Principal leadership in high-advantage, improving Victorian secondary schools

Fiona Gail Longmuir

BEd(Hons), MEd(EdMgmt)

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The University of Melbourne
Abstract

This study explored the leadership of principals in high-advantage, improving secondary schools in Victoria, Australia. This thesis reports on the leadership characteristics and practices of two principals and their interaction with specific contextual factors that contributed to improvement. It emerged that both case schools were significantly innovative and had transformed their approaches and cultures through re-establishment following challenging circumstances. This study is aligned with the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) which in its third stage had begun exploring the principalship in underperforming or improving schools. A multiple perspective case study methodology was employed. At each school, individual and group interviews with the principal, other school leaders, school council members, teachers, students and parents, were supported by observations and review of relevant documentation. The findings showed that aspects of the contexts of the two schools instigated and enabled the innovative improvement trajectories. Themes generated included having a strong student focus, the importance of vision, attitudes and approaches to leading change, the influence of trust, staff capacity development, and the principals’ personal approaches to leadership. In each of these themes it was evident that the two principals adjusted their leadership characteristics and practices in ways that were contextually sensitive and suited to the stage of improvement at their own schools. This evidence demonstrated that in many ways the leadership of the principals and the community contexts were reciprocally influential to support innovative, student-centred improvement.
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: [Signature]
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who have supported me and contributed to my thesis.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge all those who contributed to this research from both of the case study schools. Particularly the two principals who were welcoming, generous and passionate.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FHS</td>
<td>Fairview High School (pseudonym)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTE</td>
<td>Full Time Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILP</td>
<td>Individual Learning Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSPP</td>
<td>International Successful School Principalship Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOLS0</td>
<td>Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCSL</td>
<td>National College for School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLP</td>
<td>Personalised Learning Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFO</td>
<td>Student Family Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Student Representative Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Tilverton College (pseudonym)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAL</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents the findings of a study of the leadership of two principals in high-advantage Victorian secondary schools with histories of underperformance. This study provides insight into the characteristics and practices of these principals as they engaged with the contexts of their schools to lead innovative improvement. This introductory chapter outlines the significance and background of the study. The research questions are presented and the methodology is summarised. An overview of the chapters is also provided.

1.1. Significance of the study

Strong evidence has emerged from decades of research that school leadership is critical to the operation and success of a school (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Reynolds, Sammons, De Fraine, Van Damme, Townsend, Teddlie, & Stringfield, 2014; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Sammons, 1995). There are common traits, dispositions, practices, values and beliefs that have been shown to be exhibited by successful principals (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, & Brown, 2010; Drysdale & Gurr, 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017). However, these common aspects have been described as necessary for success but not enough alone to ensure it (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). To further understand the enactment of leadership for success scholars have suggested attention be turned to context variables (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Dempster, 2009; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Levin, 2005).

Through a focus on the specific context variations of schools serving communities of high educational advantage and that are undertaking improvement journeys following periods of underperformance, this study contributes to broader understanding of school leadership. The advantage and performance context parameters investigated by this study are not common in the research literature and therefore the findings provide useful and relevant contributions to the research area.

The two schools that formed the case studies for this research were found to have undertaken particularly innovative improvement journeys. How the leadership of the principals, within the contexts of each school, supported and enabled innovative improvement provides additional insights to understanding school leadership.

This study may have implications for, or be of interest to, practicing or aspiring school leaders, policy makers interested in innovative approaches to broad social and educational challenges, and
researchers and scholars looking to progress understanding of school leadership and contextual considerations.

1.2. Background to the study

This study is aligned with the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP). The ISSPP has been described as ‘the most comprehensive and coherent international comparative study of the Principalship ever undertaken’ (Caldwell, 2014b, p. xvii). The ISSPP has developed agreed and consistent research protocols that have been used in more than 20 countries to produce more than 100 case studies since 2001.

The first phase of the ISSPP focused on investigating principal leadership in successful schools. In a second phase, a number of original schools were returned to five years later to study how the principals had sustained success. This ISSPP research found that principals make significant contributions to their schools based on flexible approaches to using a common set of practices (Leithwood & Day, 2007b) and leadership qualities, ideas and interventions in context sensitive ways to influence school and student outcomes (Gurr, 2015).

In 2011, the core research group developed the protocols for a new phase of the research. This new phase aimed to ‘investigate the principalship in schools which were underperforming/performing less well than they should be given the composition of the student body and the community from which they were drawn’ (Day, 2013, p. 12). It was recognised that this area was not well researched and that this focus would enhance understanding of the complex connections between leadership and school success.

The Australian research team were founding members of the ISSPP consortium and have participated in all phases to date. This study has been developed in collaboration with the principal Australian researchers and aligns with another similar study that together will contribute to an important body of knowledge about school leadership in Australia.

1.3. Research Questions

There are two research questions that have been designed to meet the purpose and background that instigated the study.

1. What are the characteristics and practices of principals in high-advantage, improving schools?
2. How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in high-advantage schools?

### 1.4. Methodology

A qualitative methodological approach was employed for this study. This was the most appropriate for this investigation that aimed to capture the lived experiences of the participants within their specific contexts to inform the research questions.

The research is a multiple case study investigation. Case studies investigate perspectives, knowledge and interactions of multiple participants within bounded systems (Feagin, Sjoberg, & Orum, 1991; Merriam, 2009) and are particularly appropriate for research that is interested in contextual conditions (Yin, 2009).

The approach employed was consistent with the ISSPP and the protocols were adapted from those developed by the research group and utilised across the prior case studies. The study was designed to capture multiple perspectives of leadership at each school through individual and group interviews with a variety of stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, parents and students) as well as extensive interviews with the principals. This primary evidence was supported by observations of the work of the principal and activities that illustrated the culture of the school. Further supporting information was gathered through review of relevant documentation.

Analysis of the data collected was guided by the Miles and Huberman (1994) Interactive Model of Data Analysis to display and condense data and draw and verify conclusions. Several iterations of this process were undertaken with the assistance of the computer aided coding and classifying program NVivo ([www.qsrinternational.com](http://www.qsrinternational.com)). This resulted in the inductive development of themes of findings that informed each independent case study. The independent case studies were compared and contrasted based on the thematically categorised data to develop cross-case meta-themes which enabled further consideration of the findings.

### 1.5. Summary of the chapters

Chapter One introduces the study and outlines the significance and background of this research. It summarises the methodology and provides a brief description of each chapter of the thesis.
Chapter Two presents the research literature relevant to this study. Predominant school leadership theories are reviewed and recent significant research projects are summarised for the purpose of situating this study in the context of the current body of knowledge. Research literature that considered school context factors and school improvement trajectories was also attended to.

Chapter Three presents the research questions and details the methodological theory that supports the application of a qualitative, case study approach. This chapter also specifies the methods of case selection, data collection and data analysis and considers the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. Finally, the delimitations and limitations that constrain the findings are described.

Chapter Four reports the findings from the first case study school, Tilverton College. The school profile, culture and performance are outlined before an investigation of the leadership characteristics and practices of the principal, Michael. The findings are presented according to the themes that were derived through the analysis of data collected from interviews, observations and document reviews. This case study showed that Tilverton College had been re-established after a period of demise using innovative approaches to transform the culture and operation of the school. Michael's leadership was central to the improvement initiatives implemented. His personal characteristics, student-centred practices and sensitivity to contextual factors were important to the journey of the school.

Chapter Five reports the findings of the second case study school, Fairview High School. The format of this chapter is aligned with that of Chapter Four with the themes derived from the data analysis presented according to the same sections. Fairview High School had also been on a journey of re-establishment following a period of closure. The Principal, Robyn, had been closely aligned with the re-opening of the school in previous roles and her principalship commenced five years after re-opening. Her strong connections, personal characteristics and considered and collaborative leadership practices supported the school to continue with innovative, student-centred approaches to improvement.

Chapter Six considered the similarities and differences between the two cases by review and analysis of both cases across the themes of findings. From this exercise, six meta-themes were identified that captured the evidence from both schools to enable deeper exploration and consideration of the findings in combination. These cross-case comparisons found that there were many similarities in the context and leadership at both schools. Both schools had chosen improvement paths that were innovative and student-centred. Their diversion from traditional models had attracted enrolments and support from their communities. The schools were at different stages of their improvement journeys.
with Fairview re-opening five years prior to the start of Tilvertton’s re-establishment. This difference was reflected in the cultures of the school and the practices of the principals.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings from Chapters Four, Five and Six in relation to the research literature in order to answer the research questions. This chapter considered the evidence that demonstrated how these two principals’ characteristics and practices were successful and effective. The broad and local contexts of these two schools interacted with the leadership to instigate and enable innovative improvement trajectories that transformed the schools. The chapter presented a model of successful school leadership in two high-advantage schools. This model illustrated the reciprocal and mutual influence of leadership and context. This resulted in the development of innovative and student-centred cultures and the implementation of interventions that led to broad outcomes for students and for the schools.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This study adds to the research knowledge by a specific focus on principal leadership and improvement in schools that are relatively highly advantaged, as determined by the socio-economic situation of the students that attend the school. This chapter will provide a research literature context for this investigation by reviewing and discussing the relevant theories, studies and findings from a large body of academic work.

The chapter is structured around four themes.

1) Broad considerations of the purposes of schooling; school effectiveness and school success; and the importance of leadership in schools.
2) Review of what is known about successful school leadership, including: predominate theoretical conceptualisations; summary of the International Successful School Principalship Project; and review of other recent, seminal school leadership research programs.
3) Review of literature on school context variables and understandings of impact on school success, improvement and leadership.
4) Review of literature on school improvement, including innovative leadership approaches.

2.2. Broad considerations

This section of the review situates this study broadly within the body of educational research. This considers what successful schools are and how leadership is important to school success.

2.2.1. School effectiveness and success

In the broadest sense, this study contributes to knowledge that enhances the likelihood that schools will educate effectively. Taking the well-developed understandings of effective schools and successful leadership to this investigation in specific contexts of advantage and improvement enriches the knowledge of “what works” in schools and why.

A clarification of the differences between the terms ‘success’ and ‘effectiveness’ is a useful exercise and as both terms, and the related research foci, contribute to this review of literature. The ISSPP research consortium, which provides the framework for this research, has been primarily interested in leadership of identified ‘successful’ schools. ‘The ISSPP decided to focus on success rather than effectiveness because success was seen to be a more inclusive and broader concept.’ (Drysdale & Gurr,
Other researchers also describe the interpretation of the term ‘success’ as a broader conceptualisation as it focuses on a range of outcomes, not just performance and achievement indicators (Sammons, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1991). Day and Sammons (2014, pp. 8-9) provided a clarification of the terms and explained how both can be used for a review such as this.

This review uses both the terms ‘effective’ and ‘successful’ in reviewing school leadership research. School effectiveness research has had a strong focus on student outcomes; a more effective school is generally defined as one that promotes better student outcomes than would be predicted on the basis of student intake characteristics. It can be argued, however, that creating the conditions that promote greater school effectiveness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful school leadership. Thus, although it is acknowledged that measurable outcomes such as student progress and achievement are key indicators of effectiveness, they are insufficient to ensure success. In order to achieve the latter, schools must strive to educate their students by promoting positive values (integrity, compassion and fairness), love of lifelong learning, and fostering citizenship and personal, economic and social capabilities. For successful leadership, these social outcomes are likely to be deemed as important as promoting students’ academic outcomes.

### 2.2.2. Purpose of schooling

Consideration of the purpose of schools is a helpful precursor to exploration success and effectiveness of schools. The Day and Sammons (2014) extract above attends to specific broader aspects of student outcomes and these are becoming an increasingly important focus in schools.

In Australia, the goals for school education have been considered and reviewed by state and federal ministers for education every ten years. These have then become foundational for policy and practice. To date, three sets of goals have been agreed upon and adopted. 1) The 1989 Hobart Declaration on Schooling (Ministerial Council on Education, 1999b). 2) The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (Ministerial Council on Education, 1999a). 3) The most recent Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008).

The Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008) presents two goals:

- **Goal 1:** Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- **Goal 2:** All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

Of interest for considering a successful Australian school, Goal 2 is expanded to propose that successful learners in Australian schools:

- develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning
have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas
- are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines
- are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines
- are able to plan activities independently, collaborate, work in teams and communicate ideas
- are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are
- are on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills to make informed learning and employment decisions throughout their lives
- are motivated to reach their full potential.

(Ministerial Council on Education, 2008, p. 8)

These goals express a broad definition of success for students in Australian schools where academic outcomes measurable through performance measures are just a part of what they are supported to achieve. As Day and Sammons (2014) stated in the extract from their work above, this review will consider research that is focused on ‘effectiveness’ and ‘success’ as both provide relevant and helpful understandings for this study.

2.2.3. Educational Effectiveness Research

Educational effectiveness research has expanded rapidly since the late 1960’s. Reynolds et al. (2014) in their recent “state of the art” review of the key findings from across the body of educational effectiveness research suggested that there are two simple, foundational questions at the core of all school effectiveness investigations.

- What makes a “good” school?
- How do we make more schools “good”?

The movement to investigate educational effectiveness started as a response to seminal research projects by Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks (1972) which, in synopsis, concluded that schools had little or no effect on the outcomes of the students, but rather that student background factors were the major determinates of student educational success (Hoy, 2012). Almost immediately, those cognisant that many schools were producing results contradictory to this finding began what has grown over five decades to be a substantial and influential field of research. Significant studies by Edmonds (1979) and Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) were some of the first to take on the challenge of providing contrary evidence and they signified the ‘dawn of the effective schools era’ (Hallinger, 2011, p.125). Following from these, some early large scale studies such as Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979), Smith and Tomlinson (1989), and Mortimore (1988) used quantitative
studies and found many consistent correlates of school effects. Through the intervening decades the research has increased significantly to be an internationally broad, statistically enriched, methodologically varied and contextually sensitive, body of knowledge (Reynolds et al., 2014).

Growing interest in evidence of “what works” along with enhanced sophistication in methodologies and technological advances in data analysis techniques (for example, multi-level modelling and structural equation modelling), have enabled a number of large scale, scientifically sound research projects and meta-analyses (for example: Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Brown, Ahtarioudou, & Kington, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009) that have been able to ‘draw robust conclusions about the impact of educational factors on children’ (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 200).

As Reynolds et al. (2014) explained, two general dimensions of effectiveness are considered, quality and equity. School quality is considered the degree to which a school ‘scores’ compare with other schools against comparable measures, corrected for student intake characteristics. Equity relates to the ability of a school to compensate for input characteristics attributable to student or family background (such as socio-economic status, gender or ethnicity) (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 205).

The correlates of school level factors of effectiveness that were found in the early studies have persisted through the multiple settings across multiple countries over multiple decades. Edmonds (1979) concluded five correlates of effective schooling: 1) strong principal leadership, 2) an emphasis on basic skill acquisition, 3) an orderly climate that facilitated learning, 4) high expectations of what students would achieve, and 5) frequent monitoring of the progress of students.

Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) reviewed five major studies, two from the USA (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993) and three from the UK (Mortimore, 1988; Reynolds, Jones, & St.Leger, 1976; Rutter et al., 1979), and two significant school effectiveness research literature reviews (Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Sammons, 1995). This body of knowledge generated nine processes of effective schooling. Reynolds et al. (2014) reviewed these findings and presented them as nine global factors that they suggest are an expansion of Edmonds (1979) correlates.

- Effective leadership that was: Firm, Involving, Instrumentally orientated, Involving monitoring, and Involved staff replacement.
- A focus upon learning that involved: Focusing on academic outcomes and Maximized learning time.
- A positive school culture that involved: Shared vision, An orderly climate, and Positive reinforcement.
- High expectations of students and staff.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

- Monitoring progress at school, classroom, and student levels.
- Involving parents through: Buffering negative influences and Promoting positive interactions.
- Generating effective teaching through: Maximizing learning time, Grouping strategies, Benchmarking against best practice, and Adapting practice to student needs.
- Professional development of staff that was: Site located, and Integrated with school initiatives.
- Involving students in the educational process through: Responsibilities and Rights.

(Reynolds et al., 2014, pp. 210-211)

Research into effective education has become more sophisticated and has diversified with focus on complex factors that are context-specific. For example, effective schools in different socio-economic areas or schools with challenging cultural contexts (see for example: Harris, Chapman, Muijs, Russ, & Stoll, 2006; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). An interest in classroom level practices has also increased with many studies simultaneously studying the school and the classroom factors (see for example: Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Robinson, 2004; Day et al., 2009).

2.3. Leadership Matters

The school effectiveness research movement has demonstrated leadership is critical to the operation and success of a school (Branch et al., 2013; Louis et al., 2010; May, Huff, & Goldring, 2012; Robinson et al., 2009; Sammons, 1995; Southworth, 2009). Teddlie and Reynolds (2000, p. 141) observed,

We do not know of a study that has not shown that leadership is important within effective schools, with that leadership nearly always being provided by the headteacher.

Reynolds et al. (2014) nine global factors presented above illustrate that leadership is important, not only in terms of narrow and specific managerial processes but also in creating and supporting the culture and conditions for all processes that have been demonstrated in effective schools. The centrality of leadership to successful schools has been a consistent finding of many empirical school effectiveness research projects over many decades but limited evidence of direct effect on student achievement has been found (Scheerens, 2012). Rather it is more commonly accepted that school leaders ‘contribute to student learning through their influence on other people or features of their organisations’ (ten Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Sleegers, 2012, p. 701).

Bell, Bolam, and Cubrillo (2003) undertook a systematic review of eight quantitative studies of leadership effect sizes to analyse the effect of headteachers on student outcomes. They drew on these findings to make recommendations for policy, practice and future research. From the studies included they found evidence in seven of an effect of headteachers on student outcomes (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993; Cheng, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b; Leitner, 1994; McMahon,
Effective leadership was confirmed as probably being an important factor in a school’s success. The evidence relating to the effect of headteachers on student outcomes indicates that such an effect is largely indirect. It is mediated through key intermediate factors, these being the work of the teachers, the organisation of the school, and relationship with parents and the wider community. (Bell et al., 2003, p. 3)

Of these intermediate effects, the work of teachers was identified as highly influential and has become an increasingly important focus for school leaders. Southworth (2009) proposed that where leadership is ineffective in a school it is harder for teachers to do their job well. When leadership is effective, teachers can teach more effectively, staff and students are better motivated, communication is clearer and all stakeholders are working towards shared goals.

Louis et al. (2010) undertook a significant study on leadership effects. A starting point for their investigation was an explanation of the capacity of talented leadership to ‘unleash latent capacities in organisations’ (p. 9) through making connections and balancing influences for best effect.

Most school variables, considered separately, have only small effects on student learning. To obtain large effects, educators need to create synergy across the relevant variables. Among all the parents, teachers and policymakers who work hard to improve education, educators in leadership positions are uniquely well positioned to ensure the necessary synergy. (Louis et al., 2010, p. 9)

2.4. Development of School Leadership Research and Key Theories

Certainty about the broad factors of effective schools and the centrality of leadership to coalesce these factors has seen the development of many conceptual theories of what type of leadership is best applied in schools. School leadership theory development has been informed by other research disciplines, such as business, psychology and social activity. This section reviews four of the dominant theories of school leadership relevant to this study. An overview of the seminal school leadership study of Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998) provides a starting point, background and context for this section and the following significant research literature included in this review.

2.4.1. Hallinger and Heck

Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998) recognised that the decade and a half that they were investigating (1980 to 1995) had seen a substantial increase in policies, research and practices that sought to enhance school leadership. Their research included over
Chapter 2: Literature Review

40 studies from 12 countries that looked at the effect of principal beliefs and leadership behaviours on school effectiveness (normally measured by student achievement data).

They sought to ‘understand what has been learned about the substance of claims that principals’ leadership practices make a difference in school effectiveness’ (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, p. 159). They recognised that it is a difficult area of study.

This relationship is complex and not easily subject to empirical verification. Our own perspective is that the principal’s role is best conceived as part of a web of environmental, personal and in-school relationships that combine to influence organisational outcomes. (1996b, p. 6)

Despite recognising these difficulties, Hallinger and Heck felt that research during the 15-year period warranted an in-depth review both to summarise the developments in methodological, conceptual and substantive issues and to ‘frame an agenda for research on the principal’s role in school effectiveness for the next generation of studies’ (1996a, p. 7).

Hallinger and Heck found that the results drawn from the review supported the assumption that principals do influence school effectiveness. They found this effect to be indirect and relatively small but statistically significant. Importantly, from this study Hallinger and Heck identified the limitations of their work and the implications for future study.

Even as a group the studies do not resolve the most important theoretical and practical issues entailed in understanding the principal’s role in contributing to school effectiveness. These concern the means by which principals achieve an impact on school outcomes as well as the interplay with contextual forces that influence the exercise of school leadership...our assessment is that the field has made substantive progress over the past 15 years and is now equipped conceptually and methodologically to address the important substantive issues in this domain. (1998, p. 186)

Since this review, numerous significant research projects have been undertaken to shed light on many aspects of the ‘web’ of principal leadership characteristics and practices that make a difference to school success. This study contributes further to this complex body of knowledge.

Outcomes from the growing research literature include the identification of numerous models or theories of leadership, for example: emotional; strategic; ethical; and invitational (Davies, 2009). At the time of their review Hallinger and Heck (1998) identified transformational and instructional leadership as the predominant leadership constructs and this continues to hold true through to recent research (for example: Bush & Glover, 2014; Day & Gurr, 2014; Hallinger, 2003; Robinson et al., 2009; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014).
Over the years of significant research projects, instructional and transformational leadership models have been supplemented with increasing evidence that shared leadership is also apparent in effective schools. Hallinger’s (2011) review of 40 years of research suggested that now a combination of the predominate leadership models is most useful and he termed this Leadership for Learning.

The fervor of debates over which model offers the greatest leverage for understanding how school leaders contribute to learning has reduced in recent years. Empirical results across a large number of studies have begun to show fairly consistent patterns of impact, and today, the term “leadership for learning” has come to subsume features of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and shared leadership (Hallinger, 2011, p126).

These four significant models, Transformational, Instructional, Distributed and Leadership for Learning will now be reviewed individually.

### 2.4.2. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership has been a persistent part of the conceptualisation of effective school leadership for many decades. It is thought to have originated in research by Burns (1978) that was interested in why some leaders were able to motivate followers more so than others. Bass and Avolio (1993, 1999, 2000) further developed the transformational leadership model around a theory of influential and inspirational leadership that is embedded in a supportive ‘culture of creative change and growth rather than one which maintains the status quo’ (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 113). One description that they provide is: ‘Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and more than they thought possible. They set more challenging expectations, raise levels of self and collective efficacy and typically achieve significantly higher performance.’ (Bass & Avolio, 2000, p. 10).

Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999) developed Bass and Avolio’s (1993, 1999, 2000) transformational leadership model with a specific educational perspective. Leithwood (1994, p. 500) argued that the model was particularly useful in the context of significant school change.

Under the circumstances of change, “commitment” rather than “control” strategies are called for. These are strategies that help frontline school staffs appreciate the purposes for change and that foster their commitment to developing, trying out, and refining new practices until those purposes are accomplished (or until they change). Virtually all treatments of transformational leadership claim that among its more direct effects are employee motivation and commitment to leading to the kind of extra effort required for significant change.

Hallinger and Heck (1998, p. 169) further illustrated why transformational leadership had appeal in times of restructuring and rapid change in schools.
Transformational leadership focuses on increasing the organization’s capacity to innovate. Rather than focusing specifically on curriculum and instruction, transformational leadership seeks to build the organization’s capacity to select its purposes and to support the survival of changes to the school’s core technology.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999a, p. 114) presented a six-dimensional model to describe transformational leadership based on their research in schools.

- Building school visions and goals
- Providing intellectual stimulation
- Offering individualised support
- Symbolising professional practices
- Demonstrating high performance expectations
- Developing structures to foster participation in school decisions

The dialogue in literature around transformational leadership, particularly as it relates to educational contexts has been considerable (Gurr, 2002). At the time of writing Gurr (2002, p. 85) argued that the transformational leadership model was ‘the most complete and relevant view of leadership in education, and that it is a useful platform on which to build the next dominant view of leadership’.

Leithwood and colleagues (including: Day et al., 2009; Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010a; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a, 1999b, 2005, 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Sleegers, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2012) have continued to investigate and refine transformational leadership theory through a variety of research projects and academic publications. This body of work has explored transformational leadership in many contexts and from many perspectives. Recent conceptualisations, including the four paths framework (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010b; Leithwood et al., 2017), have verified transformational leadership dimensions such as those developed by Leithwood and Jantzi (1999a) but within a more integrated theoretical model (see below for further review of the four paths framework).

2.4.3. Instructional Leadership

This predominant and popular theory of leadership in school settings is also referred to commonly in European literature as ‘pedagogical leadership’ and in Australia the term ‘educational’ leadership is preferred (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2007). Edmonds (1979) provided an empirical foundation for this leadership theory with his landmark study that found effective schools have leaders that focus on instruction (Neumerski, 2012). The theory was further developed in schools in the 1980’s (Robinson et al., 2009) and is specific to educational contexts, although some believe it bears resemblance to task orientated leadership theories (Louis et al., 2010). Common to understandings of instructional
leadership theory is that there is ‘close involvement by leadership in establishing an academic mission, monitoring and providing feedback on teaching and learning and promoting professional development’ (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 88). Research has illustrated the importance of principal leadership behaviour that is instructionally focused because support and assistance directed at teachers is essential to increasing teacher capacity and related increases in student achievement (Blase & Blase, 1999; Purinton, 2013; Southworth, 2002).

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) proposed an early but persistent model of three dimensions for the instructional leadership role of the principal.

- Defining the mission
- Managing the instructional program
- Promoting the school climate

Each of these dimensions has underlying leadership functions as illustrated in table 2.1

**Table 2.1: Dimensions of Instructional Management (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 221)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defines the Mission</th>
<th>Manages Instructional Program</th>
<th>Promotes School Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Framing school goals</td>
<td>Supervising and evaluating instruction</td>
<td>Protecting instruction time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating school goals</td>
<td>Coordinating curriculum</td>
<td>Promoting professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring student progress</td>
<td>Maintaining high visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing incentives for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enforcing academic standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing incentives for students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This model has been the most frequently used conceptualisation of instructional leadership with over 110 empirical studies employing it up until 2005 (most of these studies utilised the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale instrument - PIMRS) (Hallinger, 2005).

A relevant and recent study by Bendikson, Robinson and Hattie (2012) investigated the instructional leadership behaviours of principals in a sample of 29 New Zealand secondary schools. From this they proposed that there is a distinction between direct instructional leadership and indirect instructional leadership.

Direct instructional leadership is focused on the quality of teacher practice, including the quality of the curriculum, teaching and assessment, and the quality of teacher inquiry and teacher learning. Indirect instructional leadership creates the conditions for good teaching and teacher
learning by ensuring that school policies, routines, resourcing and other management decisions support and require high-quality learning, teaching and teacher learning. (Bendikson et al., 2012, p. 4)

Bendikson et al. (2012) suggested that this distinction is particularly important when considering the instructional leadership practices of primary and secondary school leaders. They found that the typically larger secondary schools have more elaborate organisational systems with more layers of leadership which mean that ‘secondary school principals’ instructional leadership is likely to be exercised more indirectly through oversight of those who have delegated responsibility for the quality of classroom teaching’ (Bendikson et al., 2012, p. 2).

For the purposes of their research into the instructional leadership behaviours of secondary school principals in the North Island of New Zealand the authors used the instructional leadership dimensions as illustrated in Table 2.2 below. These were adapted from the work of Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008, see below) to include two further dimensions: Solving complex problems; and Developing a sense of collective responsibility, that had been shown from other research to be educationally powerful in secondary school contexts (Heck & Mayor, 1993; V. E. Lee & Smith, 1996)

Table 2.2: Instructional Leadership Dimensions (Bendikson et al., 2012, p. 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct instructional leadership dimensions</th>
<th>Indirect instructional leadership dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals</td>
<td>Ensuring a safe and orderly environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring quality teaching</td>
<td>Resourcing strategically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Solving complex problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a sense of collective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They found from this research that principals in a secondary school environment were most likely to use indirect instructional leadership behaviours as they facilitated the direct instructional leadership of others in the school.

This evidence supports the logic that shared instructional leadership is an important area of theoretical focus in the leadership literature (Murphy, 2002; Neumerski, 2012; Printy & Marks, 2006).

2.4.4. Distributed Leadership

The intricacies and complexities of how leadership influences are shared and enacted in schools is described by distributed leadership theories and research. The centrality of a single force of an individual leader responsible for success of the organisation had been a traditional focus of leadership investigations. Often described as ‘heroic’ approaches as they were interested in how the nominated
leader operates in the organisation, in education that is most often a principal or headteacher (Gronn, 2010; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2008; Woods & Gronn, 2009). However, ‘post-heroic’ research literature in recent years has recognised that in most organisations there are many who contribute to leadership formally or informally (Leithwood et al., 2008). Distributed leadership has been the predominant label applied to this notion of leadership although a clear conceptualisation is not agreed upon in the literature (Harris, 2009). Shared leadership and collaborative leadership are other common terms used to capture the move away from the focus on the individual, top-of-the-hierarchy, leadership.

The practice of shared leadership has evolved to some degree in response to the increase in responsibility and accountability placed at the school level across developed (and many developing) nations, so that leadership roles and responsibilities are being shared for practical, work-load distribution purposes. Gronn (2010, p. 418), suggested that this is ‘a linguistically made-over way of referring to what used to be known (not so long ago) as delegating authority or delegating responsibility’.

The research has however found that distributed leadership can be greater than just delegation (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006) and has been shown to have positive impact on schools and students (Chrispeels, 2004; Harris, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006). A holistic conceptualisation of distributed leadership considers the overall picture, the purpose and the practice of distributing leadership. It has added value to leadership practice in schools as it considers sharing leadership in purposeful ways. The holistic distributed leadership theory has been drawn from network theory, distributed cognition and social learning theory (Harris, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and is interested in the co-practice of leadership that stretch leadership function across the social and situational context of the school (Gronn, 2003).

Distributed leadership research considers activities and the interactions between those who undertake formal and informal leadership roles (Harris & Spillane, 2008). The underlying assumption is that school leadership is embedded in relationships and that the interlinked capabilities and capacities work in concert to maximise impact. The research has suggested that shared practice, and interdependence of leadership can be greater than the sum of its individual parts (Gronn, 2010; Harris, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2008).
Gronn (2002) proposed three forms of concertive action that describe patterns of distributed leadership that go beyond the sum of individual acts and can be used to conceptualise and analyse shared leadership practice.

1) Spontaneous collaboration – where many leaders interact over time and various situations beyond the formalised functions of leadership. ‘Individuals with differing skills and abilities, perhaps from across different organisational levels, pool their expertise and regularise their conduct to solve a problem’

2) Intuitive working relations – these relationships develop as a working partnerships or collaborations which capitalise on opportunities for reliance on others to balance skills and strengths.

3) Institutionalised practices – this is where leadership is distributed through formal structures that are established either by design or adaption, such as the establishment of task forces or use of leadership teams.

With a predominant focus on instructional leadership in schools and with policy makers, leadership that penetrates through to interactions that ultimately enhance learning is desirable. Educators now understand that responsibility for student learning is shared (Lambert, 2002; Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009). Therefore, the focus has changed from an interest in individual leaders working in isolation to these aspects of distributed leadership across a broader range of sources within a school.

2.4.5. Leadership for Learning

Leadership for learning as a theoretical conceptualisation of school leadership approaches can be argued to be a culmination of the many theoretical conceptualisations that have preceded, the most significant of which have been described above.

The debate about which leadership model offers the greatest potential for school effectiveness has reduced in recent years with the emergence of consistent patterns of impact from substantial research. Leithwood et al. (2017, p. 13) observed ‘the different accounts of successful leadership exemplified by such models almost always include overlapping categories of practices; indeed, the labels of these models are often more distinct than the practices they include’. In response, recent research suggests that an integrated model of leadership that is contextually sensitive is most effective (Bush, 2014; Hallinger, 2003, 2011; MacBeath & Cheng, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003; Printy et al., 2009; Shatzer et al., 2014; Silins & Mulford, 2010; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Day and Sammons (2014, p. 7) articulated a revised perspective on transformational leadership and instructional leadership.

While there is evidence that instructional/pedagogical leadership has been shown to be important for promoting better academic outcomes for students, it is concluded that the two forms of leadership are not mutually exclusive. A combination of strategies can be most beneficial in ensuring school success and most leadership effects operate indirectly to promote
Hallinger (2011, p. 126) surmised that ‘the term “leadership for learning” has come to subsume features of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and shared leadership’.

Hallinger’s (2011) theoretical model of Leadership for Learning ‘describes approaches that school leaders employ to achieve important school outcomes, with a particular focus on student learning’ (p. 126). The model incorporates a broad range of leadership sources and emphasises that leadership is enacted within organisational and environmental contexts. ‘Effective leadership is both shaped by and responds to the constraints and opportunities extant in the school organisation and its environment’ (Hallinger, 2011, p. 127). It also contests that personal characteristics of leaders moderate the exercise of leadership and that the impact of leadership on student learning is mediated by school-level processes and conditions. Figure 2.1 is taken from Hallinger’s (2011) synthesis of the leadership literature and illustrates his Leadership for Learning model.

Figure 2.1: A synthesized model of leadership for learning (Hallinger, 2011, p. 127)

A large three-year research project by MacBeath and colleagues (MacBeath, Frost, & Swaffield, 2005; MacBeath, Frost, Swaffield, & Waterhouse, 2006) was undertaken with 24 schools across seven countries with the aim of exploring leadership for learning concepts. Rather than viewing leadership for learning as subsuming key aspects of predominant models, as Hallinger (2011) did, this project specifically sought to explore a conceptualisation of leadership for learning that was evident but not
explicitly explained in other leadership models. They considered the variety of leadership models, such as transformational, instructional and distributed, and noticed,

There are, of course differences among these various forms of leadership (otherwise diverse labels would not have been coined), but a number of common threads among them may be discerned. They are all concerned with learning, primarily of pupils, but also of teachers and other members of the community whose continuous learning is in the service of student learning. (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009, p. 34)

This specific focus on learning and the connection between leadership and learning became the emphasis. From the project, and specifically discursive interactions with researchers and practitioners, a definition of leadership for learning was developed.

Leadership for learning is a distinct form of educational practice that involves an explicit dialogue, maintaining a focus on learning, attending to the conditions that favour learning, and leadership that is both shared and accountable. Learning and leadership are conceived of as ‘activities’ linked by the centrality of human agency within a framework of moral purpose. (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009, p. 42)

Hallinger (2011, p. 127) described his model as a ‘wide angle lens for viewing the contribution that leadership makes to school improvement’. MacBeath and colleagues (MacBeath et al., 2005; MacBeath et al., 2006) focused more specifically on conceptualising the connection between leadership and learning with a view to enhancing educational practice.

This review now turns to an overview of significant and relevant investigations in the school leadership domain in order to further extend the research context and knowledge base for this study. The findings of the included research studies have contributed to the theoretical conceptualisations outlined above and provide this research with detailed evidence of how successful school leaders contribute to effective schools. This is an important body of knowledge to enable analysis and conclusions about the leadership characteristics and practices of the case study schools.

### 2.5. The International Successful School Principalship Project

This research at the two selected schools will form part of the ISSPP. A comprehensive review of the significant progress of the ISSPP to date is relevant to this study as it aims to contribute specifically to this body of knowledge.

