implement change. (T5)

The success of this relationship or partnership between the principal and AP was also acknowledged by the School Council President who wrote

Special thanks to the principal and AP for their outstanding commitment to our school community. Their caring, professional approach and ability to manage any crisis has gained them the respect and admiration of all they deal with. Their experience and vision make them wonderful leaders. We truly value their efforts. (Annual Report to School Community, 2006)

Parents, too, affirmed the partnership.

We noticed the leadership of the principal and the AP and that is why we chose the school. They complement each other. They support the staff. They are very approachable and part of our community. (Parent focus group)

Another person in the parent group commented

The principal and the AP’s relationship has developed and they are a stronger team. If the principal is away you almost don’t notice her absence. She has built her staff up and her Leadership Team. This is a sign of a good leader: to lead yourself out of a job.

The two leaders were observed to support staff and teachers reported that they were both seen to act as mentors for them in terms of their career development.

Shared leadership practices were supported by the revised leadership structures. The return visit to the school confirmed that success relied on both of them and increasingly on teachers, particularly those within the Leadership Team. The revised leadership structures had a focus on teams and an emphasis on empowerment. The principal used ‘we’ to reinforce the concept that the school was a community, that people within that community were interdependent and she was but one of its members. Key decisions
were discussed in forums. Issues could be openly raised by staff. The principal’s leadership reflected her beliefs on the power of community, on the power of ‘we’, not ‘I’. The concept of team was important. People in the study commented on the way people shared and worked together: ‘We are team based and team driven.’ (T6) The Review Report (2007:22) also confirmed that ‘also impressive was the way teachers teamed’

Working together was part of her philosophy as she explained during one of the shadowing days:

I believe in the absolute imperative of empowering others and throughout my career, and especially during my years as principal, I have been committed to this, to valuing diversity and developing successful and happy working teams. If you are into power and control you will not do well with me. We are very much about empowering our young people to take on leadership roles. We don’t interfere with staff once they run with an idea. (Principal)

On another occasion, she shared her response to a suggestion that she acknowledge exemplary teachers through awards such as Teacher of the Year. She was clear about her philosophy saying:

I file all that in the ‘round’ file—Principal of the Year, Teacher of the Year. I have parents who want to nominate a teacher and I say ‘Yes, she is wonderful’ but this is what I believe. All teachers here do a wonderful job. These awards bring about competition between staff. (Principal)

Marion empowered staff but she also monitored and supported them. For example, it was observed that she had put new processes in place for the office staff and so she checked in at their meetings to ensure everything was working as planned and offered support saying ‘Just talk to us if it is getting too busy’. Her shared leadership was acknowledged by a teacher new since the original study. She, (T2), said she was attracted to the school because of the principal who ‘listens, takes on an idea, works well with staff and students and has a code of conduct that allows anyone to have input.’

Consultative

The majority of the participants (see Table 6.2) noted that the principal’s consultative style was a significant feature of her leadership. In the initial study, one of the teachers had commented:

When big decisions are made they involve a lot of work. It is a big process and everyone is heard. We often use small groups. (T3)

Teachers confirmed that this process of staff consultation had continued. As discussed in the Leadership structures section of this chapter, new processes for communication and decision making had been put into place to enable staff to have a voice. Staff believed that Marion was very open to change, as did parents who commented:
She is always open to new ideas, to discuss things. Whenever the principal has brought in a new idea, teachers are willing to try. (Parent)

Another example of consultative practice emanated from the drop in enrolments. Other program offerings needed to be re-examined. For example, the offering of a Language Other Than English (LOTE) and having corrective reading withdrawal classes. A discussion between the principal and the AP was observed. It was agreed that options needed to be put forward and discussed with staff before a decision was made, but that the decision would be after census day when enrolments were more certain.

**Courageousness and preparedness to challenge**

The principal believed that one way in which her leadership practices had changed was in her capacity to challenge people.

I’ve had one or two move on but in a win-win situation. I will be tough if I need but I always try for a win-win. (Principal)

She shared another example of both supporting yet challenging a young teacher who wanted to be friends with students but who seemed to be heading for disaster:

I sat down with her and was very directive about what she had to do. Now she is one of our best teachers. Being a leader is being compassionate, caring yet also tough.’

She had also demonstrated preparedness to make tough decisions with regard to students, for example, an autistic child who had been given a great deal of support. Having believed the school had done all they could, she reported that finally she had met with the parents to say that they (she and the AP) believed this was not the school for him. Marion reported that she had also felt comfortable in challenging the Education Department that the reclassification of the school, believing that some parents had incorrectly stated their occupations and that the percentage of students they had receiving government assistance through the Education Maintenance Allowance would challenge their LSG 2 classification. While she was unsuccessful, she believed it was important to raise the awareness of the Department as to the impact of inaccurate classifications and higher academic expectations had on staff morale. There was one example given of a challenge which she had not faced successfully. She was challenged by the impact of the falling enrolments and the impact that had had on staffing. These concerns were shared with the researcher at the end of the shadowing days. Not only were there a larger number of teachers who, because of years of service were classified as ‘expert’ and were more expensive to employ, but she confided that she believed some of them were ‘seeing out their time’ and didn’t want to change too much, hence external pressures for higher student outcomes was causing higher levels of stress. She believed that although the staff opinion surveys were not at the 90% satisfaction level they had been before, they were still high but
that perhaps this reflected a ‘country club’ attitude. Her concerns were observed by the researcher who also saw the ‘country club’ atmosphere where teachers felt very comfortable. There was at times, a sense of complacency or contentment with some staff being observed taking their time in returning to class after breaks or wandering back to class with a cup of coffee. It demonstrated that this school was, indeed, a good place to work, a comfortable place but perhaps staff was supported too much. The principal shared that she had tried to challenge this behaviour but it had caused distress to staff and so she had not pursued it. This discussion was one of the few times that she shared, that while success had been maintained, she believed she taken the school as far as she could.

**Partnerships**

One of the principal’s leadership practices was forming successful partnerships. In addition to the universities, she had formed other strong partnerships externally: with the region, with colleague principals who were observed to ring her for advice or to ‘run things past me’ and with neighbouring schools. At one of these schools, the researcher observed negotiations over an enrolment taking place with a request to ‘postpone the transfer until after Census day if possible’. The school had also become involved in an Innovation and Excellence program with neighbouring schools. This program was aimed at improving outcomes in the senior years of primary school and the early years of secondary school. She described this partnership as one where ‘We all work differently as a cluster but share and appreciate each other’s ways of operating’. Partnerships had been formed with community groups too. A partnership with ‘Apprenticeships Plus’, a group which provided temporary placements for unemployed people, was reported to have enabled the school to give additional support for students at the school. During one of the shadowing days, the researcher observed a meeting with this group where Marion clearly outlined her expectations. To another community group representative whose work, she believed, would not benefit the school at this time, she offered support in another way:

You are welcome to promote in the school newsletter free of charge. We have a community page and we have a form for people to register as volunteers. (Principal)

Whilst not necessarily a partnership, the principal had built a respectful working relationship with the Australian Education Union (AEU), always welcoming representatives in to the school and supporting staff who were members of the union. At the time of this research, there had been a stop work meeting called. While concerned about the impact of staff stop works on students and on the school’s standing in the community, her attitude was ‘It’s up to you but it shouldn’t impact on relationships.’ She was seen to model the values of the school by assuring staff that ‘In this school we respect people’ individual choice’.
The principal trained the school choir and accompanied them as they visited the local senior citizens and aged care facilities to entertain people. She commented that this was another way of building the social competencies of students by encouraging them to interact with other members of the local community. Professionally, it was observed that she kept her regional people informed of any potentially difficult situations so that they always had the details should anything suddenly be reported to them.

6.8.3 Personal qualities

Six qualities displayed by the principal are described in this section. They are supportive, approachable, affirming, positive, personable and resilient.

The initial study had identified this principal’s personal skills and disposition as factors which had enabled her to rebuild relationships among the staff and the community. Data from the return visit confirmed that her personal qualities and her personality were seen as important contributors to her sustaining success as a leader. One teacher, (T5), reported:

She sees her work as a vocation rather than a career. She is democratic, compassionate, an open human being and suited to the role.’

Her warmth and friendliness and her gregarious personality had helped create a community where everyone reported they felt valued. As noted earlier in this chapter, she was observed to be a consistent presence around the school, in the classrooms, in the school yard and with the parents before and after school. She used yard duty as an opportunity for interactions with students, parents and teachers. She trained the school choir at lunchtime. She was observed to be consistently positive, optimistic and affirming of everyone. As one teacher (T2) commented ‘the attitude starts with leadership and filters down.’ As an example, in her introduction in the school newsletter at the beginning of the school year she wrote:

It is a great pleasure to walk around the school, as I regularly do, and observe the happy smiling faces of the children and how beautifully all grades are working. (Gorge News, Feb 2008)

6.8.3.1 Supportive

While there were many adjectives that described her personal qualities cited in interviews, one that was used by all participants was ‘supportive’.

Marion believed that

One of the important things about success is teachers and what they do. They must feel encouraged and supported and passionate about their work. They must feel they are in a
workplace where they are supported. It’s about creating a framework that enhances and enables the teachers to teach. (Principal)

She was perceived to have built a culture of collegiality and support. From the Staff Opinion survey (2007), 89.6% of staff believed that they could rely on their colleagues for support and assistance when needed while 86.8% of staff believed that there was support from leaders in the school. Another teacher (T4), who had changed roles, reported: ‘She is supportive. I am never made to feel inadequate. They (principal and AP) always visit classes so there is a face.’

Another teacher, (T6), described the support:

The principal has been a consistent support and person in the school. You can go to her about anything. She is willing to give time to help and support you personally. She is consistent with staff, no favourites. She has been so consistent over the last seven years.

CRTs were observed to be very well supported. Although they were given an information package when they arrived, the principal noted that they often didn’t use it so she or the AP always visited the classes with the CRT’s, to ensure that the school’s values and processes were understood. During shadowing days, one of these interactions was observed. Students were reminded of how they should treat ‘guests in the school’ and values were reinforced. The CRT was encouraged to report back on any students who ‘made poor choices’ and these were followed up.

6.8.3.2 Approachable

The principal reported that she continued to believe in the power of relationships, of people, and the power of community to make a difference. This opinion was supported by the AP who commented ‘people are our priority. We build community with open doors.’ (AP) This approachability was modelled. For example, one of the teachers (T2) reported that ‘kids readily come over to the office to share things. They are comfortable talking to her.’

She was observed by the researcher to be very people oriented. Her approachability was apparent by her open door and by teachers who reported they could talk to her about anything. Her ‘open door’ policy meant constant interruptions to her desk work were observed. For example, a parent wanting a form signed, another wanting to chat about a possible secondary school for her child, a teacher with a draft report for assembly. Everyone was made welcome. Her desk was positioned so that she caught the eye of people walking past and she was observed to always greet everyone. One CRT was observed to come into the office after school to say

Thank you. I love coming here. The staff is really inclusive, there are no divisions. The children are fantastic, really respectful. The company I work for, know I will always come here’.
During one of the shadowing days, the principal excused herself from talking with the researcher to spend time with a staff member who had received bad news. Staff commented on her empathy, one, (T3), saying ‘She is very in tune and can pick up if someone is having a bad day’. Within the school there was a very strong sense of belonging by staff, much due to the principal who, it was reported, ‘has these lovely skills where she knows how to approach people’ Another commented ‘She listens and takes a genuine interest in everyone and in what is going on’. (T2) Again, this was evidenced by the comment: ‘She is a friend. She goes to every wedding, engagement.’ (T6) The principal reiterated that, reporting that at the recent wedding of a staff member, 25 of the 80 guests were staff of Urban South.

6.8.3.3 Affirming

Affirmation was observed as a strong personal quality by seven of the participants and by the researcher. In an interview with a young teacher, the principal’s opening comment was

Well, I think you have done an amazing job for someone so young. What I love about you is your willingness to take on new learning, your use of plans to know how you extend children and where they are going.

With another teacher the affirmation was again observed:

You are doing a fantastic job and every time you go into the classroom the kids are engaged. Well done.

At a school assembly, the affirmation was again observed. Her opening words to students were affirming, positive, congratulatory on the way they had come into the hall and settled. She publicly affirmed the staff for their work; she thanked the parents for their presence, she asked which parents had come to the working bee on the previous Saturday and thanked them. During the assembly, students observed by teachers behaving ‘according to our values of respect, tolerance and caring’ received tickets for a small award. She saw assemblies as another aspect of providing a holistic education. Each class learned to present and to be an audience. Students ran the assemblies. The principal was invited to speak and to present awards, for example, sporting awards or student of the week. She called the children ‘darling’ or ‘mate’. As she read out citations for the stars (those receiving awards), Marion commented: ‘Good on you’ or ‘Well done’ or ‘What a star’. As part of community building, parents were notified if their child was to receive an award. The principal reported to the researcher that on occasions she had withheld an award to a later date so that the parents could be present.

Examples of children being affirmed were observed on other occasions. When the wrong boy had been sent to her office she was quick to affirm him saying ‘It’s not you. I am so pleased. That’s terrific. You can go back to class’. In documents made available to the researcher (School newsletters, Annual Reports to
the school community) there were numerous examples of public affirmations. For example, ‘Y is an exceptionally talented person who had excelled herself with the school concert’; ‘our AP is an outstanding educator’ and ‘We are lucky to have C who is a trained librarian. She works tirelessly to provide resources’.

In a Leadership Team meeting, thanks and affirmations were again observed. Staff interviewed readily acknowledged and affirmed her capacity to build relationships, for example with parents:

The principal is really good at involving the community. Her nature and manner encourages community. She deals with difficult parents in a positive and calm way and most hold her in high esteem. (T2)

6.8.3.4 Positive

The principal was perceived to be both positive and personable. One of the teachers, (T4), summed up the principal saying, ‘She works and gets something positive out of the most difficult situation.’

In the initial study, the principal’s personal qualities of high energy, passion and enthusiasm, sensitivity, integrity and general people skills were seen as one of the drivers of the school’s turnaround. The impact had not diminished as evidenced by a staff member (T1) who attested: ‘The principal is brilliant. She is friendly and upbeat. Her vibe has affected the staff. Another, (T2), said:

The principal has a very positive manner with everyone, even if you have done the wrong thing you feel as though you are being congratulated.

A third staff member, T4, added,

She had wonderful qualities. She is a warm ‘person’ person. She understands people and not only does she understand processes and that we need processes but she understands how these affect people. She is also open to new things.

6.8.3.5 Resilient

One thing that had helped the principal maintain her success was her capacity to sustain herself. She had developed resilience from when she was first appointed, reflecting with the researcher that she had had a staff member who had undermined her. She commented ‘I was not intimidated by him. I felt it but I never showed it and the staff noticed that’. After an interaction on the phone with a difficult parent over uniform she commented:

It does get to you because sometimes because you are powerless. I cope by sharing and having a laugh. You can’t take it too seriously. She is the only one I have had. Some of my colleagues have lots; up to 50. (Principal)
She reported proudly that she hadn’t taken her computer home at night for three years. She looked after herself through exercise, going to the gym, by enjoying the company of friends, by going to the theatre and by travelling.