#### 2.5.1. A Brief History
The ISSPP was established in 2001 and to date has ‘sought to understand the characteristics, dispositions and qualities of successful principals in successful schools’ (Day & Gurr, 2014, p. 1). The ISSPP posed the following questions that have guided the collaborative research efforts to date (Drysdale, 2011):

1. What practices are used by successful principals and do these vary across countries and contexts?
2. What gives rise to successful principal leadership?
3. Under what conditions are the effects of such practices heightened or diminished?
4. What variables effectively “link” principals’ influence to student learning?

Agreed and consistent research protocols have been utilised in more than 20 countries and resulted in over 100 multiple perspective research informed case studies. This body of evidence has been shared broadly through four project books, three international books, 20 individual book chapters, five special issues of journals and more than 80 journal papers to date (Day & Gurr, 2014).

In 2011, the core research group took a collective decision to develop two new strands to the ISSPP. The first new direction was to ‘investigate the principalship in schools which were underperforming and/or performing less well than they should be, given the composition of the student body and the community from which they were drawn’ (Day, 2013, p. 12). The second was to ‘examine more deeply the nature and role of identity in the work of principals in successful and less successful schools’ (Day, 2013, p. 12). It was recognised that both new research areas would enhance the ISSPP by extending understanding of the lives and work of principals and the complex connections between leadership and school success. It was also identified that these areas are not well researched to date. This thesis contributes to the first direction specifically as it has used the proven methodology to investigate principalship in schools that are improving.

2.5.2. The First Phase

The original phase of this international study was undertaken in 63 schools across eight countries (Australia, England, Canada, China, USA, Norway, Sweden and Denmark). Where possible, principals were selected based on evidence of student achievement above system expectations and principal reputations in the community (Leithwood & Day, 2007a).

2.5.2.1. Australian Contribution

Two separate research projects were undertaken in Australia. In Victoria, Gurr, Drysdale, Di Natale, Ford, Hardy, and Swann (2003) examined examples of successful school leaders as a part of the ISSPP
collaboration, collecting data according to the agreed protocol. Case studies were also undertaken in Tasmania by Mulford and Johns (2004). The Tasmanian research was underway prior to joining ISSPP. The findings were included and analysed along with the many other case studies that contributed to this original phase. All the Australian case studies featured multiple data sources including documentary evidence of student achievement and school success, and interviews with a variety of stakeholders including the Principal, school council chairperson, Assistant Principal, other staff, parents and students.

In reviewing the two sets of Australian case studies Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2005, 2006a) concluded:

- the importance and contribution of the principal to the quality of education in a school.
- a common and consistent set of personal traits and behaviours.
- the importance of principals’ values and beliefs
- the importance of the principal’s contribution to the areas of capacity building and teaching and learning.

The findings of each of the studies were conceptualised in two separate models (see Gurr & Drysdale, 2003; Gurr et al., 2003; Mulford & Johns, 2004) and then combined into a single model representing an Australian perspective on successful school leadership (Gurr et al., 2006a). This work contributed significantly to the international body of research reported in the first project book (Day & Leithwood, 2007).

2.5.2.2. International Findings

The country reports were presented in a 2005 special edition of the *Journal of Educational Administration* and in the first project book *Leading Schools in Times of Change: An International Perspective* edited by Day and Leithwood (2007). In these publications, Leithwood (2005) and Day and Leithwood (2007) used the framework that was first developed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003). Leithwood (2005, p. 621) concluded,

In sum, the seven country reports do not challenge the conclusions from earlier research about the value of a common set of “basic” leadership practices in almost all national contexts and the policy environments they share. However, the reports do increase our sensitivity to how enactments of these generally successful practices are adapted by principals in order to have their predicted effects.

Leithwood and Day (2007a) went further in their analysis of how the set of basic leadership practices were reflected in the country studies. The Leithwood and Riehl (2003) model was updated by Leithwood et al. (2006), adding a fourth practice area *Managing the Teaching and Learning*
Programme (see below for an expanded review of the development of this model). Leithwood and Day (2007b) reaffirmed their contention of four categories of core leadership practices based on evidence that in all the country studies successful principals engaging in aligned practices. Further, from their analysis of the studies, they identified several new individual practices to include as additions in each of the four core areas. The four core practice areas with their associated practices including those added from the ISSPP research are presented below.

Building Vision and Establishing Direction

- Building a shared vision
- Fostering the acceptance of group goals
- Demonstrating high performance expectations
- Problem solving
- Articulating a set of core values

Understanding and Developing People

- Providing individualised support and consideration
- Fostering intellectual stimulation
- Modelling appropriate values and behaviours
- Trust building
- Being visible in the school

Redesigning the Organisation

- Building collaborative cultures
- Restructuring [and reculturing] the organisation
- Building productive relations with the parents and the community
- Connecting the school to the wider environment
- Building a safe and secure environment

Managing the Teaching and Learning Programme

- Staffing the teaching programme
- Providing teacher support
- Monitoring school activity
- Buffering teachers against distractions from their work
- Introducing positive forms of instruction to staff

As well as the extra individual leadership practices being added to the four existing categories, Leithwood and Day (2007b) contended that a significant finding from the combined country studies was a fifth broad category that they labelled Coalition Building.

Coalition Building

- Participates in government decision making organisations
- Participates in professional organisations and networks

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Leithwood (2005) also identified common factors that gave rise to successful leadership practices from the country studies. The factors were qualified as either internal to leaders or as features of the external environments in which they worked. The internal factors (dispositions, skills and cognitive styles) that successful leaders displayed included: passion and enthusiasm for education; values around social justice and equitable education for all; dedication to achieving goals and persistence and optimism in this; emotional sensitivity to school community members; high level communication skills; cognitive flexibility; open-mindedness, creativity and lateral thinking in regard to problem solving. External factors that were seen as impacting on success included: public accountability measures; school level (e.g. primary, secondary); school type (e.g. catholic); school size; and, school location (e.g. urban). Leithwood (2005, p. 623) identified research into the impact of external factors as an area of research that is lacking by suggesting,

A very restricted range of variables has been explored and there is little accumulation of evidence about any of those variables that have been studied. This neglect is surprising since a great deal of the educational leadership literature claims that the context in which leaders work is of enormous importance in determining what they do.

2.5.3. Further ISSPP research

Following on from the extensive work completed as part of the first phase the focus shifted to more cross-national analysis. The second project book (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011) explored instructional leadership, organisational learning and culturally responsive practices based on a secondary analysis of the original data collected in the first phase. Gurr, Drysdale, Swann, Doherty, Ford, and Goode (2006b) produced a cross-national analysis of the original case studies and concluded that the following commonalities of principalship were consistent across the countries:

- The ethical and moral imperatives, emanating from each principal’s value system, were consistent across countries and underpinned successful principal leadership.
- Improvement in student learning and student development were the core concerns of the principals and schools.
- Principals were typically able to harness the whole community to contribute to the educational vision and strategies.
- Successful principals were able to balance external pressures, such as accountability in a results-driven environment and testing regimes, with the context of their school.
- Principals were seen as responsible for three key leadership practices, namely, setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organisation as identified by Leithwood and Riehl (2003). The competent, respectful and cohesive manner in which these practices were achieved marked the degree to which schools were successful.
Regardless of country, culture and context, these principals demonstrated a ‘can do’ attitude in their approach to education. They were hardworking, committed, respected and trusted by their communities and remained hopeful despite the challenges they faced.

The quality of relationships was a vital component. Working with and through others was a feature of the way the principals worked, even in those cases where principals adopted a very strong, almost authoritarian leadership style.

(Gurr et al., 2006b, p. 43)

The ISSPP then moved to a second phase which reported on further research in the participating countries. The researchers returned to some of the original schools five years later to find out if the success of the principals had been sustained and what factors had contributed to sustained success. A third book (Moos, Johansson, & Day, 2011) and a second special journal edition (Journal of Educational Administration, 2009) reported the findings of this phase. The sections below outline the research in this phase.

2.5.3.1. **Australian contribution**

Drysdale, Goode, and Gurr (2009, 2011) returned to two of the original case study schools in Victoria to examine how leadership success had been sustained. They found that many of the important characteristics that had led to developing success originally continued to contribute to sustaining success. These included ‘vision and passion, appropriate leadership style, clear and articulated values, personal qualities and skills, ability to build relationships, being highly engaged and connected to the school community and managing change.’ (Drysdale et al., 2011, p.36).

There were interesting observations of differences in the two case study schools and principals. Because one school had maintained the initial level of success and the other school had continued on a trajectory of improvement to a higher level of success the researchers were able to identify aspects that seemed to explain the difference. 1.) There were external factors that impacted differently and effected enrolments and therefore staffing. 2.) One principal’s leadership style was ‘more prepared to challenge the behaviour of staff and create a climate of further change’ (Drysdale et al., 2011, p. 36). 3.) The researchers noticed a difference in attitude to change with one principal being proactive and creating opportunities for change and the other being more reactive in dealing with changes.

These observations are interesting additions to the broader understanding of successful school leadership. Positive change management is a critical factor of sustaining success and further to effective leadership succession (Fullan, 2008; Hargreaves, 2009).
2.5.3.2. **International Findings**

As well as the Australian findings from this second phase of the ISSPP, five other countries returned to further research in some of the original case study schools. This enabled international perspectives on leadership and sustainability over the five-year period to be developed. This augmented the leadership framework that had been developed in the initial phase around the work of Leithwood et al. (2006). Findings from this phase upheld the importance of the four major leadership practices: building vision and establishing direction; understanding and developing people; redesigning the organisation; and managing the teaching and learning programme (Moos et al., 2011). However, this phase led to a change in the practice area of coalition building by renaming and reframing it as *Leading Environments*. Leading environments resulted from the findings that ‘most case schools had expanded their community involvement considerably, some in relation to parents and others in partnership with institutions and enterprises.’ (Moos & Johansson, 2009, p. 776). This expanded on the “Coalition building” area practice which was focussed narrowly on system relationships.

This phase also reviewed the principal characteristics that were identified in the original work. The first research phase found there were many common traits and dispositions and beliefs and values across the principals of the successful schools. Some of the most reported of these from the participating countries included: open and frank personalities; high levels of motivation; strong social appraisal skills; and strong basic human, general moral, professional, social and political values and beliefs. (Leithwood & Day, 2007a). This second phase found that after five years some of these characteristics had become more apparent. Commitment to the job, strong relationships with all stakeholders and effective communication practices were evident in the principals that sustained successes.

2.5.4. **Drysdale and Gurr Successful School Leadership Model (2011)**

The findings of the ISSPP have consistently and comprehensively described principal leadership and the contribution of it to school success. These have been drawn together by Drysdale and Gurr (2011, 2017) into a conceptual model shown in Figure 2.2. The presentation of such a broad body of findings into a model is not without drawbacks but Drysdale and Gurr (2017, p. 171) suggest that ‘conceptual frameworks or models help make sense and explain complex ideas and relationships resulting from research. They provide a conceptual map for testing ideas and a guide to future research’. For these reasons a review of this model as a tool for summary of the ISSPP findings is relevant.
Figure 2.2: Successful school leadership model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011, 2017)

This model has been drawn from prior models of successful school leadership (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr & Drysdale, 2007; Gurr et al., 2006a). An expanded ISSPP model was presented by Gurr (2015, 2017) with this version synthesising and extending models developed from across the international evidence of the research group. It focused in greater detail on the organisational ‘distinction between the why, how and what of successful school leadership’ (Gurr, 2017, p. 21). Although Gurr’s (2015, 2017) ISSPP model incorporated greater detail, the focus of the Drysdale and Gurr (2011, 2017) model is well suited to this study.

This model attempts to capture the relationship between the characteristics of the school leader (who they are), the interventions they initiate (what they do), and the way they respond to the context in which they operate. (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011, p. 355)

This intention of this model aligns well with this study in that it aims to capture interactions between leadership characteristics, practices (what they do) and context.

This extract from Drysdale and Gurr (2011, p. 357) describes this model succinctly:

The leader (principal) interacts within the particular school context to deliver a series of interventions aimed at improving student outcomes. The areas that can influence student outcomes are teaching and learning (Level 1), school capacity building (Level 2), and other influences (Level 3). Level 1 has the most impact on outcomes followed by Level 2 and Level 3. The leader can make interventions at any level in the model, including student outcomes.

The authors continue with an explanation of context and principal characteristics:
Surrounding these are the school context (what the school is – its vision and mission, school culture, the organisational structures and processes and the people who inhabit the school including staff, students and parents) and the qualities, characteristics and competencies of the principal as the key leader. We include these as separate elements to represent their importance. Principals are the key leaders in schools and school context as we describe it, whilst open to change, is an enduring and important element of schools. (Drysdaile & Gurr, 2011, pp. 358-359)

This model provides a clear and accessible framework for considering a wide range of variables, mediators and moderators of leadership effectiveness by conceptualising the outcomes of the ISSPP. It captures the indirect and direct opportunities for principals to exert influence on a range of student outcomes which are reported to be usually concentrated on teaching and learning and school capacity building. It highlights the importance of principal leadership within context to the effective operation of a school organisation.

2.6. Other Significant School Leadership Research

This review now considers significant school leadership studies outside the ISSPP. They will be presented in a loosely chronological order and have been chosen for review as they are studies of significant influence on school leadership research. Many of these have specifically influenced and informed the ISSPP. Often these studies have been undertaken over the same periods as ISSPP research projects described above. The combined findings across the ISSPP and those described below have been in many cases collaborative, supportive and mutually influential due to the relationships and connections between individual academics and research organisations. ‘Cross-pollination’ of findings and development of theoretical frameworks through many overlapping projects is evident and provides further validation to consistent findings.

2.6.1. Effective Headteachers

This study was the precedent research that led directly to the formation of the ISSPP. The methodology and findings as described below having significant influence on the ISSPP under the guidance of Day, a lead researcher across both studies.

In the late 1990's the National Association of Headteachers in the United Kingdom commissioned research into successful leadership practice in schools in England and Wales. Day and colleagues (Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001; Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000) aimed to explore how the existing theories of effective leadership, (including, moral leadership, transformational leadership and
purposeful leadership) were being demonstrated by the actual practice of headteachers. At that time, schools in the UK had undergone a decade of externally imposed, significant change and the project team was interested in how leadership was demonstrated and conceptualised in the context of change. The researchers recognised that ‘effective leadership was both a highly contextualised and relational construct’ (Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 1999, p.2).

The methodology that they utilised was designed to capture multiple perspectives of leadership within each school through individual and group interviews not only with headteachers but also other key stakeholders (teachers, parents, governors and students). When this research began there were few other empirical studies of this kind (Day et al., 1999).

Data was collected from more than 200 interviews in 12 schools. The most important findings from this research on effective leaders were:

- That although they are surrounded by a matrix of expectations and demands they are clear about their core values and these permeate their thinking and actions;
- They are constantly and consistently managing several simultaneously competing sets of tensions successfully; and
- They have to make ‘tough decisions’ about the resulting leadership dilemmas.

(Day et al., 2001, p.51)

The researchers termed the skills and attitudes required to succeed ‘values-led contingency’ leadership. They suggested that this style of leadership was a ‘post-transformational’ model necessary in the context of change and complexity of schools (Day et al., 2000). This study changed the approach to understanding successful school leadership by using new methodologies that considered multiple perspectives and by results that presented a values oriented view of school leadership. The methodology and the significant findings influenced many research projects that followed including the ISSPP.

2.6.2. The LOLSO Research Project

The Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcome (LOLSO) Project (Mulford, Leithwood, & Silins, 2004; Mulford & Silins, 2003) was undertaken in Australia from 1997 - 2001 and was a ground-breaking study at the time in its aim to link leadership during school reform initiatives to student outcomes. The LOLSO research design included four phases of data collection including surveying and resurveying students, teachers and principals, and longitudinal case studies in four schools. ‘In brief, the project’s research design allowed for iterative cycles of theory development and
testing, using multiple forms of evidence’ (Mulford & Silins, 2003, p. 177). The research was undertaken in 96 secondary schools in Tasmania and South Australia.

This important research addressed several questions. Of these, the question that most directly contributed to the understanding of successful school leadership was: Do school leadership and/or organisational learning contribute to student outcomes?

This study found that there was an indirect relationship between leadership (both in principal and distributed forms) and student outcomes and that the ‘organisational learning’ seen as ‘teacher work’ was the important intervening variable. This indirect leadership was termed ‘transformational’ as leadership impacting on the ‘collective efficacy’ of the staff was the key to impact on student outcomes.

The research identified four dimensions that characterised the schools as learning organisations: 1.) Trusting and collaborative climate; 2.) Shared and monitored mission; 3.) Taking initiatives and risks; and 4.) Professional development. Further it identified six dimensions that promoted these organisations to be transformational as they attended to the school reform initiatives and improved student outcomes: 1.) Vision and Goals- consensus and communication of these; 2.) Culture – an atmosphere of caring, trust and respect; 3.) Structure – that promotes participative decision making and distributive leadership; 4.) Intellectual Stimulation – reflection on student achievements and shared learning opportunities; 5.) Individual Support – moral support and appreciation of others work; and 6.) Performance Expectation – holding high expectations for effectiveness and innovation.

Silins and Mulford (2002, p. 603) summarised the findings of the LOLSO project as such:

Our research clearly indicates that the closer school leaders’ practices are to being described as transformational, the more active interest school leaders demonstrate in teaching and learning, the more distributed leadership is throughout the school community, in particular, to teachers, and the better the performance of that school in terms of student outcomes.

2.6.3. What we know about successful school leadership

Established in 2000 in the United States the Task Force on Developing Research in Educational Leadership was charged to promote high-quality research into educational leadership. As a part of this task force Leithwood and Riehl (2003, 2005) reviewed research studies that had been published in refereed academic journals and books. From this review the researchers defined school leadership ‘as the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school’s shared intentions and goals’ (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p. 14).
The researchers then made five research-based conclusions about successful school leadership:

1) Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2).

The review of large scale quantitative studies found that leadership explained between three and five per cent of variance in student achievement. This effect seems small but is actually equivalent to nearly one-quarter of the total effect of school factors.

2) Currently, administrators and teacher leaders provide most of the leadership in schools, but other potential sources of leadership exist (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 3).

The research had shown that there are important potential sources of leadership in teachers, parents and students and also that distribution of leadership can help develop: a broader commitment to goals; increase understanding of teaching and learning; and, encourage collaboration toward improvement.

3) A core set of leadership practices for the “basics” of successful leadership are valuable in almost all educational contexts (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 3).

Three broad categories were identified with each containing more specific ‘competencies, orientations and considerations’ (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 3). These three categories were: 1) Setting directions; 2) Developing people; and 3) Developing the organisation.

This set of leadership practices reflects aspects of transformational leadership in a focus on indirectly influencing student learning through supporting the development of individuals and the organisation to work toward visions and goals. The researchers suggested,

While mastery of these basics provides no guarantee that a leader’s work will be successful in a particular school context, lack of mastery likely guarantees failure. A successful leader can do more but cannot do less. (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 5)

This was the first iteration of the core practice categories that would come to feature in various research findings over future years including in the ISSPP research as reviewed above.

4) Successful school leaders respond productively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 5).

Although school contexts are unique, the requirement for accountability is a broadly shared challenge of school leaders. Responding positively with practices such as: strategic planning; providing
instructional guidance, and; empowering others to make decisions, contributes to school success in an accountability era.

5) Successful school leaders respond productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 6).

Student populations are increasingly diverse in many schools across socio-economic, cultural and special needs (for example physical or learning disabilities) variables. This research found that successful leaders in diverse contexts focus their efforts on these four areas:

- Building powerful forms of teaching and learning - Critically examining practices and attending carefully to curriculum and assessment that is appropriate and engaging.
- Creating strong communities in school – developing learning communities that have a strong sense of affiliation, trust and collaboration for students, families and teachers.
- Expanding the proportion of students’ social capital valued by the schools – embedding knowledge, values and dispositions of students and communities into the school context as an educational asset.
- Nurturing the development of families’ educational cultures – promoting communication and providing resources to families to enhance perceptions of value of education and levels of home support provided to students.

This work of Leithwood and Riehl has been important for the ISSPP as well as other significant research that followed. In particular, the ISSPP found that the theoretical model offered as a core set of leadership practices was applicable in a variety of contexts.

The following sections provide review of two other subsequent significant studies in the UK. These studies also verified and extended these original findings and the core set of leadership practices.

2.6.4. Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins (2006), undertook a review of literature that built on the earlier work of Leithwood and Riehl (2003, 2005). This study was commissioned by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in the UK and the report presented seven strong claims that are summarised below:

Claim 1: School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

This claim is based on five sources of evidence that informed the report. The first was qualitative studies in high performing school settings. These studies usually reported very large leadership effects on a variety of school conditions but they lacked generalisability and external validity. The second type of evidence was from large scale quantitative studies such as those reviewed by Hallinger and Heck.
(1996a, 1996b, 1998) which concluded that the combined direct and indirect effects of school leadership on pupil outcomes were small but educationally significant, as reported earlier in this review. The third source of evidence was a second large scale, quantitative study that investigated specific leadership practices. A meta-analysis concluded that a 10-percentile point increase in pupil test scores could result from a headteacher who improved leadership practices in 21 areas of responsibility. The fourth source of evidence was an evaluation of leadership effects on student engagement with engagement then being a predictor of student achievement. The fifth source of evidence was taken from research that had shown unplanned headteacher succession was a common reason for schools failing to succeed.

The authors concluded their review of this evidence in support of this first claim with the observation ‘As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership.’(Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 5).

Claim 2: Almost all successful leaders build on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.

This claim is based on two basic assumptions: (a) the main task of leaders is to support improved employee performance; and (b) performance is a function of the beliefs, values, motivations, skills and knowledge and the conditions of employees. The authors re-framed Leithwood and Riehl’s (2003, 2005) leadership practice framework adding a fourth category: 1) Building vision and setting direction; 2) Understanding and developing people; 3) Redesigning the organisation; and 4) Managing the teaching and learning programme. The addition of the specific focus on the teaching and learning programme demonstrated increased evidence of the impact of instructional leadership.

Claim 3: The ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather that dictation by, the contexts in which they work.

The evidence demonstrated that successful school leaders are sensitive to context in their application of the basic leadership practices outlined above. They do not utilise significantly different practices to suit their context but rather adjust the balance of application to meet the needs of the individual school.

Claim 4: School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.
This claim highlights the essential understanding that effective teaching improves student learning. Leadership practices that support staff to teach in the most effective ways are of greatest value to pupil learning.

Claim 5: School leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed.

The research that influenced this claim had found that total school leadership had two to three times higher proportion of explained variation than is typically reported in studies of individual headteacher effects. Further to this significant evidence the authors suggested that distribution of leadership supports effective succession, turn-around practices and team problem-solving.

Claim 6: Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others

Evidence for this claim comes from research that demonstrated different patterns of leadership distribution had differing effects on student achievement. The authors suggest that although the evidence supported this claim there was limited further research to explain the relative effects of types of leadership distribution on the quality of teaching and learning.

Claim 7: A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

The research suggested that the most successful school leaders are: open-minded and ready to learn from others; flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values; persistent; resilient; and optimistic. These traits were particularly demonstrated in research of school leadership in challenging circumstances.

These seven claims illustrate useful insights into successful leadership and build upon the research reviews that had occurred prior. However, these claims also demonstrate that at the time there were known gaps in understanding of leadership effects on student learning, such as the impact of variations of distributed leadership.

Both these seven claims, and Leithwood and Riehl’s (2003) five claims, strengthen the proposition that there is clarity in the basics of school leadership for effectiveness.

2.6.5. The Effective Leadership and Pupil Outcomes project

Day et al. (2009) undertook the largest and most extensive study of contemporary leadership that had occurred in the United Kingdom at that time. The Effective Leadership and Pupil Outcomes Project
was initiated to build upon the work of Leithwood et al. (2006) described above. The literature review that led to the Seven Strong Claims informed: the design of this project; the development of the questionnaire surveys; and, the first round of case study interviews that were used (Sammons, Gu, Day, & Ko, 2011).

The new research investigated leadership in schools that were identified as having significantly raised outcomes within a three-year period (2003-2005). A longitudinal, mixed methods design was used for this three-year research project (2006-2009). This involved qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ‘increase the possibilities of identifying various patterns of association and possible causal connections’ (Sammons et al., 2011, p. 85). Twenty qualitative school case studies were conducted over two years, along with data analysis and questionnaire sampling in a larger number of primary and secondary schools that were identified as more academically effective and showing sustained improvement (Sammons et al., 2011). The study claims to be ‘the first of its kind to focus explicitly on studying leadership and pupil outcomes in a large sample of schools identified as more academically effective and improved.’ (Sammons et al., 2011, p. 97).

This extensive and complex study revealed a wealth of evidence about leadership effects on school effectiveness in a variety of contexts and also over time. A review of the six general findings of this study as reported by Day et al. (2009) are summarised briefly below:

- There were strong associations between headteachers’ educational values, qualities and strategic actions and improvement in school conditions that lead to improved pupil outcomes.
- There were similarities between effects of leadership in Primary and Secondary schools but the influence of a Senior Leadership Team was more direct in Primary schools.
- There is no single model of practice of effective leadership but it is possible to identify a common repertoire of practices which all effective headteachers possess and use.
- This common repertoire is necessary but not enough alone to ensure effectiveness. Headteachers combine strategies uniquely to respond to specific contexts and situations.
- Strategies of successful school leadership are underpinned by clear values around wellbeing and raising achievement for all pupils.
- There were significant differences in the use and intensity of strategies between schools that had different starting positions in terms of achievement levels.

These main findings were presented as 10 strong claims that were framed as ‘the sequel to Seven strong claims about successful school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006) and [they] confirm, qualify and build on those original claims’ (Day et al., 2010, p. 2).

The 10 Strong Claims are as follows:

Claim 1: Headteachers are the main source of leadership in their schools
The case study evidence demonstrated the importance of headteachers to the expectations, aspirations and wellbeing of staff and therefore the improvement of teaching and learning conditions.

Claim 2: There are eight key dimensions of successful leadership

This study builds on the four core leadership practices from the previous review (Leithwood et al., 2006). These eight key dimensions are demonstrated in a model based on circles in figure 2.3 below.

![Figure 2.3: The dimensions of successful leadership (Day et al., 2010, p. 4)](image)

This illustrates that student learning, wellbeing and achievement, and high expectations should be the core focus of leaders’ attention. The inner ring demonstrates the core strategies of leadership. Defining vision, values and direction is one of the eight key dimensions of successful leadership. The other, building trust, is argued to be intrinsic and embedded in all core strategies and essential to the actions in the outer ring.

The other seven key dimensions are in the outer ring as they are the actions that successful leaders take to support the core strategies. They are: Improving conditions for teaching and learning; Restructuring the organisation; Enhancing teaching and learning; Redesigning and enriching the curriculum; Enhancing teacher quality; Building relationships inside the school community; and Building relationships outside the school community. Earlier in this research project Day, Leithwood & Sammons (2008, p. 93) published a predecessor to this figure which they called ‘Nested Leadership’. The concept of ‘nested leadership’ is a good metaphor for the model as it shows the key purposes of
schooling being ‘nested’ in the values, culture and behaviours that are required to nurture them and see them thrive.

This model of eight key dimensions illustrates that the study supports other recent key findings that instructional leadership is essential to school effectiveness (Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009, see below). The growth from the predominantly transformational model presented by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) to this latest model involved the inclusion of instructional leadership based dimensions, such as ‘redesigning and enriching the curriculum’.

Claim 3: Headteachers’ values are key components of their success

The previous review suggested shared traits evident in successful headteachers which included: open-mindedness; flexibility; persistence in high expectations; and emotional resilience and optimism (Leithwood et al., 2006). The underpinning core values of headteachers were also noted as a commonality. This research iteration identifies these common core values as:

- a strong sense of moral responsibility and a belief in equal opportunity
- a belief that every pupil deserves the same opportunities to succeed
- respect and value for all people in and connected with the school
- passion for learning and achievement
- commitment to all pupils and staff.

Claim 4: Successful heads use the same basic leadership practices, but there is no single model for achieving success.

The evidence from this study showed that successful heads drew on elements from both instructional and transformational leadership. ‘They work intuitively and from experience, tailoring their leadership strategies to their particular school context’ (Day et al., 2010, p. 8).

Claim 5: Differences in context affect the nature, direction and pace of leadership actions.

The extensive nature of this study allowed comparison across groupings of schools, including: the socio-economic circumstances of the school; the starting level of the school in terms of effectiveness; and differences in the time headteachers had been in the role. The evidence was clear that these impacted the way that leaders implemented actions to achieve core strategies and goals.

Claim 6: Heads contribute to student learning and achievement through a combination and accumulation of strategies and actions
This study demonstrated that over time headteachers affected pupil learning and achievement ‘by a combination of leadership strategies which, taken together, address school culture and staff development, and focus on enhancing the process of teaching and learning’ (Day et al., 2010, p. 10).

Claim 7: There are three broad phases of leadership success.

This research identified an early phase, a middle phase and a later phase of leadership trajectories. The phases each having differing focuses in terms of the leadership actions that were prioritised by headteachers. The research also found that headteachers in schools with more challenging contexts placed greater attention and effort to the aspects of the early phase which included such things as a focus on the physical environment and setting standards for pupil behaviour.

Claim 8: Heads grow and secure leadership success by layering leadership strategies and actions.

The longitudinal nature of this study allowed the researchers to determine that leaders found certain strategies and actions were applicable at different times.

Claim 9: Successful heads distribute leadership progressively

A connection between increased distribution of leadership roles and improved pupil outcomes was determined and the study identified that distribution was a developing feature in all schools.

Claim 10: The successful distribution of leadership depends on the establishment of trust.

‘Building and sustaining trust and trustworthiness played a key part in the longer-term success of the case study schools.’ (Day et al., 2010, p. 17). Distribution of leadership was dependent upon factors of trust.

2.6.6. The Best Evidence Synthesis (BES)

Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) reviewed 134 studies for a New Zealand project which aimed to analyse research evidence about the links between leadership and student outcomes. One aspect of the work was to compare the impact of transformational and pedagogical (instructional) leadership. They found that the impact of pedagogical leadership was nearly four times that of transformational leadership. They further investigated the relative impact of eight dimensions of leadership. Five of these were taken from direct evidence found in the studies analysed and three from indirect evidence.

Direct Evidence Dimensions:
• Establishing goals and expectations
• Resourcing strategically
• Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
• Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
• Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment

Indirect Evidence Dimensions:

• Creating educationally powerful connections
• Engaging in constructive problem talk
• Selecting, developing, and using smart tools

(Robinson et al., 2009, p. 39)

The authors suggested their research found these to be valuable in educational leadership, with the five direct-evidence dimensions all having measured positive effects. The strongest effect size was for “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” which had an effect size twice that of any of the others.

This research also identified four Knowledge, Skill and Disposition (KSDs) areas that leaders required to effectively engage in the leadership dimensions:

• Ensure administrative decisions are informed by knowledge about effective pedagogy.
• Analyse and solve complex problems.
• Build relational trust
• Engage in open-to-learning conversations

(Robinson et al., 2009, p. 46)

These four KSDs are similar in content to some of the common traits and suggested leadership behaviours that were identified in the Seven Strong Claims (Leithwood et al., 2006) and 10 Strong Claims (Day et al., 2010) research.

2.6.7. Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning

This project was conducted over six years in the USA by Louis, Leithwood, Walhstrom and Anderson (2010). It examined educational leadership at multiple levels from classrooms to systems and uncovered detailed findings about a wide range of leadership actions and their effect on student learning. It utilised multiple methodological approaches including survey data, student achievement data, observations and interviews.
The findings were presented at the three levels of school, district and state. This review is only concerned with school level findings. The school level findings alone are complex with six areas presenting 33 individual key findings. What follows is a summary of these:

Collective Leadership – shared influence is important to student achievement, with collective leadership being demonstrated to have a stronger influence than individual leadership. This included influence being shared with teachers, parents and students.

Shared Leadership – working relationships between principals and teachers influenced student achievement. Shared leadership, in relation to the development of strong professional communities, improved the working relationships, climate and instructional practice of teachers.

Distributed Leadership – No single pattern of distributed leadership was found to be linked to student learning and the ways that leadership is distributed in a school should depend on the goal and the context.

Leadership Practices – The research used the core leadership practice dimensions of: Setting Directions; Understanding and Developing People; Redesigning the Organisation; and Managing the Teaching and Learning Programme that were developed by Leithwood et al. (2006). Further, in this study the researchers found that of the 15 practices outlined in those four dimensions, the following three specific leadership practices were the most instructionally helpful: Focusing on the schools’ goals and expectations for student achievement; Keeping track of teachers’ professional development needs; and Creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate.

Instructional Leadership – There are two complementary types of actions that principals take to promote effective instruction: Instructional Climate development; and Instructional Actions. Instructional Climate involves a culture of continual professional learning and valuing research-based strategies. Instructional Actions include observations of, and conversations with teachers.

Context Variables – These findings demonstrated that the context of the school impacts on teachers experiences of leadership and the positivity of their perceptions of their schools. Poverty, diversity, school size, type and location were all found to influence teachers’ experiences of leadership on measures of shared values and norms, instructional leadership and collective responsibility for learning.

These findings are an interesting addition to the research for a few notable reasons. Firstly, they re-affirm the model of basic practices developed by Leithwood et al. (2006) around the categories of
Setting Directions, Understanding and Developing People, Redesigning the Organization and Managing the Teaching and Learning Programme. They also support evidence of the move away from individual leaders to the concept of leadership as a shared construct. Finally, this study supports the notions of clarity and complexity that are arising from the broad body of research. The same clear message of basic successful school leadership practices presented in this study, in the framework of Setting Directions, Developing People, Redesigning the Organisation and Managing the Instructional Programme, is once again validated. However, complexity in relation to contextual influence is evident, as it has been in other research projects reviewed. This project specifically reviewed some contextual factors and indicated that they influenced aspects of leadership.

2.6.8. The Four Paths Framework

Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010b, p. 672) turned their attention to ‘how’ leaders contribute to student success by searching for the ‘most powerful mediators of leadership influence on students’. Working from the assumptions that leadership is the exercise of influence and that the influence on students is indirect, the authors developed a conceptualisation of this influence as flowing through four distinct paths: Rational, Emotional, Organizational and Family. Their framework was conceptualisation into a model by Leithwood, Sun and Pollock (2017) and is illustrated in Figure 2.4.

![Four paths of leadership influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 3)](image-url)

Figure 2.4: Four paths of leadership influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 3)
Each path was populated with associated variables that may be influenced by leadership as described in the following sections taken from the exploration of the four paths framework in Leithwood et al. (2017).

The Rational Path: includes classroom and school-level variables which ‘are central to the “technical-core” of schooling – the knowledge and skills of school staffs about curriculum, teaching and learning’ (Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 45). The three most powerful variables identified as associated with the Rational Path are:

- Classroom instruction
- Academic emphasis
- Disciplinary climate

The Emotional Path: includes ‘feelings, dispositions, or affective states of teachers, both individually and collectively, about school related matters’ (Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 131). Variables included are:

- Collective teacher efficacy
- Teacher trust in colleagues, parents and students
- Organisational citizenship behaviour (commitment and dedication)

The Organisational Path: includes ‘features of schools that structure the relationships and interactions among organisational members’ (Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 204). Variables included are:

- Safe and orderly environment
- Organisation of planning and instruction time
- Collaborative cultures and structures

The Family Path: includes ‘aspects of families and family/school relationships that can be influenced by leaders and that have important consequences for student success at school’ (Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 306). Variables focused on for this path are those that research has shown are ‘alterable’ through interaction with schooling:

- Parent expectations
- Forms of communication in the home
- Parents social and intellectual capital related to schooling

The four paths framework advances the school leadership literature through a concise presentation of the aspects of schooling through which leaders can have the most influence.

As Figure 2.4 and the descriptions above demonstrate, the four paths of influence describe how leadership practices can have effect on students in schools. This framework is based on specific
enactments of core leadership practices as have been discussed throughout this review. Leithwood et al. (2017) reflected on the strength of research of core practices and on the integration of theories of leadership and suggest:

The past 20 years of educational leadership research has identified an increasingly common set of core practices, often in the context of exploring the effects on schools, teachers and students of at least partly distinct models or approaches to leadership. By now, the bodies of evidence resulting from this research are large enough to attract significant systematic syntheses...The different accounts of successful leadership exemplified by such models almost always include overlapping categories of practices.

These authors noted that the consistency in core practices had led to their use in the creation of leadership standards and frameworks for systematic approaches to school leadership in many countries. Leithwood et al. (2017) accepted a version of core leadership practices that had resulted from a systematic review of such frameworks. Hitt and Tucker (2016) reviewed three substantial frameworks: the Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood, 2012); the Learning-centred Leadership framework (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006); and the Essential Supports for School Improvement framework (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006). In combination, these three frameworks had undertaken 323 reviews of empirical studies spanning 41 years. Hitt and Tucker (2016) found congruence between the three frameworks and developed a unified model of effective leader practices. The five domains of practices drawn from this systematic review are shown in Table 2.3. Table 2.3 also displays the core practices framework from the ISSPP (Leithwood & Day, 2007b). The connections shown demonstrate the close correspondence between these two iterations of classifications of effective leadership practices.

Table 2.3: Correspondence of Unified model and Core leadership practice model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unified model of effective leader practices (Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016)</th>
<th>Core leadership practice areas (Leithwood &amp; Day, 2007b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing and conveying the mission and vision</td>
<td>Building vision and establishing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students</td>
<td>Managing the teaching and learning program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building professional capacity</td>
<td>Understanding and developing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a supportive learning environment</td>
<td>Redesigning the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with external partners</td>
<td>Coalition building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correspondence between these two frameworks demonstrates that the Leithwood and Day (2007b) core practices have been well researched and verified through re-conceptualisations that maintain the essence of the original model. This demonstrates further that these key areas of leadership should be central to consideration of success and effectiveness.
2.6.9. Significant research projects summary

This review of eight significant research programs spanning from the late 1990’s to 2017 has provided a summary of the research evidence that has contributed to theoretical leadership models. This section of the review also contextualised the ISSPP within school leadership research history and provided background and justification for this study within the broader educational leadership knowledge base.

These projects have added strength to the contention that there are core behaviours and characteristics of effective school leaders that transcend context. However, the enactment of these need to be undertaken within the complexity of the individual context of each school. Leaders need to understand that to successfully translate effective leadership practice through to successful experiences for students, mediation through organisational and relational aspects of the school is necessary.

Having explored and demonstrated the importance of leadership practice and influence, this review now turns to deeper consideration of research literature and theoretical conceptions of context. The purpose of this focus is to provide a further research background through which to consider the contexts of the case study schools and how the leadership has interacted within the contextual circumstances.

2.7. School context research

As demonstrated there is vast research resulting in persuasive findings that school leadership has impact on school performance and success. These findings also suggest that there are core leadership practices that have been identified as important for successful leadership but that need to be enacted in ways that are highly responsive to context (Hallinger, 2016; Leithwood & Day, 2008).

Scholars have suggested that attention to contextual variables is required for any further development and understanding of successful school leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; ten Bruggencate et al., 2012). Clarke and O'Donoghue (2017, p. 2) explain, while academics working in a variety of areas have paid significant attention to the importance of being sensitive to context when engaging in education research, policy and practice, this is not largely the situation, with some notable exceptions, in the case of those focusing on leadership of educational organisations, and especially schools.
Gronn and Ribbins (1996, p. 454) also argued that context must be considered in educational leadership in ways that provide evidence on how contextual circumstances ‘constrain leadership and give it its meaning. Context is the vehicle through which the agency of particular leaders may be empirically understood’. They suggest that a deeper understanding of context in principal leadership can help policy makers and system leaders avoid the ‘homogenisation of the role’ (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996, p. 459).

Mulford (2008, p. 4) in a comprehensive review of leadership and schools argued that broad contextual challenges including technological change, increasing diversity and globalisation were ‘causing educational organisations and systems around the world to broaden and personalise curricula and rethink school structures...yet this activity is proceeding in the absence of an ongoing conversation that joins together this context, its implications for organisation of schools and the implications of both for school leaders’. The importance of such contextual influences to effective school leadership is further supported by Caldwell and Loader (2010, p. 5).

It is critical for school leaders to understand the context within which schools function. While the context is not something that can be changed, it does provide the drivers for change that need to be understood and used in creating the schools of the future.

2.7.1. Context research models

A review and analysis of leadership literature with a lens of context was presented by Hallinger (2016). The analysis explored several dimensions of school context using a model that is a redefinition and expansion of an earlier model by Bossert et al. (1982).

Institutional - refers to the influences of the ‘education system’ including the state, regional, government or catholic aspects that comprise that system. Hallinger’s (2016) review suggests that these institutional aspects have received increasing attention over recent years. A cross-national comparative study by Lee and Hallinger (2012) found that institutional structures have an impact on the role definition and behaviour of principals.

Community - There are several aspects of community influences that have been considered by research including; socio-economic status; levels of parental support; location of urban compared to rural (see for example: Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Hallinger & Lui, 2016; Starr, 2016); and communities where there are challenging circumstances (Henchey, 2001; Leithwood & Steinbach, 2003; Lloyd-Nesling, 2006; Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007). Research has shown that often differences in
community context impacts physical, financial and human resource availability and this in turn impacts on organisational climate and leadership (Othman & Muijs, 2013; Starr & White, 2008).

**National cultural** - Hallinger (2016) reported that the consideration of the national cultural context has become a more common contextual consideration since the mid-1990’s as globalisation has had increased influence on education. Clarke and O’Donoghue (2017) noted the increased cross-national comparisons that have arisen in school leadership research since the first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000 have enhanced attention to country based contextual differences, whilst still trying to identify common successful practices. Hallinger (2016, p. 7) concluded that the national socio-cultural contexts require school leaders to adapt ‘in ways that are consistent with the prevailing values and norms’.

**Economic** - Hallinger (2016) reviewed research on the influence of economic circumstances on school leadership at a macro country level through discussion of comparative research of economically developed versus developing societies. Lee and Hallinger (2012) suggested that the higher the national level of economic development the more overall time spent on principal work and a greater percentage of that time is allocated to instructional leadership.

**Political** – ‘The national goals of education determine which outcomes of schooling are considered of highest priority. These are typically defined by the political authorities within a given society’ (Hallinger, 2016, p. 10). Therefore, it is necessary that the political context will shape the practice of school leadership.

**School improvement** – unlike the above aspects which are external contextual influences, this area reviewed by Hallinger (2016, p. 11) considers the internal historical context of the school. The research reviewed (Day, 2005; Gray, Goldstein, & Thomas, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2011) found that improvement trajectories can be broadly characterised in four different ways.

- Effective: evidenced by stability of student success over time
- Improving: evidenced by significant improvement in student learning over time
- Coasting: evidenced by moderate student performance levels with little improvement or decline over time
- Ineffective: evidenced by poor and/or declining performance in student learning over time

Hallinger (2016, p. 11) concluded that ‘in concert with other contextual features, a school’s improvement trajectory defines the nature of the principals’ leadership challenge’.
School contexts have also been conceptualised by Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins (2011, p. 588) into a framework of four dimensions of:

- Situated contexts: includes location, histories, enrolments and settings
- Material contexts: includes staffing, budgets, buildings, grounds, infrastructure and technology
- Professional contexts: includes values, teacher commitments and experiences and policies
- External contexts: includes local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy makers.

These dimensions were used in work by Clarke and O’Donoghue (2016) to frame discussion of how school leaders respond to contextual demands. Their investigation led them to make five key and interconnected assumptions about school leadership that accommodated diverse contexts:

- Leaders acknowledge the complexity of context
- Leaders are sensitive to their own contexts
- Leaders employ flexible strategies
- Leadership learning enables school leaders to be flexible in their strategies
- Contextualisation of research in the field of educational leadership is important.

2.7.2. Context research summary

The focus of school leadership research has become more concerned with context. Calls for investigation of what is generically known about successful leadership to be considered in specific contexts are clear. Classification of contextual aspects provide a framework for consideration of different factors (Braun et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2016) and reflection on leadership in these circumstances (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2016). As also discussed in this section, many scholars are increasingly highlighting the need for consideration of broad contextual challenges and how these might be addressed more specifically by policy makers and school leaders (Caldwell & Loader, 2010; Mulford, 2008).

This review will now consider the literature on different school improvement trajectories. The following section will reflect a recognition of the described broad social and educational contextual challenges facing schools and consider options for leading improvement that responds to these, including innovative leadership approaches.

2.8. School Improvement

As has been demonstrated so far in this review, there is a valid body of knowledge about effective schools and successful school leadership. The ISSPP has contributed broadly to the evidence of what
Chapter 2: Literature Review

successful school principalship entails with a focus on recognised successful leadership examples in prior phases. The new phase that this study contributes to, calls for a focus on leaders in schools that are, or need, improving. The case studies of this research are examples of improvement trajectories that embraced innovative approaches resulting in the transformation of their schools. This section of the review will consider research literature relevant to understanding the leadership of such improvement.

2.8.1. Improvement and Turnaround

Researchers have acknowledged the importance of focusing not only on what successful leadership in effective schools looks like but also on how leaders can work to improve less effective schools. Barth (1986, p. 294) stated ‘We know far more about the features that characterize an effective school than we know about how a school became effective in the first place’.

A similar contention was suggested from a major review of school effectiveness research which found that studies have rarely focused on topics of school ineffectiveness (Reynolds et al., 2014). ‘There is a great need for case studies and pro-active change studies of efforts to improve chronically low-performing schools’ (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 220). Luyten, Visscher, and Witziers (2005, p. 267) also called for research to ‘pay more attention to clearly ineffective schools as a starting point for expanding the school improvement knowledge base’.

Although research investigating underperforming schools and school leaders is not as prolific as that which has investigated successful school leadership, there is a significant body of work that has examined schools that are identified as “turnaround” schools (see for example: de la Torre, Allensworth, Jagesic, Sebastian, Salmonowicz, Meyers, & Gerdeman, 2013; Duke, Tucker, Belcher, Crews, Harrison-Colman, Higgins, Lanphear, Marshall, Scott, Taylor, Thomas, & West, 2005; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Meyers & Murphy, 2007). ‘Turnaround’ schools have been significantly underperforming and so purposefully (either by choice or by direction from governing bodies) implement changes which result in increased measures of success.

Murphy and Meyers (2008, p. 321) concluded from their synthesis of evidence of successful turnaround processes,

Successful turnaround schools almost always have good, if not exceptional, principals. As a common strand across successful school turnarounds, leadership is crucial. The principal typically sets the turnaround agenda, involving the community, and building general capacity.
Research in this area has shown that leadership for “turning around” a troubled school entails significant affective effort and symbolic leadership (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). Leithwood et al. (2010a) advised that leadership for school turnaround requires a focus on the core practice areas previously identified. They found that leaders who successfully improve failing schools identify and implement the practices with the greatest potential for improving student learning within the context of their schools.

2.8.2. Innovative leadership for improvement

There are many who call for school improvement to be more than what is commonly described by the school effectiveness and success body of literature. This perspective is based on concerns about the suitability of the current prevalent structures of schools and methods for provision of education. Authors, researchers and practitioners have contributed to debate about the future of schooling in Australia and internationally (see for example: Beare, 2006; Caldwell, 2014a; Caldwell & Loader, 2010; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013; Chen, 2010; Gardner, 2008; Hattie, 2015; Mulford, 2008; Zhao, 2006, 2012). Senge (1990) persuasively wrote about the failings of the prevailing system of education in the United States of America. His work continues to be relevant to discussion of systematic issues in developed education systems, especially in countries such as Australia, where policy initiatives and system structures have often replicated US initiatives. In a recent revision of his work he argues,

The pressure – on students, teachers and schools – has only intensified. It is exacerbated, of course by years of mandated performance increases on standardised tests... and federal programs that focus on the symptoms of poor school performance without addressing – or even considering - the underlying causes. Indeed, few school leaders anywhere seem to recognise what they can do to address the deeper causes of their school’s problems... The situation leaves over-pressured students with two basic alternatives: cope or disengage. More and more of them disengage. The system then tracks them into classes for underachievers where they no longer will be challenged. Others try to cope, trapped in the conflict between competing against their peers (and pleasing their parents and teachers) versus being true to their own well-being. The end result is a lack of motivation and engagement, waste of their potential, and a diminishing of the contribution that they could make to society. (Senge, 2012, p. 33)

Disengagement has been identified in Australia as a growing concern for schooling provision. Research programs have investigated the prevalence of disengagement and include estimates that up to 40 per cent of students are disengaged from learning in classrooms (Angus, McDonald, Ormond, Rybarcyk, Taylor, & Winterton, 2009; Goss & Sonnerman, 2017). More serious disengagement from schools has been difficult to quantify but estimates are that around seven per cent of young people aged between 12 and 18 do not attend standard schooling in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Ellum & Longmuir, 2013; Hancock & Zubrick, 2015).
Caldwell and Loader (2010) remind us of the importance of having a relevant and futures focused orientation for students in our schools. Students who started school in 2010 will likely be contributing to the workforce until 2072 and ‘they will experience what may well be the most profound changes in society that have ever been encountered by humankind’ (Caldwell & Loader, 2010, p. 6). They describe a futures focused school as ‘not one set in another time – the future. Rather it is a school parked solidly in the present, but with an attitude and a commitment to engage with the future in order to discover alternatives as a context for making choices today’ (Caldwell & Loader, 2010, p. 19).

These interlinked challenges of disengagement and considering the future needs of students drive a call for leaders to consider how their schools are addressing these concerns. The suggestion that a focus on innovative leadership is a solution to these concerns is a common one.

Innovation can cut through the inertia that envelops many school systems by mobilising three key ingredients: the rising of hopes and expectations of... parents and students; mounting frustrations with the shortcomings of traditional models of education; and a commitment to develop new and more effective solutions. When these three – hope, frustration and experimentation – come together in the right way they can produce radical innovation that delivers much better outcomes for families. (Leadbeater, 2012, p. 25)

Innovative school leadership insight has often been taken from research in the business field. A seminal project from that sector was an eight-year investigation into the leadership of companies identified as exceptionally innovative (Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2011). This work identified five ‘discovery skills’ of innovators:

· Associating – capacity to associate ideas, problems and perspectives that were not previously connected in order to solve problems or create something entirely new
· Questioning – constant questioning and inquiry was found to be trait of the most innovative leaders
· Observing – innovators recognised that observation is essential to learning and therefore gaining insight into new possibilities
· Networking – connecting with others diversifies perspectives and enhances future opportunities and possibilities
· Experimenting – willingness to try out new ideas or methods despite the risk of failure and seeing failure as a learning opportunity.

In the education sector, work by Sharratt and Harild (2015) researched the introduction of new school programs and strategies across four countries. They found that leadership matters significantly in moving schools from traditional to innovative. They contended that school leaders need the following skills, attitudes and actions:

· Knowing the ‘faces’ and how to teach and inspire them
· Understand student learning skills, growth and achievement data
· Have strong interpersonal skills and an outward-facing interpersonal style
Develop strong community contacts with others that help leaders share and question
Act on well-informed experiential needs of changing economic and employment conditions for the future
Inspire, support and be responsible to and accountable for the learning outcomes and the new learning opportunities that are collaboratively created

(Sharratt, Harild, & Coutts, 2015, p. 21)

Tonkin (2016, p. 213) identified five perspectives of leadership for innovative and successful schools from her case studies of innovative school principals.

1) Growth perspective, which included behaviours such as:
   - Critical and reflective thinking
   - Seeking out new opportunities and daring to be different
   - Inquiry and seeking deep knowledge
   - Scanning the environment
   - Sharing knowledge

2) Collaborative perspective, which included behaviours such as:
   - Skilful communication
   - Development of shared vision
   - Leadership of collaborative structures
   - Use of technology to connect and influence
   - Forming deep connections with individuals, groups and communities

3) Business perspective, which included behaviours such as:
   - Competing to advantage the school
   - Using data to monitor improvement
   - Promoting the school in aspirational ways
   - Developing a school identity
   - Improving and maintaining the physical environment

4) Change activist perspective, which included behaviours such as:
   - Implementation of calculated risk
   - Management of pace of change
   - Embracing failure as learning
   - Being persistent and persuasive
   - Bending or breaking rules to achieve the vision

5) Moral purpose perspective, which included behaviours such as:
   - Holding student centred values and seeking out student voice
   - Articulating clear philosophical voice
   - Demonstration of strong belief in others
   - Being optimistic and passionate
   - Valuing diversity
These five interrelated perspectives and associated behaviours are a conceptualisation of leadership activities that have been shown to support innovative and successful schools. This shows that innovative school leaders extend from core leadership practices with perspectives and behaviours that help them find new solutions to challenges.

### 2.8.3. School improvement summary

Understanding schools that are improving is an area of research that provides insight into how leadership can support a journey to success. There is a recognition that a research focus on improving schools is an avenue that will further expand the school leadership knowledge base. Research in successful ‘turn-around’ schools has demonstrated that leadership is crucial and should be enacted with attention to school conditions.

The limitations of standard approaches to school improvement has been a growing concern in educational leadership literature. School leadership that is innovative is being shown to include practices and attitudes that extend on core practices. Innovative leaders are conscious of current and possible future contextual factors and respond to challenges in novel ways anchored by strong values and beliefs.

### 2.9. Conclusions from Review of Literature

An apparent trend from the literature is that there are practices, traits and dispositions, and values and beliefs that successful school leaders demonstrate consistently to maximise the effect of the predominantly indirect impacts that they have on student outcomes. For example, the set of core leadership practices identified originally by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) which have been supported and extended through a variety of further research (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2009; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2017; Louis et al., 2010; May et al., 2012; ten Bruggencate et al., 2012). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggested as they first developed this set of practices that they seemed to be necessary for school success but not enough alone to ensure it. A contention which recognised that the interrelationships between school context, individual leadership characteristics, and variations possible in the implementation of practices, all impact on effectiveness and school success.

Understanding how these demonstrated impactful behaviours, attributes and actions are implemented in practical ways by school leaders in a variety of contexts is an area that requires further
research. Hallinger and Heck (2011, p. 2) suggested that reaching a goal of leadership that results in the greatest improvements for students ‘requires a contextualisation of the research findings that goes beyond the limits of the current literature in school improvement’.

This study was aligned with the ISSPP research. The ISSPP to date has investigated a comprehensive range of leadership practices, moderators, traits, dispositions, beliefs and values that are common to successful principals in a broad range of international contexts. Findings of the ISSPP have been effectively conceptualised in a Model of Successful School Leadership (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; 2017 see above). In answering the research questions of this study, a consideration of the extent to which findings, such as those represented in this model are evident, or not, in the school contexts that were investigated helps connect this study to the broader research literature.

The literature review has demonstrated that understanding contextually sensitive successful leadership that has overseen transformative improvement is an area of contemporary interest and potential influence for educational leadership research and practice. This research makes these important contributions to understanding leadership practice in specific contexts. Further, it attends to how the relationship between leadership and context in these schools supported the innovative re-establishment that has characterised their improvement journeys.
CHAPTER 3:   METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach that was employed for this study. The use of case studies, and the associated data collection and analysis methods that were used to investigate the research questions are justified.

Multi-perspective interviews, triangulated with secondary data from observations and supporting documentation were employed to develop two school case studies. The two research questions were then investigated by analysis, comparison and interpretation of the case studies.

3.2. Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What are the practices and characteristics of principals in high-advantage, improving schools?
2. How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in high-advantage schools?

These two questions address a deficit in the current knowledge of school leadership and school improvement, as was demonstrated in Chapter Two. Investigating principal leadership in these specific contexts of advantage and improvement adds to the broader research by verifying and extending on knowledge of successful leadership practices and characteristics.

3.3. Qualitative methodological approach

The following sections outline the underlying assumptions, philosophies and prior studies that influenced the methodological approach chosen for this investigation of leadership in improving school contexts.

3.3.1. Qualitative Research

The research purpose and specific questions of this study were best investigated from naturalistic, interpretive and inductive perspectives that are central themes of qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009;
Patton, 2002). A naturalistic perspective refers to ‘the investigation of phenomena within and in relation to their naturally occurring contexts’ (Willems & Raush, 1969, p. 2). This research studied real-world situations as they unfolded naturally to understand and describe ‘how people interpret their experience, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences’ (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

Qualitative studies rely strongly on interpretive actions of researchers as the investigation is not tightly controlled by defined variables. This makes the researcher the key ‘instrument’ in a qualitative investigation.

Since understanding is the goal of this research the human instrument, which is able to be immediately interpretive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analysing data (Merriam, 2009, p. 15).

The axioms of the naturalistic paradigm presented below are adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 37). They illustrate the ontological and epistemological assumptions accepted for this study.

- Realities are multiple, constructed and holistic
- Knower and known are interactive and inseparable
- Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible
- All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish cause from effects
- Inquiry is value-bound.

Acceptance of these assumptions impacted the methodology of data collection and data analysis. The aim was an inquiry to develop rich, descriptive data that illustrates and illuminates the complexities of a bound phenomenon.

### 3.3.2. Qualitative Research and Leadership Studies

Qualitative research methodologies are often used to illuminate the intricacies of the phenomenon of leadership. Bryman (2004) reviewed 70 leadership studies to investigate qualitative research methods. He found that qualitative studies of leadership generated an appreciation of the significance of context.

[They] excel in giving the reader a profound sense of the realities of leadership: the frustrations they face as leaders, the forms of leader behaviour they engage in, and their feelings about their successes and failures. These realities are given an immediacy because they are frequently, if not invariably, presented in leaders’ own words and sometimes in the words of their followers. (Bryman, 2004, p. 763)

This illustrates the benefits of a qualitative approach for this investigation of school leadership in improving schools. The qualitative methods enabled rich descriptions of the perceptions, lived
experiences and interpretations of key informants. Undertaking research that aims for such outcomes requires consideration of the research orientation that is best to employ and the resulting methodological implications.

### 3.3.3. Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The orientation employed for this research is best categorised as hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with how individuals understand their realities and how they interpret their experiences from the position of their immediate situations and their histories (Gadamer, 2004, 2006). ‘Hermeneutic research is interpretive and concentrated on historical meanings of experience and their development and cumulative effects on individual and social levels’ (Laverty, 2003, p. 27). It is the combination of ‘phenomenology’ which is primarily interested in questions of meaning, structure and essence of lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (Patton, 2002, p. 132) and ‘hermeneutics’ which is primarily interested in questions of the ‘conditions under which a human act took place or a product was produced that makes it possible to interpret its meanings’ (Patton, 2002, p. 133).

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach seeks to understand data and ascribe meaning. It does not presuppose a meaning to data collected. With the importance of the researcher as an instrument of interpretation (Merriam, 2009) this orientation requires observation, interpretation and understanding of the experiences of the participants and a ‘willingness to put aside many presumptions while learning’ (Stake, 1995, p. 1). That is the data is not constrained by a presupposed theoretical framework, but rather themes and theories emerge and are tested through careful and thoughtful analysis of the data.

This approach is particularly appropriate for this investigation where the focus is on the lived experiences of the participants within their specific contexts. Their interpretations of the phenomenon of school leadership were critical to inform the research questions. The analysis of the variety of perceptions of their situations enabled each case to be explored fully, richly described and then compared.

The methodological implications were that the techniques and instruments used for this study allowed participants to consider and describe their experiences regarding their individual situations and their histories within the phenomenon investigated. Therefore the primary method of data collection was invitational, semi-structured interviews. This method was well suited as it provided opportunity for
considered responses and for further exploration of the participants’ interpretations of their situated realities.

### 3.3.4. ISSPP Methodological approach

The methodological approach used for this study was consistent with that of the ISSPP and adapted the protocols developed by the research group. The ISSPP research approach was modelled on the study of Day et al. (2000). Their study was designed specifically to capture multiple perspectives of leadership within a school through individual and group interviews with a variety of stakeholders (teachers, parents, school councillors and students). This significant project recognised that, at the time, there had been few previous studies that had attempted to collect and compare the broader perspectives of ‘those who, arguably possess the closest working knowledge of leadership’ (Day et al., 2001, p. 39).

### 3.4. Case Study Approach

A case study approach is consistent with the methodological orientation identified and the prior ISSPP studies. Merriam (2009, p. 43) defined a case study as ‘an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system’. Case studies involve examining a phenomenon ‘by identifying it, then observing and documenting a ‘typical’ or ‘exemplary’ instance of it’ (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010, p. 55). Through a case study, the researcher not only considers the perspectives and knowledge of the participants but also the interactions that occur between participants within the case (Feagin et al., 1991).

Yin (2009) suggested that a case study approach should be used when the researcher is interested in the contextual conditions. For this research, the leadership characteristics and practices were deeply embedded in the context of the school and the community. The case study approach was best suited for this study where strong and detailed data was required to enable examination and consideration of contextual factors, moderators and antecedent factors that influenced leadership.

#### 3.4.1. Multiple Case Studies

This research is a multiple case study investigation consisting of two individual case studies of principals at two different school sites. Each case study illuminates the characteristics and practices of the principal at each school and allowed the research to be enriched by analysis across the cases.
The cross-case comparisons provided a deeper understanding of what was unique and what was common in the findings from each of the individual cases. Bryman (2004, p. 750) described the benefits of multiple case studies suggesting they ‘offer the prospect of producing results that are less likely to be deemed to be idiosyncratic. Further, the process of comparison enhances the researcher’s capacity for drawing theoretical inferences’.

3.4.2. Research site selection criteria

The two schools were selected using purposeful sampling guided by criteria that have been common in prior ISSPP research, as well as criteria that have been developed for this phase of the ISSPP.

The basic criteria for school selection included:

- Length of principal tenure being more than 3 years
- School category: Secondary School (12 to 18-year-old students)
- School advantage
- Student performance

3.4.2.1. School advantage

School advantage refers to the socio-economic background of the students in each school. Socio-economic factors influence student success in schools (Black, 2007; McLachlan, Gilfillan, & Gordon, 2013). Therefore, schools with large populations of students from high socio-economic backgrounds are considered to have a greater advantage in terms of the likelihood of high achievement of their students. The opposite can be said for schools with large populations of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

In Australia, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is used to categorise school advantage.

The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable fair comparisons of National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia. A value on the index corresponds to the average level of educational advantage of the school’s student population relative to those of other schools. Research shows that key factors in students’ family backgrounds (parents’ occupation, their school education and non-school education) have an influence on students’ educational outcomes at school. Research has also shown that school level factors (a school’s geographical location and the proportion of indigenous students a school caters for) need to be considered when summarising educational advantage or disadvantage at the school level. ICSEA provides a numeric scale that represents the magnitude of this influence, or level of educational advantage, and takes into account both student and school level factors. My school visitors can use the
ICSEA value to understand the levels of advantage or disadvantage that students bring to their schooling based on these factors. (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015)

ICSEA has a mean rating of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100. For this research, high-advantage schools were considered to have an ICSEA rating of between 1050 and 1200. There are no Victorian Government secondary schools that have an ICSEA above 1160. To further verify the pre-requisite levels of advantage, the Student Family Occupation (SFO) index was used with the schools classified as having a high rating, as reported in their Annual Report to the School Community. The SFO index is calculated for all Victorian Government schools based on parental occupations as reported by families on school enrolment forms.

3.4.2.2. Student performance

For this study, year nine results in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results over the years 2008 to 2013 (as reported on www.myschool.edu.au) were used to determine performance levels. NAPLAN testing is overseen by ACARA. The testing is undertaken in May each year at all Australian schools by students in years three, five, seven and nine. Year nine results were chosen to inform selection for this study as they are the most likely to represent the influence of a secondary school on the student achievement results.

ACARA also reports NAPLAN results for schools in comparison with ‘similar school’ groupings. Similar schools are those which fall into the same ICSEA range, indicating that students have similar levels of educational advantage due to their socio-economic backgrounds. The two schools selected for this study had results that were regularly below those of schools from their similar school grouping.

3.4.2.3. School selection

Based on these criteria, there were three schools considered for participation in this study. After further discussions with each school to determine interest in participating in the study, Tilverton College and Fairview High School were selected as the two case studies for this research. Selection of these two schools was based on the willingness of the principals to participate. The third school that was approached declined to be involved in this study. Detailed information about how each of the two case study schools and principals met the sampling criteria, including school advantage levels and student performance results, are included in Chapters Four and Five.
3.5. Methods of Data Collection

There are several different types of data which can be collected as part of a case study approach. Yin (2009) identified documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artefacts as the main types of data that inform case studies. The use of multiple data sources is a key feature of a case study approach and enhances the credibility of the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009).

For this study, data was obtained through interviews, observations and document review. These multiple sources allowed for verification and triangulation of the findings obtained. Stake (2005, p. 54) describes triangulation as ‘a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation... triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen’.

3.5.1. Interviews

This study collected primary data from multi-perspective interviews. In the significant precedent research that informed the methodology of the ISSPP, Day et al. (2000, p. 32) explain the use of interviews as the primary method of data collection:

> Given the project’s commitment to collecting new empirical data from a multiplicity of perspectives from within the school organisations, and in so doing seeking to capture the ‘authentic voices’ of headteachers and other stakeholders, it was inevitable that the field research would centre around some form of interviewing.

Interviews inform research through direct and authentic investigation into participants’ knowledge, experiences, perceptions and opinions. They provided insight to inform the cases that the researcher could not otherwise have discovered from methods such as observation and document analysis. Interviews expand the scope of data collection beyond just what the researcher can observe at the case site (Stake, 2005). Interview subjects provided data from broad experiences across significant periods of time.

The semi-structured interview protocol of the ISSPP was designed to illicit rich qualitative information and allow for variations in responses and opinions from the participants within a standard framework. ‘A semi-structured interview gives the opportunity for the unexpected insight to be collected, and for the interviewer to seek clarification, invite expansion or explore a response further’ (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010, p. 132). This flexibility to investigate topics through a semi-structured approach enabled the collection of valuable data to inform the research questions. Interview questions focused
on the history and circumstances of the school, the success of the school, the work and leadership of the Principal, and the work and leadership of others. For this study, interview protocols were adapted from the ISSPP interview guides. (see Appendix 1 for outlines of interview protocols)

The interviewees participated in semi-structured, individual or group interviews of between 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in person, on site at the schools, either in the office of the Principal or a secure, private meeting space. Prior to the commencement of interviews of the Principals, teachers and parents, informed consent forms were provided and discussed as required. Consent forms were provided to student participants several days prior to interviews to enable informed consent to be granted by their legal guardians if they were under the age of 18.

All interviews were conversational and participants responded as they felt comfortable. On occasion, the researcher paraphrased or summarised an answer for clarity or to elicit further comment. In group interviews, participants generally contributed randomly as they felt they had something to add. For two of the four student groups, the interviewer invited responses from specific students who had not had an opportunity to contribute due to the group dynamic. Group interviews were well suited to students and parents as they were likely to be more comfortable in the presence of peers and were able to support or develop each other’s responses. Some possible disadvantages in group interviewing come from ‘asking people to cross boundaries which they do not normally do in the contexts in which they usually meet’ (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 43). Possible discomforts of being in an unfamiliar group and discussing topics that may be unusual were mitigated by ensuring that all participants had been introduced and had some time prior to the start of the interview for brief familiarisation conversations. The researcher ensured that each participant’s background and perspective were appreciated and their responses were respectfully received.

All interviews were recorded and saved in digital audio format. The audio files were transcribed and in the case of the individual interviews, the transcripts were sent to each participant for review. This provided opportunity for participants to revise their responses if they felt clarification was necessary. Only two participants availed themselves of this opportunity. The adjustments they made were minimal and did not impact data analysis or emerging themes. Transcripts of the group interviews of parents and students did not identify individual contributions, therefore opportunity to review the transcripts was not necessary.
The transcripts were imported into the qualitative data analysis software program NVivo where they were coded, classified and arranged through cycles of analysis that contributed to the themes reported for each of the case studies (see below for further detail about this data analysis).

### 3.5.2. Observation

Observations totalling 24 hours were undertaken at each of the research schools. The activities observed varied somewhat at each school due to scheduling and suitability of researcher attendance. There were some common events observed at both schools including: school tours; leadership team meetings; school assemblies; and school council meetings. A day of extended observation of the Principal’s work was undertaken at both schools. Table 3.1 outlines the observations undertaken at each case site.

Table 3.1: Research Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Tilverton hours</th>
<th>Fairview hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School tour</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leadership meetings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School council meeting</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal day observation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff meetings</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During and after the observational activities, notes were recorded by hand in a research journal. These notes included descriptive and reflective information. These observational notes were transferred to digital documents which were imported into the data analysis software for coding and classification.

### 3.5.3. Documents

In addition to the interviews and observations, documentary data was collected from a variety of sources to provide contextual and historical information to support this study. This was secondary data as it was not developed specifically for this study but for a variety of external purposes. Sources of the documents included the schools, the Department of Education and Training (DET), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), ACARA, and media sources (newspapers, radio and television...
stations and online outlets). Documents reviewed included: school websites; school annual reports; school newsletters; school organisational documents; minutes of meetings; media articles and recordings; and, information from websites for associated organisations. These documents were not thematically analysed. They were used to contextualise, explain, support and enhance other data sources.

3.6. Access to Sites

Access to Victorian government schools requires approval from the DET. This was sought and granted for this study and subsequently application was made to the individual school principals for approval to conduct this research in their schools. The principals were initially contacted by an email which included a summary of the research proposed and the suitability of the school for this study. Following that, an initial meeting was held with each principal to discuss the study and begin arrangements for the logistics of participation.

After this initial contact with the Principal, a point of contact or gate-keeper for organisational arrangements was provided to the researcher. This person was a close colleague of the Principal in each case (an Executive Assistant at Tilverton and an Assistant Principal at Fairview). Most arrangements for interview scheduling, observational visits and provision of relevant documents were negotiated with the gate-keeper.

3.7. Participants

At each case study site, the following informants were interviewed to provide the multiple-perspectives sought for this research. At each of the schools, the categories of participants for interview were provided to the Principal who, in consultation with the gate-keeper, suggested appropriate individuals to approach for participation. These participants were contacted through the gate-keeper who also managed practical arrangements for times and locations of the interviews. Table 3.2 lists the interview participants for each of the case sites.
Table 3.2: Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tilverton College</th>
<th>Fairview High School</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Individual (x3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Teacher</td>
<td>Leading Teacher</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers x 6</td>
<td>Teachers x 6</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council president</td>
<td>School Council president</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council member</td>
<td>School Council member</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents x 3</td>
<td>Parents x 8</td>
<td>Groups (3 or 4 per group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students x 10</td>
<td>Students x 10</td>
<td>Groups (5 per group)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected for this study was undertaken through cycles of coding and review to determine the emerging and relevant themes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014, p. 10) described an approach to analysis that best explains the analysis method undertaken.