6.9 Contribution of others.

While this research was initially focused on Marion and how her leadership contributed to the sustainability of success in the school, the evidence collected through interviews and shadowing days indicated that she did not do this alone. While there had been a restructure to enable all staff and students to have a voice, the relationship with the School Council and the school community now provided support, something which had not been evident in the initial study. There was much evidence to suggest that the strong, complementary, working relationship between Marion and her AP was a very important factor in the sustainability of success. While both the principal and the AP confirmed their complementary skills, as has been discussed in this chapter, all staff interviewed referred to the fact that ‘they do it together’ (T1); ‘they are involved in the boys’ program, (T2) and ‘the budget is a particular challenge for them as we have an older more expensive staff (T2); ‘they are very open and we can talk to both (T4), ‘they bring goals to the staff and then we all get involved’ (T5). Students reported at camps ‘they often drive up to visit’, while a parent reported ‘they complement each other. They are very approachable and part of our community.’ While accepting that the AP, as the new principal, would do things differently, Marion summarised her beliefs about being a successful leader saying to her ‘talk to personal and professional issues, get a feel before you start changing things, be careful not to change things too quickly and stay approachable.’

6.10 Summary

Findings from this research would suggest that the principal had been moderately successful to some degree in sustaining the school’s success. While academically, student learning outcomes had not continued to improve as hoped, many other aspects of the school had continued to improve, particularly the welfare and wellbeing programs and the student social competencies. These improvements were largely attributed to the values which had become embedded both in the school and much of the school community. Community support had also continued to improve and with that had come a growth in the reputation of the school. The sustainability of the success of Urban South was attributed to the principal, albeit assisted by her AP. She had demonstrated consistency in her leadership: in her focus on building relationships and community, on student centeredness and the education of the whole child and providing a learning environment were students were happy, safe and learning. She had responded to
changes in the external environment to some degree, particularly new government priorities and falling enrolments, by putting in interventions. She struggled, however, to reconcile government priorities with her philosophy and vision. These did not change. Marion was very relational, consistently affirming people, and modelling respect. Her personality, her warmth and exuberance endeared her to most of her school community, certainly to staff and students. She had a good understanding of herself, her strengths and weaknesses and so sought to work with people with complementary skills. Most importantly, though, the principal was reflective and true to herself. As she was retiring at the end of the school year she was invited to reflect on her tenure at Urban South.

I would have done nothing different in terms of building teams and developing relationships. I leave knowing I have been true to myself. How do you maintain balance (judging a school on Literacy and Numeracy) with lifelong learning? It’s time for me to get out. (Principal)

In the end she was true to herself. She believed she had done her job but she was not the person to take the school to the next level.
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research questions: *How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance* and *The personal qualities, characteristics and practices that contributed to the success*. The study has attempted to explore the extent to which successful school principals were able to sustain their school’s success over time. The discussion of the findings consider what can be learned from the study and its relevance to the Australian context. The work adds to an earlier study of two Australian schools (Drysdale, Goode and Gurr, 2009, 2010), as part of ISSPP research conducted in schools in England, the United States, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

This research followed up three principals in Victoria, Australia, initially identified as successful by Goode, (2004), Di Natale, (2005) and Doherty (2008). They had remained in the same school at least five years after the study. It provided a unique opportunity to explore the notion of sustainability of success over time as to date there has been a lack of research evidence in this area. The findings in this study suggest that these leaders were able to sustain successful performance in their schools because they were able to sustain their success as leaders. This study adds to the body of knowledge of the larger ISSPP project and the wider body of literature by exploring the influence of the principal in the sustainability of success in schools over five or more years.

This chapter redefines sustainability within the context of the sustainability of the school’s performance and the sustainability of the principal’s leadership. What emerged from the research was the degree of interdependence between the school’s success and the principal’s leadership.

This discussion chapter attempts to answer the two key research questions under the following subheadings:

7.2 To what extent were the three principals able to sustain success?

7.3 Why were they able to sustain success?

7.4 Common factors that led to sustainability?

7.5 What were the qualities and characteristics of the leaders?

7.6 To what extent did the leadership of these three principals remain the same or change?
7.7 What are the key learnings from the study that contribute to our knowledge and understanding of leadership for sustainability?

7.8 What are the suggestions or implications for further research?

Connections with the literature presented in Chapter 2 and have been made and more broadly used to highlight where this study supports what is already known, and the contribution it makes to the knowledge of the influence of the principal on the sustainability of a school’s success.

7.2 To what extent were the three principals able to sustain the success of their schools?

In this study, an important factor to the sustainability of the success of principals and of schools was contingent upon their strategic interventions and the extent to which they were able to respond to, and influence, their internal and external environments.

Findings from this study suggest that there are levels of sustainability of success. Success is frequently defined narrowly in business terms, where there is often a focus on profit or growth. Similarly, it is often narrowly defined in education as evidenced by reliance on national and international tests of literacy and numeracy and other external measures of learning success such as Year 12 results. While principals in this study did recognise the importance of maintaining or improving test scores, their understanding of performance included the broader purpose of education that encompassed a wide range of student outcomes as well as parent and community attitudes, school reputation, staff attitudes, and resourcing of the school. This wider understanding of success was shared by the teachers, parents and students of these schools.

Fundamental to this question is what we mean by *success* and *sustainability*. The schools in this study were part of the initial ISSPP study (Gurr and Drysdale, 2007:41).

The focus of the investigations was on the leadership of the principals, with selection criteria based on the reputation of the schools, the acknowledged success of the principals by peers, and evidence of improved student outcomes over time. These outcomes were measured (where data were available), based on comparative state-wide test and examination results, through positive school review reports, and other data such as: staff and parent opinion; student participation, engagement and satisfaction; rates of student attendance, retention and suspension; and, student pathways as indicated by data on transition from school to work. The selected schools were able to demonstrate success on a wider scale than that of the selection criteria and academic outcomes and included aspects such as achieving individual potential, high levels of
student engagement, self-confidence and self-direction, a sense of identity and a sense of community and belonging.

Having achieved a level of success, the key question in this study was to determine the extent that the principals were able to sustain the success of their schools over a period of years.

The findings from this study argue that the sustainability of a school's performance is inextricably interwoven with the sustainability of the principal's leadership and their response to internal and external factors. Building on the work of Fullan (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink, (2003, 2006) the researcher has defined sustainability of school success in this study as follows:

Sustainability, in an educational setting, is the capacity of a leader to maintain or improve performance through mediating their internal and external environments.

Using this definition, this study found that all three principals sustained success but to different degrees. The reason they were able to sustain the success was to a largely due to their personal qualities and leadership.

Table 7.1, a summary of Tables 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1 from the three previous chapters, shows comparatively how many aspects of school performance had declined, been maintained and improved in each of the three case studies. The interventions that contributed to these improvements are then listed.

### Table 7.1 Levels of sustainability of school performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Aspects which had Declined</th>
<th>Aspects which had been Maintained</th>
<th>Aspects which had been Improved</th>
<th>Interventions which had contributed to these outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marion (Urban South)</td>
<td>(2) Staff opinion surveys; enrolments.</td>
<td>(4) Relationships; quality of teaching; student achievement; facilities.</td>
<td>(4) Community relationships; student behaviour; staff capacity; reputation.</td>
<td>(5) Leadership structures and practices; welfare program; extension of Values program; partnerships; professional learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward (VGS)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>(2) Culture; high academic results.</td>
<td>(7) Alignment of Junior and Senior Schools; facilities; focus on environmental sustainability.</td>
<td>(6) Leadership structures and practices, student leadership programs; Headmaster's</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Marion’s case she was able to maintain the current level of performance in four areas: strong relationships with her staff and students; high quality facilities; the Quality Teaching program and students outcomes. What had improved were community relationships, student behaviour and the capacity of staff to adopt a restorative approach to student management. An outcome of these improvements was the improved reputation of the school within the community. Interventions which contributed to these improvements were changed leadership structures and practices, partnerships with the community, the extension of the Values program into the community, professional learning opportunities for all staff and an extension of the welfare program, including the introduction of school dogs. The transformation to a values-based school was now complete. Student test scores, too, were maintained but compared to Like Schools, had not improved. The school had been reclassified to a higher band of performance because of socio economic changes, moving from a Like School 5 to a Like School 2 (Like School 1 being the highest band in terms of educational advantage). As a result, student achievement outcomes were now compared with higher benchmarks so growth was not seen to have been sustained, much less improved. Data on parent opinion and students’ attitudes to school remained consistently above the state mean. Hargreaves & Fink (2000:17) link sustainability with growth arguing that ‘Sustainability ... addresses how particular initiatives can develop’. Using this definition, external factors, discussed further on in this chapter, had mitigated against Marion being able to sustain growth. Two aspects of performance had declined. Enrolments had decreased because several new schools had opened in this growth corridor and students moved to schools closer to their homes or to schools where

| Eve (Specialist School) | (1) Staff opinion | (4) Relationships with families; celebrations of student achievements; partnerships; parent opinion | (5) Education focus; enrolments; Early Education program; team approach; facilities; refinement of Integrated Services model. | (9) Leadership structures and practices; decision making and communication; VPAC curriculum; class structures; staff selection and professional learning; tracking students and reporting to parents; reputation; enrolments; RiSE conference. |

| Eve (Specialist School) | (1) Staff opinion | (4) Relationships with families; celebrations of student achievements; partnerships; parent opinion | (5) Education focus; enrolments; Early Education program; team approach; facilities; refinement of Integrated Services model. | (9) Leadership structures and practices; decision making and communication; VPAC curriculum; class structures; staff selection and professional learning; tracking students and reporting to parents; reputation; enrolments; RiSE conference. |
they did not have to cross major highways. Coupled with government expectations for high academic performance and the loss of key staff, opportunities for new initiatives had been curtailed and the school had settled into more of a ‘holding pattern’. The loss of key staff and uncertainty about future enrolments had resulted in a decline in staff satisfaction.

Edward had been able to sustain and build on the success of VGS, for example, the high academic results and the strong culture of the school. A significant improvement was the greater alignment between the Junior School and the Senior School. Other improvements were new or renovated facilities (including the purchase of acreage for outdoor programs), a greater focus on the environment and on environmental sustainability, the standard of the Music program (described as having ‘skyrocketed’), a change in pedagogical approaches, and greater success in the interschool sporting competition. These improvements led to the enhanced reputation of the school and of the Headmaster, an increased demand for enrolments and increased waiting lists, and students who were more highly engaged, committed and proud of their school. Interventions which supported these improvements were changed leadership structures and practices, wider curriculum options and learning opportunities, (including students with special learning needs), the building of staff capacity, international learning experiences, student leadership programs, and the Headmaster’s strategic leadership.

At the Specialist School, staff opinion was the only area where results were lower than in the initial study. According to Fullan (1993) this is an outcome of the uncertainty associated with large scale change to culture and practice, a turnover in staff and a growth of staff numbers by more than 50 per cent. Strong relationships with families, high parent opinion, strong external partnerships and school celebrations of students’ achievements and milestones had been maintained. The key improvement was the focus on education, including an Early Education program. Other improvements were the refinement of the Integrated Services model, improved facilities and a stronger team approach within the organisational structure. There were nine interventions which contributed to these improvements. The leadership structures had changed to a more distributed model and there were clearer decision making and communication processes. The introduction of the new curriculum (VPAC) changed the way classes were structured and also necessitated an increased focus on staff development. The educational emphasis had resulted in a more rigorous tracking and reporting of student progress. Most importantly, the reputation of the school had grown as had the enrolments. Eve had set out to raise the brand of the school, employing a PR company when necessary, to manage school events and publicise them in the media. Finally, the RiSE conference extended the profile of the school locally, nationally and internationally.
7.3 Why were these schools able to sustain success?

This study found that the leadership of the principal was very important sustaining success. The qualities of the principals and their actions and practices were at the core of creating, developing and sustaining internal conditions for improvement and they were able to effectively manage the challenges from the external environment. They played a central role in managing anticipated and unanticipated tensions and dilemmas and mediating the interplay between the internal and external school contexts. There was evidence that these principals were also able to influence their external cultures.

The data from interviews and observations collected from the return visits to these three schools showed that the original themes that accounted for the principals’ success were still evident. These were their leadership style, personal characteristics, relationships and personal philosophy and values (Goode, 2004; Di Natale, 2005; Doherty, 2008). The data confirmed that Marion’s philosophy and values had not changed, nor had her personal qualities; and Edward’s philosophy, values, leadership and personal qualities had been maintained as had Eve’s. Their philosophies and values influenced how each had responded to internal and external forces of change. The context in which they operated and their attitudes to change emerged in this study as important factors.

There were a common set of factors and that together with the principal’s vision, values and qualities continued to play a crucial role in sustaining the school’s success.

7.4 Common factors that led to sustainability.

In identifying the common factors that led to sustainability, the researcher returned to the findings from the initial study. An outcome of that study was a model (see Model 7.1) developed by Drysdale and Gurr (2006). Building on models of influences on student achievement by other writers (Hopkins, 2001; King and Newmann, 2001; Mitchell and Sackney, 2001) Drysdale and Gurr developed a conceptual map to describe, explain and categorise the kinds of interventions a successful leader made and how they impacted on student outcomes. As part of the ISSPP, refinements were made to this model (for example, Drysdale and Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2015; Gurr et al., 2006). Drysdale et al. (2009) also constructed a complex model derived from the nine Victorian case studies and five Tasmanian ones (see Drysdale et al., 2009:698). The original model is used here because it was representative of the findings from the initial study in Victorian schools.
In Model 7.1, (below) Level 1 Impacts refer to *direct impact*, that is direct classroom practice and its impact on student outcomes. Level 2 Impacts describe the *indirect impact* a leader’s interventions have on student learning outcomes, the building of the personal, professional, organisational and community capacity of the school. Level 3 Impact interventions are ‘other influences’.

**Model 7.1 Successful School Leadership Model**

![Model 7.1 Successful School Leadership Model](image)

In answer to the first research question of this study, *How successful principals contributed to the sustainability of the school’s performance*, this study identified a number of common factors within the principals’ strategic interventions in response to internal and external contexts. Building school capacity remained important as did the principal’s influence on teaching and learning through building a purposeful learning environment.

The researcher has modified both the original model (Gurr and Drysdale, 2007) and all subsequent models (Drysdale and Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2015) to capture the findings for sustainable leadership. Model 7.2 provides an overview of the common factors that supported sustainable successful school leadership.
The qualities, characteristics, (particularly their self-leadership), philosophy, values and vision of the three principals influenced their capacity to sustain the school’s performance. The school’s vision, mission, culture, structures, people and processes were identified as the internal context. These internal factors, together with the leader, mediated on the educational interventions, both at Level 1 impact and Level 2 impact. The external context, Level 3 impact, influenced the strategic interventions made by the principal. The degree to which these principals were able to sustain the successful performance of their schools was related to the degree to which they could not only work within these external constraints but influence them.

Model 7.3 explains in more detail the components of the model. The external influences identified in this study were the demographics, governance structures and educational requirements mandated by external bodies. Building the capacity of the school, Level 2 Impact involved indirect interventions. These were staff selection and capacity building, organisational changes such as a more distributed style of leadership, accompanying changes in leadership structures and practices, including communication processes, increased internal accountability through appraisal processes and further development of community partnerships. Other indirect interventions were related to the learning environment and included changes in pedagogy, development of facilities which supported the learning program and more rigorous assessment and monitoring of student performance. Although Edward at VGS was a practitioner, his impact on the learning environment was more indirect then direct. His purpose in remaining a
practitioner was related to his belief in building relationships with all the boys rather than having a direct impact on classroom practice.

**Model 7.3 Sustainable Successful School Leadership Model**

The outcomes of these interventions were not only student outcomes but school outcomes. Student outcomes looked beyond just academic achievement, as measured by external examinations, and standardised tests. Student outcomes which demonstrated sustained success or improvement included developing the whole student, extra-curricular opportunities and personal outcomes for each student were an important component of how these schools measured success.