[Data analysis] moves from one inductive inference to another by selectively collecting data, comparing and contrasting this material in the quest for patterns or regularities, seeking out more data to support or qualify these emerging clusters, and then gradually drawing inferences from the links between other new data segments and the cumulative set of conceptualisations.

This process aimed to organise and present the vast information collected into a structure and order that described the cases, informed the research questions and presented the evidence in meaningful ways. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 154) explained that the complex and creative process of qualitative data analysis ‘does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat’. They also noted that there is no clear formula for producing findings and that individual researchers will interpret and categorise data in their own ways to transform them into findings. These ‘interpretations are always entwined with a researcher’s biases, prejudices, worldviews and paradigms – both recognised and unrecognised, conscious and sub-conscious’ (O’Leary, 2014, p. 307).

Data analysis for this study was undertaken with the assistance of qualitative data analysis software package NVivo. The use of computer software to assist with data analysis increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the data analysis process. Bazeley and Jackson (2013, p. 6) explained,
The efficiencies afforded by software release some of the time used to simply ‘manage’ data and allow an increased focus on ways of examining the meaning of what is recorded. The computer’s capacity for recording, sorting, matching and linking can be harnessed by researchers to assist in answering their research questions from the data, without losing access to the source data or contexts from which the data have come.

Bazeley and Jackson (2013, p. 7) outlined five ways that using NVivo for analysis of qualitative data can assist the researcher:

- to manage data: keeping track of raw data and supporting documents, including research literature
- to manage ideas: ease of organisation and access to conceptual and theoretical knowledge generated supported by connections to the data in context
- to query data: the ability to ask questions of the data with the program retrieving all relevant evidence. Queries can be stored for further interrogation and become an important part of the ongoing enquiry process.
- to visualise data: content and structure of cases, ideas, concepts can be shown along with visual representations of the relationships between these.
- to report from the data: about the information, ideas and knowledge developed from the data, including the original data sources and the processes which were used to achieve outcomes.

These authors suggested the above capabilities of the NVivo program can enhance rigour in the analysis process through management and interrogation of the data that is more comprehensive and methodical and less fallible than manual methods. It is important to note however that analytical software is a tool used by a researcher and therefore is subject to the researcher’s abilities and biases.

We reiterate that no single software package can be made to perform qualitative data analysis in and of itself. The appropriate use of software depends on appreciation of the kind of data being analysed and of the analytic purchase the researcher wants to obtain on those data. (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 166)

Use of the NVivo program enabled secure and manageable storage and access to the data as well as the efficiencies of searching, comparing and coding the data. Using a computer aided process enhanced rigor and reliability as it supported the researcher to review and consider data methodically, comprehensively and objectively.

### 3.8.1. Independent Case Studies

The first objective of data analysis was to develop the two case study chapters (see Chapter Four and Chapter Five). These case studies were designed and developed as stand-alone units of analysis within the broader study. Processes for the analysis of data to develop the two case studies were framed by the Miles and Huberman (1994) Interactive Model of Data Analysis. A revision of the earlier model was included in Miles et al. (2014) and is presented in figure 3.1 below.
As this model demonstrates, the analysis of data involves reviewing, coding and filtering of the data through various cycles with decisions made by the researcher influencing all stages. Figure 3.2 shows the processes undertaken for data analysis for this study based on the Miles and Huberman interactive model.

Figure 3.1: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model (Miles et al., 2014, p. 14)
Chapter 3: Methodology

Figure 3.2: Interactive data analysis process employed for this study

The process described in Figure 3.2 is a simplified representation of the long and complex process that transformed the raw data collected into the themes and categorised findings that are presented in the case study chapters. For each case the process of data collection, transcription and data analysis occurred over a period of approximately 15 months. During this time, deductive and inductive processes were used ‘to move from raw data to meaningful understanding’ (O’Leary, 2014, p. 304).

Miles et al. (2014) explain that deductive analysis comes from pre-conceived ideas and variables that the researcher brings to the study and inductive analysis is the emergence of ideas and themes from interaction with the data during collection and analysis. Analysis of data for this study began with a deductive phase based on broad themes that represented the research questions. The first phase of coding involved assigning data to the three categories of: Leadership characteristics; Leadership practices; and, Contextual factors. Table 3.4 shows these categories and provides examples from the
interview transcripts of initial deductive analysis based on these broad themes from the research questions.

Table 3.3: Example of deductive data categorisation based on broad research question themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad themes</th>
<th>Examples of initial data coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Characteristics</td>
<td>• seems very calm and cool&lt;br&gt;• passionately interested in students&lt;br&gt;• very open and available&lt;br&gt;• not afraid of the challenge&lt;br&gt;• really enthusiastic and motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Practices</td>
<td>• made me reflect on what I was doing&lt;br&gt;• goes out of way to be in classrooms&lt;br&gt;• important as the Principal that I can actually talk about what is happening in someone’s Physics class&lt;br&gt;• when I can have a look at individual kids and then I can go and talk to the teacher and say what is going on&lt;br&gt;• you need to get some people who can work through your philosophy with you, who understand where you are coming from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual factors</td>
<td>• it was abundantly clear that they didn’t know how to get themselves out of the situation they were in&lt;br&gt;• it was acknowledged that it wasn’t 100% sure if the school would continue to be functioning.&lt;br&gt;• it took a lot to get the school opened, there was a lot of support.&lt;br&gt;• the school has a very good relationship with the school community and with the parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the inductive data analysis continued themes and categorisations emerged from within, and beyond, each of the question based categories shown in Table 3.3. Inductive insights began during the data collection process, with thoughts and ideas beginning to form through interaction at the school sites and continued throughout all stages of engagement with the data. These were recorded in research journals, or in NVivo, depending on the stage of research. For example, during transcription of the interview recordings, the researcher made notes in a research journal which added to notes that were recorded on the interview protocols at the time of each interview.

This inductive process continued through to the very late stages of engagement with the data. The themes that were discovered through inductive logic evolved as the cycle of returning to raw data and prior categorisations to re-view and re-examine was undertaken. In many instances, ideas were tested using the software and dismissed immediately, or at a later stage. Themes were also merged or split in some instances as the researcher worked to make sense of the emerging findings and present them logically in the case study chapters.
Data analysis and data collection overlapped in the later stages of the on-site research for both the cases. This was planned as it enabled attention to be focused on specific areas of need during data collection activities. For example, in each case, the last of the three principal interviews was scheduled as one of the final data collection activities. Prior to this interview, transcripts and notes of all other interviews at the school were reviewed and follow up questions were included as necessary. As an illustration of this, the following questions were added to the protocol for the final interview with the Principal at Tilverton College:

- There was a notable alignment with, and passion for, your philosophies and vision for the school. What key things have you done/ or have happened, that have contributed to this?
- Your strong relationship with the students was clear. How did you develop this as part of your leadership identity and what impact has this had on the development of the school?
- Rapid change was commonly identified as a feature of the school. Thinking back over the intended and unintended impacts of changes over your time here, what are your reflections? Would you have done anything differently?

Data analysis continued through iterations of the cycle outlined in Figure 3.2, with data from interview transcripts and observational notes being coded to refined and redefined themes. An example of these is presented in Figure 3.3 below.

![Figure 3.3: NVivo extract of Principal Practice themes during analysis](image)

Figure 3.3 shows a screenshot of the data analysis summary of the principal practice themes in development. Further analysis through the inductive process resulted in the list of themes presented and discussed in the case study. NVivo provided structure, organisation and tracking of the data throughout these cycles. Including tracking of links to sources as is shown in Figure 3.4 below.
Once the final themes were established, it was features such as the node summary as displayed above in Figure 3.4 that assisted with the transfer of the data analysis to findings as presented in the two case study chapters. Numerical counts were used to indicate the strength and spread of themes across the sources and illustrative quotes were extracted to support the discussion for each theme.

The case studies were drafted into Chapters Four and Five. Each principal was provided with the opportunity to review and comment on their Case Study draft prior to finalisation of the chapters and commencement of cross-case comparisons.

### 3.8.2. Cross-case comparisons

The investigation of comparisons and contrasts from the two cases was undertaken based on the themes that had been deduced from the two individual case studies. The researcher returned to the thematically categorised data to identify the broad meta-themes that captured the findings from both cases. This enabled deeper consideration of the intricacies of leadership in these contexts. The findings from this analysis are presented in Chapter Six.

### 3.9. Ethical Considerations

All human interaction, including the interaction involved in human research, has ethical dimensions. However, ‘ethical conduct’ is more than simply doing the right thing. It involves
acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one’s fellow creatures. (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, p. 3)

Educational research is often situated in contexts that involve interaction with many subjects that might bring vulnerabilities and potential for harm that requires consideration. Research practices and protocols have been developed and refined over many years and multiple investigations, and these protocols assist in undertaking research that first aims to ‘do no harm’. This research was designed and undertaken following the standards and practices for ethically appropriate research provided by The Melbourne Graduate School of Education Human Ethics Advisory Group. These guidelines provided detailed advice on ethical procedures and accountabilities that must be adhered to for research undertaken through The University of Melbourne. These were strictly followed by this study.

Some of the key components of these ethical procedures include:

- Providing participants with a plain language statement that outlined the intent of the research and the expectations of participants consenting to take part.
- Obtaining signed informed consent from each participant.
- Ensuring that participants understood that they may withdraw from the study at any time.
- Providing participants with the researcher’s contact details, and those of the university, for contact should they have any concerns with the study.
- Upholding dignity, self-esteem and rights of the participants at all times throughout the study.

In conducting this study ethically, the researcher:

- obtained ethics approval from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Human Ethics Advisory Group.
- obtained authorisation and ethical approval from DET.
- obtained permission to undertake research from the principal at each of the case study schools.
- de-identified schools using pseudonyms
- de-identified participants in all data and samples that have or will be published by replacing identifiers with pseudonyms or codes in a way that minimised the possibility of participants being identifiable.
- secured data and information by use of password protected electronic files and secure storage of other materials. Backed-up data is password protected and will be stored for five years.

### 3.10. Rigor and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain rigor and trustworthiness as the extent to which the findings of the research are worthy of attention. They offer four criteria by which to evaluate qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.
To heighten the credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of this study, Merriam’s (1998) basic strategies were employed where possible:

1. Triangulation – This study collected and triangulated evidence from multi-perspective interviews, observations and documents. Data from multiple sources was compared and contrasted to develop credible and dependable findings.
2. Member checks – Interview transcripts and case study chapter drafts were checked and verified by the participants.
3. Peer examination – This study has been overseen by supervisors and an advisory committee and the resulting thesis and any related publications will be subject to assessment and peer review.
4. Researcher biases – For this study, assumptions by the researcher were identified, recorded and reflected upon through the use of a research journal.

Further strategies that were undertaken that supported the clarity and purpose of the research and the reliability of the data and its analysis included:

- Development of appropriate research questions from a comprehensive understanding of the relevant research literature.
- Consistency in interviews by the researcher conducting all interviews and employing common structures and approaches as much as possible.
- Consistency in observations with the researcher undertaking all observations and minimising participation in, or influence of, all observed activities and events.
- Consistency in application of data analysis processes as described.

All aspects of the research design, methods and analysis have been considered and substantiated with research theory and practice and could be reproduced for further studies. All measures described here attest to the rigor of this study and ensure that the findings are justified, credible and trustworthy.

3.11 Delimitations and Limitations

3.11.1 Delimitations

Delimitations define the boundaries of the study for the purpose of understanding how the results can and cannot contribute to the broader body of knowledge. It is important to state that this study is bounded and situated within a specific context. Understanding delimitations assists readers to consider the appropriateness of applying findings to broader settings.

The delimitation of this study is that it is bounded within the cases of two principals in improving, high-advantage schools in metropolitan areas of Melbourne, Australia. Case study methodology narrows the boundary of this research to the specific sites and specific phenomenon of principal leadership at these schools (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Miles et al., 2014). Having a narrow focus on only two cases, this
study provides comprehensive and detailed evidence about this phenomenon within these specific contexts. Comparisons and contrasts between the two cases enable generalisations but these are bounded by these circumstances of these two cases. These cases are also situated within the research context of the larger international comparative study of school principalship (ISSPP) where these results will contribute to a significant database of cases.

3.11.2. Limitations

Limitations describe the restrictions and qualifications of the case study findings. Limitations of this study are predominantly those that are attributable to qualitative research generally. Although in these cases varied, rich and detailed evidence of principal leadership was gathered, the results reflect the interpretations of interviewees as well as those of the researcher. Interview participants may have had personal agendas or conscious or unconscious biases which influenced their responses to questions. At each school, the interviewees were recommended by the principals and the gatekeeper. The reasons for selection of the specific interview participants were not controlled by the researcher. The gatekeepers indicated that generally interviewees were selected for reasons of convenience. Regardless of any possible selection biases, the number and range of participants in group and individual interviews was sufficient to provide broad perspectives and generalisations from the aggregated data. Data collection was undertaken over several months at each school which reduced the likelihood that findings would be influenced by a particular event or circumstance.

The researcher plays a central role in analysing, filtering and presenting data in qualitative research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; O'Leary, 2014; Stake, 1995, 2005). The influence that the researcher has through the data collection, analysis and presentation of the case is acknowledged and managed throughout the research process through valid, reliable and rigorous methodologies as described throughout this chapter.

All limitations were routinely considered and managed throughout this study. Credible and validated strategies for data collection and analysis were employed at all stages, generating trustworthy findings regardless of the limitations.

3.12. Summary of Methodology

The employment of a carefully considered qualitative approach has seen the development of findings that are trustworthy and rigorous. The credibility and generalisability of this study has been maximised
through research methods that are supported by methodology literature and connected to previous validated and reliable studies. The positionality of the researcher has been reflected on and accounted for throughout the study. The results produced can therefore be considered to dependably inform the research questions which validate and extend the broad body of successful school leadership literature.
CHAPTER 4:  CASE STUDY A - TILVERTON COLLEGE

4.1. Introduction

This chapter reports the findings obtained from analysis of data from interviews, observations and documents gathered from the case study school, referred to by the pseudonym Tilverton College for the purpose of this study. The school profile, culture and performance are outlined before an investigation of the leadership characteristics and practices of the school’s Principal and the contributions of others. Findings are presented according to themes that were derived from the data under the following sections:

1. School profile
2. School context
3. Performance of the school
4. Success of the school
5. Principal leadership
6. Contribution of others to leadership and success

To generate understanding of how school context and school leadership contributed to the performance and success of the school a variety of school community members were interviewed. These research participants are listed in the table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: List of Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Category</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P (1,2,3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other School Leaders</td>
<td>SL (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>T (a – f)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council Members</td>
<td>SCM (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Group</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>1 group of 3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Groups</td>
<td>SG (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2 groups of 5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of this study, the Principal of Tilverton College will be referred to by the pseudonym Michael.
To enhance understanding of the school context, culture and operations and to validate findings through multiple data sources, extensive observational activities were also undertaken. Table 4.2 presents these observational activities.

Table 4.2: List of Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbrev.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation 1</td>
<td>Ob1</td>
<td>20/08/14</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 2</td>
<td>Ob2</td>
<td>15/10/14</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 3</td>
<td>Ob3</td>
<td>15/10/14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 4</td>
<td>Ob4</td>
<td>15/10/14</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 5</td>
<td>Ob5</td>
<td>31/10/14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 6</td>
<td>Ob6</td>
<td>02/02/15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 7</td>
<td>Ob7</td>
<td>02/02/15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 8</td>
<td>Ob8</td>
<td>02/02/15</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 9</td>
<td>Ob9</td>
<td>04/02/15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 10</td>
<td>Ob10</td>
<td>04/02/15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 11</td>
<td>Ob11</td>
<td>09/02/15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 12</td>
<td>Ob12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 15</td>
<td>Ob15</td>
<td>22/04/15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 16</td>
<td>Ob16</td>
<td>29/05/15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. School Profile

Tilverton College is a co-educational, government secondary school that operates within the Victorian DET. Students attending the school are aged between 12 and 18 years of age. The school is situated in a suburb of the local government area of Manningham. The suburb is approximately 17km east of the central business district of Melbourne, Victoria.

Tilverton College’s Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was 1079 in 2015. The average ICSEA score of Australian schools is 1000. This indicates that the students at Tilverton are from backgrounds of relative social and educational advantage. This is further illustrated by information available about the distribution of family backgrounds where nine per cent of students were classified
into the bottom quartile, 22 per cent and 33 per cent in the two middle quartiles respectively and 36 per cent in the top quartile (compared to the average distribution of 25 per cent in each quartile). (My School, 2015)

The ICSEA data is compatible with data for the suburb where the school is situated which is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The 2011 Census data indicates that the largest identified occupation group was Professionals with 29 per cent of employed people occupied in this category (Australian average 21.3 per cent) and persons with post-school qualifications make up 60.5 per cent of those who are 15 years or older (Australian average: 55.9 per cent). The Census data also provides insight about the multicultural nature of the suburb with a higher than average proportion of people born overseas at 40.6 per cent (Australian average: 30.2 per cent) and 41 per cent of the population speaking a language other than English at home (Australian average: 18.2 per cent). The top four languages spoken in homes were: Greek - 9.8% per cent; Cantonese - 6.3 per cent; Italian - 6 per cent; and Mandarin - 4.2 per cent.

The neighbourhood in which Tilverton College is situated is well serviced in terms of education options. Within four kilometres there are nine government primary schools, five Catholic primary schools, one Catholic secondary school and two government secondary schools. The two close government secondary colleges have reputations in the community as high achieving schools (P1, SLa, SCMb, Tf) and publicly available achievement measures support this perception (myschool.edu.au).

### 4.2.1. Student enrolments

In 2015 there were 629 students enrolled at the school. Figure 4.1 illustrates that the school had seen significant growth in enrolments over the years 2010-2015, following several years of decline. The severity of decline resulted in recommendations from the DET that the School Council consider closing in 2010.
Chapter 4: Case Study A - Tilverton College

4.2.2. Staff numbers

Figure 4.2 shows the staffing of Tilverton College over the years from 2008 – 2015. These numbers are presented as Full-time Equivalent (FTE) staffing levels.

Although many of the student population lived locally to the school, there were numerous students who travelled greater distances and bypassed other secondary schools to get to Tilverton. There were also many who had enrolled at the school in Years Eight to Twelve after leaving another secondary school. Of the nine students who participated in the interview groups for this case study, six had been to a previous secondary school and had changed to Tilverton College not because it was the local school but because of what they felt it would offer them (SGa, SGb).

Figure 4.1: Student enrolments 2008 - 2015

Figure 4.2: FTE teaching and non-teaching staff numbers 2008 – 2015
Staff numbers at the school had increased over these years but not at an equivalent rate to the increase in student numbers shown in Figure 4.1. To illustrate this, in 2011 the ratio of staff to students was one FTE staff member for every 7.6 students. In 2015 this was decreased to one for every 10.2 students.

Staffing trends over these years reflect the changing circumstances of the school. In the years where enrolments were decreasing, departmental processes had been implemented to select and reassign staff who were in excess of what was required for the school. These processes impacted the morale and cohesiveness of the staff at the school (P1, SLb, Tc, Tf) and consequently the culture of the school at that time. Once student enrolment numbers started to increase, the opportunity to employ new teachers and support staff was important to the improvement of the school as appointments could be made with the vision and values of the school in mind (P1, P2, P3, SLb, SCMa, SCMb, Tc).

4.2.3. Physical environment

The school is set on approximately six hectares of grounds in the leafy eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. The grounds of the school have some rolling hills and the campus is tucked back from any main roads. Access to the school is from a quiet residential street. The grounds are surrounded on three sides by private residences and share one boundary with a government primary school. The outdoor space includes a large sports oval, several terraces and courtyards, two large paddock areas that house alpacas, goats and sheep and a significant space that is dedicated to a permaculture garden. The school buildings had capacity to accommodate approximately 1000 students, however, through the years of declining enrolments, many of the spaces and buildings were poorly maintained. The School Council had needed to oversee several significant maintenance and upgrade projects, including major repairs to heating and roofing (SCMb).

One of the long disused buildings had, after renovation, provided opportunity for the development of various specific-use spaces. These included a fitness centre and an animals program, including extensive reptile enclosures, large aquaculture tanks and aquariums and spaces for rabbit and guinea pig breeding programs. At the time of data collection, the final disused section of this building was being stripped and renovated as an indoor sports arena for activities such as indoor cricket, hockey and soccer. There were proposals being considered to build a low rock climbing wall in the breezeway of this building. As was the case with many of the school’s facilities, purpose built spaces were utilised by external organisations outside of school hours. These commercial arrangements provided a source of revenue for the school. The school had a well-equipped and modern gymnasium that was less than
two years old. During the research period, significant building works were completed on a new Performing Arts Centre that included a 300-seat theatre, a recording studio, music rehearsal spaces and a commercial kitchen.

The main learning spaces of the school are housed in older buildings of corridors and classroom spaces. Although there has been significant effort to reconfigure some of these spaces, particularly in the refurbished science wing, they were somewhat constrained by the traditional configuration of school buildings of that vintage. Predominantly the learning spaces were arranged into learning domain areas such as the Design and Technology Centre, the Performing Arts Centre and the Sustainability Centre. Efforts had been made to configure and use these spaces in innovative ways. An example of this was the re-invention of the Mathematics classrooms into the Maths Hub. This was a configuration of classrooms connected by central working spaces. Specific classes or short sessions were run in the classrooms and students also worked independently, or in small groups in the central spaces. At the time of this research, the aim for this learning centre was that tutors and teachers would be available in the communal space to support learning at the point of need for individual students.

An important area of the school was the Resource Centre. This had previously been the library and still housed some books on shelves around the walls. It was predominantly a large multi-purpose, communal, open space. There were many sets of tables and chairs, a bank of computers, several couches and arm chairs, two table tennis tables and a kitchen area with microwaves, small kitchen appliances, sinks, a dishwasher and a refrigerator and café style seating. A large proportion of the Resource Centre was sectioned off with a glass wall and designated as the Quiet Room to be used for private study. There were also utility spaces off the main room such as the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) office and storage spaces.

The Resource Centre was effectively the ‘heart’ of the school. Students congregated there during break times and it was the designated place to go for students should they have any unscheduled time during their day. This included any time when a teacher was unavailable for a scheduled class. The Resource Centre had the status as the central hub of the school for several reasons including, that it was comfortable, welcoming and well resourced. It also housed the Assistant Principal and Leading Teachers work spaces. These were not tucked away in adjoining offices but were at a large reception type desk near the entrance. These key staff members were visible and available for the students. During observations, they were seen working alongside students at the reception desk or elsewhere in the Centre (Ob6, Ob11, Ob15). It was viewed by community members as the place to go for information, relaxation, socialisation or study (P3, SLb, SCMb, SGa, SG2, Tb, Te).
Chapter 4: Case Study A - Tilvertont College

The shared use of the Resource Centre reflected the ‘One Person’ policy (see below for details) and shared use of space was the expectation across the school. With very few exceptions, there were no private spaces, no staff rooms or out of bounds offices.

All the spaces are equal and so I can be having lunch in my office and then all these kids decide to visit for lunch. Great. Come on in. You know there are pros and cons to that but it is actually quite lovely. (Teacher)

The development of physical spaces and the symbolism of the equality in the use of spaces reflected key aspects of the culture of the school.

4.2.4. Governance of the school

The school is part of the Victorian DET and is subject to all department requirements. The school was predominantly funded from government revenue. There was supplementary income collected from a cohort of 40 international students as well as fundraising efforts, income from student-led businesses and hire of facilities. As is the requirement for all Victorian government schools there was a legally formed school council that is accountable to the Minister for Education. The functions of a school council in a Victorian Government school are to:

- Establish the broad direction and vision of the school within the school’s community
- Participate in the development and monitoring of the school strategic plan
- Develop, review and update school policies
- Develop, review and monitor the Student Engagement Policy and the School Dress Code
- Raise funds for school-related purposes
- Approve the annual budget and monitor expenditure
- Maintain the school’s grounds and facilities
- Enter into contracts (e.g. cleaning, construction work)
- Report annually to the school community and to DET
- Generally stimulate interest in the school in the wider community

(DET, 2014)

Victorian DET school councils include the school’s principal as the Executive Officer and elected staff and parent members. There is also an option for community members to be co-opted onto school councils. Tilvertont College has a history of a strong and supportive school council. The school council overcame the two departmental recommendations for the school to be closed and the council’s support of the Principal’s change initiatives were integral to the transformation of the school (P1, SLa, PG, SCMa, SCMb).
4.3. School Context

4.3.1. History of the school

The school was opened in 1971 as a technical school and remained focused on technical education until it amalgamated with a local high school in the mid 1990’s. The school had several name changes through the preceding years but adopted its current name after that amalgamation.

The history of the school, prior to the appointment of the Principal in late 2009 was something that the school community has purposefully chosen to distance itself from. ‘We as a community needed to “red line the past”, and not look back.’ (School website, 2015). It had been through a decade of declining enrolments and challenging staff and student issues (including two issues that had attracted negative media attention). These had impacted on the reputation of the school in the community. In the four or five years prior to Michael’s appointment, the culture of the school had been influenced by a negative spiral of declining enrolments, low staff morale, an entrenched negative reputation in the community, challenging student behaviour issues and unsatisfactory academic results. In the five years prior to 2009 the school had three different principals. Those involved in this study who had been part of the school community prior to Michael, indicated that there was general understanding that at that time the school was in crisis and that something had to change or the school would close. It was suggested that the staff, students and parents who remained in the school community at that time were either, very resilient and committed to a hope for what the school could be, or were not motivated enough to go elsewhere, ‘Those with the get up and go had got up and gone’ (Principal).

Michael, was appointed by the school council and the DET to ‘turn the school around’. Michael reported that he presented an innovative and ambitious vision and plan for the school’s improvement to the selection panel during his interview for the principal position.

They were appointing a principal to sell a new way forward. They wanted to see whether you could sell it, so I sold it. I did a lot of thinking about it and then sold that vision.’ (Principal)

Because of this approach during the selection process, upon appointment Michael felt strongly that he had a mandate from the community to implement his vision. He also felt a keen sense of urgency during the first few years, a race against declining enrolments and imminent closure.

Michael described his tenure as consisting of two distinct phases, with the first two to three years classified as ‘survival’.
There is sort of two distinct phases, one was the turn-around and survival and then the innovation. There was innovation happened in the survival time and that was the only reason why we did survive. But the purely innovative stuff has really only been in the last two of the five years and the survival was in the first two with a bit of a crossover into the third. (Principal)

He explained that often during these initial years he was not confident that they would avoid closure. There was a shared understanding among parents, staff and students, about the dire situation that the school was in at that time. The legacy of those circumstances was important to the culture of the school, the identity of the Principal and the success of the innovative vision that was enacted.

4.3.2. School philosophy and vision

Tilverton College reinvented itself as a progressive, innovative, student-centred learning environment in a short time frame. The vision and philosophy were important pillars for these changes. The strength of the school vision and philosophy was symbolised by the fact that the vision was painted strategically in the entrance hall so that it was one of the first things seen on entering the school.

The vision of the school at the time of research was:

To be a supportive community, empowering students to manage their individualised learning and turn ideas into reality

This vision is reflective of an educational philosophy that was broadly understood, valued and committed to, by all members of the community. The full philosophy statement was also predominantly displayed around the school.

Educational Philosophy @ TC

@TC we believe...

- Learning is a personal, exciting, lifelong journey where our challenge is to discover and pursue our passions, preferably which contribute to the greater good.
- We each have our own strengths and talents and work best when we are able to follow and explore our passions and interests.
- TC will remain a school small in number but with a global focus, where students have adults and peers who know and care for them, accept them for who they are, support them in their learning and help them to create their own future.
- All people should be treated equally regardless of the position they hold and are entitled to be treated with respect and shown trust, which will grow or diminish based on our actions. We call this our One-person Policy.
- Parents and carers can be a young person’s greatest supporters and we want and value their contribution. Staff and parents/carers need to ensure that they allow students the room to grow and develop their independence.
- Community is important and we all have an individual and collective responsibility to make it work.
Innovative education should be developed around evidence-based research and high quality student learning data. Every student will benefit from having a detailed individual learning plan.

With support and accurate information, students are capable of making appropriate decisions in their own best interests. Allowing them to do so empowers and engages them.

Youth is no barrier to brilliant ideas. Students can contribute significantly to the decision-making process and operation of their school, as well as to the wider community.

Ensuring a positive learning environment is essential for students to reach their potential.

Our student empowerment model works best when students are self-motivated, naturally curious and responsible and have already developed a degree of independence.

(School website, 2015)

The school participated in a three-year review process in 2014 and the peer reviewers, who included eminent scholars in innovative and student-focused education, captured the overall focus of the school in the following statement in the review report,

The College is tapping into an unmet need in the broader community for student-centred, flexible learning. With great entrepreneurship, in highly innovative ways and informed by current research, the College is leveraging its resources in a coherent way to create a vibrant, student-centred learning environment. The scope of innovation is breathtaking. (Peer Review Report, 2014)

A clear strength of the school was the progress made toward the vision of students controlling their own learning. Encapsulating this was the symbolism of the school referring to itself as TC rather than Tilverton College. TC being the initials for the college but also standing for ‘Take Control’.

In the short time frame of five years the school had significantly challenged and changed structures that reflect traditional modes of teaching and learning. Observations as well as review of media articles and marketing materials suggested that the school differentiated itself as offering an alternative to traditionally structured schools. The following are some of the structures and programs that illustrated the progressive nature of education provision at the school:

- Student choice in what they study from a vast array of electives and supported opportunities to develop their own ‘subjects’. The school offers a broad curriculum including for example, an extensive ‘Working with Animals’ curriculum, a sustainability program, and an elite sports development program.
- Students are not organised in ‘year levels’ and are able to take more or less than six years to complete their education.
- Students have the opportunity to accelerate their learning programs and classes often have students of a variety of ages. Students can access VCE subjects from Year Eight. In 2015, 22 per cent of Year Eights and 74 per cent of Year Nines were enrolled into a VCE subject (P3).
- All students have Individualised Learning Plans which are collaboratively developed with a mentor teacher, and their parents.
Students are employed at the school in a broad range of positions including in school maintenance, administration, school photography, catering, graphic design, and in teaching roles.

Students are involved in decision making, including staff selection processes and school and curriculum leadership committees.

There were some key policies that had enabled the school to pursue these and other innovative reforms including:

- ‘Yes’ is the default. The answer to any suggestion must be ‘yes’ unless doing so would take too much time, too much money, or negatively impact on others.
- The One-Person Policy that all members of the school community are equal and should not be treated any differently based on their age or their position in the school.
- The school is keenly inclusive and celebrates diversity by insisting on an environment that is free of harassment, disruptive behaviour and intolerance.

The degree to which education opportunities were flexible and personalised was evident at the school and was noted in a variety of interviews with staff and parents and observed during school visits. There was a culture of ‘anything is possible’ and the opportunities both provided for and created by the students were vast (P1, P2, P3, SGa, SGb, SCMb, SLa, Tc, Td, Te, Tf, Ob1, Ob3, Ob5, Ob7, Ob14, Ob16).

4.3.3. Learning programs

The curriculum at the school was based on the educational philosophy described above. As discussed, the philosophy was strongly centred on a model that aimed to empower students. The structure of the curriculum was designed to maximise opportunity for students to follow their passions and interests. Subject choice was a core aspect, and from their first day at the school students could choose a significant proportion of what they studied. In their Entry Year (referred to in other schools as Year Seven) the students could choose 30 per cent of their study program. Once students had completed Foundation Literacy, Numeracy and Science requirements (nominally a high Year Eight level) they were free to choose 100 per cent of their study program.

In 2014, the school offered over 100 elective subjects including: art, visual communication and design, photography, media, dance, drama, music performance, fashion textiles design, computer gaming design, food technology, design and technology, ‘Geek’ studies, personal fitness, IT software development, extra sport and working with animals. After completion of Foundation level subjects, students can choose to study pre-chemistry, pre-biology, pre-psychology, pre-literature, History, Philosophy or any of the 37 Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) subjects offered at the school. The school also facilitated access to any subject offered through distance education providers and over 30 Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects in partnership with external providers. Further, if a
student had an interest that was not offered they were supported to devise their own subject as a Personalised Learning Project (PLP). These projects were supervised by staff, and the student collaborated with their supervisor to set and meet specific learning goals. Examples of PLPs had included helicopter pilot training, composing digital music, and creative writing projects.

Every student at the school had their learning journey planned and monitored through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) process. In close consultation with parents and a mentor teacher (whom the students choose for themselves), the students wrote their own ILPs which outlined their interests, passions and goals for learning.

For non-VCE subjects, students were not required to do homework. Rather they worked on a Home Learning program. This was a negotiated program of learning activities that were undertaken to support school learning, follow passions or enhance health and wellbeing. Students in VCE subjects were required to do appropriate extra study to support their learning and achievement. This often involved specific learning activities as many VCE subjects were taught based on a flipped-learning model. Flipped-learning required students to complete information transmission type activities in their own time, often in the form of videoed lectures or specific reading. Then in class time they participated in collaborative, problem-based learning activities with the support of the teacher.

### 4.3.4. Management and leadership structures

At the time of data collection, in the prior five years, management and leadership structures of the school had been characterised by an increase in the number of formal leadership positions and movement towards more collaborative leadership approaches. New formal positions were introduced in 2015 including a second Assistant Principal. There was also a strengthening of the house system which included the appointment of six Heads of House for 2015 who were undertaking significant leadership roles. The Principal hoped that these leaders would develop into ‘mini-principals’ of their individual houses (P2). Further for 2015, three Learning Development Leader positions were created. These three leaders were tasked with focusing on improving the teaching and learning within the school. There were also Learning Area Leaders responsible for different curriculum areas and the Careers Counsellor was considered an important leadership position within the school. These were the members of staff who were regularly involved in leadership activities, with formal and informal meetings being attended based on needs. For example, early in 2015, there was a meeting to review the course programs of students and it was attended by the Principal, the Assistant Principals the Leading Teachers, the Heads of House and the Careers Counsellor (Ob10).
Of interest at the school were the arrangements for the official School Leadership Team which was tasked with making significant decisions and overseeing the teaching and learning programs. This group met each week and consisted of those holding the official leadership positions (Principal, Assistant Principals, and Leading Teachers). It was also open to any other staff member or student who wished to join. The only requirement for membership was a commitment to the team for at least one term (10 weeks). During observations of this meeting there were up to five students in attendance and contributing to significant whole school leadership discussions (Ob4 and Ob11).

Student leadership was highly valued at the school and positions of School Captains and House Captains were significant roles within the overall leadership (Ob7, Ob8). Students were also involved in school leadership through an active Student Representative Council (SRC). This group met regularly and was consulted on many school decisions (Ob5).

4.4. Performance of the school

This section describes the performance of the school as illustrated by publicly available measures from the years 2008 – 2015. These measures include the NAPLAN and the VCE results.

4.4.1. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

At the time of research there were eight years (2008-2015) of publicly available data through the My School website that is managed by the ACARA. NAPLAN is a mandated testing schedule that is implemented in all Australian schools for students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine. To review the performance of this school, the Year Nine results were relevant as they are the most likely to illustrate impact that the school had on student learning. There are five learning areas tested (Reading; Writing; Spelling; Grammar and Punctuation; and Numeracy). Table 4.3 summarises the Year Nine NAPLAN results for the years 2008 – 2015 showing results above comparator average scores in green, at average comparator scores in white, below comparator average scores in light red and substantially below in dark red. (All NAPLAN data included in Table 4.3 and Figures 4.3 to 4.6 was sourced from www.myschool.edu.au)
Chapter 4: Case Study A - Tilvertion College

Table 4.3: Summary of Year Nine NAPLAN results

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<th>Below average</th>
<th>Substantially below average</th>
<th>Average</th>
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These Year Nine NAPLAN results indicate that on most of these tests the school performed below expectations of a school whose community has similar levels of educational advantage until 2015. Further, these results suggest that although this school (as measured by ICSEA), serves students of above the Australian average of predisposition to educational success (as a facility of their family and social background) until 2015 they were often performing less well than the average of all schools. The 2015 results are more typical of the expectations of schools with similar ICSEA.

To further understand these results, deeper interrogation of NAPLAN data available provided insight to how the context at the school may have influenced performance results. Student gain is demonstrated through the NAPLAN data by comparison of matched cohort student results from Year Seven to Year Nine. This growth measure showed that the value added to students was comparable to, or greater than, that of other students who had the same starting scores in Year Seven for 12 of the 16 available data sets. As an illustration of this Figure 4.3 shows the student gain for Numeracy for 2012 – 2014.
As can be seen in Figure 4.3 the growth in student learning in this example shows that performance in terms of achievement on the NAPLAN Numeracy tests in Year Nine was slightly better than other students who had had the same scores in Year Seven. Also the gain from Year Seven to Year Nine was comparable to similar students and all students.

A further notable difference, as seen in Figure 4.3 above, is that the scores at which the students started in Year Seven were lower than those of students in both similar schools and in all schools. Further investigation found that in fact students in Year Seven from 2009 to 2012 often performed below students in similar schools and students in all schools on all areas of NAPLAN testing. Figure 4.4 illustrates this with the data of the Year Seven students from 2011.
NAPLAN testing is undertaken in May of each year and so results achieved by Year Seven students are more likely to reflect their learning experiences throughout their primary school years than the three months that they have been attending secondary school. On average, the students attending Tilverton had lower levels of Literacy and Numeracy than would be expected for a school that has a similar ICSEA. This suggests that the measure of ICSEA, does not adequately describe the students that chose Tilverton College over the years 2009 to 2012. From 2013 the performance of Year Seven students on NAPLAN testing more closely matched that of students in similar schools. This is demonstrated in Figure 4.5 below.
Figure 4.5: 2013 NAPLAN results in numbers

This may be a factor in the improvements in 2015 Year Nine NAPLAN results as those students were stronger in their 2013 Year Seven testing. This trend of more academically able students entering the school in Year Seven continued and as Figure 4.6 below shows, in 2015 the Year Seven students results on the NAPLAN tests were comparable to similar schools and in four of the five areas above the averages of all schools.

Figure 4.6: 2015 NAPLAN results in numbers

This investigation of the data suggests that contextual factors warrant consideration when reviewing NAPLAN as a performance measure. Two possible contextual influences that may explain this are apparent from the evidence collected for this case study. Firstly, the trend of school decline, as described earlier, likely proved a disincentive to students and families considering this school over the years 2008 - 2012. Research participants described a strong community perception that the school was ‘failing’ and that it was likely to close. A second factor is that the school had not chosen to undertake changes that were driven by interest in improvement in NAPLAN test scores. The vision of the school had attracted, and encouraged the enrolment of students who had diverse talents and
learning interests. The data may reflect that many students had chosen this school as it offered an alternative to narrowly focused academic achievement.

### 4.4.2. Victorian Certificate of Education Results

In Victoria, most students in senior years of secondary schooling are working towards their VCE. This is the most commonly awarded school completion certificate and the performance of a school is often presented as a data set based on student achievements in VCE subjects. The result most commonly used to indicate school wide achievement in VCE is a median study score. The VCE results are recorded as Study Scores. Achievement in a subject is assessed on a scale of 0 to 50. In all subjects, the average Study Score across the state is 30. The median Study Score is the middle score when all the study scores obtained by students at the school are ranked from highest to lowest and therefore it should represent a “typical” level of achievement of students in the school. Figure 4.7 presents the median study scores for students who undertook a VCE subject at this school from the years 2008 to 2015.

![Figure 4.7: VCE Median Study Scores 2008 – 2015](image)

As Figure 4.7 demonstrates, the school’s median study scores were consistently below the state average. There are several factors that may have influenced the VCE performance over these years. In the earlier years, the declined enrolments and negative community reputation had resulted in the numbers of students participating in VCE subjects being low. Michael suggested that at one stage there were only 2 local students eligible for Year Twelve (P2). There was also a feeling that those
students who were interested in strong academic results had chosen neighbouring schools with stronger academic reputations (PG, P1, SCMa, SLb).

Another factor to consider in the analysis of VCE results is that the school had opened access to VCE subjects. Moving to a three year VCE program in 2010 was one of the first major initiatives implemented by the current Principal. The school philosophy had seen access to VCE studies broadened even further so students of any level could undertake a VCE subject. In 2015, 22 per cent of Year Eight students and 74 per cent of Year Nine students were enrolled in at least one VCE subject. This policy reflected the school’s philosophy of allowing students to follow their interests and to progress at their own pace in their learning. However, it also resulted in a significant number of students repeating VCE subjects. The Principal suggested that this can have an impact on the aggregate school data.

> On average, it will lower our performance because they are doing their subjects a year earlier. You are always better to have an extra year of maturity to do a subject. And so, if they are doing the same subject twice they should do better at it the second year, and they do. So, when they repeat a VCE subject, they get, on average 20% higher subject scores. But logically, overall it lowers our average for the school published ATAR score. But it benefits the student because they only get the higher of the two scores. So, from a school it makes our data look worse than it really is but for the student it’s a benefit and that’s what matters. You know I don’t care what it looks like really. (Principal)

However, the counter effect of the repetition of subjects seeing students achieving higher scores on their second attempt at a subject seems to somewhat nullify this argument. These factors would require deeper interrogation of individual VCE data to ascertain the actual impact on the school’s Study Score results. Although this level of analysis is beyond the scope of this research, consideration of these mattes offered insight into the performance, context and culture of the school.

**4.5. Success of the school**

Tilverton College had undergone significant transformation since 2009. In response to the perceived crisis at the school, Michael was appointed to the principalship with the challenge to turn the school around. The way that Michael led the changes had resulted in a school that was thought to be unlike most other secondary schools in Australia. One of the staff interviewees had been a student at the school less than ten years prior and he described how different it had become in that short space of time.

> As an ex-student here, the place is not the same. You cannot put the two together. And I often talk to kids that were from my group that went through and they just remember school as being
what it was and when I talk about some of the things we are doing they are like “Are you sure you are at [Tilverton]? That doesn’t sound right”. That’s because of their memories of where it was and what it is today. It’s interesting because another question that I get asked is “how do you like working at your old school?” And I say well it’s not, it doesn’t feel like that at all because it has just changed so significantly, and all for the good. (Teacher)

As was demonstrated above, review of the performance of the school as evidenced by measurable student outcomes such as NAPLAN and VCE scores suggests that indication of improvement was minimal and limited to the 2015 Year Nine NAPLAN results. However, the sense of ‘success’ at the school is very strong. There are several areas that demonstrated this success.

4.5.1. Enrolment Increases

One of the most significant indicators of successful change for this school was the increase in enrolments. Figure 4.1 showed that there was significant decline in enrolments from 2008 to 2010. Michael was appointed in late 2009 and started implementation of changes to transform the school from 2010. Enrolments had increased each year since 2010 and by 2015 the school considered that it had reached an ideal number of student enrolments.

The school considered this enrolment growth a fundamental indicator of the success of the school’s philosophy and programs. Increasing enrolments had been a key priority for the school to ensure its survival. Early increases in student numbers enabled the college to avoid closure and the opportunity to employ staff that supported the vision and objectives of the school. This, in turn, strengthened the capacity of the school to pursue a transformative agenda. Continued enrolment increases were an endorsement of the innovative teaching and learning programs that had been implemented. By 2014 the school leadership were discussing the impact of larger student numbers on the ‘small school’ identity (P1, P2, SLa, SCMa, SCMb, Ob6, Ob13).

4.5.2. Satisfaction with the school

Satisfaction with the school was observed and reported during interviews. These reflections from the students’ interviews are one example,

Very positive. I just get this positive feel when I walk around the school. Everyone has got this good attitude and eager to learn and teach as well.... The best school this side of Australia. (Student groups)

During observations, there were many occasions where satisfaction was evident, particularly from the students. On one occasion, there was a conversation occurring between a student in their final year
who was telling other students how sad she was to be leaving the school that she loves (Ob2). This satisfaction was further evidenced by the annual DET surveys of satisfaction of the parents, staff and students. Figure 4.8 below demonstrates the high levels of satisfaction in all three of these groups (source: 2015 Annual Report)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parent Satisfaction Summary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average level of parent satisfaction with the school, as derived from the annual Parent Opinion survey. The score is reported on a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 is the highest possible score.</td>
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<th>School Staff Survey</th>
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<td>Measures the percent endorsement by staff on school climate derived from the annual School Staff survey. The percent endorsement indicates the percent of positive responses (agree or strongly agree) on school climate from staff at the school</td>
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<th>Students Attitudes to School</th>
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<td>Measures the Connectedness to School factor derived from the Attitudes to School survey completed annually by Victorian government school students in Years 5 to 12. The school's average score is reported here on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the highest possible score.</td>
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Figure 4.8: 2015 Parent, Staff and Student survey results.

As Figure 4.8 shows, the parents, staff and students all rated the school clearly above state averages on the respective surveys. This indicates high levels of satisfaction with Tilverton College and the innovative, non-traditional approaches to teaching and learning that had been implemented.

4.5.3. Broader community interest

There was evidence of increasing interest in the school from the broader community, both within Victoria and Australia. An indicator of this was media interest in the activities of the school. There had been 10 articles about the school’s initiatives in Melbourne’s two major newspapers since 2014. Further, Michael had participated in five radio and five television interviews since 2014 where he discussed the educational model implemented at Tilverton. There was also significant interest in the changes at Tilverton from within the education sector. This interest involved Michael in regular presentations at conferences and professional events and attracted visitors to the school from around the country. Finally, Tilverton had partnered with three Melbourne universities for, research of the
Tilverton model, access to pre-service teachers, and implementation of specific programs, for example supporting pathways for students into tertiary courses.

4.5.4. Broader Success Measures

A key factor in the discussion of the achievements of Tilverton College under the leadership of Michael is the observation of what success meant at the school. The perception of success was much broader than standard performance measures. To investigate this, interviewees were asked questions about what success means at Tilverton College. Their responses were categorised into the themes as shown in Table 4.4 and they provide insight into broad perceptions of success that align with the vision of the school.

Table 4.4: Interviewees responses about success by themes

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<th>Response Theme</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Illustrative responses</th>
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| Career pathway support for students                 | 6          | -The message had to go out that we are not about ATAR but we are about pathways. We are about getting kids in to their pathways.  
-It’s about well how can we get to where you want to be. Is there a course that’s going to help you get there and what can we do at school to help you get to where you want to go? |
| Students making most of opportunities and having choice in their education | 6          | -The success is our students taking advantage of the opportunities 
-Getting them moving forward, those opportunities, just making sure that we’re making everything available to them rather than just limiting them on certain things. |
| Students feeling positive about learning            | 6          | -Kids leave having felt positively about their ability to learn in an educational setting. Confident that when they want to learn something they can learn anything. 
-A school that can create that atmosphere that when they leave, although their score may not have been the top of the rank, they come out going, I love school that is going to create that passion to keep on wanting to learn. |
| Student engagement and developing passions          | 6          | -If I had the choice for my kid to get a 95 and have no passion or self-confidence or belief or a 60 but be passionate about what they did, I know which I’d have. Results don’t sustain you they, on the whole, destroy you, but passion, that’s unstoppable. 
-That are they really engaged, are they really getting what we hoped. |
| The school is doing things differently              | 3          | -That we are doing it differently and students are taking that control. I think a lack of structure, the more structure we put in place the easier it is to regress to the norm. So, we’ve got to make sure that we do have the structure in place that is needed but not too much. |
There were several respondents (SLb, P2, Tb, Td) who identified that the school’s current academic achievement needed to be improved, demonstrating that there was some sense of value of these measures. However, all interviewees talked about student achievements in diverse areas and this was also evident during observations (Ob1, Ob3, Ob4, Ob7, Ob9, Ob10, Ob12, Ob13, Ob14). There were eight instances where the Principal described the success of the students during the three formal interviews, and many more during the observation sessions. This quote from the third principal interview is an example of the broad successes that are valued at the school and the passion that Michael had for student achievement outside the standard measures.

In Geek Studies for instance, our super geeky kids and our computer programmers and things like that, they won’t get great ATAR scores but some of our kids are doing 12 hours of robotics and electronics and pulling stuff apart. Now they are not necessarily going to do well on the Systems exams. But one of the kids last week earned $5000 programming for an American company... At the moment, he is clocking through his 10,000-hour rule and he is going to be the best programmer of his age, or one of them. It’s breaking that notion that everybody has to be the same and everybody has the same trajectory of six years of secondary. Another kid, he hasn’t passed a subject since basically Year Eight. Now he spent all last year sitting under a desk in the Resource Centre programming on his computer. Doing a CISCO qualification and doing a Cert 3 in Computer Illustration. So, he finished his Cert 3 and he did CISCO, which is a two-year qualification in 18 months and passed them both and he never even went to class. And this year we are paying him to teach computer gaming design as well as finishing off his stuff here. So, it’s just breaking that notion that everything has to happen in a classroom and in a nice sequence. (Principal)

4.6. Principal Leadership

This section describes Michael, the Principal of the school, and examines themes that emerged to explain how his history, characteristics and practices had influenced the culture and performance of the school.

4.6.1. Professional History

This section is informed by analysis of the Principal interviews where Michael was asked to respond to questions about his professional experiences and leadership development.

Michael applied for the principalship at Tilverton and was appointed to the school in late 2009. At the time of data collection, he had been in the position of Principal for five years. Education is his second career after training and practising as an accountant. Michael described that he had an interest in leadership from an early age as he enjoyed leadership opportunities, such as house captain, throughout his own primary and secondary schooling. In his early adulthood, he was a member of the
Army Reserves and credits participation in officer training courses with forming some of his leadership skills, practices and attitudes.

Michael’s teaching career started in a large independent school in an outer Melbourne suburb. In his first year, he had the opportunity to take on a leadership role that involved starting and managing an Army Cadet unit. He credits this role as an important experience which influenced his educational philosophy. The Cadets program supported students to organise and participate in significant adventure activities and their success in these activities impressed him.

I guess in my mind it showed me what kids are capable of when they are just given a go. And of course, they made mistakes but we all make mistakes. And so, that has always been at the back of my mind that I’ve thought I wonder if you could do that on a whole school basis. (Principal)

Michael continued to have significant leadership experience at that school including as a Head of House. He identified the support of the Principal at this first school as important to his leadership development. ‘He let me do ridiculous things for someone of my experience. He backed me when I probably wouldn’t have backed myself’. Michael believes that the Principal there, was an exceptional role model whose leadership style he has tried to emulate. This connection developed as an important mentor relationship which has continued throughout Michael’s career.

His second appointment was to an Assistant Principal position. This appointment was to a small independent school that was struggling with enrolments and financial concerns. Michael worked with a principal, who was also relatively young, to turn the school around to capacity enrolments with extensive waiting lists.

From that success, Michael was ‘head-hunted’ to his first principal position in a very small independent school that was also struggling to survive. He explained that he had taken the position with the understanding that if he was successful in significantly improving the school he would have the option to take over ownership of the school. At the time, this was particularly appealing to Michael. He had an ambition to start his own school which he planned to operate according to the student-centred philosophies he was developing. However, after facilitating an enrolment increase of 15 per cent in a short time, Michael was dismissed. He explained that he felt that it was an unwarranted response to the fast-paced change that he had implemented.

Michael’s final appointment prior to Tilvert College was his first in the Victorian government education system. After the difficult experience leading the small independent school he decided to move across to the government system. His new role was as an Assistant Principal in a large secondary
school in an outer, northern Melbourne suburb. Michael described that discipline was a significant issue in this school but he actively sought out the challenge to address this by requesting that his responsibilities were expanded to include behaviour management. He successfully introduced a ‘very authoritarian discipline policy’ (P1) which was based on one that had been implemented by the Principal at the independent school where he had been Assistant Principal. Michael described the ‘Clear Rules Policy’ which included strict liability for offence. It was effective in restoring discipline but it challenged him in many ways.

[We] had about 200 kids on detention per day, had introduced the most authoritarian, horrible disciplinary system that you’ve ever seen. [But] got it to the 95 percentile for effective discipline policy within two years. [I] had teachers coming up and saying that they had run out of work to teach at mid-year because they no longer had to spend half their time on discipline. [I] had kids coming up. Like heaps of kids coming up and thanking me for restoring order to the place. But it was the worst time in education that I’ve had. I hated it. It was just soul destroying. But it was what was needed at the time. (Principal)

4.6.2. What are the leadership characteristics and practices of this Principal?

The themes that emerged in response to this research question were derived from analysis of the 16 individual and group interviews undertaken at the school. The specific questions used depended on the category of participant (School Leaders, Teachers, Students, Parents and School council members). In accordance with the nature of the semi-structured interview methodology, the researcher chose questions that responded to the flow of the conversational style of the interviews (outlined in more detail in Chapter Three).

Comments about Michael’s characteristics and practices were also often shared in response to other questions, such as those asking for information about how school success is perceived and the participants’ insights into the culture, vision and relationships at the school. The three principal interviews also generated plentiful data about Michael’s characteristics and practices.

The data collected from the interviews, observations and supporting documents were analysed with NVivo qualitative analysis software using a grounded approach where themes were not pre-determined, but emerged as the evidence was analysed.

4.6.3. Principal Leadership Characteristics

The turnaround of Tilverton had been clearly influenced by the appointment of Michael. The combination of his personality, beliefs and passion are identifiable as significant in the transformations and successes at the school. This section describes specific characteristics that participants identified
and that were observed. Table 4.5 shows a summary of the emergent themes with frequency of comments attributable to each theme for each of the interviewees, interview groups and from the observations. The Principal’s three interviews are combined in the Principal response column. Each of these themes is then explored further in the sections below.
### Table 4.5: Number of interview comments attributed to themes of Principal characteristics

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<td>Committed to students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reformer/ Risk Taker</td>
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4.6.3.1. Committed to students

The strength of focus on students at Tilverton was apparent across the school and was strongly evidenced in all aspects of data collection for this study. This was underpinned by the authentic and trust based relationships that existed between students and educators. Michael exemplified and prioritised these relationships with students. Evidence from the three interviews conducted with him indicated that this theme had the highest incident of self-report with 22 comments made about connections with and commitment to the students. His connection with the students was witnessed during observations where he knew the name of every student he encountered and interacted with them in ways that showed that he knew them as individuals, both personally and as a learner (Ob1, Ob3, Ob5, Ob7, Ob9, Ob10, Ob12, Ob16). This was supported by interview participants (SLa, SLb, SCMb, SGa, SGb) who reported that Michael knows every student in the school and that it is valued by them.

He is very personally involved... you will walk past him in the hall and he will ask you how you are doing and what’s going on and what’s happening in your education. Just see how you are doing, give you some advice, pick you up if you are down. It’s great. (Student Group)

Importantly this characteristic of meaningful commitment to students was described as a driver of his leadership (SCMb, SGb, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tb, Te).

He gets attached to the students. He likes getting to know them... He likes knowing every students’ name, he likes knowing their backgrounds, what they are interested in, where they are heading, and I think that’s what drives him. (School Leader)

4.6.3.2. Visionary

The scale of change that occurred at Tilverton in the short space of five years had been anchored by a strong vision for a student controlled learning. Evidence suggested that the genesis for this ambitious and transformative vision was Michael’s leadership in imagining, articulating and committing to a different future for the school. (P1, P2, P3, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf, SCMa, SCMb, PG, Ob11, Ob14, Ob16).

Very driven, very much with a vision, very visionary but as with a lot of good visionaries able to take other people along with him. (School Council Member)

In terms of being a visionary sort of person for the school he is fantastic. I think that he sets a great foundation for developing a vision for the school (Teacher)
Chapter 4: Case Study A - Tilverton College

The strength of this characteristic and the influence on the school’s improvement journey was illustrated within the first two minutes of the first interview conducted with Michael through this comment in response to an invitation to describe the school,

It’s a school that for the last five years has been guided by vision... The vision that built the school was to be a dynamic and caring learning community recognised for future focused personalised learning. I usually am very sceptical of vision statements, you know because people workshop them and then that’s about all they do with them. But ours, we’re really happy to be held accountable to our vision statement. Whenever we are faced with serious questions we’ve always referred back to the vision and gone well what are we really trying to achieve? Who are we here for? (Principal)

In a later interview, Michael elaborated on the importance of the clarity of the vision and the commitment that he expected to it.

But when we started, when your back is up against the wall there had to be a singularity of purpose and a non-ambiguous message... torturing staff by making sure that they knew how to recite the school vision, which a lot of people didn’t like, but I said, ‘well sorry you are not a volunteer if I am paying you to do something you can learn the vision statement’, you know it’s not too hard. So, there was a singularity of purpose... It’s really quick to implement, people can get clarification quickly, it’s pretty unambiguous. People know what you stand for. (Principal)

Other interviewees demonstrated respect for Michael’s commitment to his vision and his ability to inspire others to connect with it.

The end point is quite clear. The vision is very, very clear. And that’s probably more than what a lot of schools have so we should be pretty grateful for that... We are all here because we obviously believe in the vision. (Teacher)

4.6.3.3. Risk Taker and Reformer

Michael’s background as described earlier was noted as influential on his pre-disposition to take risks and favour reform. It was known that Michael did not enjoy his own schooling (SLa, SLb, Tb, Te) and identified by Michael as an influence on his work.

I hated school, hated it. So, part of what this is, is a reaction against everything I despised. All educators refer, I don’t care if you’ve been out 40 years you still reflect back on what it was like when you were on the other end of the process. (Principal)

His career experiences encouraged him to develop a belief that education is ‘broken’ and not suited to many children and this was a key platform underlying his philosophies and therefore his leadership (Ob1, Ob13, Ob14, Ob15, Ob16). Figure 4.9 is a graphic recording of Michael’s presentation for TEDx Melbourne 2014 and demonstrates his personal background and beliefs about education and the reformative aspects of the Tilverton approach.
Figure 4.9: Graphic Recording of Presentation at TEDxMelbourne 2014

Figure 4.9 provides insight to how Michael’s characteristics drove the transformation at Tilverton under his leadership. It was explained by Michael and other interviewees that the aim of change at Tilverton was to significantly reform everything that resembles a ‘traditional’ approach (SLa, SLb, P1, Ta, Td, Te, SGa). Michael’s fervent comment on the number of year’s students attend secondary schools further illustrates this:

Why six years? School is the only place you can’t get out for good behaviour. Prison you can get out of for good behaviour. Time in seat learning – disgraceful. (Principal)

The situation of the school was somewhat serendipitous for Michael as he started his principalship. Closure was thought to be inevitable so Michael felt that he had nothing to lose by attempting to implement this different approach. He explained that his beliefs about the dysfunction of traditional models of education would have influenced his leadership in any school setting, but that Tilverton gave him the opportunity to challenge traditional structures at a much faster and riskier pace. The risks paid off and early major changes saw improvement, particularly in enrolment numbers and student satisfaction. As a result, Michael’s credibility increased, he attracted greater respect and authority, and grew his leadership identity as an innovator and reformer.
4.6.3.4. Trust

The presence of trust was a core characteristic of the relationships across the school. The equitable and trusting relationships evident were influenced by personal characteristics of Michael. His example of casual, approachable, friendly interactions set a tone that was repeated throughout the school. His ability to connect with individuals, particularly students, was reported as influential in rebuilding the school. Further, trust-based relationships had supported effective change (P1, P2, P3, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tb, Tc,Td, Te, Tf, PG, SGa, SGb). The starting point for the trust generated was the commitment of time that Michael makes to the students.

There would be very few secondary state schools that would have a population of 650 students of which every one of those students coming in would have had half an hour to an hour with the Principal. So, they all think he personally knows them and he does. I think the fact that the Principal, he’s spoken to them, it’s not to the parents, it’s very much to them. Treating them as you’re the person I need to know about. The students really remember that and I think that is where the loyalty is. (School Leader)

It was very clear that his primary commitment was to the students but Michael had also built a significant amount of trust with the parents and the community. This was a consequence of the relationships that he had with the students, but also as a result of his open, available, honest approach with parents.

A lot of our parents when they join us initially like to be made to feel special. They liked the fact that the Principal went to their [children’s] games and that sort of thing. They weren’t here, personally I feel, that they weren’t here for the whole educational push and what we were starting to try. It was more that they were here because they felt special, their child was being made to feel special. And they had a direct line to the Principal and the Assistant Principal. And their children were coming home happy. They liked that. (School Leader)

Michael believes in the investment of this time to develop positive relationships.

If they know the Principal and they’ve got confidence that the Principal will at least hear them, genuinely hear them and be fair in their judgement then anything is solvable, there is never a problem. We might agree to disagree but at least they are guaranteed that they will be listened to and that I’ll make the judgement that I think is right, based on the information and I don’t think anyone asks anything more than that. We all know that we might have different opinions on things but if they know that we’ve all got the kids and the school’s best interests at heart, it’s a pretty good basis... Sometimes I worry because we’ve got a lot of emotional credit with our parents. They are happy with what we do and sometimes when we make mistakes they don’t even let us know. Because they go ‘Actually it’s still so good I don’t want to make a fuss’ (Principal)

The trust developed with teachers was a more complex manifestation of Michael’s characteristics. Trust in these professional relationships seemed to be both enhanced by his open and approachable manner but also sometimes hindered by the strength of his conviction and history of his ownership of
the transformative processes. Comments from teacher interviews about trust were categorised into respect and belief in him, based on his open, honest and committed approach (SLa, SLb, Ta, Tc, Td, Te, Tf) and that trust was based on the successful leadership of the school turnaround (SLa, Tc, Td, Te, Tf).

Because there has been such a change and he’s gone through all the change with [the staff] and they’ve seen that he’s turned or the school has turned around from being almost closed and them having to find jobs elsewhere, to being this thriving place. So, they do have the trust in him. (School Leader)

In contrast, there were some teachers that expressed a desire for Michael to show greater trust and belief in them to support and enact the vision.

Not every principal takes such an active interest in everything that is happening in the school. Probably needs to trust a little bit more. What drives him is his vision and we’re all part of that but he needs to understand, I think, and trust that we want that to happen too. (Teacher)

**4.6.3.5. Passion and Enthusiasm**

Michael’s interactions were characterised by passion, enthusiasm and conviction. He was identified as being steadfast in his beliefs and able to communicate them in ways that inspired others to share those beliefs and commit to the vision of the school (SLa, SLb, SCMa, SCMb, Ta, Tb, Td, Te, Tf).

And then seeing the Principal and just how much drive he had even in that first 6 months. It was like, Wow! This is commitment and you know, I’m on this as well. (Teacher)

This had been a successful characteristic in transforming the reputation of the school within the community. Michael engaged with students, parents and families and rallied staff to enact change and support innovative approaches.

Interviewees credited this characteristic with the early successful changes to the image of the school in the community.

He came in with a vision and I guess a personality that was very enthusiastic very can-do, kind of, let’s-do-this. Let’s roll up our sleeves and get going... I think the jump in and do something brings with it a kind of energy that is infectious (School Council Member)

Teachers who were able to comment on Michael’s early days at the school supported this sense of immediate energy that was injected into the struggle culture,

He came in and he was just like BANG! from the first moment. I think whether you agreed with him or not it was what the school needed. (Teacher)

This comment illustrates that the ‘can-do’, ‘let’s get on with it’, unrelenting positive enthusiasm and committed passion for the vision was critical at the time to the turnaround of the school. The credit
that was assigned to Michael for the success of early changes (PG, SCMa, SCMb, SGa, SGb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf) was then critical to the trust that developed and the resulting confidence in Michael that facilitated continued change.

We were on the brink of closure and we needed someone to really come in and have some guts and that’s when [Michael] came in. I say this all the time, I don’t always agree with everything he has said or done but the reality is that he had the guts to do it ... he’s made changes, he’s had success. (Teacher)

4.6.3.6. Summary of Leadership Characteristics

The leadership characteristics that have been identified as evident in Michael’s principalship and successful turnaround of Tilverton College could generally be categorised as strongly individual based. Belief in his vision, his willingness to take risks and his tenacity to implement major change contributed to the significant transformation at Tilverton. Michael demonstrated understanding of the circumstances and context of the school throughout his principalship. This allowed him to draw on aspects of his personality in ways that were needed at the time. He also recognised that a future challenge was to enhance collaboration and distribution of leadership of the school. This included the consideration of the influence of his personal characteristics. His response to a question in interview two asking what would happen if he were to leave the school illustrated his insight:

That’s one of the most common questions that I get. We call it the under the bus question, what happens when you go under the bus? Had that happened in the first three years it would have been catastrophic. Now it might be the best thing that happens. Because of my personality type and things like that, it might actually be better if I get out of the way. Now I’m not signalling some intent to leave but, what I’ve bought to the position might not even be in the best interests now. So, if I left or when I leave, I would suggest that they don’t get someone who is like me. I think that they probably need someone who is less dominant. Because that will create a vacuum that forces other leaders to step into that role. (Principal)

4.6.3.1. Dedication and determination

The situation at Tilverton when Michael was appointed was dire. As described above, Michael came with a vision for education that was significantly different to the more common traditional approach that had been operating at Tilverton, and in neighbouring schools. He saw an opportunity to reinvent the school but the magnitude of change required was significant. The evidence suggests that Michael’s dedicated, determined, almost single-minded approach was instrumental in achieving the necessary change (SLa, P2, SCMa, SGa, Ta, Tc, Te, Tf, Ob,12, Ob16).

[He’s] relentless in promoting the school and pushing for changes that are necessary. (School Council Member)
He’s very caring and very dedicated and he always tries his hardest. (Student Group)

He’s a tough cookie, because he’s had to be. He’s really had to be. (Teacher)

He worked through several phases, guided by slightly different, but equally compelling goals for the school. The first of these phases was to increase enrolments to prevent closure. As one example of his dedication to connecting with the community to solicit enrolments he would visit the local shops and cafes talking to parents about his vision for the school (P1, SLb).

He had no time for staff resistance to the radical changes that he was implementing and he needed to be firm in his decisions. This was in part due to the time critical nature of the situation and reflects his dogged determination. These comments summarise his approach at that time:

Get on board or get out of the way, just don’t oppose us. (Principal)

When I did all of my leadership training through the army there are times when you are consultative and times when you are not. And this was a time when we couldn’t be wishy washy we couldn’t consult to the nth degree because we would be dead in the water. (Principal)

4.6.4. Principal Practices

This section presents evidence about the themes related to the practices that Michael utilised in his principalship at Tilverton. As will be demonstrated, his practices reflected many aspects of the characteristics of his leadership and how they were perceived and explained by research participants as influencing the transformation and success at the school. Table 4.6 shows a summary of the emergent themes with the frequency of comments attributable to each theme for each of the interviewees or interview groups and observations. The Principal’s three interviews are combined in the Principal response column. Each of these themes is then explored further in the sections below.
Table 4.6: Number of interviews comments attributed to themes of Principal practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>SLa</th>
<th>SLb</th>
<th>Ta</th>
<th>Tb</th>
<th>Tc</th>
<th>Td</th>
<th>Te</th>
<th>Tf</th>
<th>SCMa</th>
<th>SCMb</th>
<th>PG</th>
<th>SGa</th>
<th>SGb</th>
<th>Obs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students first</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>113</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspires shared moral purpose</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Implementation of rapid change</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Develops relationships</td>
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</table>
4.6.4.1. **Students first**

This aspect of Michael’s practice emerged as very strong with 103 comments from interviews coded to this theme. Every participant commented on Michael’s practice of prioritising students. This practice had clearly contributed to the enhancement of the Take Control philosophy of student empowerment in their education that underpinned the school culture and operations.

Michael’s prioritisation of students was regularly evident in his own interview comments. Across his three interviews, comments about students were more numerous (31) than comments coded to any other theme.

> I’m quite open in saying that I put the kids ahead of the staff. I’ve told [the staff] that. I’m not here for you, you’re an employee, you can leave if you don’t like it, the kids don’t have that choice. So, they know that if push comes to shove the kids are our top priority and if they don’t like it you’re in the wrong profession. (Principal)

> My theory is that if you’re not here in the best interests of the kids then you’re in the wrong job. So, if you don’t like it and it makes your life more difficult but it makes the kids’ lives or outcomes better then that’s what’s happening. (Principal)

The perception that he put students first was also clearly noted by other interviewees (SLb, P1, P2, P3, SGa, SGb, Tb, Te) and came through strongly in the student group interviews with high numbers of comments related to this theme (7 for each student group).

> He cares more about making the students happy than about making him look good. (Student Group)

The characteristic of commitment to students that was identified as a very strong theme in analysis of Michael’s leadership characteristics translates into this practice of putting students first. This flowed through to the culture and successes of the school. The identity of the school as one where student empowerment was central was evident in any interaction that was undertaken during the research period. The school had clearly moved to a model of education where students had choices, opportunities and influence in all aspects of their school experience.

4.6.4.2. **Inspires shared moral purpose**

An important aspect of Michael’s practice were actions and strategies that had brought others along on the journey of significant change. Practices that unified the Tilvertion learning community to the moral purpose underlying the school’s vision and philosophy were important.
Michael inserted himself into a depressed school culture and clearly, passionately and consistently articulated a new vision for education provision at the school. He did this in a way that inspired the community to see an alternative to closure. His ability to connect others with the moral purpose behind changes, combined with some of the early successes, led to increased support for his leadership and for the direction he was taking the school in. (P1, P2, P3, SCMa, Ta, Tb, Tc,Td, Te, Tf, Ob4, Ob7, Ob8, Ob9, Ob10, Ob11, Ob13, Ob14, Ob16)

He has bought this place out of the doldrums, it was going down and fast. Would have keeled over at some point if he hadn’t taken it over. I guess he used the opportunity when he took over the school to try some ideas out. And the idea is, can we offer a non-traditional education and what does it look like. And he’s been researching and leading that idea ever since. (Teacher)

From very early he developed traction for the vision through his strong personal commitment to improvement in perceived times of crisis.

The reality is that he has moved things forward. Things have changed. Obviously, he knows something of what he is doing and obviously there are people out there that really want that style of education. So, if I’m not going to follow it then I need to leave. So, it’s almost like you’ve got to make that decision, am I going to be on board or am I going to jump off. Because he’s made changes. He’s had success. So, who am I, who was here prior to him, didn’t have any success as part of the school team, to say to him, you know, you are doing it wrong. (Teacher)

This quote also illustrates another clear aspect to the way that Michael developed unity. This was by expecting that all staff committed to the vision and accompanying changes or that they moved on from the school (P2). As the school began rebuilding and enrolments increased Michael could appoint new staff who were supportive of the vision. This enabled a greater density of support and enthusiasm within the school (SLa, PG, SCMa, SCMb, SGa). He also situated himself as central to the vision and direction by assuming a ‘gatekeeper’ presence as illustrated by personally conducting all school tours and enrolment interviews (SLb, PG, P1, P2, SCMa, SCMb, SGa, Te).