Equally important in this study were school outcomes. An unintended outcome of schools which sustained their successful performance was the improved reputation of the school and an enhanced positive school culture. In this model the researcher has identified reputation as an outcome. It could equally be argued that a deliberate effort to enhance reputation was a strategic intervention. For example, Eve deliberately set out to raise the profile of education for students with special needs and the RiSE symposium was an intervention which showcased achievements of the Specialist School.

Leadership was a common factor in the sustainability of successful school performance. What was different was the importance of the principal’s self-leadership. The findings from this study suggested that the impact of the principal’s self-efficacy and continued personal and professional growth was a
significant contributor to the sustainability of the school’s success. (Badura, 1997, 2000; Dimmock & Hattie, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The qualities and characteristics of the principals, along with how they built their own capacity and maintained their success as leaders, being the second research question, are reported in more detail in section 7.4 of this thesis.

### 7.4.1 External context

In leading for sustainable performance, the demographics of the school and government policy influenced the interventions made by the leaders. At VGS, governance was an additional factor. These findings supported Gurr’s (2014) contention that successful leaders are less constrained by context and seem to be able to work both within and across constraints. While community expectations, the social and economic landscape and financial resources were important they were subsumed in this study into interventions. For example, Eve’s capacity to find resources was subsumed into facilities.

#### 7.4.1.1 Demographics

In each of the three case studies the changes to the demographics impacted on the school’s capacity to sustain successful performance. Research by Mulford and Silins (2003) confirmed the importance of the external context on success. They found that socio economic status and school/family relationships did effect school performance. Ylimaki & Jacobson (2011) also found that the leadership of successful principals was ‘context sensitive’ but not ‘context driven’. The principals in these case studies sustained success to the degree they were able to influence the external environment. Hallinger (2016) identified several types of school contexts, (institutional, community, socio-cultural, political, economic, school improvement), and outlined how they shaped school leadership practice.

In Marion’s case, there were changes in the demographics. For instance, while the socio-economic status did not change dramatically and relationships between home and school actually improved, the emphasis on the importance of education changed. The parents were less ambitious for their children, preferring to emphasise the importance of their child being happy. There were also changes in enrolments which were beyond her sphere of influence. Urban South had been built in a growth corridor which had continued to expand. The result was that several new schools had been built in the vicinity of Urban South and enrolments were lost as families sought schools closer to their homes.
At VGS demand for places had grown because of the school’s and the Headmaster’s reputation. As a high fee paying independent school, the demographics had not changed greatly in terms of social demographics or social capital but they had changed in terms of the academic potential of the boys. The Headmaster’s strong social conscience extended to a policy and practice of inclusivity. In response to gaining a reputation for supporting boys with special learning needs, there had been a significant growth in numbers of these boys and this was seen to impact on performance.

The social demographics at the Specialist School had changed significantly. While originally the school had serviced students in the local area, many of whom were both financially and academically disadvantaged, the reputation of the school had seen not only a significant growth in enrolments but enrolments drawn from wider and more affluent areas of Melbourne. The composition of students was described as approximately ‘one third of students classified as needy, one third middle class and one third very wealthy’.

7.4.1.2 Governance

Urban South and the Specialist School were government schools so other than changes in policy, there was little change in governance structures or practices. This was not so at VGS. Externally Edward was subjected to greater accountability not only through government policies but through the School Council, his employer. A change in personnel within the School Council had brought with it a more corporate approach and an emphasis on high academic results in the final year of school as well as sporting success through the Associated Grammar Schools (AGS) sporting competitions. The publication of all Victorian secondary schools’ results through the media (a type of League table) and through the myschool website had exacerbated the emphasis on academic results. Edward responded positively to this accountability and the demands of the Council for high achievement in student outcomes, but within the context of his vision of educating well rounded citizens. He was transparent. He kept Council informed, he put in place interventions such as the Captain’s Club and extended supervised study opportunities yet he maintained his policy of inclusivity, meaning that boys who were not high achievers were not transferred to other schools, and he continued to resist raising the profile of sporting achievements through awarding sporting scholarships. These actions enabled Edward to sustain success. He was not confined by the context in which he worked (Day and Schmidt, 2007) but rather finetuned his responses the new demands.
7.4.1.3 Changes to government policy

More defined processes of accountability, both external and internal, had impacted on the sustainability of each schools’ success were measured, particularly at Urban South and VGS who were subjected to external accountabilities in terms of student outcomes which were now published in a public domain; specialist schools do not have student learning outcomes published. How the leaders responded to this change was different. To Marion, the strong focus on data and improving student outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy, as mandated by the Education Department, was at odds with her philosophy of a broad, holistic, values based education for each child and while she remained passionate about students achieving academically, she railed against changes in government policy which emphasised academic achievement being the single purpose of education.

Edward’s response to government policy changes was discussed as part of governance. He responded proactively. He described academic achievement at a high performing school such as VGS as a ‘given’ but the publishing of the results of external testing had had an impact and he sought to comply without compromising his philosophy of educating future citizens who would impact positively on the world. The students at the Specialist School were exempt from external testing.

7.4.2 Interventions

A study by Mourshed et al. (2010) identified the importance of schools acknowledging their current reality, what interventions were needed to move it to the next stage and then adapting the intervention to the context. The principals in this study identified similar interventions but in each case, adapted them to their particular context.

7.4.2.1 Capacity building

Staff selection

None of these three principals achieve and sustained their success alone. The selection of the right staff was a key determinant. Eve, for example, made sure she surrounded herself with people who had complementary skills and she was described as ‘always having her ear to the ground’ looking for talented staff. Eve maintained that she surrounded herself with smart people as Drysdale et al. (2011: 32) reported ‘Sustainability is very dependent on the right people...it’s not a one man show’.
The development of VPAC would not have been possible without the right driver and Eve found that person in one of the consultants who became one of her AP’s. This new approach to learning had casualties in regard to staff, losing people who chose not to come on board. The growth of enrolments had enabled her to select a number of new staff and the higher profile of the school, achieved through her networking and through the RiSE symposium, had had the effect of attracting new talent to the staff. Eve was very determined to have the right people to drive through change and was observed to move people on if they were not totally on board.

Good recruitment, that is, hiring the right people, was reported as one of the key reasons for the sustainability of the performance of the school. People sympathetic to the culture of the school was a key criterion. This had been identified by Doherty (2008) as a reason for his success. It remained important. Like Marion at Urban South, Edward believed that you hired people with the right attitude and a passion for teaching, you then developed their skills. Developing staff remained a priority. This will be discussed further in the next section.

The sustainability of success of Urban South had in fact been hampered by the inability to select or to maintain the right staff. In an earlier study (Goode, 2004:2), Marion had reported that she ‘...made a concerted and conscious effort ...to employ staff who share the school’s values of caring for children and working as a team’ and that she had ‘only slipped up once’. While initial success had been supported by the growth in enrolments and the capacity of Marion to employ energetic, talented and vibrant staff, who were willing to challenge pedagogies and shared practices, the fall in enrolments had seen the school lose some of this talent because contracts could not be renewed or because the staff obtained other positions, frequently on promotion.

Staff professional learning

All three principals in this study maintained that building the capacity of their staff had enabled them to sustain success. This is supported by Fullan (2009) who identified capacity building as one of his six secrets to sustaining educational change. He argued that leaders who invest in their staff encourage new competencies but also renewed motivation. Even as enrolments fell and she lost many of her best staff, Marion did not waiver in the opportunities she offered staff for professional learning, both through formal courses and through opportunities to shadow and observe other teachers. She genuinely celebrated the success of staff she lost through promotion or transfer to other schools believing that part of her role was
to identify potential and encourage it. Both she and her AP were reported to go out of their way to support their staff both personally and professionally.

In Doherty’s initial study (Doherty, 2008), staff development was cited as one of the reasons for Edward’s success at VGS. It remained a feature of the sustained success of the school’s performance. The school attracted skilled staff but the Headmaster was renowned for his encouragement of staff to extend themselves either through formal courses, such as masters and doctorate programs or through presenting at national and international conferences. Such programs were financially supported by the school. In addition, staff were encouraged to build their leadership capacity by being supported to step into temporary vacancies in leadership. He was reported and observed as an excellent delegator. The third way in which Edward built capacity of staff was through a rigorous performance appraisal program which he had developed and implemented. Finally, he personally mentored several staff members whom he perceived had leadership potential, meeting with them regularly, listening and guiding. This was observed during some of the field days of shadowing.

Eve built capacity in a number of ways. While always encouraging staff in their professional learning, she modelled lifelong learning by completing formal courses, but more recently by accepting invitations to address educational forums both in Australia and international on the learning needs for students. She built the capacity of her staff by encouraging them to go out and to present at conferences thereby building their confidence and their networks and, importantly, she built the capacity of her teacher assistants by encouraging them to complete formal teacher qualifications while employing them part time during their studies.

7.4.2.2 Organisational changes

Leadership structures and practices.

With all three principals, a great knowledge of and confidence in oneself and one’s leadership was the common factor in introducing organisational changes, which were a key intervention. Redesigning the organisation had been identified initially by Leithwood and Reihl (2003) as an important dimension of successful leadership. Day and Sammons (2013) reiterated its importance in their study. Dinham’s (2007) research, too, supported this noting that as schools develop and change, different leadership approaches are required if development is to keep moving. In this study, components of organisational change
included creating leadership structures which allowed for more distributed leadership, accountability processes and opportunities for staff leadership.

The most significant change to each principal’s leadership was not just the shared leadership which they had enacted. Each acknowledged that they had not succeeded alone. All had become more dependent on personnel within the school. This finding supported Mulford (2003:2) who maintained that sustaining improvement required the ‘leadership capabilities of the many rather than the few.’ For Eve, this was her Admin Team but particularly the AP who had the knowledge of the arts and of arts curriculum and was able to drive that change, and another member of the team who provided emotional support and counsel and who coached her on further developing her interpersonal skills.

For Marion at Urban South, it was her AP who provided her with the greatest support. While Marion’s strength was her capacity to work with people and build relationships, Julie had complementary skills, preferring to work in the background using her curriculum knowledge to change pedagogies and set up the processes which enabled the school to function effectively.

Edward was supported by his Executive but in particular by Simon who was one of the Deputy Headmasters and the Head of the Senior Campus. Appointed one year after Edward, Doherty (2008:141) noted Simon’s role had been changed from Deputy Headmaster: School Management to Deputy Headmaster: Head of Senior School as he had progressively taken up more of the day to day operational matters. Their interdependent relationship was described by Simon as being the ‘Ying’ and the ‘Yang’. Their skills were complementary, they were comfortable challenging each other but also providing one another with a sounding board.

All three principals had moved to a more distributed leadership structure, supporting Lambert’s (2002) belief that one person cannot fulfil all the requirements of an entire school. Their leadership practices supported Spillane and Diamond’s (2004) definition of distributed leadership emphasising practices rather than roles and responsibilities.

Marion had come into a very difficult situation initially and had worked alone trying to build trust and relationships and turn the school around. Although it was not named as such, Marion’s approach to leadership become more distributive. She modelled Bennett, Wise and Wood’s (2003) concept of distributed leadership being a form of collective leadership. Decision making had become more collaborative and consultative and she, too, had, developed a structure that empowered teams in the school and encouraged them to be accountable for their performance.
She had a good knowledge of herself and had sought out people with complementary skills, for example, her AP who had both strong curriculum and learning and teaching skills and good organisational skills. A very strong partnership now existed at Urban South between the principal and the AP. Marion consistently used the pronoun ‘we’ usually referring to herself and her AP and staff, too, referred to ‘they’ in the same context. Staff, students and parents saw the strength in this partnership and in their complementary skills.

The growth of the school was one of the contributing factors in the change of Eve’s leadership and organisational practices. Initially quite directive in her style, she realised that the new direction in which she wanted to take the school required a broader skill set than her own and so she sourced the people she needed to implement her vision. She delegated but she remained strong in holding people to account. She had become more consultative, collaborative and invitational and, as she explained, had developed her ‘soft skills’ and become less judgmental.

The leadership and organisational practices of Edward, at VGS, had changed in that he, too, had become less ‘hands on’. New structures had provided a vehicle for him to delegate more, to be less ‘hands on’ and more strategic. He had a strong and competent Executive, again with complementary skills, particularly his Deputy Head who was also Head of the Senior School.

As each of these leaders had moved to a more distributed model of leadership, so too had their leadership structures changed with each of the them expanding their leadership team. The work of Hallinger and Heck (1996a) and Hallinger (2003b) demonstrated the need for organisational structures to be aligned to the school’s mission to promote school effectiveness and influence student outcomes.

Eve’s school grew. It also changed direction and she recognised that she could no longer do everything herself nor did she have the necessary skills. She knew herself and her strengths and her expanded Leadership Team now provided the complementary skills. She introduced an Administration Team of which she was not a member. This structure empowered the new team leaders, the heads of each of the sub schools and the leader of the paramedics team, to have responsibility for their area as well as some autonomy, again exemplifying Spillan and Diamond’s (2007) theory. Their capacity to lead was supported by Eve taking an active mentoring role with each of them. The new team succeeded because there were clear structures and processes for communication and decision making as well as high levels of accountability. While Eve may have been seen to physically step back, her finger was firmly on the pulse of the school’s operations at all times, a practice described by Day et al. (2009:14) as ‘internal authority’. 
VGS was a well-established school and initially the leadership structures reflected that. Edward sought an opportunity to change this situation. The appointment of a new Head of Junior School was this opportunity and from it emerged a leadership structure for the whole school rather than a senior and junior school who operated quite independently. While the Head of Junior School retained autonomy of his campus or school, it was within the philosophy and practices of the whole school and processes became consistent between the two schools. He became a member of the College Executive, the composition of which had also changed. In addition to two Deputy Headmasters, there were now three Assistant Headmasters. 70 positions of responsibility allowed both the Headmaster to withdraw, as did Eve, from much of the day to day running of the school, and importantly provided opportunities for many staff to build their leadership capacity. It was about what Bennett, Wise and Woods (2003:2) describe as ‘letting go’ rather than simply delegating tasks. These practices of all three principals supported by the work of Katz and Kahn (1978) and Schein (1998) who concluded that when functions are distributed, there is more quality decision making and more commitment to decisions.

The leadership structure at Urban South was also more representative. As with the Specialist School, there was more emphasis on teams and on team leaders being part of the Leadership Team. Specialist teachers were represented by a team leader, similar to the paramedics at the Special School. What differed at Urban South was that school support staff were also represented. Unlike the Specialist School, the change in leadership structure was an outcome of changed leadership practices as a response to feedback on the need to improve communication and decision making rather than in response to growth as with the other schools.

In each of the case studies, improved communication processes was cited as one reason for the sustainability of success in these schools. All three principals were observed to have become more consultative and this consultation was supported by improved leadership structures.

At Urban South, the team structure was seen as a contributing factor for improving both decision making and communication of decisions. Teachers believed they had a voice and that there were processes in place for their voice to be heard. Gronn (2008) suggested the strength in distributing leadership was that it laid the ground for voice and this had become the practice at Urban South. Issues perceived to affect the whole school were discussed openly in whole staff forums and high levels of trust among staff resulted in people being comfortable to challenge ideas. Mulford (2007) identified transparency in decision making and facilitative, supportive structures as being key practices for improving student outcomes. At Urban

The team structure at the Specialist School had also facilitated improved communication processes. Eve was a passionate and powerful communicator, both in her written word and in her oral communication and she used these skills to advantage. Her School Council, the parents and benefactors were kept well informed of events, students’ achievements and of future plans. Policies were discussed by staff and decisions were made from the ‘bottom up’ via teams and team leaders. It was reported that the decision making structures and clarity of purpose for decisions had enabled the school to change its direction and adopt the VPAC.