They can’t get into the school without meeting me. I just won’t enrol ... Nobody is going anywhere until we have an agreed understanding of what we’re about. We need to understand what we are about because we are only delivering what we are delivering, not what they think we should deliver. So, it has to be a shared understanding and they have to be comfortable with that. (Principal)

[Michael] interviews everybody. So, every single student that comes into the school has to have a tour and interview with him. So, that sort of means that you are probably going to get more people who are like minded because the others won’t come because it won’t suit them. (School Leader)

By personally connecting with every potential student and his or her parents through an interview and school tour Michael had ensured that every member of the school community was clear about the direction of the school.
A key part of the TC approach was a high expectation of parental involvement. This was most evident in development of individual learning plans and in the home learning program. The logic followed that having been provided clear information about the TC vision and the style of education offered, a decision to enrol enhanced the likelihood of support. A sentiment explained by this School Council Member,

I think it’s because you’re tending to get a group of parents who see the advantages of the type of education that is being offered here and they are kind of by default more motivated and more interested. (School Council Member)

The school attracted and developed people who were genuinely ‘pulling in the same direction’ (P2). This was a tribute to the actions and behaviours of the leadership. A School Council Member summed this sentiment,

I think it has really come together a lot more. Like there is a real sense of celebration about what the school is. That when he started off, not everybody was on board whereas now there’s a real sense that everybody knows what it is that the school is trying to do. That we are on our way. That we’ve reached what we would consider to be maximum numbers and I think [Michael] has been very much behind that... I think he has spread out a lot of his beliefs into other people, who probably already had those beliefs so it’s not like they were blank slates or whatever. But he has bought it out and allowed them to develop. (School Council Member)

4.6.4.3. **Staff development and management**

Michael’s leadership practices for developing and managing teachers emerged as an interesting theme. The evidence suggested that he did not subscribe to more commonly espoused approaches to school improvement which commend the importance of directing significant attention and resources to improving teacher quality. As an example, in response to an interview question ‘What are the key leadership strategies to improve a school? Michael replied:

Focusing on the students and your structures, which are things that you can change. Not on the inadequacies of your present staff. All the people that I hear about wanting to change schools all invest thousands of hours on staff development and it’s got a really low rate of return. (Principal)

In another conversation Michael described his approach to making changes to improve the school and explained why he didn’t believe that a focus on staff should be a primary concern.

When I started a whole heap of people came up to me and said “you’ve got to work with your staff, you’ve got to turn the staff around, it’s all about the staff” and all of that sort of thing. And I basically said “I haven’t got time to turn the staff, I don’t even know whether staff can change” and I still don’t know whether staff can change appreciably. Very, very rarely have I seen a bad staff member turn into a good staff, in fact I’ve never seen that. I’ve seen incompetent teachers become tolerable, that’s about it, and I’ve seen an average teacher become good, but you can’t
Chapter 4: Case Study A – Tilverton College

Michael’s high expectations for the staff were clear and this comment evidences how Michael’s expectations influenced his practice regarding staff development,

So, I’ve given you the responsibility and you’ve come back and gone well train me and my answer to that is well you are a professional so train yourself. I believe that it is the staff member’s responsibility to look after their own professional development. (Principal)

A follow up question to this statement asked if Michael expected teachers to improve.

I do because they are being paid and they are professionals. But most of them want to and that is what I love. Don’t wait for us to come and say you need to go and do that. You come to us and say, I want to learn how to do this and we will talk to you about ways that we can help. (Principal)

Some of Michael’s responses to questions on this theme in the interviews were quite controversial and direct, for example,

Staff are a necessary evil in the system and I’m not sure all that necessary to be perfectly honest (Principal)

We just need to get out of the way and stop thinking that it is all about us. The biggest problem in education is that it is run by teachers. Ok. I don’t say that lightly. It actually is. Because my
theory is that the reason most people go into teaching is because they had a good time in school and they enjoyed the structure of it, they enjoyed everything about it because they were the success models. They were affirmed by their teachers, groomed by them as, you’re a good person, you fit the mould. So, when they are considering a career they go back into that same mould and the same things that annoyed them when they were a student, they’re still annoyed by now they are a teacher, but now they can give them detentions and medicate them. So, it becomes a self-fulfilling system. (Principal)

However, he also displayed clear leadership expertise in the way he had built a cohesive team and brought others along with a vision that originated with him. His approach to staff management and development was based on shared understandings and goals for the students and the school. He was successful in developing a team around him that were motivated more by this shared commitment than by a traditional notion of management by a school leader.

For the vast majority of our staff I don’t consider them staff, they’re other people who are on this journey who are just as passionate, just as committed and they are not ‘staff’, we are just all doing the same thing. (Principal)

A similar sense of shared purpose was evident in comments made by others and relates closely to the previously discussed strong connections to the vision. There was a clear sense that you either ‘got’ the Tilverton approach or you didn’t.

It’s really funny you know, a lot of people on the leadership group are first and second year out. It’s like who gets ‘it’. Who gets the ‘thing’. (Principal)

There was a sense that at Tilverton they were part of something important and different in the broader context of education in Australia. This influenced the way that staff were appointed, developed and managed.

4.6.4.4. Rapid change implementation

Most participants noted in interview that Michael’s approach was very fast paced and dynamic and this was reflected in the culture of the school (SLa, SLb, PG, P1, P2, P3, SCMa, SCMb, SGa, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf). He had managed over his five years to lead a considerable number of major changes which had completely transformed the school. Several respondents indicated that rapid change was now part of the culture and identity of the school (SLa, SLb, P1, SCMa, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Tf).

There’s a real culture of change, people get worried if we’re not changing things. (School Leader)

We are certainly dynamic, things have never been static. So, we’ve got a change mentality here. (Principal)
I love being part of something that is changing. That is responsive... I think a lot of school councils would be, you know every year is the same as the last... Whereas here it really is a vibrant sort of growing, changing organism. (School Council Member)

It’s just a rolling ball and we went from being a very sort of static operation to a very progressive one. (Teacher)

The sense of crisis and urgency that existed due to facing closure along with Michael’s characteristics, such as determination and identity as a risk taker, had manifested in an acceptance of rapid change. In interviews, there was recognition that there were consequences, both positive and negative, resulting from the speed of changes in the school (P3, SCMa, SGa, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td). In the third interview with Michael an insightful discussion compared the rapid change approach to that of a chainsaw.

The reality is that the second or third or fourth best decision made instantaneously, is better than the best decision made five minutes too late... Probably I guess I would be more of a chainsaw than a scalpel. (Researcher: And then patch up where you need to when you find out about it?) Yeah, a bit of a triage. (Principal)

An important aspect of this was the clear sense that the stakeholders knew that there was also responsiveness to negative consequences of a change, or a willingness to abandon an initiative if it didn’t work.

We are all just like, what is this change, and it’s like it’s just another one of those changes and then we get used to it and we are like, yeah this works and its better than what we had before, and if it isn’t then we’ll stop doing it. If it is then we will keep doing it. (Student Group)

And one of the things that I think is good too is that not everything has to last. I think that what we say that some of the things you bring in won’t work but if you don’t try them then you don’t know what’s going to work and some of the things will work for a while and then they have to be changed. (School Leader)

Most participants viewed the culture of rapid change as positive and exciting (P3, SLa, SLb, SCMa, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf).

I think rapid change creates an excitement and it also creates a climate where people that are not happy with how things currently are don’t stress about it too much. Because in their own mind they go well it won’t always be like this. It’s just that they haven’t got to it yet... So, because there was that rapid pace of change, people cut you some slack in areas that they didn’t like because they knew that it’s not going to be this way forever. (Principal)

Is it better to jump in and do something or is it better to plan? I think the jump in and do something brings with it kind of an energy that is infectious. Whereas if you kind of take a much more sedate approach you get much less energy and enthusiasm and people are kind of just, whatever. (School Council Member)

It’s very exciting because we are doing so many different things. It’s definitely not boring. There is a lot going on. We are constantly changing and doing things differently. (Teacher)
Although, as noted above, all staff participants reported positivity and excitement, there was also recognition by five of the six teachers interviewed that there were challenges associated with rapid change. (Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Tf)

> Sometimes we are too rapid in our decision making. Things get made informally and they are not well communicated. (Teacher)

> And sometimes the goal posts shift very quickly. So, you assume you are aiming for one thing and then it's like oh where did that other thing come from. So, that is quite hard. (Teacher)

The principal and other interviewees noted that decision making about change was shifting from being situated mainly with Michael and his close leadership advisors, to being more collaborative and inclusive (SLa, P2, P3, Ta, Td, Te).

> Now of course the challenge is to move to a genuinely more consultative model. Because survival, I cannot continue to use our survival as the reason for veto power over everything. (Principal)

**4.6.4.5. Develops relationships**

Michael’s ability to develop productive and supportive relationships was evident. As this theme overlaps with other themes, for example, commitment to students and developing commitment to moral purpose, it has been somewhat evidenced in previous sections. This section will consider in more depth specific practices that Michael engaged in to develop positive relationships.

On a general level, the evidence collected can be summarised by noting that Michael was well liked and respected. Parents, students and staff all made comments of admiration and respect for his achievements and his passion and enthusiasm. As discussed elsewhere, the relationships that he had with students were particularly notable and they had a strong impact on the culture and climate of the school.

Michael also clearly developed important specific relationships within the staff from early in his appointment. The strongest example of this was the relationship developed with Carolyn, his Assistant Principal (SLa, SLb, P2, P3, Ta, Tc, Te). Carolyn had been an assistant principal at the school for five years prior to Michael’s appointment. From the very start of Michael’s tenure and the transformational changes at Tilverton, Carolyn was a key supportive relationship for Michael. Their partnership was critical to the success of change initiatives. When asked how Michael so successfully implemented his vision at the school, the following was an answer from one staff member:
Carolyn]. Ok, that is it. Basically, those first few years [Michael] said let’s do this and [Carolyn] made it happen. She may say the same, she may not but [Michael] definitely would. That he would just come up with this idea ‘should we do this?’ and she’d say, ‘yeah let’s do it’ or ‘they’re not going to like it’ talking about the staff, ‘there not going to like this but nah let’s do it anyway’. So, he came up with the ideas and [Carolyn] made them happen. (School Leader)

Michael also recognised the importance of the support he had received from Carolyn, both in respect to her leadership capacity to support change but also as a personal support during challenging times.

With [Carolyn], I needed her to confirm to me that it would work and she’s been fantastic because she’s not a “yes” person. We’ve got an ultra-honest thing. If I see her do something that I think is against the philosophy I’ll say that to her and that’s tough, but likewise she will say to me ‘that’s not in accordance with our vision’, or ‘that’s not going to work’. You don’t want “yes” people that confirm your own demise basically. So, I needed her to be able to say ‘yep that’ll work’ because she knew the school inside out because she had been here for a long time. (Principal)

Michael developed a close team around him in the early ‘survival’ phase. He explained these colleagues were very important, not just for assisting in the change processes but they helped manage the emotional labour of the challenging work.

And you can’t do it alone. So, you need to get some key staff around you and they do not have to be your own senior staff necessarily, it’s just people that when you are having a low will support you and who’ve got your back. They can be teachers, they can be educational support staff, but you can’t do it alone in the school. It is too demoralising. So, you need to get some people who you can work through your philosophy with, who understand where you are coming from. Keep them close, that will keep your tyres pumped up so to speak and they will hold you accountable hopefully and then you just keep pushing forwards. (Principal)

Michael’s capacity and thoughtful practice to develop effective relationships that are based on shared values and goals was evident.

4.6.4.6. Visible and available

A key aspect of the approach of this principal was the emphasis he placed on being available and involved in all aspects of the school. The value of this practice was reflected clearly in thematic analysis of the interviews.

Observational evidence demonstrated that Michael enjoyed being out and about in the school and interacting with students (Ob1, Ob3, Ob5, Ob7, Ob9, Ob10, Ob12). It was also well reported in the interviews with the student groups that they felt that Michael ‘knew’ them (SGa, SGb). From the point of view of the parents they felt that he knew their children (SCMa, PG). This practice was perceived as
having expanded to others in leadership positions who were also reported as being exceptional in knowing the students and being available for them (SCMa, SGb).

His commitment to being available to students was evident in several ways. As previously described, he spent a considerable amount of time with students and families through the enrolment process. There were also examples provided of Michael attending important student events both for school based activities and out of school activities. This included such things as attending important basketball games (P1), and award ceremonies (SGa), participating in swimming carnival staff swimming races (Tc) and student v staff games (Ob2). He also committed to being visible and available every day. For example, manning the school crossing (SGb, SLb), time each day in the Resource Centre (SLb), and playing table tennis with students (Ob6). Students reported spending time lying on couches engrossed in discussion with Michael (SGb) and he was well known for appearing in classes regularly to chat to students (SGb, Tc). All students and parents had his mobile phone number and he welcomed contact from them (P1, SLa).

Observing his interactions when walking around the school it was clear that he knew the students (Ob1, Ob3, Ob6, Ob12). He had something meaningful to say to everyone he spoke to and it was clear that it was appreciated as described by the students,

He’s very hands on. So, you see him around school and he’s not the type of principal who says let’s do this and then doesn’t do it. He actually does things that he thinks will benefit the school and he puts it into motion. And then some other days you might just see him in the resource centre playing table tennis with the students. It’s very hands on, very interactive with the students. There’s no hierarchy. We are all on the same level. (Student Group)

I actually really like it here because he’s my first principal who is always there... He’s everywhere. You turn around and he’s there. He’s really involved. (Student Group)

The fact that every morning you see him in the corridor and he’s like ‘Hi how have you been and how was your weekend?’ Little things like that, little personal connections when you are like the Principal cares about my weekend! (Student Group)

4.6.4.7. High expectations

Michael was decisive, direct and consistent in his expectations that decisions and actions taken were in line with the school’s vision. As indicated in Table 4.6 above it was generally the staff that reported during interviews that the clarity and consistency of message was strong when it came to the expectations (SLa, SLb, Ta, Tb, Tc,Td, Te, Tf, SCMa, and Ob14).
He has high expectations, that is the first thing. He expects nothing but the best from all of us. He is quite strong and direct. I think he is quite honest and open about it, there’s no hidden agenda. He tells us what he is looking for, he tells us what he is expecting. (Teacher)

As discussed in the analysis of the importance of vision above, the centrality of the school vision is clear and Michael consistently behaved and interacted in ways that supported and embedded this for all community members.

It was also clear that an expectation of support for the vision was a starting point for engagement for all members of the school community. For the staff, part of accepting a position at Tilverton was an agreement to teach, work and interact in ways that aligned with the vision.

I mean everyone who is here, and that is something that he does do very well, he does make it very clear about what he wants his school to look like. So, there aren’t really any excuses if you’ve come in here and said oh but I don’t really want to teach in that way. There is no excuse for that. (Teacher)

This acceptance that there were no excuses for a lack of understanding or support of the vision of the school underpins the sense of accountability that staff described. It was clear that Michael generally had good understandings of the roles and responsibilities of his staff and that where necessary he would engage in interventions if he felt that these were not being fulfilled appropriately (P3, SLb, Td). His ability to remember details and information about students that was observed throughout case study visits also applied to staff and assisted him to manage accountability (SLb, Tc).

Michael saw his direct approach to accountability with others as something he expected to be equally applied to his leadership.

We’ll talk, I’ll pick them up if they’ve done something wrong, but they pick me up too. They’ll let me know about such and such. You made this decision unilaterally without telling me or something. Absolutely, and I’ll admit it. (Principal)

He doesn’t hesitate to speak his mind. He is certainly happy to share his views as much as he is happy for us to share ours. But you know if he’s not happy with something. He’ll just tell you as simple as that. There’s no crap, no beat around the bush. (Teacher)

Challenges of managing expectations and accountability were not avoided altogether. There was evidence that, although the vision and expectations were very explicit, the details and support for daily practice were less clearly understood by the staff (Tb, Tc, Td, Te).

He has certain expectations that he wants the staff to meet. He wants staff to be a certain level of professionalism in the classroom and he is quite tough on us with that. So, you are constantly making sure that you are doing what is expected of you... Sometimes, not all staff are at that mind-frame where they can do that. So, that can cause issues. (Teacher)
Michael (P1, P2) and others (SLa, Ta, Tb, Tc) described that empowerment was a key value of the school culture. It was a goal for students and a principle that was also applied to the work of teachers. How teachers responded to this was clearly varied. Although it was noted that some staff struggled, there was evidence that others appreciated the freedom to solve their own problems and the trust in their capabilities to do so (SLa, Ta, Td, Tf).

He’s very much posing the questions back on others and getting us to come up with our solutions which is very empowering. (School Leader)

The leadership here does try to empower the staff to make their own decisions, do their own thing. I mean we’ve been told umpteen times that if we see something that we like then we should run with it. That’s quite empowering. From a leadership point of view that’s a good thing. (Teacher)

The level of Michael’s belief in empowering staff to make decisions reflected the expectation that they can and will solve their own problems (P2, SLa, Tb, Tc).

If I ever hear that you have not felt empowered enough to make a decision that you know to be right and you know is the right thing to do in that situation and the cost is less than around $200, I am going to go ballistic. You know if you can solve a problem, buy a resource, have an opportunity or whatever ... I’m not going to get hung up on $200 or whatever... so you have the power... I guess the point is that the staff are, I would like to think that they are, empowered to make a call and a lot of them do. (Principal)

An illustrative example of practice that aimed to empower staff was the implementation of a strategy where Michael ‘mandated’ that the teachers make mistakes. He instigated this approach with the goal of teachers developing more ‘dynamic, engaging, creative lessons’ (P1). The hope was that encouraging mistakes would reduce the restraint of the safe and familiar approaches in the classroom and encourage teachers to take risks and be innovative in their teaching. To best ensure that this occurred he presented it as a requirement.

I have said to the staff that they will be evaluated on the basis of how many mistakes they make. If they have not made any mistakes and cannot demonstrate that they are continuing to make mistakes, then we will be having a serious discussion. (Principal)

Further demonstrating the complexity of the high expectations when transferred into daily practice by staff is this teacher’s comment about this requirement to make mistakes:

Look I understand where he’s coming from with that. I understand that kind of idea where if you don’t make the mistake you don’t learn and you don’t move forward. But I don’t like thinking that. I like to think that I’m doing enough preparation that I don’t make the mistake. But then the flip side of that is he is encouraging you to try something new. (Teacher)
4.6.4.8. Research backed strategies

The implementation of a comprehensively different approach to education provision at TC required Michael to not only advocate for changes passionately but also to demonstrate legitimacy for the initiatives. This was achieved by positioning himself as knowledgeable and ‘current’ in terms of research and awareness of broad educational theories and trends.

Regularly over the data collection activities reference was made to ‘research’ that supported the approaches and initiatives being implemented (SLa, SLb, PG, P1, P2, P3, Ta, Tb, Td, Te, SCMa, SGa, Ob14, Ob15, Ob16). Michael was often credited with having research behind decision making as these examples show:

Certainly when [Michael] talks about bigger picture stuff he always talks about research backed decisions. We certainly don’t make them on a whim. (Teacher)

He’s very into research. He keeps up with the research around the place on education. (Parent Group)

One of the things that I like about [Michael] is that he is often talking about research and saying best practice indicates this and he’ll refer to studies that have been done... personally I like that because I like to know that the thinking is based on something other than I just woke up last night and thought this might be a good idea. (School Council Member)

But the changes are not changes because someone came up with a change. It is based on the research most of the time. (Student Group)

This had clearly been an important practice in terms of how strategies were communicated and validated to the community. However, it appeared that there was a fine balance apparent in the use of research to support decisions and strategies. Tilverton’s identity was based on being progressive and innovative. This direction meant that some research-supported teaching and learning practices, that are common in many other schools, are not as valued at Tilverton. There was some sense from staff that they were aware of some of these conflicts (Tb, Tf, SLa). However, the evidence was that Michael was deeply engaged in research in a quest to find transformative, student-centred approaches to education provision.

4.6.4.9. Summary of Principal Practices

The themes of leadership practice that emerged from the evidence demonstrated that Michael’s personal and leadership characteristics influenced his actions. Michael’s leadership practices can be summarised as being student-centred and direct. Most interviewees reported there was no possibility
of mis-interpretation of what the school valued and how they were expected to support students to take control of their learning. At the whole school level, Michael’s practices were effective in turning around the school, uniting the community behind a vision and drawing together strong, like-minded staff to work through rapid changes. High expectations, strong key relationships and being visible, available and open helped Michael stay connected to all stakeholders and as a result the staff, students and community connected to the vision and supported Michael’s leadership.

Participants in this research all identified that there were further areas that should be focused on for improvement, particularly in the details of practice and organisation and this was starting to occur. Michael’s leadership practices were shown to reflect these changing needs with leadership distribution and shared responsibility becoming more common. These changes will be discussed further in the following section.

4.7. Contribution of others to leadership and success

At the time of the data collection activities leadership at Tilverton was undergoing significant change and diversification. A second Assistant Principal was appointed, three new positions of Learning Development Leaders had been created and a new house system required the appointment of six new Heads of House. In 2015, there were more formal leadership positions than there had ever been since Michael’s appointment, signalling a new phase in the distribution of leadership responsibilities that contrasted to the principal-centred leadership style of the earlier years.

The early period of ‘survival’, as it was labelled by Michael, gave licence to a very top down, authoritative approach to leadership. As has been evidenced earlier, Michael felt that taking direct control during this period was essential.

Interviews provided evidence of greater distribution of leadership with the increase in leadership positions. Interviewees also reported that Michael was stepping back somewhat from deep involvement in all aspects of the school.

So, the leadership, it’s got to this point now where the Principal has been the focal point for the last four years and now you see that he’s pushing it downwards. (School Leader)

I sat down with him last week at a meeting that they had with his learning leaders, and they were running the meeting and we went off and sat down and just had a chat. He just sat down and he said, for the first time I feel like I’m not needed. He said, it’s a bit scary. So, he’s not the type of leader that is holding everything tight because I think if that was the case he still would be holding it pretty tight now. And my comment to him was that you know the sign of a good
leader is that everything keeps operating when you are not there. And that’s scary because it is your baby. But it’s also a good thing. (School Council Member)

This greater distribution of leadership was possible for several reasons identifiable from the evidence. Firstly, increases in enrolments and therefore staffing resources had facilitated a greater spread of leadership roles. Secondly, the effectiveness of Michael’s practices of developing commitment to the approach at Tilverton had resulted in staff members who were passionately committed to the TC approach. This had deepened the pool of leadership capacity and talent that Michael could access. Observations (Ob3, Ob4, Ob8, Ob10, Ob11 and Ob14) as well as evidence from interviews (SLa, SLb, P2, P3, Ta, Tc, Te, Tf, SCMa, SCMb), showed that the unity, in terms of shared moral purpose and passion for the student-centred approaches, was very strong across those holding leadership roles.

Michael’s practices of empowering others and developing open and inclusive leadership structures, such as the open School Leadership Team, had provided opportunity for anyone with interest to exercise leadership within the school.

I think the leadership ... there was a word used that we were ‘lean’... because we don’t have a lot of layers of leadership. That’s officially. I think that we have been through a period where we have been quite tight with two leading teachers, an assistant principal and a principal. But I think that the leadership is broader than that. So, you have an official leadership but I think that the opportunities for anyone to run with something means that it is expanded. (School Leader)

There was also an effect from the One-Person Policy, which outlined the belief in the school that from Principal to student, everyone’s voice was important and valuable. This policy had enhanced a culture of broadly shared ownership and agency across the school. This had an effect of broadly shared responsibility which Michael portrayed as everyone being on the same journey (P2).

The development from the early principal-centred leadership to a significant increase in formal leadership roles and responsibilities, as well as a strong and broadly shared stewardship of the culture and success at Tilverton was clear.

4.8. Summary

This case study of Tilverton College has investigated a school that had significantly transformed after the appointment of a new principal. Tilverton was reinvented from a situation of demise and crisis characterised by negative circumstances such as low enrolments, staff issues and negative community reputation, to a school that was recognised for its courageous and innovative approach to engaging young people. A commitment to a vision of education that empowers students in their own learning
journeys had underpinned changes to structures, programs and ultimately, culture. The opportunities offered to students to develop their interests and passions through their education choices were vast. The opportunities for students to be involved in school operations and management through participation on leadership teams, staff selection panels and paid work at the school were also broad and these connected the students deeply to the school.

There was a sense of pride in what had been achieved and a clear connection by all stakeholders to the unique direction that the school had taken. Students, staff and parents were active participants and advocates and were inspired by the enactment of the vision for students to be engaged and empowered learners. For many this was a circumstance that they had not found in their education experiences prior to working at or attending Tilverton.

The performance of the school, as indicated by available standardised measures, had over the past decade been below that of schools with students of similar backgrounds. However, in 2015 the Year Nine NAPLAN results started to show the levels of performance that the school should expect based on its measure of advantage.

Notions of success at Tilverton were not restricted to student achievement on standardised measures. However, there was acknowledgement that these results should show improvement over coming years, and that this should be considered as a goal. Participants in this research regularly discussed success being about students developing positive and empowered attitudes to their education. Success was also about the school providing choices and opportunities for the students to follow pathways into their areas of passion for learning and career interest. The school claims success through the community support evident in doubling student enrolments over a four-year period and the significant broader external interest in the Tilverton approach to education.

The leadership of the school through the transformative years was centralised around Michael. Evidence showed that his committed and student-centred approach was a significant factor in the success of his leadership. This commitment underpinned the strong vision that Michael communicated broadly and connected others with. The strength of this vision in the school was clear and has been a foundation against which change initiatives have been developed and evaluated. Michael’s leadership characteristics include determination, passion and willingness to take risks and these were well suited to the needs of the school in the early years of his appointment. The strength of his drive to transform the school was captured by the sense of ‘get on board, or get out of the way’ that he shared through this research. This phrase neatly summarises how he shifted the culture of the school with an approach
that pushed forward quickly and collected supporters through targeted relationship development, staff selection and enrolment processes.

The contribution of others to leadership in the school had increased over the years as Michael had developed the cultural and financial capital to distribute responsibility for the vision of the school more broadly. Staff and students were empowered to exercise leadership in many formal and informal ways including by open invitations for participation in formal leadership groups and activities. Policies and practices that encouraged anyone to implement an idea or initiative that benefits the students also provided broad opportunity for leadership across students and staff.

This case study has evidenced the improvement of Tilverton College to an innovative, successful and vibrant learning community. These changes were driven by and delivered as a result of Michael’s leadership practices and characteristics. His leadership united the community to develop a strong sense of ownership, investment and pride in the success of the school.
CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY B – FAIRVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

5.1. Introduction

This chapter reports the findings obtained from analysis of data from interviews, observations and documents gathered from the school throughout the research period. The school profile, culture and performance are described. Robyn (a pseudonym that will be used for the purpose of this study) is the Principal of Fairview High School and the data has been interrogated to provide insight into her leadership characteristics and practices as well as broader school leadership and school culture. Findings are presented according to themes that were derived from the data under the following sections:

- School profile
- School context
- Performance of the school
- Success of the school
- Principal leadership
- Contribution of others to leadership and success

To generate understanding of how school context and school leadership contributed to the performance and success of the school, a variety of school community members were interviewed. These research participants are listed in the following table.

Table 5.1: List of Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Category</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P (1,2,3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other School Leaders</td>
<td>SL (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>T (a – f)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council Members</td>
<td>SCM (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Groups</td>
<td>PG (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2 groups of 4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Groups</td>
<td>SG (a &amp; b)</td>
<td>2 groups of 5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To enhance understanding of the school context, culture and operations and to validate findings through multiple data sources, extensive observational activities were also undertaken. Table 5.2 lists these observational activities.

Table 5.2: List of Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbrev.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ob1</td>
<td>19/02/15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Initial visit and school tour with Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob2</td>
<td>30/04/15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>School open morning and tour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ob3</td>
<td>30/04/15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Information night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob4</td>
<td>09/05/15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Principal presentation to University of Melbourne Masters students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob5</td>
<td>06/08/15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Three-way conferences and general classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob6</td>
<td>11/08/15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Principal day observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob7</td>
<td>11/08/15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>School Leadership Team meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob8</td>
<td>01/02/16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Senior teaching team meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ob9</td>
<td>15/02/16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Whole staff professional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob10</td>
<td>18/02/16</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>School Council meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob11</td>
<td>04/03/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Whole school assembly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2. School Profile

Fairview High School is a co-educational, government secondary school that operates within the Victorian DET. Students attending the school are aged between 12 and 18 years of age. The school is situated in a suburb of the City of Yarra local government area. The suburb is less than 5 kilometres north of the central business district of Melbourne, Victoria.

Fairview High School’s 2015 ICSEA was 1089. The average ICSEA score of Australian schools is 1000. This indicates that the school is populated by students from backgrounds of relative educational advantage. This is further illustrated by information available about the distribution of family backgrounds where 11 per cent of students were classified into the bottom quartile, 16 per cent and 27 per cent in the two middle quartiles respectively and 46 per cent in the top quartile (compared to the average distribution of 25 per cent in each quartile) (data taken from information publicly available at [www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)).
The ICSEA data is compatible with data available from the ABS 2011 Census. Census data indicates that the largest identified occupation group in the suburb where the school is situated was *Professionals* with 46 per cent of employed people occupied in this category (Australian average 21.3 per cent). Persons with post-school qualifications make up 72.6 per cent of those who are 15 years or older (Australian average: 55.9 per cent). The Census data also provides insight about the multicultural nature of the suburb with a slightly higher than average proportion of people born overseas at 32.1 per cent (Australian average: 30.2 per cent) and 18.6 per cent of the population speak a language other than English at home (Australian average: 18.2 per cent).

The neighbourhood in which Fairview High School is situated is well serviced in terms of education options. Within two kilometres there are nine government primary schools, three Catholic primary schools and three government secondary schools.

### 5.2.1. Student enrolments

In 2015 there were 537 students enrolled at the school. Figure 5.1 illustrates that the school had seen steady growth in enrolments over four years. Enrolments at Fairview had generally increased steadily since the re-opening of the school in 2004. The school predicted that they would reach the enrolment capacity of 600 by 2017.

![Figure 5.1: Student enrolments 2008 - 2015](image-url)
Although many of the student population lived locally to the school, there were a number of students who travelled greater distances and bypassed other secondary school to attend Fairview (P1, SLa, PGb, Ob3).

5.2.2. Staff numbers

Figure 5.2 shows the staffing of Fairview High School over the years from 2008 – 2015. These numbers are presented as FTE staffing levels.

![Figure 5.2: FTE teaching and non-teaching staff numbers 2008 – 2015](image)

Figure 5.2 demonstrates that staffing numbers have risen over the past five years. Of interest in these figures are the changes in ratios of staff to students. Overall staff to student ratios had remained relatively consistent. In 2011, there was one staff member for every 9.6 students and in 2015 this ratio was one staff member for every 9.5 students. However, if just the teaching staff are considered some decline in ratio is evident. In 2011, there was one teacher for every 13.1 students and in 2015 this ratio was one teacher to 14.7 students.

5.2.3. Physical environment

Fairview High School is situated on a site of approximately 1.5 hectares in an inner-city suburb of Melbourne, Victoria. The suburb was settled in the 1850-60s which makes it one of the oldest areas of Melbourne. The local neighbourhood includes terrace houses and renovated older buildings. The school site is close to a busy strip of shops and cafes. The buildings of the school are a mix of: the
original 1915 school building; a school hall; a wing of classrooms that were added within the last 30 years; and a large, new, architecturally awarded, three-storey extension to the original building. The school also has a decommissioned tram which had been converted to a learning space for the Hands-on Learning program, a re-engagement initiative. The Hands-on Learning program had also developed an extensive vegetable and herb garden area in a previously disused back corner of the school. Open space includes: an asphalted courtyard area between the buildings with some shaded tables; sports court areas for ball games such as basketball and tennis; and landscaped and grassed areas at the front of the school. Land space on the site is limited so the grounds are well used and heavily populated by the students during break times.

The internal arrangements are varied as there is a range of very modern, recently built learning spaces as well as more traditional classroom spaces in the older parts of the school. Everything was well maintained and in use for learning. Many classroom spaces were flexible in their ability to accommodate groups for learning. There are also many specific-purpose learning spaces including a library, visual art classrooms, a food technology lab, science labs, a wood technology workshop, music classrooms and small rehearsal spaces, and computer labs.

The front of the school houses the administration, a modern reception area and several staff offices, including the Assistant Principal’s office. On the opposite side of the entrance is the Principal’s office. The staff room is at the end of the entrance corridor, close to these administration facilities. The Principal’s office is a beautiful large room in the original part of the building that has large old-style windows that look out to the front of the school. This room included a desk and working space, a comfortable couch area and a large conference table that could accommodate 12 people. Most meetings of whole school leadership and management groups were held in the Principal’s office, including the school council meetings.

The current buildings and facilities are suitable for approximately 600 students and as the enrolment numbers had increased towards this maximum the learning spaces were all in regular use for classes and the outdoor spaces were close to capacity.

5.2.4. Governance of the school

The school is part of the Victorian DET and is subject to all department requirements. The school is predominantly funded from government revenue. As is the requirement for all Victorian government
schools there is a legally formed school council that is accountable to the Minister for Education (see Chapter Four for further detail of functions of school councils in Victorian DET schools).

Fairview High School had a history of a strong and supportive school council reflecting the community investment in ‘saving’ the school after the 1992 closure and lobbying for the re-opening. Many of those who were involved in the community campaign were on the school council for the years following the re-opening. At the time of this research there were no longer any of these original members represented.

5.3. School Context

5.3.1. History of the school

The history of Fairview High School is fragmented by a closure of 12 years over the 1990s. The school was established in 1915 making it one of the oldest secondary schools in the Melbourne area. The school merged with another local secondary school in 1988 but retained its name. In 1992 a change in Victorian government saw a program of budget austerity measures introduced. Closure of 380 schools was a central policy and Fairview was one of the first selected. The closure was completed by the end of 1992 but the community were strongly opposed to the loss of the school and particularly to the possible sale of the land for development. A dedicated community group of approximately 300 members protested strongly and staged a sit-in on the school site in the old library. They maintained the protest 24 hours a day for over 14 months. Eventually, the government committed to retain the site for local education needs and it was leased to a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) provider who operated at the site until 1998. After the TAFE provider ceased operation, the property was returned to the Education Department and the community lobbied to have the high school re-opened. In 2001, the then Minister for Education announced that the school would be re-opened by 2003 starting with an intake of Year Seven students, extending to cater for Years Seven to Ten by 2006 and eventually opening for Years Eleven and Twelve. (Madden, 2002)

Significant refurbishment and renovation works were undertaken at the site. A working party was established in 2001 and began developing an innovative charter for the new school. This innovative approach was strongly supported by the community as illustrated by this comment from a member of the group who lobbied for the re-opening ‘We want it to be more than just a high school. The plan is for it to be a demonstration school... We’re hoping to showcase different ways of teaching’ (Madden, 2002).
The school re-opened on the first day of the 2004 school year with 14 staff and 135 students in Years Seven and Eight. Since that time the school had fulfilled the plan of expansion to Year Ten by 2006 and opened for students in Years Eleven and Twelve in 2007. Year Eleven and Twelve programs were offered in partnership with another local secondary college.

In 2010 an award winning new building was opened which substantially increased the learning space available at the school. The architecture of the building was recognised for its innovative and striking design that responded to the school’s requirements for flexible, collaborative teaching and learning spaces.