As the Headmaster of a large school, Edward saw good communication processes as essential for sustaining success. An expanded Executive and many levels of leadership supported communication but it was Edward’s approachability, his presence, his capacity to listen and his relationships with staff, students and the school community that was the hallmark of his communication.

**Accountability and appraisal**

Hallinger (2003b) cited researchers such as Mortimore (1993) and Purkey and Smith (1984) who described instructional leaders as ‘culture builders’ that set high expectations and standards for staff and students. All three of the principals in this study set high expectations and held staff and students accountable to them.

Marion’s structure allowed for more accountability through teams but it was not perceived to be rigorous in terms of Literacy and Numeracy but it was in terms of behaviours and the school community being committed to their values. The culture of the staff at Urban South had become more comfortable and while Marion reported that she believed she was more comfortable in challenging teachers, she had lost some of her passion to hold them accountable for their classroom practices and challenge the ‘country club’ mentality that had developed. She reacted against the mandated academic results accountability by choosing to retire rather than, as she said, ‘drag people kicking and screaming’.

For Edward, accountability came from within as well as externally through government policy and the School Council. As a scientist, he enjoyed analysing data and using it to inform decision making, especially strategic direction for the school. He had also introduced more accountability measures for staff and had encouraged analysis of academic data, particularly Year 12 external exam results. He had established
more stringent staff appraisal processes and he had increased to use of feedback and data to inform future planning and directions for staff. As part of the appraisal program staff were encouraged to visit one another’s classrooms and reflect with each other on what they had observed. Harris and Lambert (2003) describe these practices are progress indicators on a journey of building staff capacity. These practices supported the performance appraisal program which was focused on teacher professionalism and building teacher capacity but was in no way punitive. It was all for the boys. As with Eve, accountability processes at VGS were based on high expectations of all.

High expectations were a hallmark of the Specialist School, both for student learning and for staff participation in every facet of school life and these expectations defined the sustained success of the school. Eve practised what the studies of Hargreaves (2003) and Elmore (2000) found, that professional learning and communities of practice support cultural change and sustained success. Accountability processes were linked to student outcomes but in a broader context. The success of the new curriculum was dependent on clear expectations of staff, goal setting linked to the vision of the school and teachers being accountable for these goals. Each child had to demonstrate growth. Eve was described as being ‘uncompromising’ in her expectations and comfortable in calling people to account if she felt they were not performing to expectations.

**Staff leadership opportunities**

Tead (1935) described leadership as the act of influencing and Mulford (2008) maintains that leadership is about behaviour, action and practice. To sustain success, one intervention each of the principals in this study made was to build the capacity of staff to lead by giving them opportunities to influence.

As described, Eve challenged her staff to present at conferences, to pursue further study and to expand their experiences beyond the Specialist School environment. Edward, too, encouraged additional formal study but also for teachers to step up and take short term leadership appointments. The expansion of leadership positions for staff to 70 meant that there were frequent opportunities for teachers to experience leadership, again building their confidence. In spite of a fall in enrolments and loss of staff, Marion continued to encourage to staff to seek new leadership opportunities, to challenge themselves professionally and to enrol for further study.
7.4.2.3 Community partnerships

Partnerships, particularly external partnerships, were important in the leadership interventions of each of these principals. Caldwell's (2007) emphasised the importance of partnerships and networks arguing that by strengthening and aligning resources transformation was more likely to succeed and one could argue and this researcher would argue, to be sustained.

For Eve, they were fundamental to providing the resources she needed to provide the education she believed was each child’s right. Eve’s networks and partnerships outside the school had been part of the reason for her initial success because it was through these that she had been able to provide facilities, programs and additional personnel well beyond the realms of a budget of a government school. She had continued to expand these partnerships and networks. Devolving many of the management issues within the school through expanding her leadership group had enabled her to concentrate her energies outside the school, strengthening her alliances and networks, raising the profile of the school and accessing resources.

To Edward, a key partnership was that with the School Council who were his employer. He maintained a good working relationship with them through transparent processes and a respectful relationship. Other partnerships for Edward and VGS extended the learning opportunities of the boys, whether through sporting tours overseas, overseas learning experiences, opportunities for exchange programs and ‘Gap years’ or working in remote communities.

Marion used partnerships to support opportunities for teachers and to forge relationships with the wider community. Partnerships with other schools provided opportunities for teachers to shadow leaders. Through partnerships within the community she was able to compensate for the reduction in staff. She had a strong network of volunteers to support students with extra curricula activities such as Music, as well as those who provided administrative support and support in fund raising. Both she and Edward used community relationships and partnerships to provide opportunities and even expectations that students should give back to others.
7.4.2.4 Purposeful learning environment

Changes in pedagogy

As educational leaders, making learning relevant was important to all three principals. Zbar (2013) cites the importance of enhancing teacher expertise and building structures to support teacher learning and student engagement in their learning as pre-requisites for school improvement. Within the learning environment there were three interventions which enabled these principals to sustain success. There were changes in pedagogy, improved facilities and improved assessment and reporting practices.

At the Specialist School, changes in pedagogy was Eve’s most significant intervention. This was acknowledged by all of the participants in the study. It was the development of a culture of learning, through the introduction of a Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum. Harris (2005:161) maintains that ‘nothing really changes for students and their learning unless there are changes in beliefs, behaviours and practices of teachers’. This was the finding at the Specialist School. As an intervention, this change in curriculum and pedagogy was described as ‘revolutionary’ in the field of education for students with special needs. It recognised that these children learn best by doing. Learning goals were set for each student so that progress in their learning could be monitored. This intervention had school wide implications for the staff, who had to relearn their craft and rewrite their curriculum, for the therapists who now had to plan and work alongside teachers, for parents who saw their child making progress in their learning and for the students of whom there were now higher expectations that they learn. The intervention had wider implications in terms of the reputation of the school locally, nationally and internationally.

One of Edward’s key interventions was also a changed approach to learning. His leading of changed practices also reflected the beliefs of Zbar (2013) and Harris (2005). The school had been an early adopter of technology in the classroom in 1993 but the Centre for Contemporary Learning challenged the pedagogical practices of many teachers as the focus moved from content to how students learn. In a high performing, high fee paying independent secondary school, this change was a challenge. Teachers were to be facilitators of learning, to allow students to explore under the guidance and mentoring of staff. As with Eve, there was some ‘push back’ from staff but like her, Edward was determined that this was the best way for students to learn and grow. There were other indirect learning experience interventions which were significant in his context. These were Edward’s expansion of international experiences for boys, his emphasis on the concept of student leadership and the expansion of outdoor education learning
experiences. These programs helped sustain success in that they demonstrated his determination to be continually improving, never resting on past successes.

Although Marion did not cite ‘relevant learning’ as an intervention, her actions demonstrated that this was her vision. Her vision of learning was holistic. In the initial study (Goode 2004:13) Marion had commented that ‘high standards maybe good but to want to learn is a preference’. Academic learning was important but the strong emphasis of government policy on Literacy and Numeracy benchmarks did not sit comfortably with her philosophy of education. When she was first appointed to Urban South she ensured that programs were initiated to bring students to standard, hence she appointed an assistant principal with a strong pedagogical background and an interest and competency in using data to track student learning. Student success remained important to her, but not at the expense of a strong welfare and wellbeing program. Her key intervention, which impacted on the learning environment, was the introduction of a values based education program which underpinned all policies and practices within the school. Making the school safe, moving from an emphasis on a ‘rules’ based approach to behaviour management to a values based approach which extended beyond the school to be a common language and approach with families too, she believed, was her greatest achievement and most successful intervention. Being ‘fair’ was fundamental to all practices and she worked hard to ensure that each student, each teacher and each person who came into the school was treated with respect and their self-esteem never destroyed.

Assessment and monitoring practices

Improved practices for the assessment of and for learning was a key factor in sustaining success at the Specialist School. With the new VPAC approach to learning, all teachers were required to report to parents on students’ individual learning goals with pictorial representation of each child’s progress.

At VGS tracking of each boy’s academic and social progress and putting in place appropriate interventions ensured that no boy slipped ‘under the radar’. The structure for this was a referral system or register on which boys’ names were placed if they were perceived to be at risk in any way. Regular meetings between the Head of Year and the Headmaster monitored the progress of these boys. Each Head of Year was responsible for liaising with a boy’s teachers. In doing this, Edward demonstrated how the internal context can mediate the effect of the external contexts. (Gu and Johannson 2013). He demonstrated his ability to respond proactively to external demands and strategically align them with the boys’ needs.
At Urban South, students were monitored although not with the same rigour. Much of the monitoring of learning was dependent on relationships and informal observations. The AP did collect data and analyse it, but the strong links between the data and classroom practice were not observed.

**Curriculum**

Hallinger (2003b) proposed one of the functions of an instructional leader was to manage the instructional program and each of these principals did. In Day and Sammons (2013) review of international literature on successful leadership, they concluded that the combination of instructional or pedagogical and transformational strategies had the greatest impact on ensuring school success. Among their nine characteristics, which include Leithwood and Reihl’s (2003) four dimensions, are the redesigning and enriching the curriculum. All three principals demonstrated this characteristic in their leadership. All made changes to the curriculum, albeit quite different.

The introduction of VPAC was the most dramatic change. It demanded a new curriculum at the Specialist School. This was a direct intervention which resulted in a purposeful learning environment with high levels of accountability for consistent documentation with a scope and sequence of skill development and a focus on learning rather than welfare.

Both VGS and Urban South were obligated to follow government guidelines with curriculum as students were both schools were subject to external examinations. Both broaden their curriculum offerings. For example, at VGS, student opportunities for international learning experiences, outdoor education and a broad range of arts increased. The Contemporary Learning Centre impacted on the way curriculum was delivered. Students were encouraged to be more independent learners and to design their own learning within the confines of a curriculum.

While also adhering to government guidelines, Urban South had expanded their use of technology in learning and also encouraged students to expand learning experiences into the community. Values underpinned all their practice.

**Facilities**

In the case of Eve, she had continued to develop the facilities of the school to make it a ‘state of the art’ educational environment for students with special needs. Facilities had been a feature of the initial study. They continued to be. Eve had garnered support and funding to build a swimming pool which enabled the school to now provide a full time swimming program for all students. A three bedroom house had also been built. This house, Eve envisaged, was fundamental to students as they transitioned from the Specialist School to life beyond. The students, under supervision, maintained the house and garden and so developed home skills to enable some of them to be able to live independently. The building also housed a coffee shop which the students manned. To sustain school performance, Eve had continued to seek support to provide the best for these students. At the forefront of the new facilities was a performing arts/multimedia centre built to support the VPAC. The new junior playground provided a safe environment for students to learn to ride bikes. Because of the growth in enrolments, Early Years and some senior programs were off site but architectural plans had been developed to demolish some of the older demountable buildings and within the same footprint, develop new facilities for senior students on site, safer entry and exiting for vehicles and additional playing space.

Facilities at VGS were an important element of the sustainability of the school’s success, in particular the Centre for Contemporary Learning, the purchase of 640 acres of land in the high country to expand the outdoor education program and the continual upgrading of technology and technical support for learning.

Marion maintained facilities rather than improved them. In an earlier study (Goode 2004) the school buildings were on a new site which was well planned and set within spacious grounds. Because of rapid growth in enrolments, several ‘portable’ classrooms had been brought in but these were connected with walkways and landscaped. Marion’s plan had been to replace these portable classrooms with permanent, contemporary learning classrooms but it had not been deemed a priority in government funding distributions so had not eventuated. Marion believed in the importance of a safe, attractive environment and so buildings and grounds were well maintained. The most significant change in the facilities was the introduction of the school dogs who supported the welfare program and gave additional life to the school.
7.4.3 Outcomes

7.4.3.1 Student outcomes

In each of these schools, the interventions that were made were all related to improving student outcomes. In line with Zbar’s (2013) research on pre-conditions for school improvement, the researcher found evidence of a clear vision and direction, high expectations, a safe environment, a culture of shared responsibility for learning and structures that supported the school’s vision. In this research, the concept of student outcomes remained broad, not only academic success but social competencies, skills and values to enable the students to take their place in a community. The interventions of the principals were found to result in positive outcomes for the students, not only academic but in a broader context. Factors such as student engagement, self-confidence and self-direction, a sense of identity and self-efficacy, and a sense of community and belonging remained important and success was sustained by improving or refining practices already in place. The three principals in this study epitomised what Starratt (2005:70) described as an ethical leader, one who engages both teachers and students in their learning.

Edward described academic success at VGS as a ‘given’ in terms of student outcomes. Students who were underperforming or had special learning needs were case managed as described above. Saturday sport, social justice activities such as working with aborigines in remote Australia and outdoor education experiences were all viewed as student outcomes. Some of these practices had been in place during the initial study but had been extended or revised, for example, the Somers and Leppitt leadership programs described in Chapter 5. A refinement of the formal positions of leadership, the appointment of prefects from the Year 12 (final year) boys, was an intervention that had impacted on outcomes positively. Previously appointed towards the end of the penultimate year, only the School Captain and four Deputy Captains were appointed at that time now with prefects appointed half way through their final year when they had demonstrated leadership. The structure was designed to emphasise that all boys should be leaders, that leadership is not a position. An extension of this was the Leadership Awards Ceremony, held mid-year during their final year, which saw every Year 12 boy publicly acknowledged for his leadership contribution with a citation. This emphasis on leadership as a student outcome reflected the work of Burns (1978) on leaders transforming by encouraging others. In this situation that transforming to ‘act manfully’, which was the school motto. The VGS model aligned with Northouse (2010), too, in that it encouraged leaders to influence others.
Student outcomes at the Specialist School had changed most dramatically as an outcome of the VPAC. The learning and social progress of all students now had to be assessed and reported on. Success was measured, too, by the growth in confidence of students. The performing arts program enabled many students to shine through musical performance, drama and art. These were new measures of student success and outcomes with an emphasis of the Specialist School being an educational organisation.

Student outcomes at Urban South were measured in terms of academic success. As reported elsewhere in this thesis, results for Literacy and Numeracy had remained consistent and at standard although not when measured against new benchmarks. In this way, Marion modelled Hargreaves and Fink’s (2006) belief that sustainable improvements are encouraged through less emphasis on standard testing and more on restoring educational diversity. Marion’s concept of success was improvement in social competencies and in this there had been success. Suspensions, serious incidents and absenteeism had decreased, the Values program was firmly entrenched and formed a common language. There were high expectations of students, socially, and they had responded.

7.4.4.2 School outcomes

Two school outcomes emerged as part of the findings: the reputation of the school (and the principal) and the positive school culture each school enjoyed.

The reputation of the school

The reputation of the school was found to be an outcome particularly in the cases of Edward and Eve. At the same time, the improved reputation was an indirect outcome of the leaders’ influence. Doherty’s (2008:133) study found that VGS already enjoyed a high reputation in the community but that Edward had ‘lifted the bar of the school’. This had continued. The growth in the reputation of the school was measured not only by an increase in enrolments and very substantial waiting lists for entry but in the behaviours of the boys. They were very proud of their school. They saw being a member of the school community was a privilege and they reported they would not do anything to tarnish the reputation of their school or disappoint their Headmaster. They had genuine pride in wearing the ‘gold and green’ blazer. Parents and teachers exhibited the same pride of being associated with the school. The improved reputation can also be seen as an outcome of Edward’s leadership. In this case study, it was difficult to separate the principal’s reputation and that of the school. While Edward did not see himself in this light,
Analysis of the data suggested that he had continued to lift the profile of the school during his tenure and it was the school of choice for many families within the locality and beyond.

The reputation of the Specialist School had also grown, and, as with Edward, this was seen to be an outcome of Eve’s leadership. Again, it was difficult to separate the reputation of the person and the reputation of the school. Her name was almost synonymous with the school. Through her public image she had raised the profile of the school and at the time of this study, it was at capacity in terms of enrolments. Eve had been strategic in deliberately raising the profile and the reputation of the school, not only to encourage support for the school in the form of philanthropy, but also to demonstrate to societies local, national and international what children with special needs could achieve.

The reputation of Urban South was maintained but had not grown as evidenced by the drop in enrolments. Marion remained very popular within the school community.

**Positive school culture**

The importance of culture in each of these case studies was been cited throughout this thesis. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Leithwood et al. (1998) among others have stressed the importance of a positive school culture on attaining and then sustaining success. All three principals demonstrated strong relational qualities, the outcome of which was a positive school culture. They created warm, open trusting, supportive and collaborative environments which functioned as the social glue in their organisations. Barth (2002) describes the importance of culture to organisation because of the power it wields. Creating a positive school culture was an element of the success of these principals identified in the initial study. It was identified as an outcome of the sustained success in each of the case studies. By developing and broadening social capital beyond the school gate, they nurtured a culture which aided the sustaining of success of the school.

The behaviours of Marion, who had had to build a positive culture from a toxic environment, had continued to enhance a culture of belonging to a community through demonstrating trustworthiness thereby creating high levels of trust, of modelling the positive behaviours and a sense of welcome, and of inclusivity.

Edward operated within a traditional boys’ independent school that he had nurtured through his own behaviours and expectations and he had created a very gentle culture. It was consistently described as ‘affirming’, ‘welcoming’ and ‘inclusive’. It was a positive culture, a respectful culture and this was evident in the behaviours of students, staff and community.
Eve had changed the culture of the Specialist School from that of a welfare culture to that of a learning culture but in doing so she had lost none of the elements of care and inclusivity. There was a very strong element of care for students, for staff and for the parents and families in the school community.

In all three schools the norms attitudes, values and beliefs were at the core of the organisation. (Barth, 2002).

_**Quality teaching**_

An outcome of the professional learning intervention was the change in teaching practices. The importance of building the capacity of teachers to implement change has been cited throughout this discussion. For example, Leithwood and Jantzi, (2000); Harris and Lambert, (2003); Leithwood, Reidlinger, Bauer and Jantzi (2003). At the Specialist School, teaching through the performing arts required a new skill set. At VGS, the appraisal system, the opportunities for professional learning and the emphasis on the use of technology as a tool to enhance learning was reported to have raised the quality of teaching. At Urban South professional learning, both internal and external, was offered but there was less evidence of high quality teaching or changes in classroom practice.

7.5 What were the qualities and characteristics of the leaders?

There were common qualities and characteristics identified in these principals. This supports Stogdill’s (1948) claim, more recently verified by Day et al. (2011), that while traits are important to a successful leader, they are not sufficient in themselves. It is the combination of particular traits that can be advantageous to a leader. Leithwood et al. (2006b) suggests that successful leaders do possess a number of common traits. Strong relationships are fundamental as are their moral and ethical values. Each of these leaders had a clear vision, a set of core values and a strong educational philosophy. To achieve that vision, they recruited for talent, built the capacity of their staff and set high expectations. They knew themselves and they focused on their own professional and personal growth.

7.5.1 Vision, values, philosophy of the principals

In this area, none of these principals had changed. Their personal philosophy, vision and values had been a driving force in them achieving success. As Day and Schmidt (2007) suggested, they did not comply, subvert or oppose their contexts but they were clear as to what their core values were and whilst they might modify their practices, they did no deviate from their core. These same qualities had helped them
sustain success as leaders and the sustained success of their schools. All three principals saw their career as a vocation. Each of these principals had core values which were grounded in a sense of social justice. It was these values which underpinned their qualities and more importantly their behaviours.

While all were visionary, Eve stood apart from the rest. Her vision was her driving force. Children with special needs could learn. It was about finding the right key to unlock the door to their learning. Her vision was to create the best special school in the world, a school where no child could fall through the cracks. She never lost sight of this vision and she ‘drove it relentlessly’. Her leadership style continued to be shaped by a very strong personal philosophy about the education of students with special needs and it was this philosophy which informed her challenge for the school to be an educational facility rather than a welfare facility, where students were cared for rather than challenged to learn and develop. She had a clear vision of what she wanted for the school and the determination to achieve this.

Edward continued to be driven by a personal philosophy underpinned by very strong values and an equally strong social conscience. In a school where academic success was important, he argued that within the social capital of the boys, academic success was a ‘given’. His philosophy was that the school should produce ‘well rounded boys’ that left the school as ‘good people’. Dinham (2007) found that the larger the school, the more challenging it was for a leader to build relationships. Edward defied that finding. He not only knew most boys by name but knew something about them.

Marion’s philosophy did not change. Her leadership practices continued to be driven by a clear philosophy and strong values. She firmly believed in the education of the whole child, acknowledging that Literacy and Numeracy and academic outcomes were important but so too were the arts and social competencies and she resisted the temptation to see these solely as a measure of success.

7.5.2 Personal qualities

What this study confirmed was that the personal qualities of principals mattered in terms of achieving success and in sustaining both the success of the school and of them as leaders.

Burns (1978:18) posited that power is about influence to achieve purpose and that this purpose can be achieved through ‘position power’, derived from rank or office, or’ personal power’ bestowed by followers because of one’s competence and /or likeability. With each of these leaders, it was not just their
position power that enabled them to influence; it was also their personal power derived from their relationships with all those with whom they interacted.

Day et al. (2011) organised leader attributes into four categories: personal, relational, organisation and professional. Whilst the same headings have not been used to report these findings, the qualities identified by Day et al were in evidence.

In this study, the building of strong relationships was an inherent part of each principal’s personal qualities. These principals all created warm, open, trusting, supportive and collaborative cultures which functioned as the social glue in their organisations. They were all highly relational and people oriented (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Covey, 2004; Dinham, 2005; Day et al., 2011). Developing and broadening social capital beyond the school gate was found to support sustained success. Importantly, each had a clear vision, a set of core values and a strong educational philosophy. They all had high expectations; they recruited for talent and they built the capacity of their staff. They also focused on their own professional growth. There was evidence that partnerships, both internal and external, supported sustainability and finally, that success bred success; the reputation of each of the schools and their principals helped sustain success.

Marion was supportive of everyone and her modelling of this had filtered through to the school community. There were very high levels of trust. An outcome of her supportive attitude and the high level of trustworthiness was her approachability. She was a physical presence and enjoyed people and interacting with them. She was extraordinarily welcoming. She demonstrated integrity, high energy, enthusiasm, sensitivity and persistence. She believed that there was nothing you could not achieve or fix if you were consistent, persistent and tenacious. She was very gregarious and people oriented. Like Edward, she consistently modelled the behaviour she expected of others. What she had learned to do was to be more comfortable in challenging inappropriate behaviours. Like Edward, she too, was a strong presence around the school, visiting classrooms, doing yard duty and being present to parents and students, greeting them as they arrived and left school.

Edward’s life was defined by his faith and his humility. His sense of social justice and of what was fair was his hallmark. He was deeply respectful of people and of the traditions of the school. He, too, was passionate about teaching, about continuous improvement in learning and about the boys being the best they could be and making a difference in the world. He was highly relational describing that he began his work day early so that much of the administrative work was done and his day could be devoted to people. He remained a presence around the school and at all school events and was loved by the whole school
community because he immersed himself in the lives of all those at the school and those who were part of the school community. Fullan and Sharratt (2007:129) suggested that one of the most difficult elements for sustainability is the ability to establish and maintain school and home community relationships. This was an area in which Edward was seen to excel. He had developed the capacity to engage with people in all walks of life and to move effortlessly among crowds whether they be at school functions, sporting events or social events. In this way he was reported to have grown in confidence. Everyone was treated equally and he made time for everyone. When engaged in conversation, he was observed to listen far more often than he spoke. A gentle person by nature, his leadership, too, was gentle, described by some as being ‘too soft’ but he described to the researcher that he had a ‘black line’ and although it took time, when that was crossed he could move quickly and quite ruthlessly. This was supported by him, on one occasion, instructing a boy who had crossed ‘the black line’ to remove his school blazer because he had lost the right to wear the ‘green and gold’. He was expelled. Edward’s reputation within the educational community had grown since the initial study. He was a frequent spokesman on educational issues and on boys’ education and this in turn raised the profile of the school.

Eve was defined by her passion and her compassion. She was naturally gregarious and enjoyed people. Her personal qualities had enabled her to both achieve success and then to sustain it. Her passion for teaching and learning and for enabling these children to be the best they could be was matched by her compassion for their families and for her staff who worked in emotionally trying situations. She remained very entrepreneurial. She never accepted ‘No’ for an answer arguing that if someone refused a request it was because the question had not been asked properly. Apart from adopting a more shared approach to leadership, she had developed a capacity to ‘read’ people more clearly, to know when to push and when to pull back and to ‘see’ when people were emotionally vulnerable and respond accordingly.

Gu and Johannson’s (2013) study found that successful principals are resilient, optimistic and hopeful. They are also trustworthy, persistent, have a strong moral purpose and commitment. These qualities were found in each of these principals who sustained both their own success and the success of their organisations. They also demonstrated flexibility in their thinking; they were learners who could listen and learn. These three principals demonstrated a passion for social justice, albeit in different ways. Marion and Edward were described as ‘positive’ whereas Eve was described as ‘optimistic’. The difference between being described as ‘positive’ and being described ‘optimistic’ is subtle. Marion was ‘upbeat’; Edward saw the good in each person ad Eve saw challenges as opportunities. Nothing was ever unattainable in her eyes, you just had to keep trying and asking. This was her resilience. Marion’s resilience was to never be seen overtly to succumb to opposition or adversity. This quality had enabled her initial success when she faced innumerable obstacles from within the school community but when
new obstacles had emerged, in the form of government policies, she continued to display the same brave face.

All three were reflective and each sought feedback in an endeavour to be the best leader they could be. Their personal qualities were similar although often named differently by those interviewed.

7.5.3 Leadership of self and personal capacity building

All three had a knowledge of themselves and an aspect of their sustainability was their sustainability of themselves and their ability to achieve a work/life balance. They were confident which Bass (in Burns, 1987) equates with self-esteem, believing that persons with high self-esteem are more likely to change others and to lead others rather than be led or changed by others or to conform readily.

Edward demonstrated self-discipline and was defined by his physical fitness. He reported that mid-way through his time at VGS, he recognised that he was tired, that he had lost his edge so he took time out to regenerate. During this time he worked in a Science laboratory, travelled and studied other educational practices and trained for and walked the Kokoda Trail. He returned with renewed passion and ideas to move the school forward again. He continued with the training routine he had set himself for Kokoda completing a gruelling walk each weekend which, he believed, helped him operate at capacity for the week.

Marion, too, had developed a more balanced life style. Since the in initial study, her behaviours, too, had changed. She no longer took her computer home at night and at weekends, only worked on Sunday in preparation for the next week. She kept fit through attending a gym and through walking and regularly attended the theatre. She continued to renew herself professionally through networks and professional learning opportunities offered through the education department.

Eve modelled lifelong learning herself both by completing formal courses and sharing her learning. Since the initial study, she had been awarded a Churchill Scholarship which changed the way she led new learning in the school. Eve travelled extensively both nationally and internationally, presented at conferences and networked. She had found new life and energy through the birth of grandchildren with whom she sought to spend time.
7.6 To what extent did the leadership of these principals remain the same or change?

Gurr (2015) wrote an article which summarised the findings of fourteen years of research over number of countries by through the ISSPP. He concluded that no one model of leadership dominated in studies of successful school leaders but that a discussion of leadership styles and an exploration of leadership behaviours did provide a lens to better understand the practices that successful principals employed to lead their schools and communities.

Leadership practices remained a key determinant of these leaders sustained success. Although there were some changes, many of their behaviours and practices remained the same as had been observed in the initial study.

They all remained a strong presence in their school community, highly relational and a role model within the school and the community. Their presence in and around their school and school activities was a hallmark of their leadership.

Many other aspects of their leadership practices did not change.

For example, the three principals continued to use appropriate interventions. Not all the interventions were the same nor were they implemented identically. They varied according to the context.

In addition to leadership structural changes and practices discussed in 7.1, other key interventions made were changes to students’ learning experiences, improved facilities and higher levels of accountability for performance. In Marion’s school an important intervention was the expansion of the welfare program, in Edward’s school the student leadership program changed, and in Eve’s school the key intervention was the change in curriculum and learning and the move from a ‘welfare’ culture to an educational one.

All three were and remained instructional or educational leaders. What did change was how they led learning and they all did it differently. The effect of their educational leadership was mostly indirect; they were able to influence others to achieve their organisation’s’ goals by creating a learning environment and a learning culture (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003, Hattie, 2009, Hallinger, 2010) but how they did it was in their response to their environments. They did have some direct effect, for example, their strategic recruitment and the building of staff capacity (Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins, 2006).
Eve consistently looked for ways to improve learning for the students at the Specialist School. Her leadership practices changed to enable this to occur. She created the dream that students with disabilities and special needs needed to be educated, not just cared for and sought ways for this to happen. Her leadership changed as she sought to radically change the educational outcomes for these students. She realised she could not do it alone. She realised a large school required a different style of leadership. She realised that a team approach resulted in better learning outcomes for each child. Learning through the performing arts, each student being every person’s responsibility, accountability to demonstrate learning growth for each child were examples of her changed educational leadership. She was the visionary and the driver. Her staff were the enactors.

Being a presence in the school community was a hallmark of these principals’ success and sustained success. Both Eve and Marion extended their presence to be visible in classrooms and engaging with students. Eve reported that one reason for doing this was to support teachers and therapists in their work and to empathise with them as well as offer practical support. Marion enjoyed engaging with students and discussing their learning. Edward remained a classroom practitioner, teaching each Year 7 class for one term. His impact, as discussed earlier in this paper, remained largely indirect. Classroom teaching helped him establish a relationship with each boy throughout their years at VGS. It also had other benefits. He modelled the importance of engaging with students and of building relationships with them. As a practising teacher he affirmed his credibility with staff who perceived him ‘never to have left the shop floor’. As a teacher, he participated in the teacher appraisal program which he had established. His educational leadership was more pronounced, though, in his strategic leadership. He had envisioned the development in facilities and technology that challenged pedagogical practices and expanded learning opportunities for the boys through both national and international learning experiences.