Since the re-opening, the leadership of the school had been relatively stable. Robyn, was only the second principal since the re-opening. She had been a part of the working party that established the new school and was subsequently employed as a Leading Teacher. Robyn worked closely on the leadership and development of the school alongside the previous Principal whose tenure ended in 2008.

5.3.2. School philosophy and vision

Fairview High School had developed as an innovative, student-centred learning environment and this was reflected in the vision and philosophy of the school.

The vision of the school is:

[Fairview] High School values children as individual learners who are full of potential and capable of excellence. Our students will be lifelong learners, reflective and creative thinkers, responsible and active citizens, and resilient and adaptable problem solvers able to navigate through an uncertain and constantly changing future.

[Fairview] was a learning community where students and teams of teachers work together to:

- achieve high standards so that all students fulfil their capabilities in academic, intellectual, social, emotional and physical development;
- celebrate diversity and embrace individual differences, including class, culture, race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity;
- build a cohesive, compassionate and proud school community with a productive legacy for the future;
- develop beyond our current capacity through continuous change and review; and participate in and contribute to our wider community.

The school's philosophy was consistent with the vision and summarises the central standing of students in the approach of the school:
Chapter 5: Case Study B – Fairview High School

[Fairview] High embraces a bold and ambitious dream: striving for excellence and equity. We aim to be a humane learning community in which teachers use relationships to deepen their knowledge of students.

This is in order to engage all of them in an intellectually challenging education based on powerful ideas, help them toward social maturity, and prepare them for a life of meaningful possibilities and active participation as Australian and global citizens.

The vision and philosophy of the school were reflected in the observed culture of the school during the data collection activities. The importance of relationships, respect for individuality and the provision of broad opportunities for students to explore their creativity and their individual talents were evident (Ob1, Ob2, Ob11). Symbolic of this was an absence of school uniforms and the use of first names for all community members. The vision and philosophy were readily available on the school website and incorporated into promotional materials and formal documents such as annual reports. However, they were not evidently displayed in the school environment nor was reference made by interview participants specifically to the vision or philosophy statements, although the general sentiments were reflected.

5.3.3. Learning programs

The opportunity that presented itself to invent all aspects of the school was embraced by those involved in the re-opening of the school. Support from both the community and the DET to explore innovative learning and teaching practices coincided with an emerging Middle Years (Years Five to Nine) teaching approach. The DET was invested in supporting and driving Middle Years approaches and it became the basis for the structures and learning programs at Fairview High School.

Fairview High School developed learning programs and structures that arranged the curriculum around inquiry learning, core literacy and numeracy foci, and student choice in learning. The structures that were adopted to support Middle Years philosophies included organisation around sub-school teams based on year levels. The time table was structured so that these teams of teachers and students stayed together during the school days as much as possible with the aim of developing strong relationships. These priorities had remained since the reopening and informed core decisions and arrangements made for teaching and learning.

The curriculum was arranged into three components of Inquiry, Toolbox and Excel. Inquiry was based around core themes for each year level. For example, the Year Ten students investigated Crime, Justice and Power and their classes engaged them in learning in integrated ways across disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology and economics. Toolbox covered essential learnings in literacy,
numeracy and science that were not covered through the Inquiry topics. The final aspect of the curriculum structure was called Excel which provided opportunities for students to choose learning areas and topics that reflected their passions and interests.

The day at Fairview High School was arranged around three learning blocks of 100 minutes each and one 30-minute session at the start of each day. The 30 minute sessions saw students organised into groups called Advisory and the focus of this was pastoral care and student well-being programs. For the students in Years Seven to Ten the teacher that was assigned to a group for Advisory was also, where possible, a teacher that worked with those students for Inquiry or Toolbox learning areas.

In Years Eleven and Twelve students could work toward their VCE or a Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Senior learning programs were offered in conjunction with a neighbouring secondary school with subject provision shared across the two sites.

Fairview offered another learning program through an option called Hands-On Learning. Hands-On Learning was available for students who had disengaged from learning or were at risk of doing so. These students were supported by a personalised curriculum and learning plan that integrated essential learning in areas such as maths and English with engaging, applied projects. At Fairview, students participating in this program had refurbished an old tram, turning it into a learning and social space for their use and had developed a vegetable and herb garden (Ob1, Ob6).

5.3.4. Management and leadership structures

Fairview High School had a leadership structure that had expanded as enrolments and staff numbers grew. At the time of data collection, the Principal was supported by an Assistant Principal (who also had teaching responsibilities), and several others with formal leadership positions. These included a Teaching and Learning Leader, a Transitions and Pathways Co-ordinator, and the three leaders of the sub-school teams. The sub-schools were divided into Years Seven and Eight, stand-alone Year Nine and Years Ten, Eleven and Twelve. Within the sub-schools there were leaders for each individual year level. The school had regular Leadership Team meetings. The Leadership Team consisted of those that held the formal leadership roles as described above. There were also teachers who held responsibility for the leadership and management of learning areas. There were weekly sub-school team meetings and whole staff meetings every second week and these usually had a professional learning focus. (Ob6, Ob7, Ob8, Ob9)
5.4. Performance of the school

This section describes the performance of the school as illustrated by publicly available measures from the years 2008 – 2015. These measures include the NAPLAN and the VCE results.

5.4.1. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

At the time of research there were eight years (2008-2015) of publicly available data through the My School website that is managed by ACARA. NAPLAN is a mandated testing schedule that is implemented in all Australian schools for students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine. To review the performance of this school, the Year Nine results are relevant as they are the most likely to illustrate impact that the school has had on student learning. There are five learning areas tested: Reading; Writing; Spelling; Grammar and Punctuation; and Numeracy. Table 5.3 summarises the Year Nine NAPLAN results for the years 2008 – 2015 showing results substantially above comparator average in dark green, above comparator averages in light green, at average comparator scores in white, below comparator average scores in light red and substantially below in dark red.

Table 5.3: Summary of Year Nine NAPLAN results

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<tbody>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<tr>
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<td>All</td>
<td>Sim</td>
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</table>

These Year Nine NAPLAN results indicate that on most of these tests the school performed at or above the national average of student scores. On 29 of the 40 tests reported, the scores were below or substantially below the averages of students in similar schools (as measured by ICSEA).

To further understand these results, deeper interrogation of NAPLAN data available on the My School website provided insight to how the context at the school may have influenced performance. Student
gain is demonstrated through the NAPLAN data by comparison of matched cohort student results from Year Seven to Year Nine. This growth measure showed that the value added to students was comparable to, or greater than, that of other students who had the same starting scores in Year Seven for nine of the 16 available data sets. As an illustration of this, Figure 5.3 shows the student gain for Reading for 2012 – 2014 (sourced from myschool.edu.au).

![Figure 5.3: Matched Cohort Gain results for Reading 2012-2014](image)

As can be seen in Figure 5.3 the growth in student learning in this sample area shows that performance in terms of achievement on NAPLAN Reading tests in Year Nine was better than other students who had had the same scores in Year Seven. Also, the gain from Year Seven to Year Nine was greater than that of similar students and all students.

A further notable difference, as seen in Figure 5.3 above, is that the scores with which the students started in Year Seven were lower than those of students in similar schools (orange line). Further investigation of this found that averages for students in Year Seven at Fairview from 2008 to 2013 were below averages of students in similar schools on 33 out of the 40 NAPLAN tests reported.
NAPLAN testing is undertaken in May of each year and so results achieved by Year Seven students are more likely to be attributable to their learning experiences throughout primary school than to the three months that they had been attending the secondary school. These data indicated that, on average, the students attending Fairview had lower levels of Literacy and Numeracy at Year Seven than would be expected for a school that has a similar ICSEA. This suggests that the measure of ICSEA, did not adequately describe the Year Seven students that chose Fairview High School over the years 2008 to 2013.

A second consideration is that the school had not chosen to undertake changes that were driven by interest in improvement in NAPLAN test scores. The vision of the school had attracted, and encouraged the enrolment of students who have diverse talents and learning interests (P1, P2, SLa, Tc, Td, Te, Tf, PGa).

5.4.2. Victorian Certificate of Education Results

In Victoria, most students in senior years of secondary schooling are working towards receiving their VCE. This is the most commonly awarded school completion certificate and the performance of a school is often presented as a data set based on student achievements in VCE subjects. (See Chapter Four for further explanation of VCE results). Figure 5.4 presents the median study scores for students who undertook a VCE subject at this school from the years 2008 to 2015.

![Figure 5.4: VCE Median Study Scores 2017 – 2015](image)
As Figure 5.4 demonstrates, the school’s median study scores were around the state median for most of these years. These results suggest that the school was performing on this measure of VCE consistently with the levels of performance illustrated by the NAPLAN measure. Year Nine NAPLAN results were consistently similar to the average achievement of all Australian schools but generally below those schools that have similarly advantaged students (as measured by ICSEA). In 2015, of the 36 metropolitan Melbourne government secondary schools that have an ICSEA score of 1050 or higher, 21 schools had a VCE median score higher than the state median of 30 (Fairview HS has an ICSEA of 1089). Fairview High School with its VCE median of 30 or below (except for 2010) could have the capacity to achieve scores higher than the state average based on these data.

In considering these data however, it is beneficial to remember, as illustrated above, that the Year Seven students that started at Fairview, had generally had lower academic scores than those students in comparable schools (according to NAPLAN testing, see Figure 5.3). It is also evident from data collected through interview and observation, that Fairview High School has a strong philosophy of inclusivity and diversity. This is reflected in programs that attracted disengaged students into programs such as Hands on Learning and a significant number of students who were supported through the Program for Students with Disabilities (P1, SLa).

The Principal of the school and other interviewees indicated that they were pleased with the results in the context of re-establishing the school after re-opening, rapid growth in enrolments and the broader focus that was taken to provide opportunities for all students (PGa, PGb, P2, P3, SCMa, SCMb, SGb, SLa, SLb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf). There was also recognition that there was opportunity for improvement and a need to work toward stronger results in NAPLAN and VCE (P1, P2, SCMa, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf). ‘As far as being amongst the top schools in Victoria, I think we should strive to get there’ (School Leader).

5.5. Success of the school

The success at Fairview High School was perceived more broadly than the standard, publicly available data as discussed above. There was consensus that the school was performing reasonably well, but that there was a need to continue to strive to improve results. The evidence also suggested that there was a strong sense that the school had much to celebrate in terms of successfully catering for the students that they serve. The areas below illustrate the various ways in which the school had demonstrated success.
5.5.1. Enrolment Increases

Having reopened the school in 2004 with 135 students, the increase to capacity of 600 students in 2016 was strong indication that the school was perceived as successful in the community. As Figure 5.1 demonstrated there had been a consistent rise in student enrolments over the period from 2008. This had been an important aspect of the school’s success for several reasons. Enrolment growth required an increase in staff numbers and opportunities to employ appropriate teachers and support personnel was a factor in the enactment of the philosophical approach of the school (P1, P3, SLb, Tc, SCMa).

5.5.2. Satisfaction with the school

Satisfaction with the school was observed and reported in interviews during the data collection for this research (SCMa, SCMb, SGa, SGb, PGa, PGb, Ob2, Ob5 Ob10). This is further evidenced by the annual DET surveys of satisfaction of the parents, staff and students. Figure 5.5 below demonstrates the levels of satisfaction in all three of these groups (source: 2015 Annual Report)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Satisfaction Summary</th>
<th>![Parent Satisfaction Chart]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average level of parent satisfaction with the school, as derived from the annual Parent Opinion survey. The score is reported on a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 is the highest possible score.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>School Staff Survey</th>
<th>![School Staff Survey Chart]</th>
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<tr>
<td>Measures the per cent endorsement by staff on school climate derived from the annual School Staff survey. The per cent endorsement indicates the per cent of positive responses (agree or strongly agree) on school climate from staff at the school</td>
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<tr>
<th>Students Attitudes to School</th>
<th>![Students Attitudes Chart]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures the Connectedness to School factor derived from the Attitudes to School survey completed annually by Victorian government school students in Years 5 to 12. The school’s average score is reported here on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the highest possible score.</td>
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Figure 5.5: 2015 Parent, Staff and Student survey results
As Figure 5.5 shows, the satisfaction of parents and staff are consistent with state medians. The result from the student surveys is the outstanding evidence here. The levels of connectedness to school for the students was notably above the median results in other schools. This result was consistent with the four-year aggregate data available that suggested that students’ levels of connectedness to school was consistently above state medians since 2012. This result reflects the student-centred focus of the school that strives to ‘celebrate diversity and embrace individual differences, including class, culture, race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity’ (from School vision statement, School website, 2015).

5.5.3. Broader community interest

There was a history of community interest in Fairview High School throughout the period of closure and re-opening. The community and the school received significant political and media attention throughout that time. The mandate that the school was given upon re-opening to implement structures and approaches based on Middle Years philosophies also attracted attention, particularly from within the education sector. Fairview had maintained a culture of innovation and diversity and this enabled the school to pursue programs that attracted interest for their innovative and uncommon approach. For example, the development of the Tram learning space as part of the Hands-on Learning re-engagement program attracted media attention in 2015. Another example was the interest in the Feminist Collective at FHS. The Feminist Collective resulted from interest shown by a group of students in the portrayal of female characters in the literature they were studying. This led the students to develop a suite of resources to examine systemic sexism. These resources have now been developed into a nationally accredited subject available to schools throughout Australia.

5.5.4. Broader Success Measures

It was evident that the perception of success at Fairview High School was much broader than the standard performance measures of NAPLAN and VCE. To further investigate the perception of the importance of broader success measures, interviewees were asked questions about what success means at Fairview High School. Their responses were categorised into the themes as shown in Table 5.4 and they provide insight into the broad perceptions about success that align with the vision of the school.
Table 5.4: Interviewees responses about success by themes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response Theme</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Illustrative responses</th>
</tr>
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| Individual student needs      | 13         | - It aims for individuals to be what they need to be and learn what they need.  
- Each and every individual has their place, whereas at other schools it’s like you are generalised but here you are looked at as that individual.  
- We are really great if you care about your kid getting individual attention |
| Non-academic areas            | 8          | - Strong in Arts, Culture, Music and Languages  
- Kids have been very successful with hand-on stuff |
| Learning opportunities        | 6          | - the work based around projects and integrated curriculum  
- we look at the potential that is there and the opportunities that are available and we run with them and we are not scared to try something different |
| Post-school pathways          | 5          | - they leave school and we have somehow got them into a pathway, we were able to put them into something that they have been successful at.  
- the emphasis is not on ATAR scores but on actually the pathways that the kids take after school |
| Staff and leadership          | 5          | - a lot of the teachers are very passionate, they are committed to learning  
- the school hires staff that care and they put kids first |
| Re-opening and establishing   | 4          | - greatest mark of success is that in a short period of time really has managed to establish itself as an identity  
- our message is getting out there a bit more |

Table 5.4 shows that the strongest indicator of success was categorised to the theme of Individual student needs with 13 out of the 17 interviews describing how the school successfully catered for individuals (P2, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tc, Td, Te, Tg, Pbg, SCMa, SCMb, SGa, Sgb). This was a strong reflection of the vision and philosophy of the school. The importance of valuing difference and developing individual relationships were clearly being communicated and implemented. There were several instances where participants discussed how this supported students who had had negative experiences at other schools but found success at Fairview (P2, SLb, Te, Sgb, SGa, Pbg).

Other themes that emerged from analysis of opinions of success indicated that the school valued broad success measures. These included, success in non-academic pursuits, the quality of learning opportunities, and the focus on post-school pathways. Robyn’s consideration of how she defines school success reflected this.

They all have an outcome that is positive, whether that’s staying here or going somewhere else to finish school or whether it’s leaving school, if they go onto a pathway that they want, I think that is successful... If they come here hating school for various reasons and they end up enjoying their time, I think that is successful. If they make friends, that’s successful. If they become independent and motivated, engaged, that’s successful. It is not just academic success, although
we want that too. We want that, but it is not the only measure. You know, if they become tolerant, if they become good citizens, if they contribute in lots of ways to both their school and their community and their families I think that’s really fantastic. It is a very broad definition of success. (Principal)

5.6. Principal Leadership

This section describes Robyn, the Principal of the school and examines themes that emerged to explain how her history, characteristics, and practices had influenced the culture and improvement of the school.

5.6.1. Professional History

This section is informed by analysis of the principal interviews and observations where Robyn was asked to respond to questions about her professional experiences and leadership development.

Robyn had been an educator for all her career. She trained as an English and humanities teacher straight after her secondary schooling. Her first teaching posts were in rural schools and she moved to inner-city schools, in suburbs surrounding Fairview, as soon as she had the opportunity to do so (P1, Ob4).

Her role prior to starting at Fairview in 2004 was as a Middle Years Project Officer for the DET. In this role, she was immersed in the research evidence about middle years learning approaches and was responsible for leading professional learning and supporting schools to adopt these approaches.

She was originally involved in the project team for the re-development of Fairview High School as part of her Middle Years Project Officer role. She accepted the position as Leading Teacher for the new school and joined the Principal as a key leader in planning for re-opening the school. After the school opened and enrolments increased sufficiently, there was capacity to afford an assistant principal and Robyn successfully applied for the position. She served as the Assistant Principal from 2006, until her Principal vacated the position in 2008. At this time, she moved into the principalship in an acting capacity until she successfully applied for the substantive position from 2009.

Robyn reflected on her history at Fairview High School often during her three interviews. It was clear that she was strongly connected to the school. She reflected on her leadership development and relationships at the school and explained how her desire to support what she and her colleagues had implemented at the school was a focus of her leadership (P1, P2, P3, Ob4). For example, she explained
that she decided to apply for the principalship because ‘I didn’t want anyone else to take my baby’ (Principal). At that time, she believed that stepping into the principal position was a big career advancement for her and she felt the challenge of following a charismatic and successful Principal. ‘I had big shoes to fill’ (Principal).

Her growth throughout her five years’ tenure was something that she reflected on. She recalled feeling concerned about her competency and the possibility of ‘failing’ which for her would be illustrated by falling enrolments. She described that in her first year she was ‘too busy worrying about myself’ (Principal) to be able to do much in the way of school improvement. But she learnt a lot and soon felt comfortable in her position. Her experience and confidence grew and she started to engage with system-wide opportunities, such as leading regional network groups and taking roles in developing and presenting principal preparation programs. At the time of this research, these system responsibilities were a significant part of her role that she balanced with leading her school.

5.6.2. What are the leadership characteristics and practices of this Principal?

The themes that emerged in response to this research question were derived from analysis of the 17 individual and group interviews undertaken at the school. The specific questions used depended on the category of participant (School Leaders, Teachers, Students, Parents and School Councillors). In accordance with the nature of the semi-structured interview methodology the researcher chose questions that responded to the flow of the conversational style of the interviews (outlined in more detail in Chapter Three).

Comments about Robyn’s characteristics and practices were often shared in response to other questions, such as those asking for information about how school success is perceived and the participants’ insights into the culture, vision and relationships at the school. The three principal interviews also generated plentiful data about Robyn’s characteristics and practices.

The data collected from the interviews, observations, supporting documents and artefacts were analysed using NVivo qualitative analysis software using a grounded approach where themes were not pre-determined but emerged as the evidence was analysed.

5.6.3. Principal Leadership Characteristics

Robyn’s leadership approach and characteristics had influence on the improvement trajectory of the school as she moved through roles of Leading Teacher, Assistant Principal and Principal. Table 5.5
summarises the data collected from the interviews and observations, analysed according to themes that are relevant to the specific characteristics that Robyn brings to her leadership at Fairview High School.
### Table 5.5: Number of interview comments attributed to themes of Principal characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>SLa</th>
<th>SLb</th>
<th>Ta</th>
<th>Tb</th>
<th>Tc</th>
<th>Td</th>
<th>Te</th>
<th>Tf</th>
<th>SCMa</th>
<th>SCMb</th>
<th>PGa</th>
<th>PGb</th>
<th>SGa</th>
<th>SGb</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear Values and Philosophy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive and Empowering</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm and assured</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committed to students</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connected to FHS</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Professional Growth</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6.3.1. **Clear Values and Philosophy**

Exemplifying this theme was that in an observation Robyn explained that she has a ‘steely idea about the ethos of the school’ (Ob4) at the heart of her leadership and that she tests actions and decisions against this. This sentiment indicated how important Robyn’s philosophy and values were to her leadership at Fairview High School. Evidence from others across the school supported this theme.

There were several features of how her clear values and philosophy were evident to those interviewed (PGa, SLa, SLb, SCMa, Tc, Td, Tf). A School Council Member suggested that Robyn’s broad view of educational success was reflected in the culture and programs of the school. A member of one of the Parent Groups said, ‘she is quite in tune with the philosophy of the school so I suppose she puts her money where her mouth is in terms of how the school is run’. Both the School Leaders and four of the teachers interviewed commented that her values and vision were central to, and reflective of, the school culture. Robyn’s values and philosophy drove and guided change within the school and were particularly evident in her commitment to the students as illustrated by this teacher’s comment,

> A lot of it is an opportunity for her to show her beliefs in all of those things, like ethos and empowering students and the thing about students first. That is 100 per cent what she believes and that is always the number one thing. (Teacher)

Comments about how Robyn’s values and philosophy manifested in her ‘progressive’ approaches were also evident (SCMb, SLb, Te, Tf). It was clear that she was not bound by past expectations of how things should be done and was not deterred by challenges. She welcomed opportunities to do things differently, as long as it was in the best interests of the students.

> I think she is very passionate about [Fairview] being seen as a really positive place to be, to send your children. I think she loves different ways of doing things. I think she enjoys all of the variety of ways that we achieve something. So, the way that we approach a task or a project or our views on feminism or sexism or domestic violence, you know really challenging social issues at the moment, I think that’s really important to her. (Teacher)

5.6.3.2. **Supportive and Empowering**

The data showed that Robyn had an underlying approach that was generally supportive of others. There was a perception that she was available for students, staff and community members (P1, P3, SLb, Tc, Td, Tf, SGb). She had an ‘open door’ approach and explained that she literally kept her office door open as much as she could whilst working in her office (P3, Ob6). Her office was situated in a high traffic area, so people walked past the door and took advantage of opportunities to communicate
with her. ‘I could have a parade of people in and out of here from “do I want a coffee” to “tell me about this” or “can you help me” or whatever’ (Principal).

Staff that participated in interviews indicated that they felt supported by Robyn in their work to varying degrees. This was balanced by evidence that Robyn was thoughtful and selective in the ways that she offered support to others. The intention of supporting others was not to make things easier and more pleasant for them but to empower them to find solutions and manage situations themselves (Tb, Tc, Td, Ob4).

She doesn’t say “here’s what we are going to do, now go and do it”… It’s not her default. Her mode of operating is more to create the space where others are able to do that. (Teacher)

Robyn indicated in general discussions during Observation 4 that she had learnt through her years of leadership that ‘not all problems need to be solved by me. Often things need to be left for others to work out for themselves, but you support them through that’.

The evidence indicated that there were varied perceptions of the supportiveness which seemed to be impacted by the strength of relationships she had. For example, some staff who were interviewed expressed that they felt strongly supported by the Principal and other school leaders, as demonstrated in this comment:

I always feel supported, so any time I have anything to do, any issues I have to deal with, I have always been supported. The leadership doesn’t pressure you into doing things; they just keep an eye out. (Teacher)

However, two staff members had different perceptions of the level of support available. They both indicated that they had had differences of opinion over leadership and management issues throughout their time at the school. However, they reflected on Robyn’s leadership characteristics in ways that demonstrated that with the benefit of hindsight, they could see why the levels of support offered may have been justified. One teacher reflected on the growth in the relationship and the respect that had developed between himself and Robyn,

I have learnt something that I wouldn’t have learnt if I had continued to experience the same sorts of principals I was used to previously. So, our Principal can be different things to different people. She sometimes does things which others may see as not being like a principal, which I assume is a very conscious choice. Some think, ‘oh she should see that stuff is important, and she doesn’t do it’. That’s things like being THE leader, having an all staff meeting where everyone can whinge about stuff, she doesn’t go in for those kinds of things. So, she is more about empowering people to go and make decisions. (Teacher)

The conclusion from considering this evidence is that Robyn had a supportive and empowering style of leadership. She used these leadership characteristics in considered ways that demonstrate her
understandings of the needs of those involved and the context at the time. It seems that she was interested in developing others through empowering them rather than exerting authority and control.

5.6.3.3. Calm and Assured

A notable characteristic of Robyn was her calm nature. This was commented on in interviews by parents and staff members (PGA, SLb, Ta, Tb, Tc). It was also noted by the researcher in observation that she had a soft and calm tone to her voice and mannerisms (Ob6). The way that this characteristic manifested itself in leadership situations was that Robyn was seen as handling pressure well and she gave a sense of order and purpose to others. It was noted by interviewees that she was ‘laidback’ (Tc) and ‘you don’t get the sense of her being in a flap’ (SLb) which resulted in the feeling that ‘we don’t have many crises in the school’ (Tb) and that ‘she seems very calm and cool, a very good leader in terms of keeping on track’ (PGA).

When asked to describe the school during interview 1, Robyn’s first response was that it is ‘calm and orderly’. In a later interview, Robyn reflected with pride on the effectiveness of the school as demonstrated by the calm and purposeful interactions that occurred every day between hundreds of students and dozens of teachers and adults. Her observations, along with other data, indicated that there was a feeling of calmness and harmony evident in the school. This suggests that her characteristics were reflected in the culture of the school.

Along with the sense of calm that she exhibited was a sense of thoughtful assuredness about her leadership. Many of the interviewees described her leadership as displaying strength and/or effectiveness (PGA, SCMa, SCMb, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tf). They identified that she had a clear passion for the school and that she had strong underlying ideas that guide her actions. This then was reflected in her ability to make thoughtful decisions and take purposeful action. Robyn elaborated by explaining that she based decisions on her beliefs and that she was not afraid to take her time to get good advice and make good decisions (Ob4). With this approach, she was able to be confident as she moved forward with action and was assured when required to defend or explain her decisions to others (P3).

5.6.3.4. Committed to students

Robyn regularly demonstrated that central to her leadership was a concern for the young people at the school. Her interview comments were often focused on the students and their successes and challenges, as was demonstrated in this quote from her first interview,
I think my role, to a large degree is to just really focus on what’s the best thing for kids, taking into account that staff wellbeing and professional learning and all those things, are really, really important. But the most important thing is the students. So, that’s my focus, what’s the best thing for students. Every other test is against that. So, when I am talking about staff wellbeing it’s in the context of I need well and happy staff because that will impact on students. I don’t know if that’s too simple but that’s my focus. That’s always my focus so I want the parents to help, I want the staff to help, I want the community to help, I want everyone to help do that. (Principal)

Robyn also explained her rule for prioritising her work. She always dealt with any issue or decision about students first, then parents are the next priority, followed by staff and lastly administration requirements. (Ob1, Ob4)

Robyn’s underlying characteristic of valuing student needs in general was also noted by others (PGa, SLb, Ta, Td, Tf).

She really knows what is most important. She always reminds me, all the time, the students, they are the number 1. (School Leader)

Robyn’s connection to students was demonstrated by her interest in engaging with individual students. This was an interesting aspect of her leadership characteristics as although her commitment to students was evidently strong on a general philosophical level, at an individual level, others’ perceptions of her commitment to students were varied. The two groups of students that participated in the interviews had differing perceptions of their connection with her. There were some students who felt that Robyn knew them personally and was interested in their education but there were others who felt that they had no connection with her. This sentiment was explained somewhat by teacher interviewees (Tb, Tc, Tf) who suggested that particularly the younger students often wouldn’t have had opportunities to get to know her. Parents who participated described that in several instances Robyn had been directly involved with and supportive of their children (PGa, PGb).

One of the teachers offered insight into this characteristic explaining that her personal connections with students are moderated by her empowering leadership style so that all staff prioritised student needs,

But the kids are always at the centre of it. So, if I came in and said I think we really should have black tables in every room, the first question I would be asked, and it’s funny, I find myself asking that sort of stuff now, is how would that serve the kids? What are the kids getting from it? So now I come in and say ‘it will serve the kids that way’. (Teacher)

This explanation goes to suggest that Robyn’s characteristic of deep commitment to the students underpinned her leadership and the way that the culture of the school was shaped. But from the
perspective of others, her commitment was sometimes not explicit because it was enacted through others.

5.6.3.5. Trust

Most informants were asked to reflect on the levels of trust that they perceived in the school. Robyn’s reflections on engendering trust with the staff suggested that her supportive and empowering approach was influential in demonstrating that she trusted others.

I think if you want to build trust with your staff you have to listen to what ...they want to do. Things that I think oh my god I don’t want to do that. But if I’m not willing to let them try out stuff and succeed or fail then I don’t think that would be right. (Principal)

Robyn also distinguished between organisational trust and personal trust. She identified that her individual relationships varied but that her approach to the organisation encouraged trust but with underlying accountability to the philosophy of the school (P1).

The variance in the individual relationships that Robyn had were evident. There were many staff who described trust underpinning relationships at the school. Many felt a positive sense of trust in their connections with Robyn and other school leaders (SLa, SLb, Ta, Tb, Tc, Td, Te, Tf). They felt comfortable discussing issues with Robyn (SLb, Tc), they felt that she showed trust by supporting their work (Tb, Tc) and they felt trusted to make decisions independently (SLa, Td).

5.6.3.6. Connected to Fairview High School

A characteristic of Robyn’s leadership was her strong connection with the particular history and culture of the school. Robyn’s involvement with the school commenced prior to the reopening when she was part of the planning group. This long connection was mentioned by others when reflecting on Robyn’s leadership (SLa, SLb, Tc, Td) along with other references to her alignment with and passion for the school (P, Ta, Tf, PGa).

And yet because she has come from the school at the very beginning she wants to be involved ... And also, because she has got, I suppose, the values of the school embodied in her decision making and the way things are done. (School Leader)

She was one of the teachers who started the school, so she has been here from the first, from when the school restarted. So, she has got really good connections, she knows what it is about what our mandate is from the start. (Teacher)
Robyn’s ability to connect the history of the school to the current culture and philosophy was evident throughout the research activities. The passion and commitment that was required to research, advocate and bring to fruition the re-opening of the school around the Middle Years model was a clear characteristic of her leadership. Through these experiences, she had developed a deep connection to the school. Even when discussing how some things had to change and adapt, usually because of the demands and complexity associated with enrolment growth, she still referred to the core and ‘non-negotiable’ aspects of the school that had been in place since re-opening (P1).

5.6.3.7. Ongoing Professional Growth

A commitment to growth and improvement for herself and others was an evident characteristic of Robyn’s leadership. Interviews and observations demonstrated that Robyn led, participated in and encouraged professional learning experiences (P1, P2, P3, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tf, SCMb, PGa, Ob4, Ob6).

Robyn demonstrated insight into her own growth as an educational leader. During observations, she reflected on the early stage of her appointment to principalship and how much she had needed to learn very quickly in that time (Ob4, Ob6). She explained that she had always had a focus on the professional learning needs of the staff and that she was regularly involved in planning and running whole staff activities as well as attending activities alongside staff (P1, P3, Ob8).

It was also evident both from Robyn’s comments and from other informants that her involvement in leadership activities outside the school had increased considerably. Commitments to broader system leadership became a significant part of her work. Robyn explained that she valued these opportunities and saw them as a part of her responsibility as an experienced school leader.

I have a view that we are part of a bigger system and if we want education to be robust and viable and have high outcomes for all students we all have to contribute to that. (Principal)

She found opportunities for external professional experiences important to her own engagement and development. She explained that she learnt a lot from activities such as participating in review processes at other schools and mentoring and coaching inexperienced and aspiring leaders (P1, P3). Importantly, she valued opportunities to grow her own capacity and challenge herself.

I get bored if I don’t have a challenge. I couldn’t come here every day if I didn’t have something different to do. (Principal)

The influence of her commitment to professional growth was reflected on in the interview with a School Leader.
I think she is constantly challenging herself and that, as a leader myself you see that and think, I have got to keep challenging myself too. (School Leader)

5.6.3.8. Summary of Leadership Characteristics

The characteristics that were identified as evident in Robyn’s leadership at Fairview High School demonstrate that she had a clear sense of her own vision and values and that these had significant alignment with those of the school. This connection developed throughout her long association. Robyn’s positive nature lead her to be supportive and empowering of others. She was perceived as calm, composed and balanced with a clear passion and dedication to education and to Fairview High School. A commitment to what was best for students provided a framework for decision making and was recognised by others as important to her leadership.

The evidence also showed that Robyn was a committed learner herself and she took opportunities to participate in professional learning and undertake challenging leadership roles outside of the school which contributed to system improvements.

5.6.4. Principal Practices

This section presents evidence about the themes related to the practices that Robyn utilised in her principalship at Fairview High School. As will be demonstrated, her practices reflected many aspects of the characteristics of her leadership. This section particularly explores the actions and process that were evident in Robyn’s leadership as Fairview improved over the years of her principalship. Table 5.6 shows a summary of the emergent themes with the frequency of comments attributable to each theme for each of the interviewees or interview groups and the observations. The Principal’s three interviews are combined in the Principal response column. Each of these themes is then explored further in the sections below.
Table 5.6: Number of interview comments attributed to themes of Principal practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>SLa</th>
<th>SLb</th>
<th>Ta</th>
<th>Tb</th>
<th>Tc</th>
<th>Td</th>
<th>Te</th>
<th>Tf</th>
<th>SCMa</th>
<th>SCMb</th>
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<th>PGb</th>
<th>SGa</th>
<th>SGb</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develops staff capacity</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborates</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manages change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports student-centred learning</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improves organisational structures</td>
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<td>Externally focused</td>
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<td>Evidence based</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6.4.1. **Develops Staff Capacity**

This theme was strongly evident in the data collected. Robyn spoke of her commitment to the development of staff capabilities and capacity at Fairview High School throughout her three interviews. An average of 27 per cent of each principal interview transcript was coded to this theme. This was the highest per cent of any theme derived from her interview transcripts suggesting that Robyn spent more time discussing the development of capacity in her teachers than she did any other leadership practice theme.

Her reflections during interviews covered a variety of related topics including: staff selection; staff wellbeing; teacher standards; teacher professional development; performance management; developing leadership capacity; and, improving teacher practice in a range of specific areas. Her commitment to practicing leadership with this focus and her insight into the complexity of managing and developing staff was clear.