Other evidence of their leadership remaining the same was that they all continued to be driven by a clear moral purpose to improve student learning opportunities and they all demonstrated the courage to challenge the status quo. The initial research of these principals, (Di Natale, 2005; Doherty, 2008; Goode, 2004), conducted as part of the ISSPP, suggested that there was evidence that these principals demonstrated elements of heroic leadership because they were prepared to fight for the best opportunities for their students but it was not heroic leadership in the traditional sense of Burns (1978). He, (Burns, 1978:244), defined heroic leadership not as a quality, but rather as a type of relationship between the leader and the led. He believed that heroic leaders came to the fore in times of crisis. This was not so with these principals, particularly Eve at the Specialist School and Edward at VGS. Marion did come into a school with poor results and a deeply divided community but was it in crisis? Pearce and Manz (2005) suggest that heroic leaders are successful within a traditional hierarchical organisational
structure, one that perpetuates the notion of command and control. Again, these leaders do not fit into this definition of heroic. They were inclusive. They were not ‘idolised’ but they were authentic and their relationships with their followers were characterised by ‘deeply held motives, shared goals, rational conflict and lasting influence in the form of change’ (Burns, 1987:247).

According to Burns’ definition, these principals in the initial study were heroic leaders. They continued to display heroic qualities. Murphy’s (1988) explanation of leaders of effective schools has them dominating their organisations through a clear vision and a strong moral purpose. Murphy (1988) also suggests that heroic leaders are charismatic. The leaders in this study could be described as charismatic. They were certainly inspirational. They had demonstrated this in the initial study and this had not changed. They inspired those whom they led and this was one of the elements which helped them sustain success.

Eve’s leadership was heroic. She inspired others with her deeply held beliefs. She challenged perceptions and prejudices in the community about students with disabilities and their capacity to learn; she challenged the bureaucracy of the Education Department and gained autonomy and resources well beyond what was normally available and she transformed the culture of the Specialist School from caring and therapy to education and learning.

Marion and Edward provided a different model of heroic leadership. They did not challenge to the same degree as Eve, but they continued to inspire and influence those whom they led. They had a clear vision and a strong moral purpose, demonstrated strong empathy and a deep sense of social justice.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that while heroic leaders can achieve great things, many of them burn out and burn out those who work for them. This study would argue that ‘one size does not fit all’. There was little evidence to suggest that either Edward or Eve had burned out or had burned out those with whom they worked. Nor could Marion be described as having ‘burned out’. Rather she had simply made the decision that her values were in conflict with those of the Education Department and so she choose to resign. What this study did not find and what could be the subject of further study is what happens to a school when a successful leader leaves. Hargreaves and Fink (2006:2) suggest that ‘the leaders’ shoes are usually too big for successors to fill’. In two of these case studies, the Specialist School and Urban South, it was the assistant principal who was appointed to replace Eve and Marion. In both situations, the principal had supported the appointment through mentoring them as successors but how they led after they were appointed is unknown.
As discussed, these three principals remained instructional or educational leaders (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Southworth, 2002,) because they continued to focus on improving student learning outcomes. How they did this can be defined as transformational (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003:41) because they set direction, understood and developed people, redesigned the organisation and built collaborative cultures and they managed the instructional program. Using Bass and Avolio’s (1994) model of transformational leadership, these leaders remained transformational. They built trust, acted with integrity, were inspirational, coached others and supported innovative thinking. Hallinger (2007) argued that there are more similarities than differences between transformational leaders and instructional leaders because both models focus on creating a shared purpose, high expectations of improvement, staff development and the leader modelling expected behaviours. He (Hallinger 2003c) also contends that there is a link between transformational leadership and distributed leadership because distributed leadership involves developing a shared vision and a commitment to change.

Burns (1978) observed the complexity of assigning a particular model of leadership to a leader. The findings from this study suggest that there were elements of transformational, distributed, instructional or educational and heroic leadership demonstrated by all three. Their leadership changed only in that, as Bossert et al. (1982:38) argued that ‘…principals must find the style and structure most suited to their …local situation’. It was their capacity to respond to their local situation and their context, that enabled them to sustain success. Building on the work of Pascal (2009) and Harris and Lambert (2003), who cite the importance of teams and of building capacity of teams as a condition for sustaining success, Zbar (2013) argued that success could only be sustained by distributing or sharing leadership. All three were seen to have done this.

They all reported that they did not operate alone. Distributed or a shared approach to leadership had become important in each of the three schools. In line with a more shared leadership approach, structures within each school had changed. While the reasons for the change in leadership style were influenced to a degree by internal and external contexts, which will be discussed in 7.6, and varied between the three, all principals reported that they were more confident, collaborative and consultative in their leadership.

Another change in practice was that all three principals had become far more comfortable with challenging people and having the ‘difficult conversations’, be they with staff or parents. For example, while Marion at Urban South did not believe her leadership style had changed, she did agree that she had become ‘tougher’ and more prepared to challenge staff and parents. She reported that she remained purposeful with her focus on students, staff and parents central to how she operated.
All three principals suggested that this willingness to challenge certain behaviours was due to stronger relationships, more confidence in their ability to do it, a strong vision for their school and a determination that opportunities for students could not be compromised.

This study confirmed that an important element of the sustained success of these principals was the finding the style and structure to suit their situation. In this study, the most significant change to their leadership was the extent to which they distributed leadership and in doing so built the capacity of others.

7.7 What are the key learnings from the study that contribute to our knowledge and understanding of leadership for sustainability?

As discussed in Chapter 2, sustainability has been ill defined in the past with much of the literature using the term in a variety of contexts: for example, environment, economic sustainability, corporate sustainability. Harry Morrison in an article in The Times (November 15, 2011) entitled *What does it mean to be a sustainable business* suggested that the issue of sustainability is no different to any other (business) challenge and that businesses that stand still will lose out in the long run because financial and environmental success are predicated on focus and strategy. He argued that sustainability involved long term strategic planning that allowed business growth and positive environmental and societal continuity. In this study, the findings suggest the commonality between the sustainability of success in business and that within these schools, that is the focus on a clear vision and strategic leadership to achieve that vision, were important factors in sustaining the success of an organisation. It was the leaders who articulated that vision and developed the strategies to achieve it and the degree to which they were successful in achieving their vision was relative to their success in sustaining the performance of the organisation.

In organisational and management theory, the term ‘sustainability’ has often been synonymous with change and with educational leadership which sustains change. There has been a lack of clarity between what is meant by ‘sustainable leadership’ and ‘sustainability of successful leadership’. Is it just another what Mulford (2008) describes as ‘adjectival leadership?’ Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that sustainable improvement is dependent on successful leadership. For example, Hargreaves and Fink (2006:17) posit that

Sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefits for others around us, now and into the future.
Fullan (2004) draws an analogy between sustainability and continuous improvement from a systemic perspective, defining sustainability as the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with the deep values of human purpose. While acknowledging the correlation between sustainability and continuous improvement, this study differs from Fullan’s definition in that it is exploring the sustainability of performance in three schools already identified as successful, rather than looking at sustainability within a system.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006:17) define sustainable leadership but in their work, use sustainability and sustainable leadership interchangeably which adds to the confusion identified in Chapter 2. They suggested that

Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can develop without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment now and in the future.

While defining ‘sustainability’, they, (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:18-20), develop the concept further, suggesting that there are seven principles of sustainable leadership related to the practices of principals. Six of these seven principles appeared in the practices of these principals: leadership for learning and for caring (Depth), distributed leadership (Breadth), socially just leadership (Justice), leadership that fostered diversity (Diversity), leadership that renews rather than depletes (Resourcefulness), and leadership which respects that past (Conservation). The findings from this study argue that the sustainability of a school’s performance is inextricably interwoven with the sustainability of the principal’s leadership and their response to internal and external factors.

Successful leaders are influenced by and in turn influence the culture of their environment. This study confirmed the importance of a leader’s personal qualities. Two further learnings emerged: the importance of response to internal and external forces, ie, the context, and the attitude of each of these principals to change. These are discussed below in 7.5.1 and 7.5.2.

While Models 7.2 and 7.3 defined the elements of Sustainable Successful School Leadership, Model 7.4 redefines sustainable successful leadership in terms of the leader. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggested that school improvement was dependent on successful leadership and it was the contribution of principals that enabled organisational success to be sustained. Model 7.4 summarises the contribution of the leader as the interdependence of these three elements: the leader’s personal qualities, the strategic interventions they make in response to their contexts and their attitudes to change. These factors operate within and on the culture and the internal environment of their school. The degree to which they
strategically and successfully intervene in response to their external environment is relative to the sustainability of the successful performance of their organisation, in this study, their school.

Model 7.4 Sustainable Successful Leadership Model

7.7.1 Responses to internal and external contexts.

Understanding the nature of schools’ internal and external contexts and how they were mediated by the principal and how the interplay between the contexts influences sustained success was a key finding. All these principals demonstrated that they were able to improve their school’s internal circumstances. Their vision, values and personal qualities continued to help them play a crucial role in responding to their external contexts in a way that sustained their success as leaders. Evidence from this research confirms that the heart of the school’s success in developing and sustaining positive internal contexts was relative to the principals’ ability to develop the key conditions which sustain improvement: a shared vision, focused but flexible curriculum and learning, high expectations for learning and achievement, differentiated professional learning opportunities and positive school cultures which enhanced staff’s collective agency, efficacy and professional capacity (Gu and Johannson, 2013). Gu and Johannson (2013:301), in exploring sustainability of school performance and the impact of context, also found that
‘One pressing challenge for school leaders is the increased emphasis on accountability and performativity demands.’ Each of these principals responded to this challenge differently.

The study found a correlation between sustained success and how the principals responded to context, both internal and external. All three worked within very different contexts and exhibited varying degrees of control over the context. While all challenged tradition, it was within different cultures and contexts.

Eve, at the Specialist School, controlled the context and the environment and completely changed the internal culture of the school from that of a ‘therapy culture’ where students were cared for rather than supported to learn to an ‘educational culture’ where through a performing arts curriculum all students could achieve a degree of growth in their learning and teachers and therapists worked together to support students in their learning. Withdrawing students for therapy, an accepted practice in special schools, was no longer a feature of the Specialist School. Eve’s success changed the culture of the school further. It became the school of choice for students with special needs and as a result, the demographics also changed.

Marion at Urban South, responded to and influenced the context and the culture of the school. She came into a divided community in a rapidly expanding suburb where there was conflict and a lack of trust between the principal, the staff and the parents. She responded to the internal context and changed the culture from a punitive one to a restorative one, defined a philosophy, improved learning outcomes for students. Through doing this, she built trust among all members of the community and established a sound reputation for the school.

Edward at VGS, worked respectfully within the context of a very traditional culture but still influenced the internal culture subtly. His actions, he believed, modelled the culture he wanted in the school, that of the boys being aware of their relative privilege and of the responsibility of each of them to give back to the world, to be socially aware and socially just citizens who would make a difference to the world. By doing this he influenced the external culture in terms of continuing to build the school’s reputation. Furthermore, he modified the impact of external influences such as the school governance and Government policy by responding proactively to enable changes to occur without compromising his beliefs.
7.6.2 The principals’ attitude to change

Sustainability invokes a multiplicity of meanings. In this study sustainability has been defined as the capacity of a leader to maintain or improve performance through mediating their internal and external environments. This means demonstrating the ability to introduce and successfully implement change for improvement. Initial findings indicate that despite political, educational and demographic changes over the past five years, these schools had sustained their performance in various ways. Urban South maintained its current performance, the Specialist School continued to improve significantly, and VGS improved incrementally but subtly. The findings show that success in the three cases was largely due to the principal: their leadership style, personal qualities and values, and their strategic interventions.

As leaders of change, they demonstrated similar characteristics: a clear vision; a focus on building relationships; strong values; personal qualities and skills; capacity building; and being highly visible and engaged in the school and the school community. In addition, each employed a model of change that met the needs within their context.

The qualities of leadership that they showed in the initial research were similar to when the schools were revisited five years later. Yet there were different levels of sustainability. From the analysis, the researcher concluded that the second important variable that determined the level of sustainability was the principals’ attitude to change. At Urban South, where current performance was maintained, the principal was controlled by external forces. As with the findings of Giles and Hargreaves (2006) and Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) system reforms, demographic changes and the natural changes in the life cycle of the school had impacted in the school. The school was able to maintain its overall performance, but not rise to the next level of improvement. In the Specialist School, where the school continued to improve upon its success, the principal controlled the change events to the school’s advantage. Improvement at VGS was continuous and subtle rather than dramatic. The school was already high achieving, but the principal was able to manage significant change by being strategic and knowing when to push and when to ease back and wait.

In all cases, internal and external change challenged past success, but the principals were able to accommodate the impact. Marion at Urban South (School A) could be described as a Restorer-BUILDER – she turned the school around and built a good school that maintained success in the face of external and internal changes. Eve, at the Specialist School, (School B), could be described as a Visionary-Driver - she drove improvement through promoting change. She used the same external and internal changes that
had impacted negatively on Urban South as an opportunity to create further improvement. While in operating in a totally different context, Edward at VGS (School C) was able to consistently improve performance across a breadth of areas— he strategically navigated through a minefield of internal and external pressures and expectations to build on the school’s success and reputation. Through his presence within the school and the school community he was able to gauge the ‘emotional thermometer’ and respond accordingly.

In preparation for a conference paper (2013), the researcher developed a model (Model 7.3) to illustrate the attitude to change of these three principals.

Model 7.3 below shows the level of performance of over five years. Each of the schools was successful in sustaining their performance in various ways. There are many variables that account for the difference in performance; however, the principal’s attitude to change appears to be significant in influencing the outcome.

**Model 7.5 Principals’ attitude to change**

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<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Attitude to change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Visionary – driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Restorer – builder</td>
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<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Strategic – builder</td>
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From the diagram, it can be seen that Principal A (Marion) was successful in maintaining performance. The analysis, however, indicates that her ability to move performance to the next level was modified by her attitude to change. She appeared to be reactive and defensive about the external and internal forces
for change. She was uncomfortable about certain changes that were against her personal philosophy and values and felt compromised in her task to accommodate these new external expectations of raising standards of student achievement at any cost. Principal B (Eve) was aware of the forces for change from external forces but chose to drive through changes that supported her vision. She controlled the external environment rather than being controlled by change forces. Principal C (Edward) was strategic. He calculated what he could or could not do. He operated in an environment where he needed to negotiate his way through the conflicting forces for and against the status quo. His philosophy, values, vision and capacity to listen provided the rudder that allowed him to negotiate the changes for improvement.

In each case principal leadership had a defining impact. In all cases the school and principal had been under external and internal pressures, many of which challenged past success but the principals were able to accommodate the impact. Sometimes the external pressures conflicted with current agendas and in other cases they provided opportunities to ignite further change that supported their own approach. What was concluded was that the principals’ attitude to change was a significant contributor to the sustainability of success in the school’s performance. Context matters. Principals need to work within their own situation or circumstances. The findings suggest that a positive attitude to change allows principals to change the circumstance to suit their needs and the future vision for the school.

7.7 What are the suggestions for further research?

In this study, models of successful schools have been examined and the role of leadership values, practices and emotions highlighted. The evidence supports the findings of Day and Sammon (2013) that school leaders, particularly principals, have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset, and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success. What emerged was the importance of context, of internal and external forces, and how these principals responded to these. While this study confirms Hallinger’s (2016) assertion of the importance of examining leadership in context, the focus of this study was the importance of context in sustaining success. Hallinger (2016) identifies the need for further research in how successful leadership responds to and adapts to different contexts.

The literature remains somewhat confused about sustainability. Different writers have different perspectives. In this paper ‘sustainably’ is defined as maintaining or improving performance over time. The three cases examine sustainability of success over a period of five years or more. In each case it would

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seem that principal leadership had a defining impact on the various levels of sustainability. In all cases the school and principal have been under external and internal pressures. How they have responded to these pressures has influenced their own change agendas for school improvement. Sometimes the external pressures conflicted with current agendas and in other cases they provided opportunities to ignite further change that supports their own approach. What is concluded from this is that their attitude to change is significant. A clear vision, a strong moral purpose and a positive, proactive response to change forces from the external and internal environment is likely to support a change agenda for school improvement. A reactive response to change is likely to be less effective. Context does matter; it was observed that principals need to work within their own situation or circumstances. It is the positive, ‘can do’ attitude to change which allows principals to change the circumstance to suit the needs and future vision for their school.

Using Hargreaves and Fink’s (2006) model of seven factors of sustainable leadership the last one, Length, relates to the importance of leadership succession. Of note in this study is that in two of the three case studies (Urban South and the Specialist School), the leaders did groom their assistant principals to succeed them. A further study examining the extent to which the success of the school was sustained beyond the tenure of the principal would provide more clarity in identifying the extent to which success is incumbent upon the personal qualities and leadership of the principal.

There are limitations to this study.

Whilst this research forms part of a larger international study (ISSPP), it is only a study of three schools and they are all in one city, Melbourne (population 4.3 million 2015), in one state, Victoria (population 5.8 million), in Australia (population 24.3 million 2015). Furthermore, these three schools were in very different contexts: a government specialist school in a bayside inner city area, a government co-educational primary school in a growth corridor north of the CBD and an all boys high fee paying independent school in an affluent middle class suburb. The sample is narrow.

One of the challenges of conducting this study was the fact that few of the principals involved in the initial study remained in their school five or more years later. These three, in fact, were the only two from 12 original studies. (One had been seconded to the central office of the Education Department although later returned to her school, a government, co-educational secondary school).

What emerged from this study was the importance of context. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) acknowledged the importance of the changing external and organisational environmental conditions and their impact
on the work of principals. They noted that because education was being transformed different forms of leadership were required. Yet they argued that there were key practices that were important despite the changes in the context, these being: setting direction, managing people, managing the organisation, and focusing on teaching and learning.

Cross country analysis by Gurr, Drysdale, Swann, Doherty, Ford, and Goode (2006) explored leadership in a range of different contexts including case study sites; the education system or structure within the country; and the government educational policy. The findings showed that similar leadership characteristics were consistent across seven countries, (US, Sweden, Australia, China, England, Norway and Denmark). They found (Gurr et al., 2006:44), that ‘less important but still significant was the environment in which the leaders worked, but precisely how much the context matters was not totally clear from the studies’.

More recently, Drysdale (2011: 454) found that successful leaders were able to adapt and influence the context. Common practices were identified.

The accumulated findings across countries show a general consensus about the personal qualities and practices of successful principal leadership. The role of contextual differences is still unclear except to suggest that successful principals are adaptive and reflect and learn from their practice and experience.

The research in this study, Drysdale (2011), included differences in context such and school size, type of school, variation in socio-economic factors, school governance and education systems. However, the advantage of this study was the researcher was able to observe how principal confronted changes in the external and internal context over time. As noted in the literature review, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) and Giles and Hargreaves (2006) found that changes in the environment such as school reform, changing student demographics, teacher generations, leadership succession, and school interrelations undermined sustainable change efforts. This researcher found that while the principals confronted similar changes there were able to maintain performance to various degrees. The skill set basically remained the same for each principal but their attitude to change was a factor that moderated their leadership.

Several of the principals in the initial study had moved to other schools but there has not been any follow up on their capacity to achieve success in another setting so a further research question might be:

- Are successful principals able to be successful and sustain success in another setting?

Another aspect of sustainability is the sustainability of successful school performance after the principal leaves a school. While some anecdotal evidence has been collected as part of the ISSPP there is no empirical data to substantiate this. Exploring this question would also shed more light on the importance
of a successful leader in sustaining successful school performance. A further question for research could be:

• To what degree do successful schools remain successful after their leader leaves?

As discussed in this thesis, all three principals were retiring at the end of the year of study. The ongoing ISSPP findings (Mulford et al., in press b) suggest that pre-retirement principals, when compared with other principals, are more likely to distribute leadership, not feel the tension between the need to be present at school and to participate outside the school, believe students are both in a safe environment at school and are more able to solve conflicts through negotiation.

The findings from this study confirmed that pre-retirement, these principals continued to have a strong work ethic, to consult widely and to have a strong social consciousness thereby continuing to be a committed and valuable resource. In particular, the profile of two of these three, Edward and Eve, had extended well beyond the confines of their schools. They had had an impact on education more broadly. For Eve it was the new approach to learning for children with special needs. Edward had become a spokesman for boys’ education. It raises another question which could be the subject of further research:

• What is the attitude of principals pre-retirement. To what degree does it change?

While Eve and Jan were able to influence succession planning in their schools and were succeeded by their assistant principals, Edward had no influence on the choice of his successor. A further question emerged as an unintended outcome of his impending retirement and an unknown future and that was the attitude of staff. His passion was unabated but further research might explore:

• To what extent did staff move into a ‘holding’ pattern and to what extent was his leadership and influence diminished?

This study has focused on the role of a successful leader in sustaining school performance. An area for further study could be succession planning for middle leaders and the role they play in sustaining performance, particularly after a principal leaves.

Two other areas of interest emerged from this study and merit further study. Crow, Day and Moller (2016) have begun research on identity construction and development in principals looking at professional identity and emotions in school leadership. Building on this in the Australian context would add value to an international body of evidence.
Finally, while these principals were defined in this thesis as heroic leaders, the concept of heroic and post heroic leadership and its importance in supporting school improvement would benefit from further research.
REFERENCES


Appendices

Appendix 1: Shadowing and observations

**Specialist School**

Grandparents Morning Tea  
Admin meeting x 2  
Integrated Services meeting x2  
Visit to coffee shop manned by students on Wednesdays  
Prep orientation day  
Interaction with staff in staff room  
Attendance at Gala Performance (by students) at Government House  
Helping volunteers prepare to send Gingerbread Houses (100+) and Christmas cards and magazines (500+) to benefactors, sponsors, academics, supporters  
Graduation dinner and ceremony for students who are 18 and therefore leave the school.  
Transition meeting for students who are 18  
Challenging three staff members (individually)  
Meeting with Coordinator of Symposium  
Visit from ex student  
Meeting with exiting staff member  
Numerous phones calls with colleagues, supporters and parents, including some with complaints  
Many informal interactions with staff.

**Victoria Grammar School**

Greeting boys at school entrance  
Meeting with 2 students on a Gap year  
Meeting with exchange students  
Meeting with Head of Junior School  
Meeting with teacher who had taken the cricket team to Sri Lanka  
Meeting staff in staff room  
Meeting with Head of Year 11 (once per term)
Meeting with Head of Year 12 (once per term)
Meeting with Head of Year 8 (once per term)
Meeting with Head of Year 10 (once per term)
Meeting with Director of ICT
Meeting with Head of Library Services
Meeting with Business Manager
Meeting with Business Manager and Property Manager
Hosted lunch in Headmaster’s study with School Captain and Vice Captains
Meeting with Senior Chaplain (2 per term to provide career mentoring support)
Meeting with teacher as part of her appraisal
Meeting with former parent (and Member of Parliament)
Headmaster’s lunch with a group of Year 11 leaders
Leadership Induction Ceremony
A Referral meeting (underperforming student/Head of Year/Headmaster)
A Year 7 c Science class
Lunch meetings between boys and Headmaster: Year 8; Year 11; Year 12
School Captain and Vice Captains
Staff briefing
Year 12 Colloquium
Chapel service
Headmaster’s assembly
Evening ‘Long’ Executive Meeting to discuss long term strategic intentions: Headmaster; Deputy Heads; Assistant Headmasters; Head of Junior School; Business Manager; Property Manager.

**Urban South**

Staff meeting
Three Leadership Team meetings
Assembly
Lunchtime choir
Lunch with Principal off campus
Meeting with Office staff
Observations in all classrooms and specialist classes: Art, Reading Recovery

Three observations of interaction with boys who had misbehaved at recess

Interview with prospective parents.

Conversation with Casual Relief Teacher

Leadership/Consultative meeting.

One on One interviews with teachers, including a beginning teacher

Visit from volunteers from local community group.

Ex student visit

Meeting with parent of an autistic child

Meeting re. Workcover issue

Attendance Innovation and Excellence cluster group meeting at a neighbouring school

Meeting with President of Parents and Friends

Meeting with Senior Education Officer (Department of Education)
Appendix 2: Documents sighted

**Specialist School**

- Parent Manual
- Staff Manual
- Staff opinion data
- Enrolment data
- Parent opinion survey data
- Emerald Hill Weekly article: *What’s the best options for special-needs children?*
- Delegate Handbook for the International Symposium RiSE (Re-imagining Special Education through Arts Education and Arts Therapy)
- Principal’s Curriculum Vitae
- Principal’s application for Telstra Business Women’s Award.
- School Magazine *A Significant Year*
- Letter of thanks from a research scholar from the Music for Autism organisation in the UK and US seeking opportunities for further work together.
- Attendance at Grandparents Day
- Attendance at Prep induction
- Attendance at Staff meetings
- Attendance at Admin meetings
- Written feedback from parents (11)

**Victoria Grammar School**

- Year 12 Valedictory Chapel Service
- Recognition of Leadership Ceremony: Year 12 Students
- Operational Plans 2005-2010; 2012-2016
- Strategic Plan 2005-2010
- Strategic Statement 2010-2016
- ISV data from parents, teachers and students
- Exit data for students
- ‘The Mitre’ (School Magazine)
- The Grammarian (Farewell to the Headmaster)
• Review of Year 9 program to include the Asia (China) Experience.
• Planning chart for Asia Experience.
• East Precinct Project Version 7.3.2 (Centre for Contemporary Learning)
• Reporting chart (Organisational chart)
• Staff list and qualifications
• Notes and Recommendations from Headmaster’s Study Leave
• An invitation to the farewell for the Headmaster.

**Urban South**

• School review reports
• School Self-Evaluation
• School Level Reports provided by the Education Department (containing all survey data reports, for example, student achievement, mobility of families, real and apparent retention, staff, student and parent opinion surveys)
• School Strategic Plan
• Annual Implementation Plans
• Sample newsletters
• Annual Reports to the School Community
• Profile of staff
• Performance and Development Culture Questionnaire
• Performance and Development Culture application
• Development of Vision Statement workshop notes
• ‘Serious consequences’ folder (entries reduced from 500 to 50m in last 5 years).
Appendix 3: Morang South Case Study

School Profile
Morang South Primary School is co-educational government primary school that was first established as a rural school in 1877. It is situated some 23 kilometres north of the Melbourne CBD. The school caters for children from Preparatory Year to Year 6 with an age range between 5 to 12 years.

For most of its long history the school has been in a rural or semi-rural setting, but more recently the enrolments have grown in response to population increases in the area. In 1996 the school shifted to its present site as the capacity of the original school site was unable cope with the growth. The school classifies itself as a ‘fringe suburban school’ because it is at the end of the rapidly developing growth corridor that stretches towards the north – east of Melbourne. The school serves the local and outlining area which has seen the development of a significant number of large housing estates.

Facilities
The new site has provided the opportunity for the school to expand. The school is attractively situated on extensive, well planned and spacious grounds. Facilities are excellent. Buildings are attractive and very well maintained. Features include a large attractive entrance, a number of good sized administrative offices, a pleasant staff room, carpeted classrooms that can be opened up for team teaching, and a suitable number of withdrawal areas for small groups and individual activities. The school has internet and intranet facilities and adequate computers in each classroom. It has a separate music room, gymnasium, art room, and library. Air-conditioning was installed throughout the school in 2001. There are several portable classrooms that have been tastefully placed with gardens and connected by covered walkways. A new out-of-hours room and literacy centre have been recent additions.

School structure/organisation
The school is structured into junior, middle and senior schools. Year levels are organised into composite grades across the school. The school has a principal and assistant principal and several leading teachers. The school is structured into five teaching teams - Prep, Year1-2, Year3-4, Year 5-6 and Specialist teachers’ team.

Each team has a designated team leader.

The School Council consists of the Principal, eight parent representatives and four staff representatives. There are four School Council Committees as follows:

1. Projects and Finance
2. Policy and Planning
3. Out of Hours Care
4. Canteen

School Council and committees meet monthly.

Demographics

Children attending our school are drawn from both the immediate area and from beyond. There is some diversity in cultural and ethnic background although there are few students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The families are reasonably affluent. Most are classified as Middle Class with 2 incomes, although there are a significant number of single families and small business owners. Few parents receive welfare payments or government assistance and student mobility is below 10 percent.

Enrolments have shown a marked increase since 1999 when the school enrolment was 332. Since then it has increased steadily and in 2004 was approaching 600 students. Because a number of housing estates are currently being developed, numbers are expected to continue to increase. Table 1 shows the rates of growth since 1992 and the acceleration in recent years.

Table 1 School Enrolment figures 1992-2004

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Staff

Morang South currently has 583 children enrolled. There are 52 staff, including 36 Teaching Staff, 3 Integration Aides, 3 Numeracy/Literacy Aides, 4 Office Staff, 3 permanent Out of Hours Care Staff and 3 Cleaning Staff. There is one Assistant Principal and three staff in Leading Teacher positions.

As the school has expanded, a significant number of teachers have been appointed.

The staff is a mix of experienced staff and some new graduates. There are four male members of the teaching staff. A concerted and conscious effort has been made to employ staff who share the school’s values of caring for children and working as a team. Appointments are also made ensuring a mix of personalities, both out-going and quiet.

Principal

The Principal, Jan Shrimpton, has been working in the Department of Education for 36 years and a principal for fourteen years.
She first took up the role of principal in 1990 at Heidelberg Heights Primary School and in 1993 successfully initiated and merged Heidelberg Heights and Olympic Village schools. She remained Principal at Olympic Village until term three 1998 when she was seconded as a Senior Education Officer in Northern Region for six weeks. At the request of the Regional Director she took up an acting principal position at Morang South in term four of that year. When the position was advertised the following year, she applied, was successful, and has been in the substantive position since then.

**Recent Background**

**Declining performance**

Between 1994 and 1998 the school experienced several setbacks that resulted in significant instability and a downturn in performance. The construction of a new school was announced in April 1994, but the school endured a difficult and frustrating transition period. Building on the new site commenced in January 1995. Six months later the builder was placed into receivership and the site lay dormant until January 1996. It was expected that construction would be completed by June 30, 1996. On the last day of Term 2, (late June) under the architect’s instructions, the staff was informed that the move had to be postponed. Large areas of landscaping were incomplete. This created significant interruptions to classroom programs and, naturally, unease among staff and students. In addition to this, the school suffered the loss of the Principal who went on extended sick leave, and there was a significant turnover of staff.

1998 was a particularly traumatic year and this is reflected in some of the data. The triennial report noted that the school’s performance on a number of measures. Student achievement was not at an acceptable standard (Triennial Report 2000: 6).

_A key outcome of the review is a very disturbing trend for students to enter the School with high levels of achievement across all strands (noticeably above both State means and those of Like Schools in Prep grades), to maintain this achievement to the end of Year 2, but thereafter improvement slows down, a pattern which continues the longer students spend at the School._

An example outlined in the report showed that in Prep year there were no students ‘at risk’ in reading, but by Year 6, 30% of students were identified as ‘at risk’.

Other indicators reinforced that the school was underperforming. Staff absentee rates doubled in 1998. The Triennial Review Report (2000) noted that Information Technology had made little progress. Also the
staff opinion survey identified a significant decline in staff morale, leadership support, and goal congruency. Staff morale was one of the lowest in the State.

Identified in interview, one of the key reasons for the decline was the lack of consultation about the move to the new site. The principal had not consulted with staff or parents about the plans for the new school or the move to the new site. A consequence of this was that the community lost confidence in the staff and the principal. ‘Sniping’, ‘bitching’ and personal attacks by parents were common. Staff did not talk to each other in the staff room. The school’s reputation in community declined.

The current principal was appointed by the Regional Education Department Office as relieving principal in the final term of 1998 to replace the principal who was on sick leave. She applied for the position at the end of the year and was appointed in 1999. She inherited a difficult and challenging situation which she was able to turn around.

**The Turn Around**

Within a year of the appointment of the current principal the school performance on a number of measures improved. The triennial report for 2000 shows that:

> It is evident that the School has made a significant recovery since 1998 and the new leadership team is well placed to tackle the curriculum issues that the School must address over the next Charter period. (Triennial Review Report, 2000: 2)

Within a year staff morale had turned around from 2.92 to 3.78 to be above State benchmarks of 3.45. The reported noted specific items on the staff opinion survey that showed a significant improvement:

> “approachable leadership”, “support from the administration”, “school goals being clearly understood” and “I feel accepted by other staff” (the scale score for supportive leadership is highest with 4.21) (Triennial Review Report, 2000: 19).

In 1999 staff absentee rated returned to normal. Since 1999, student achievement levels have continued to improve.

By 2003 the school review (Triennial School Review, 2003: 1) noted the school’s progress:

> Morang South Primary Schools is to be congratulated on continuing its improvement over the triennium. The school provides a stimulating and dynamic curriculum that successfully caters for the needs of the school community. Improvement in all aspects of the school is commendable.
Successful school

Based on the performance of the school and its reputation the school is now seen as a successful school. However, ‘success’ can be defined in many ways. The research team, here, had identified the school as successful based on the ‘turnaround’ in results, high staff opinion, growing enrolment patterns, continued high satisfaction levels as indicated in the parent opinion surveys, improved student academic results, and the high reputation of the school in the community.

Evidence of success (Researcher)

The evidence for success includes data on student achievement, parent and staff satisfaction, resource management and reputation in the community. The evidence is derived from annual reports, and triennial review information, school documents, and interview.

Student Achievement

Student achievement has continued to improve in each year level since 1999. The Triennial Review Report (2000: 2 states:

The school has made steady progress in improving student achievement in Literacy and Numeracy

The data shows that improvement in all year levels. This is in stark contrast to the 1998 resulted which showed the school had demonstrated poor performance.

Parent Opinion

The Triennial Review Report (2003) showed continuous improvement in the parent satisfaction levels as identified in the parent opinion surveys of quality of teaching, academic rigour, students reporting general environment, customer responsiveness, and general satisfaction. The data indicated that satisfaction levels rose from below state benchmarks in 1999 exceeding state benchmarks in each area in 2003.

Staff Opinion

The government system in Victoria makes it compulsory to conduct staff opinion surveys of their perception of organisational health. The survey benchmarks all school in five criteria: school morale, supportive leadership, goal congruence, professional interaction, and professional growth. The data show an increase in each criteria each year from 1999 to 2003. In 2002 and 2003 all results were well above the 75 percentile of school in Victoria which indicated that the staff were very satisfied with the current management practices.

Resource Management

The Triennial Review Report (2003) indicated that the school managed its financial resources effectively. The school allocated significant resources to its priority areas, upgraded facilities, and built up its
informational and technology infrastructure to the point that the whole school is now connected to the Internet. During 2002, a website and an Intranet service were established. There are computers located in each classroom (3 in each prep room and 4 in all other grades) and in some withdrawal areas. Grounds, play equipment and staff facilities have been continuously improved, including extensive planting of shrubs and garden beds and an outdoor eating area for staff. Plans have been drawn up for the addition of six new state-of-the-art classrooms to replace current portable classrooms.

Reputation in Community
Various annual reports, community feedback, enrolments trends, community involvement, fund raising, service agency networks all indicate that the school has community support and a high reputation as an excellent school.

School Principal Leadership
The principal also had a reputation as a successful leader. This was based on her success and achievements in two previous schools in challenging circumstances. Her perceived ability to turn Morang South around in a short time and maintain its improvement had been noted in school review data.

School’s perception of success
Along with the researchers’ criteria for success and Victorian Educational Department expectations, academic success in literacy and numeracy were outlined by the school key indicators of success. There were, however, other criteria that the school thought were more important. For example, the principal stated that her main concern was ‘how the community views the school; not just what the Department (of Education) wants.’

One was the shared vision or ethos of the school. Parents, staff, students and council members interviewed all articulated the Principal’s vision for the school:

\[
\text{I have had a long and enduring commitment to all children receiving the best possible range of educational experiences, opportunities to succeed and to reaching their full potential.}
\]
\[
\text{Within the educational context, I believe children grow and develop best in an environment that is supportive and caring and where attitudes of respecting the rights and differences of others are appreciated and fostered.}
\]

(Principal)
to develop an open trustworthy place, comfortable for all to participate, a holistic approach which prepares students for society

(Young male teacher)

Learning (not just academic) but learning for life; giving them the skills to be successful. It’s about relationships and social competence is part of that.

(Assistant Principal)

As part of this philosophy, the school has moved from a ‘rules – based’ approach to student management to a ‘values – based’ approach. Much work was done with staff, students and parents to encourage the whole school community to a shared approach. One staff member commented that ‘everyone using a consistent approach was making people feel a whole lot better’; parents commented that it ‘was not just caring...the kids bring it home and say this is the way you behave’. This shared language was viewed by the school as a great indicator of success and of how far the school community had moved; something that would not have been possible under previous administrations.

The most significant indicator of success expressed by participants was an enthusiastic and happy staff and students. Staff morale was seen as a key focus because it was perceived that a highly focused and happy staff who were working together would bring about the best working environment for the children. The principal commented that people were her priority and that ‘despite all the pressures, I never lose sight of that’. There was a basic belief that ‘every child has the right to learn and we provide the environment to make sure this happens’. If staff are not motivated and happy, nothing happens so ‘the AP (Assistant Principal) and I spend a lot of time supporting teachers.’

This, too, was endorsed:

...the support here is brilliant...I have never had such support.

(Young male teacher)

I have not ever been in a school with such support. I had heard about Jan and Julie...they have a great reputation out there.

(Experienced female, new to school)

The principal included other criteria including a rich educational environment, happy parents, a proud and respectful community, a school that could cater for individual interests, and a wide ranging curriculum options for students. Parents, teachers and students outlined similar criteria.

A summary of the school’s criteria for success include:

Clearly defined philosophy

Collaborative, happy, committed staff
Positive and rich environment for the children
Enthusiastic students
Happy parents
Happy school
Community proud of the school
Community involved in the school
Academic results
Catering for different interests, eg a strong Performing Arts program
High staff satisfaction
People willing and keen to change
Staff that mix socially
Open leadership
Effective administration
Supportive administration
Range of staff talent
Good reputation in community
People walk in a say it has a good feel
Communicate well with parents
Open communication

Strategies for success

Unquestionably the participants saw the principal as the key reason for the school’s turn around and success.

She is inspirational. I copy her and it works.

(Young female teacher)

The principal’s key strategy to improve the school was to build relationships. Her highest priority was to focus on the people and mend the relationships. At the same time she focused on teaching and learning and develop social competencies among students. When she first arrived she aim was to commence a healing process and among staff and gain the trust of the community.

Her leadership style, effective communication processes, collaborative approach, and ability to build relationship were seen as key factors. Her skill selecting the right combination of staff in the selection process was also an important determinant.

In order to build relationships she set about developing new organisational structures and arrangements. She did lots of listening and learnt about the key issues that were affecting staff: ‘I have the capacity to
listen to people and work through issues (both professional and personal) with them...I like to talk to people face to face, I would never address an issue via email.’

Many were grips about work loads, student behaviour, poor communication and aggressive parent attitudes. She modelled what she expected others to follow. She set up an open communication structure where she was always available to staff and discussed issues as she moved in and out of classrooms. She listened, asked for feedback, invited comments in newsletters, constantly introduced herself to parents and the wider school community, attended all meetings and acknowledged everyone. In order to set up a positive climate in the school she modelled a positive attitude by always walking around with a smile on her face; something that was not always easy. This positivity, though, was noted by staff as one of her great strength and something that was very much appreciated. In her attempt to heal and rebuild relationships, she was not prepared to ask staff to do anything that she was not prepared to do herself, including yard duty and other routine tasks such as cleaning up the staff room.

Staff were formally and informally acknowledged for their work. Staff activities, competitions, prizes humour and fun were introduced. For example one staff activity was a bicycle riding and walking competition to see which team could ride or walk the furthest distance over a period of several weeks. This was set up in the staff room where she hired walking machines and training bikes for staff to compete during lunch and other breaks during the day. The winning team was provided with an extended lunchtime meal at the local restaurant while remaining staff covered classrooms for the afternoon. Her leadership style, effective communication processes, collaborative approach, and ability to build relationship were seen as key factors. Her skill selecting the right combination of staff in the selection process was also an important determinant.

Because the school was growing she was able to seek out and select a variety of new staff who were ‘committed to kids’, ‘team players’, ‘liked working with people’ and ‘wanted to be there’. She admitted to only one ‘slip-up’ in five years. Again, in interview, her ability to select the right staff was reiterated many times; that she had been ‘able to select staff with same values- ethos and willingness- and them give them skills.’

Staff complimented her for her willingness to demonstrate trust,

*Encouraging everyone to be the best they can – take on new responsibilities*

and

*Sometimes targeting and encouraging and supporting people in taking risks*

and

*She allows me to get outside the comfort zone. There is huge support; everyone supports and it works its way down. When you see it work you have a good role model.*

Some staff had been employed initially on a part-time contract and were delighted to be offered full time work.
I was approached by Jan to do two days a week in the upper school. I cam in and felt very comfortable, very supported and got a great feel for the school. When the job came up I jumped at it.

*(PE teacher)*

Others were invited to apply, for example, her AP was sought out and invited and encouraged to put in an application:

*Jan contacted me and the job appealed to me, especially working with Jan.*

*(AP)*

This appointment was seen as a very strategic move because of the fact that they complement each other so well.

*They are very supportive but in different ways; Jan’s the mum and Julie is more curriculum*

*(Young female teacher)*

The parents commented that one criteria that demonstrated the success of the school and of Jan’s principalship was that ‘teachers are knocking on the door wanting jobs.’

Another key success strategy has been the organisational structures which Jan has put into place. Again, as Principal, she models what she expects, like being punctual. She also ensures that structures are in place so that the whole school community is well informed. Another welcome change has been the school council meetings. They meet at more appropriate times, are carefully structured and are seen to achieve things. Parents described them as ‘dynamic; developed and terminated as needed and open to all.’

**Challenges**

There are a number of new or different challenges now facing Morang South. Many describe their greatest challenge as being the size of the school. It is growing rapidly and the challenge will be how to maintain the community that now operates so effectively.

There are other challenges, for example increasing student achievement. The school’s re evaluation as a Like School 2 rather than 5 raises the academic bar substantially in terms of reporting student outcomes to the Department. An additional challenge associated with the growth of the school is also students coming in who have already been to other schools and may not have the same strong academic base or the same ethos.

*A challenge is becoming a values based school – it is not yet, but needs time and making this a value based school and then to a values based community. These are the values you believe we*
need. We cannot enforce this but get them to respect our values can be a challenge. The community is more difficult to educate than a school.

Another challenge is community expectations:

The community has (high) expectations but these are not as high as we would want and get them to raise their expectation is a challenge

(AP)

We have lovely people but they do not have the same aspirations as some other (LS5) communities.

(Principal)

Like most primary schools, the work done in the Early Years programs has brought success in the junior rooms. An identified challenge at South Morang is to extend the good work into the middle and upper years. The school is part of the Innovation and Excellence program, part of which targets the Middle Years. The strong learning teams already now established at the school will also provide a good basis for meeting these challenges.

When questioned, the Principal spoke of the need to ‘never take your eye off the ball’ and so saw maintaining the level of enthusiasm and vibrancy as a challenge. She offers ‘lots of opportunity for PD...more than half again what the Government offers’ because she values staff and sees the need to ‘keep them excited’ while at the same time ‘stretching them.

Principal

Her greatest success

The Principal described her greatest achievement at Morang South as having the whole community working with her. The reputation of schools has changed, as has academic success and that has brought with it a ‘feel’ – everyone believing that it is a successful school. She maintains strongly that she has achieved this by focussing on people, not her, but ‘we’. It was a pronoun she used constantly and again modelled; one staff commented that she is always happy for others to take credit and praise.

Another saw the school now as

...a happy place. I don’t know. I just know I would not want to go anywhere else. In a working environment it is the place to be.. As a student you would like it to be. I see it but it is always a challenge to keep it up. When you are happy they are happy.

(Teacher)
**Her leadership style**

‘Empathic’ was a word used frequently when people were asked to describe Jan’s leadership style. This empathy was displayed constantly in her interactions with everyone. A willingness to listen, to trust and to show respect had gained her the respect of the whole school community.

In one of the leadership development programs Jan had attended, she had completed a questionnaire which describe her style of leadership as ‘powerful’. ‘Strong’ was a word that several people used. She had certainly demonstrated that she was always willing to confront anything that might affect the school’s reputation. She cited personal issues with staff members and low AIM test results as two examples. In each case she initiated discussion to talk through what it meant, what could be or needed to be done and what support was required. One thing that was admired about her leadership and what it meant in practice was a culture of ‘when someone says let’s do it, it gets done.’

Her style is consultative and conciliatory but she is also seen to always operate in a way that is appropriate, for example she sees education very much as a partnership. She maintains very open relationships with Council or with parents but can be equally formal to ensure outcomes are achieved. She was described as ‘always operating in a way that is appropriate’.

She was also seen as flexible; nothing is ‘ever set in concrete’ so while decisions may be made, they can be changed if and when necessary. Everyone is encouraged to talk through issues and they know they will be listened to. One teacher commented ‘when big decisions are made they involve a lot of work. It is a big process and everyone is heard. We often use small groups.’

**Personal philosophy**

The Principal described her personal vision as being something that had changed over the years, not a having high achieving as much as providing an environment where students want to learn;’ High standards maybe good but to a want to learn is preference.’

> *Within the educational context, I believe children grow and develop best in an environment that is supportive and caring and where attitudes of respecting the rights and differences of others are appreciated and fostered.*

> *I have had a long and enduring commitment to all children receiving the best possible range of educational experiences, opportunities to succeed and to reaching their full potential.*

She sees herself very much as an educational leader and while she has excellent organisational skills, does not see her key role as a manager: ‘I let other people do those dinky things.’
I also believe in the absolute imperative of empowering others and throughout my career and especially during my years as principal I have been committed to this and to valuing diversity and developing successful and happy working teams.

She noted that she has always striven to provide a positive model for both behaviour and work expectations and has been most successful in doing this at South Morang, even commenting that although she puts in less hours (although still more than 60 per week) she actually achieves more!

I think it is important to have a balanced life because I want to keep going. I go to the opera, bike riding, gym, walks, films, spend time with friends. I have a very full life. I try not to take the computer home on the weekends.

Perhaps both the philosophy and the leadership style of this successful principal was summarised by one comment she made:

There is nothing you cannot achieve and fix if you are persistent, consistent and tenacious.
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