> Building teacher capacity is the most important. And it is not just their capacity to deliver the curriculum it is their capacity to relate people, it is their capacity to understand how learning works... So, it is building capacity in a whole range of areas. (Principal)

Staff members commented on how they felt Robyn guided them in their work through processes such as performance management and professional development opportunities (Ta, Tc, Te, Tf) and by the way that leadership was distributed at the school (SLa, SLb, Td, Te). Robyn described her ‘hands on’ leadership approach to professional development for her staff in this comment,

> My background and a lot of my interest is around Teacher Professional Learning, so I spend a lot of time thinking about if we want something to work really well, like we are concentrating on Formative Assessment and Feedback as a way to improve outcomes. If I don’t understand that and I am not involved in that and I don’t work with teachers then, one, I won’t understand what I want them to do and also, I don’t think it is a good model that I should say – “off you go and you do that, when you have done it I will know you have done it because your results will be better”. So, I am pretty hands-on about Professional Learning. I will either work with people to design the Professional Learning or I have a lot of ideas about how it can work. Not the formative of assessment and stuff, but how Professional Learning should work. About the use of small teams to work together on a project in their classroom, to talk about it together, but also to come back to the rest of the school and talk to them about it. (Principal)

An interesting observation from the evidence in this theme was that there was a sense that though Robyn had a strong focus on improvement of teacher capacity she also demonstrated trust in teachers to take risks and make their own decisions in the classrooms (SLb, Tb, Tc, Tf).
I describe the school to be supportive, creative and very open, in terms of being allowed to be very creative and very free with how it is that you teach something or approach something. But also, I have been given the opportunity to really play to my strengths and teach what I am good at. (Teacher)

Robyn explained how she felt her leadership role guided the development of staff capacity in a way that empowered her teachers:

I plant seeds, I think. I don’t make, I don’t enforce the change... They have to want to go and want to investigate. I know what they are interested in. I guess part of that thing is that if I don’t know the capacity of my staff and what they are interested in I won’t know what will get them excited about doing something. That’s why I say I like to plant the seed, but I’m not going to make them do things. But in terms of innovation and driving things forward, I think my role is to guide. (Principal)

A School Council Member (SCMa), a participant in one of the Parent Groups (PGa), a School Leader (SLb) and a Teacher (Te) also discussed Robyn’s leadership in attracting, selecting and retaining staff that enhanced the capacity of teaching at the school.

The most important is the ability to hire staff. I think [Robyn] has been terrific at that... And I have been on those interview panels with her and I think it is about having that idea of what you want. If you know what your vision is then you start to work out what are the types of people that are going to be able to deliver that vision. What are the types of people that we need to get because the way we work, is with each other all the time, so ‘are they a good fit for the school?’ is often a question about that person that we are employing. I think hiring of staff is pretty crucial. (School Leader)

I think also one area was probably success in terms of her own staff... In terms of having them here, stay and be happy as well. (School Council Member)

The development of capacity was clearly an influential leadership practice and Robyn summarised this well,

Our emphasis now is trying to enhance teacher capacity. It’s not around providing extra support classes for kids, it’s around if we can together build the capacity of every individual teacher to teach a little bit better than they have the day before or the year before then the rest will follow. (Principal)

5.6.4.2. Collaborates

The evidence of relationships that were collaborative and respectful emerged as a theme of Robyn’s leadership practice. Many informants spoke about the relationship that they had with Robyn, (PGa, SGb, SLa, SLb, Ta,Td, Te, Tf). There were also descriptions of other relationships across the school that demonstrated a focus on collaboration and respect (PGb, SCMa, Ta, Tc, Tf). An example of one key collaborative relationship was between Robyn and the school’s Assistant Principal, Joanne. Robyn’s
reflection on their interaction was an indicative example of collaboration and the way in which Robyn was open to feedback from others.

I think I have a clear enough idea about what I think is a good thing, a good organisation, but if someone comes along and [Joanne] is really good at this. She’s good at it in two ways, she’s good at how she thinks about it, but she’s also good at how she gets me to think about it, and I’ll go “ok, all right, I get it, I won’t do it like that then”. So, I guess it’s also being accepting of other peoples’ input about how you lead and how you might be more gentle. And some people don’t like that. Some people don’t like to have feedback where you have to make changes to yourself. (Principal)

The modelling and encouragement of collaborative relationships was an important leadership practice at Fairview because of the structural arrangements and pedagogical practices of team-based sub-schools. Shared teaching and learning spaces rely on values of respectful collaboration.

Although most of the staff interviewed felt that they had strong and positive relationships with Robyn (SLa, SLb, Ta, Td, Te, Tf) there was also recognition by Robyn and others that broader collaborative relationships needed to be supported by the structures and processes (P1, SLa, Tc, Ob7, Ob8). Leadership structures across the school were generally seen to be effective in connecting those who needed to work together and ensuring that feedback was welcomed and was directed to the appropriate people.

You can look at issues in the leadership team because every leading teacher is responsible for a team. Part of that is the ‘pulse’, what’s happening. So, you get feedback on a different level. (Principal)

There is a role for Teaching and Learning Leader, he will work with [Robyn] to make sure all of the staff is getting the information they need... they take feedback from the teams, relevant teams, and then it feeds back to the Leadership Team and [a decision] is made around that. I haven’t seen any decisions enforced on us. (Teacher)

Robyn was directly open to ideas and feedback from others. Many felt their relationship with her enabled them to share opinions, ideas for improvement and feedback on changes and issues.

Feedback is always given. There are people here who have got a lot of opinions. Yes, so people are very comfortable to give feedback and approach [Robyn]. (Teacher)

Contrary to this evidence though, were a couple of observations from participants that either themselves, or others that they knew, didn’t feel as comfortable providing feedback and collaborating with Robyn.

I know that some people feel they don’t know her very well and don’t have enough access to her. I think that’s a common thing with Prins. (School Leader)

Robyn addressed the variance in her relationships with others across the school.
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Some people you don’t see very much of and might have some attitudes of, you can’t go there because you know. But I think that is probably true of most organisations. I don’t know, some people think that some people are more favoured than others but then I’ll hear them debating, no its just because you don’t go and ask. (Principal)

In summary, Robyn’s leadership developed key collaborative working relationships with many others in the school. However, she recognised that there was variance in her ability to connect in this way with everyone. This was either due to availability or personality. To best enhance the productivity and success of the school, structures and processes were in place that supported collaboration across all relationships in the school.

5.6.4.3. Manages Change

The management of change processes at Fairview High School was an interesting leadership activity to consider in the context of the history of the school. Observations by participants referenced how the history of the school impacted the perception of innovation and the mandate to be ‘different’. They felt that these perceptions persisted but in some ways that this self-image may have been constraining the improvement of the school (P1, P2, SLa, SLb, Tc, Td).

I think there are some who feel that there is a phrase about the school that “this is the way we do things at [Fairview]”. And now ... there is a bit of a movement against that. Like as if that, in itself, had become an obstacle of change, that you couldn’t change. You know, we do things ‘differently’ but we can’t change. That’s been shifting in the last few years. (School Leader)

Robyn, having been immersed in the evolution of change at the school, provided strong insight into the opportunities and challenges that resulted from that. She described some leadership practices that have helped her navigate change within the school’s culture in effective ways.

Well I think we used to be much more innovative in a sense, compared to everyone else, but a lot of people have caught up. But someone said, “we always change here” and I think that’s right. But now we don’t change because we think we should change or because there’s a new next best thing, but because we see something is not working. Or not working as well as we think it should. So, then we will make subtle changes to our practice. And so, we are almost constantly looking for a way to do things better, and that can be as simple as how do we communicate with parents, to how do we teach. (Principal)

An important part of this practice was a solid commitment to the purpose and philosophy of the school.

Maybe there is a better way to do that now? How does it fit with our overall philosophy about what we want to achieve? So, everything is put in context with that, so we are constantly referring to the underlying principles of the school. (Principal)
The influence of the structures and processes that Robyn and other school leaders had developed over recent years were also important to the way that change was managed. The change processes had evolved from a casual, fluid approach that characterised the earlier years of the school to changes that were investigated, planned for and evaluated in purposeful ways.

It is much more measured and there is no sort of throwing things out. It is about if we are going to make a change, what is the reasoning for it, why? Present the case and there is, definitely, a set way of going about decisions and things aren’t just sort of left for people to decide. Then ask, why is that happening? Cause so and so said. That sort of thing doesn’t happen, I would say, as much. That would be if it does happen it is picked up on because that shouldn’t be happening and we need to do either what we say we are going to do or we need to communicate why we are changing. (School Leader)

There were several significant changes happening for the school at the time of the data collection including: the introduction of a new online learning management system; the use of this system to move to progressive reporting; and the formalisation of an amalgamation with a neighbouring secondary college for the provision of Years Eleven and Twelve (a process that had been evolving for several years). There was no expression of dissatisfaction with any of these major initiatives when discussing change processes with informants. There was also no obvious ‘ownership’ of the change resting with Robyn. Participants didn’t give the impression that these changes were happening because of Robyn’s influence. Rather that these were actions that had been reasonably considered and decided upon and that the driver for the changes was to improve the school to better meet the needs of the students (SCMb, SLa, SLb, Ta, Td).

5.6.4.4. Supports student-centred approach

Individualised learning that is inclusive, equitable and personalised was a clear priority of Fairview High School and was reflected in the vision and philosophy of the school. The evidence suggested that Robyn supported this in the way she practiced leadership. Robyn described her commitment to individual student needs and how that is enacted through practices and decisions about processes,

I think fundamentally what works here is that we strive to have individualised learning which is a lot harder than it sounds. But what we do is treat everyone as an individual and the learning flows from that to some degree, though you do have to construct things, it is not an automatic thing. But the recognition that people are different and need different things at different times and whether that’s in terms of what they learn in class or the wellbeing support that they need or support in many other ways that can be provided... The way you treat people and the value you place on people as individuals and getting to know them and forming positive relationships. But we put in structural things so that can occur because that doesn’t happen just because you would like it to. (Principal)
Interview comments from nine other sources supported this theme (SLa, SLb, Ta, Tc, Te, Tf, SCMb, PGa, PGb, SGb). Observations on four separate occasions validated these comments (Ob2, Ob3, Ob4, Ob6).

The primary thing that Leadership does well in our school is they maintain a focus on the kids. (Teacher)

She is very passionate about the school, about the curriculum and about each individual student (Parent Group)

The strong support for student-centred learning approaches was important to the overall culture and operations at the school. This theme of practice has built on evidence from Robyn’s leadership characteristics and the school’s vision and philosophy. This finding demonstrates alignment between what Robyn believed and what she practiced.

5.6.4.5.  Improves Organisational Structures

This theme provided interesting insight to the way that Robyn’s leadership had evolved with the school from re-opening. Interview participants described that the years of Robyn’s tenure in the principal role had aligned with a sense of increased maturity and enhanced structural organisation for the school. Robyn recognised this herself, reflecting on how the school had evolved from re-opening.

We are more organised. Because we are bigger and we have to be. Like in the early days we could be really organic about what we did, but you can do that with 15-20 staff and a couple of hundred kids, it’s easy. Once you have got, we’ve got 600 people here every day, you have to, we’ve got more processes in place now. We have more time to spend on how we do things more effectively... So, our size has meant we have to be more rigid in our structures and processes. (Principal)

The importance of this component of Robyn’s leadership practice was illustrated in her response to a question asking what factors have influenced school improvement over recent years. She identified ‘getting processes right’ as a critical factor. Analysis of Robyn’s three interviews showed that this focus on processes and organisational arrangements had been an important part of her work in leading the school. It was the second most numerously coded theme identified from her interview comments. This leadership practice area was also identified by nearly all the other staff informants (SLa, SLb, Ta, Tc, Td, Te).

Generally, there was a strong feeling from these respondents that the development of clear and well communicated processes and policies was a positive and necessary factor of the growth of the school.
Those who had been at the school for many years, (Robyn included) reflected that the key philosophies of the school needed to be balanced with the organisational requirements in a finessed way.

You know when we were a baby, when we were a young school and there were 50 kids and 12 teachers, you could all hang out in a room and have a chat and go cool I can do this... You could work like that in a super organic, hippy kind of way and that is beautiful... So, I guess in the last few years we have started to bring in a lot of structures that change and/or solidify our practices and as best as possible they are built on our values or not and sometimes we have had to change what we do and sometimes that has meant throwing out what we do and putting in something that is just better. But that is a newish thing in the last, I guess, three or four years or so of moving towards that and I hope it doesn't mean we are going to end up like everybody else. (Teacher)

A prevalent comment was about the effectiveness of processes that connected staff development to the school’s strategic planning. Six respondents including Robyn (P1, P3, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tc, Td) reflected on how the leadership utilised the Annual Implementation Plan to provide clear goals and strategies for decision making and leadership in the school.

The history and the culture of the school gave it an identity as a flexible, organic, responsive institution and this was valued by the community. However, there was recognition that the school had grown, and for continued success, organisational systems and structures needed to be attended to. The evidence suggested that Robyn had practiced leadership that has met this need.

5.6.4.6. Externally focused

Robyn’s strong connection to the school was balanced by her interest in broader system activities and responsibilities. This theme presented itself in the evidence in several different ways. For some participants, Robyn was not a visible leader. For example, there was a mix of responses from the parents and students. Some felt that they knew her well and others felt they didn’t know her at all, as this quote demonstrates,

I am kind of nearly at VCE and I have only ever had one conversation with her... I have never really known her...I guess you won’t actually come in contact with her that much unless you have a reason to talk to her about something. (Student Group)

These responses in the interviews were considered along with evidence that Robyn often had her attention diverted by commitments to external activities. These commitments meant that she was often not physically present at the school. For example, during data collection visits to the school for this research project, Robyn was off-site attending to other duties for four out of the 12 visits. Robyn estimated that external roles and responsibilities take up to two days a week of her time (P1).
Robyn believed that these activities were an important component of her work. In answer to a question in interview about what drives her in her work she responded,

> If I think about it in the system wide field, because a lot of the work I do is system wide, I am driven by the idea that as a system we get better when we contribute deliberately to the system... so there is that aspect of the contribution as a system around raising the outcomes of all students and the building of the capacity of the teaching profession. (Principal)

There was a perception among the staff interviewed that Robyn was often absent from the school because she was engaged in external activities (SLa, SLb, Tb, Tc, Te, Tf). Robyn shared an anecdote that demonstrated this,

> I said at the first day of school, welcoming the new staff, I said my office door is always open, you can call in whenever. But then someone called out, “yeah but she’s never in there. You can go but she won’t be there”, and that was funny. (Principal)

Generally, this was not perceived as a negative circumstance but as a necessity of her role.

> Some may consider that she isn’t always there but I just think it is the nature of the job and her time in the school is very limited. She has a lot of outside requirements; the department requires her to do this, you’ve got to sit on a panel for another Principal, you’ve got to look after all the business managers. Like there is a whole lot of stuff that is outside our control that we don’t actually know about. The staff probably doesn’t get a good sense of what the full extent of her job is. Sometimes they might feel she is not really there on the ground but that’s not her job though I don’t think. We should be able to handle most of it. (School Leader)

The notion of her absence facilitating opportunities for others to lead was a perception that Robyn also shared.

> I would think if you took that to a logical conclusion, it is actually what you want in an organisation. You actually want your leader to be able to leave and the place not fall apart. (Principal)

Because organisational processes and leadership structures were successfully operating, the school ran effectively in her absence (SLa). Combined with her characteristic of empowering and supporting others, this circumstance of attention to external responsibilities contributed to greater distribution of leadership across the school.

5.6.4.7. Evidence based

In the first interview with Robyn she illustrated how important using data was to the improvement processes at the school. This was as a reflection on the type of school that Fairview was. Robyn contended that the school had evolved from being labelled as a new, innovative school into a school that uses evidence and data to improve. Her comment from the interview demonstrates this,
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At the moment, our focus is around feedback and assessment. How do we use that, along with the data that we collect? How do we use that to find the point of teaching for each child and where do they go to next? It is around the notion of differentiation but using the data and our knowledge of kids, their parents. So, that means we have to constantly refine what we do and because we get more sophisticated at what we understand. (Principal)

Robyn’s leadership kept the focus of the school on individual student needs and she champions the importance of evidence in teaching and learning, and in leadership decisions.

We have to try to have it based on evidence...What’s the evidence that we will make a difference? (Principal)

During the first interview, Robyn shared data from standardized testing whilst discussing improvement strategies. She engaged in detailed evidence to demonstrate student learning at a variety of levels, including an understanding of specific individual students. Robyn returned to the theme of evidence based practice regularly in further interviews and discussions. The leadership practice of a focus on student learning evidence was identified by six other informants. Their observations were of increased reliance on evidence in review of improvement, the development of strategic plans and in decisions made about improving teacher capacity (SCMa, SLa, SLb, Tb, Tc, Td).

5.6.4.8. Summary of Principal Practices

Robyn’s practice was strongly aligned with her leadership characteristics. There was clear evidence that she practiced leadership activities and decision-making processes that reflected her core philosophy, values and personal traits. Robyn was collaborative, measured and considered. She focused on what was best for students in her practice. The evidence also suggested that her leadership practices were well suited to the stage of the school improvement as it moved out of the initial period of re-opening. Throughout her tenure, she met the needs of the school with a focus on improving structural and procedural arrangements. It was evident that the demands of an increasingly large and complex school were being addressed. As were arrangements to structure leadership and collaborative teams that ensured that change for improvement was well communicated and implemented.

Robyn’s practice was also characterised by an increased external focus that involved her in system leadership activities. She had increased responsibilities that removed her from the school and this resulted in some participants perceiving her as not available or visible. However, it seemed that the leadership and operation of the school was arranged effectively to mitigate this circumstance. In fact, it was viewed by some as an indication of the increased leadership capacity of others and of the
success of her strategies for distributing leadership. She was able to divert her attentions whilst being confident in the effective running of the school. The contributions that others made to leadership and the success of the school will be explored further in the following section.

5.7. Contribution of others to leadership and success

Leadership among the teachers at the school was well spread across a number of specific roles and responsibilities. Accompanying this was a culture that encouraged and supported staff to show initiative and to collaborate regardless of formal roles and responsibilities. This aspect of the culture had been important at the school since re-opening. This culture and evidence of the impact of those in specific leadership roles will be explored further below.

5.7.1. Leadership history

Fairview High School re-opened in 2004 with 14 staff. Some of these people, including Robyn, had been involved in planning and developing the school in the months and years prior to re-opening. These educators worked with a very supportive community and had a strong and clear vision for the new and innovative approaches that the opportunity to start afresh offered. This resulted in a cultural legacy of open leadership and shared responsibility.

The early years at Fairview were characterised by a strong leader in the previous Principal, and a close-knit, collaborative team working toward a clear vision for the school (P1, P2, SLb). Due to the small number of staff and the culture of the new school, the leadership was closely connected to all staff and students. The leadership was consultative and responsive. There was a shared sense of responsibility for the success of the school.

The evidence collected for this study suggests that there is a legacy from this time that impacts how current leadership is enacted. From that early, loose structure it was relatively easy for decisions to be made and communicated.

Because we started small and there were only twelve of us and just over a hundred kids we could sort of work on the fly a bit and I had never realised at the time what infrastructure schools really have. Like they have policy and they have pens and paper and they have a way of doing things that existed before, - we didn’t have any of that. Had nothing, like had nothing. So, some of the practices we sort of did intuitively. (Principal)

However, as the school got bigger and more complex, it became important to develop structures of leadership that ensured communication and effective responsibility for tasks (P2, SLa, SLb).
Another influence from the early years of the school that had persisted were the team based structures of the school. In accordance with the middle years philosophy, teams operated with some autonomy and had their own leadership roles. This saw a broad spread of leadership.

Leadership was open to many staff both in formal and informal ways. Opportunities to access positions from the many year level or whole school roles were available to staff who were interested.

There have always been new challenges each year for me. I started out being the Sports Coordinator and progressed into being the Year Nine Team Leader, Jet Leader and then into this role now and so as a young teacher I have had lots of opportunities and I don’t think if I had been at any other school that would have necessarily been presented to myself in my first 12 years of teaching. I might have taken this long to earn my stripes and prove myself to be recognised maybe to be given a chance to do any leadership. (School Leader)

5.7.2. Broad leadership positions

As described above, there were many teachers at the school who held specific roles and contributed to the effectiveness and the success of the school. Parents and students noted in interviews that there were others, beside Robyn, that they identified with as leaders. Several suggested that Joanne the Assistant Principal was a leader that they felt connected with (PGb, SCMb, SGa, SGb). It was also evident that year level or team leaders were the first contact point for parents, students and teachers (P1, SLa, SLb, Ta, Tc, Td, Te, PGa). These observations support the evidence that there is a clear leadership structure through the school based on the sub-school team arrangements. For day to day leadership activities these were effective and successful.

Others were identified throughout data collection as contributing to success. Both student groups (SGa, SGb) mentioned the of the leadership of the Careers and Transitions Coordinator. The influence of the Teaching and Learning Leader was identified by staff as a contribution to improvement at the school (P1, SLb, Tc, Tf). Robyn specifically identified the Year Ten, Eleven and Twelve team leader for his work developing the important partnership with a local secondary college for the provision of the senior secondary programs (P3).

The success of these arrangements was also evidenced by the Principal’s external responsibilities and regular absences. Robyn noted that the school was capable of operating smoothly without her,

There would be half a dozen people who could look after the school if I wasn’t here. Probably more actually if I think about it. (Principal)
This deep well of leadership capacity in the school was nurtured by Robyn as well as resulting from the cultural history of the school as described above. Robyn explained that she was open to ‘taking chances on people’ and providing opportunity for others to ‘step up’.

Overall, it was evident that there was significant leadership and contribution to success that resided separately to Robyn in the school. This reflection by a teacher interviewed symbolically described his perception of the combined nature of leadership at the school.

> In general, I think that our ship, I talk about ship to anchor ratio, because with staff if you have got too many anchors to too few ships, you can’t get anywhere and I think our ship to anchor is very good. Ships can pull the anchors and I think that is a tribute to the hiring process. We are a very young staff so we are quite open to new things, willing to try new things, willing to put in a bit of extra time when needed. (Teacher)

### 5.8. Summary

Fairview High School had shown improvement since it’s re-opening in 2004 and under the leadership of the current Principal since 2009. The school had regularly performed above national and state averages in publicly available data. Although some performance measures were not reflecting the level of achievement found in schools serving communities with similar levels of educational advantage (as measured by ICSEA), the data suggested that the students that Fairview attracted into Year Seven often had lower achievement levels than would be expected given their educational advantage. There was evidence that the school supported these students to show learning growth that was greater than students in other schools, who start at the same level of achievement.

The school had a strong philosophy and vision that was embedded into leadership and teaching, with individuality, equity and diversity valued. The school catered for students interested in a broad range of pursuits and was structured in a way that helped students to develop relationships and connections and to find their passions and strengths.

The history of the school had seen it develop a reputation for innovation, creativity and for ‘doing things differently’. This image is an important part of the school’s culture but had also required considered leadership practice that balanced important practical, operational and structural arrangements that supported improvement.

Robyn’s values and philosophy were closely aligned to those of the school, which in part was a result of her long history at Fairview. Students, teachers and parents confirmed that she was very committed.
to the school and that she was respected and trusted due to relationships she had developed with between staff and students and encouraged across the school.

Robyn’s leadership was generally calm, positive and assured and these characteristics were reflected in the culture of the school. She had a focus on supporting and empowering others in their work. Her supportive and empowering characteristics were reflected in her key practice focus of developing staff capacity. She saw this as a core element of her leadership. To support this, she regularly considered evidence of the performance of the school and used data to inform improvement. She also valued opportunities to do things ‘differently’ and although there was a shared feeling that the innovative history of the school was less important than it had been, there was still a culture where teachers felt confident to try new ideas and approaches.

Recent years of Robyn’s principalship had seen an increased focus on the development of organisational structures and processes. This was in response to the increased complexity in the organisation that accompanied increased enrolments. This change in structures and processes had supported further distribution of leadership. Robyn was confident in taking on system level responsibilities that diverted her attention from school based leadership because she knew that others had developed the capacity to lead in her absence.

In summary, Robyn’s involvement in the school since the re-opening had seen her in several leadership roles. As Principal, she had supervised a period of maturity of the school as it had continued to grow. It had moved from being branded as innovative, creative and different, towards a school that demonstrated strong evidence based practice with an increased focus on improving student learning performance measures. Robyn had overseen this evolution whilst maintaining the best aspects of the early culture. The school still embraced difference and was willing to try new things to meet the needs of the students. To do this however, management of change had become more purposeful and organised. Staff were empowered to try new things and were expected to attend to student learning.

Fairview High School had achieved a great deal in its relatively short recent history and Robyn’s leadership was a significant influence.
CHAPTER 6: CROSS CASE COMPARISONS

6.1. Introduction

Review and analysis of the two case studies for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the findings and themes that emerged will provide deeper insight and validity to the discussion of the research questions. This chapter specifically addresses the first research question: What are the leadership characteristics and practices of principals in high-advantage, improving schools? This chapter is presented according to the sections used in the two Case Study Chapters:

- School profile
- School context
- Performance of the school
- Success of the school
- Principal leadership
- Contribution of others to leadership and success

The methodology used for each of the case studies was as similar as practicable enabling a reliable process of cross case review to be undertaken.

6.2. School Profile

Both schools are government co-educational secondary schools. They are situated in suburbs of Melbourne with high educational advantage demographic indicators. Both schools have Indexes of School Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) substantially above the average of 1000.

6.2.1. Student enrolments

At the time of the research the two schools had around 500 students enrolled. Fairview High School was close to its capacity at that time and Tilvert College was at less than half of the capacity of the school site. Student enrolments were increasing at both schools but Tilvert College had seen the most significant increases over recent years. There had been a growth of over 300 students in five years compared to a growth of just under 100 students at Fairview. Both schools reported that they had a proportion of students who travelled past other secondary schools to attend and some travelled significant distances of up to an hour away. Both schools also indicated that they had many students join their communities after attending other secondary schools.
6.2.2. Staff numbers

Staffing numbers were similar at both schools with ratios of one staff member for around 10 students at both schools. Tilverton had a greater increase in staff numbers over the recent years which relates to the larger increase in student numbers.

6.2.3. Physical environments

Both schools have a range of buildings and facilities to accommodate teaching and learning. There are specific purpose learning spaces for subjects such as Arts, Sciences and ICT at both schools. Tilverton had a new Performing Arts centre which includes a 300-seat theatre and commercial kitchen. Fairview had a new three-storey building with innovative, flexible learning spaces.

Tilverton has significantly more land space than inner-city Fairview. Tilverton uses the extensive outdoor space for animals and gardening programs. The Tilverton site can accommodate over 1000 students and the Fairview site is almost at its capacity of 600.

6.2.4. Governance

Both schools are predominantly government funded and governed under the Victorian DET guidelines. Each school has a School Council which complies with the relevant governance regulations.

6.3. School Context

6.3.1. Histories of the schools

Both schools have significant histories in terms of having been in operation for many years. Fairview is one of the oldest secondary colleges in Melbourne opening originally in 1915. Tilverton opened in the early 1970’s.

Of interest is that both schools had recent histories of significant disruption and threat to their existence. Fairview was closed for 12 years prior to 2004. The closure resulted from a policy directive that closed over 300 Victorian government schools in the 1990’s. Tilverton came very close to closure in 2010 due to declining student numbers, staff dissatisfaction and poor community reputation. The crises in their histories pre-disposed both schools to completely re-invent the way that they offered education to their students. Fairview was opened with a specific mandate from the Victorian
Education Department to provide innovative options. Tilvertont reported that they had nothing to lose from taking big risks and following a transformative philosophy for education.

6.3.2. **Schools philosophies and visions**

The philosophies and visions of the two schools have, a fundamental focus on student individuality, flexible learning options and respectful, equitable and empowering student relationships, in common. At both schools, the philosophy and vision were evident throughout data collection activities.

At Tilvertont the vision and philosophy were explicit and highly visible. Michael, the Principal of Tilvertont, insisted that everyone was well versed in the vision statement and he held the values underpinning these at the forefront of his and others practice. The vision and philosophy statements were predominantly displayed around the school and all participants could refer to them. Any families interested in joining the Tilvertont community were informed of the vision and philosophies prior to enrolment and then their enrolment was seen as a commitment to these.

At Fairview, the values encapsulated by the vision and philosophy were intrinsic and enmeshed in the school culture and practices. They stayed in the background, but were identifiable if you turned your attention to them. The evidence demonstrated that the stakeholders may not have been able to recall the exact vision statement, but they were aligned to the values and beliefs that underpinned the school’s vision and philosophy.

6.3.3. **Learning Programs**

Both schools essentially re-invented all aspects of their learning programs in innovative and student-centred ways.

Fairview based the restructure on the Middle Years education model. This was part of the agreement of reopening the school undertaken with the Victorian DET. This model informed the way that the school was planned and structured at re-opening and had significant lasting impact on the structure and curriculum programs over ten years later.

Tilvertont’s learning programs were structured around students’ interests and passions. Core aspects of this included 100 per cent choice in subject selection once foundation level English, Maths and Science competencies are reached (nominally high Year Eight level). The school has abolished year levels recognising that what students choose to learn should not be restricted by age. The school
regularly supports students to develop learning programs around specific interest areas, including developing custom-made subjects and supporting students in running businesses and enterprises through the school.

6.3.4. Management and leadership structures

Both schools had standard formal leadership structures at the time of the research. This included the Principal, an Assistant Principal and Leading Teacher positions. Both schools had significant leadership positions for a Teaching and Learning Leader and for Student Transitions/Career support. Beyond this there were differences in the structures at the school.

Fairview, being based on year level team structures, had a variety of levels of leaders responsible for different teams and year levels, as well as subject area leaders.

Tilverton included students in school leadership activities. Students were actively involved in school leadership and decision-making committees. Tilverton had just introduced Heads of Houses. These teachers were in leadership positions responsible for multi-age groups across the school. These Heads of House worked closely with student leaders to manage each house.

At Tilverton, Michael was very central to the leadership from his arrival. There was a clear feeling expressed by participants that he was responsible for the school improvement and that the vision and change at the school was driven by his philosophy for education.

Robyn at Fairview was seen as very aligned to the school. Responsibility for improvement and change was more widely distributed and processes to enact change were more collaborative. The team based and collaborative history of the school was still a clear part of the leadership culture.

6.4. Performance of the schools

6.4.1. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

The Year Nine NAPLAN results of both schools were reviewed for the years 2008-2015. Both schools demonstrated that they often performed at similar levels or higher when compared to all Australian schools. The results were often less favourable in comparison to schools that were identified as serving similar schools. Tilverton’s 2015 results showed clear improvement in all test areas.
Deeper investigation of the results demonstrated that at both schools the students that started in Year Seven were often achieving less well than students in schools identified as similar. However, in looking at the learning growth that these students showed by the time they were tested again in Year Nine, their schools had often supported them to demonstrate higher results than students from other schools, who started with the same scores, and in many cases their achievement gains were greater than students in similar schools.

The Year Seven results also suggested that the schools were starting to attract more academically capable students in more recent years. This was particularly the case at Tilverton.

At both schools, participants reported that NAPLAN achievement was not an important consideration for their work with the students.

### 6.4.2. Victorian Certificate of Education

A review of each school’s VCE All Study score for each year 2008 – 2015 was included in the cases. There was some variation between the two schools VCE results, with Fairview’s average All Study scores being at or within one point of 30 (the state average of scores for all schools) for all of the reviewed years. Tilverton’s average scores were consistently lower than the state average. For six out of the eight years, the school’s average All Study score was 26. One year was 25 and the best score over this time frame was 28 in 2009.

Fairview’s scores are notable considering the NAPLAN insights presented above. The school is, on average, supporting their students, who are starting at the school with lower than average comparison scores, to achieve leaving certificate results that are more comparable to students in similar schools.

Tilverton’s VCE scores are more difficult to explain without access to deeper information. Factors such as the philosophy of the school not being focused on academic achievement, measured by VCE success, and the practice of allowing students to take VCE subjects from Year Eight might go some way to explaining the lower results but it is difficult to determine a clear understanding of any causal factors.
6.5. Success of the schools

6.5.1. Enrolment increases

Both schools had seen increases in student enrolments over the years of the current principals’ tenure. Fairview had steadily increased enrolment numbers and was very close to the 600-student capacity of the site at the completion of the research period. Tilverton had more pronounced enrolment increases. Numbers had more than doubled in the years that Michael had been principal.

Interviewees reported that the increases in enrolments were significant indications of the success of their schools and the changed perceptions of them in their communities.

6.5.2. Satisfaction with the school

At both schools, participants in the interviews and observations indicated that they were satisfied with the schools. Further evidence was available from satisfaction surveys of parents, staff and students that are conducted annually by the DET.

At Tilverton, all of these stakeholders reported higher than state average satisfaction with the school. At Fairview, the results of the connectedness of the student were substantially above the state averages, with the staff and parent results close to state averages.

6.5.3. Broader community interest

Both schools have attracted interest from local communities, the broader education sector and the media. School tours and community events are well attended and the reputations of each school is reportedly increasing in the local community. There was significant interest in both schools from educators who want to learn about the innovative practices and programs that both have adopted. Both schools had also attracted media attention for their programs and approaches. This was more prevalent at Tilverton at the time of research.

6.5.4. Broader success measures

During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss what made their school successful. The responses to these discussions were thematically analysed and presented in the cases. Comparison across the cases indicated that there are many similarities in the perceptions of success at the schools.
and what is valued for the students. Table 6.1 shows the themes from both cases merged into overarching themes of success for the schools.

Table 6.1: Cross-case analysis of success responses by themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Tilvertont</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Fairviewt</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Centred</td>
<td>Career pathway support for students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Individual student needs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students positive about learning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Post school pathways</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student opportunity and choice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student engagement and passion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School provision of opportunities and support</td>
<td>The school is doing things differently</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-academic areas</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning opportunities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff and leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Re-opening and re-establishing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 6.1 shows, the comments provided fall into two categories: specific areas that the students are successful at; and, successes of the schools’ structures and programs. This cross-case review demonstrates that at Tilvertont, success was more often described in terms of what the students were achieving and doing in the school. At Fairview, the responses to this question were more likely to reflect success in terms of what the school had achieved. For example, providing access to non-academic areas and re-opening and re-establishing.

6.6. Principal Leadership

6.6.1. Professional histories

The professional histories of the two principals had some notable differences. Robyn had worked her entire career in government education and Michael had moved to education after a career in accounting. Robyn’s time working in schools was interrupted by a lengthy period of work as a Middle Years Project Officer with the DET. Her experience in school leadership had all occurred in her ten years at Fairview. Michael taught and had leadership opportunities in independent schools for most of his education career history. He had been Assistant Principal at independent schools and at a government secondary college and also had been the Principal of a small independent school.
Michael started at Tilverton as an external appointment to the school. Robyn had a long prior history at Fairview, moving up through leadership roles and working closely with the prior Principal. This difference is of interest when considering the stage of improvement that the schools were in at the time of each appointment. At Tilverton, there was a real sense of crisis and helplessness. Michael was appointed as a last hope. He brought broad experience from both independent and government sectors and innovative ideas which inspired a renewed sense of hope and possibility for the school. Fairview was well into an improvement journey and Robyn’s appointment as an internal candidate saw her continue to develop the values, vision and alternative approach of the school as it matured and consolidated its culture.

6.6.2. Leadership Themes

The leadership characteristics and practices of the two principals were presented as themes that emerged from the analysis of data. For the purposes of cross case comparison, the characteristics and practices themes have been organised into meta-themes. To capture the key findings from each principal, some of the case themes are presented with an additional caption that adds further pertinent information from the theme’s findings. Table 6.2 displays these meta-themes enabling comparisons and contrasts to be explored.
Table 6.2: Meta-themes of characteristics and practices from the cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership meta-themes</th>
<th>Robyn - Fairview</th>
<th>Michael - Tilverton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong student focus</strong></td>
<td>Committed to students -</td>
<td>Supports student centred learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Personally, and through others</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision</strong></td>
<td>Clear values and philosophy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change leadership</strong></td>
<td>Connected to FHS</td>
<td>Manages Change- <em>reviews and consults</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improves organisational structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>Trust- <em>through others</em></td>
<td>Collaborates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Development</strong></td>
<td>Supportive and empowering</td>
<td>Develops staff capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing professional growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Approach</strong></td>
<td>Calm and assured</td>
<td>Externally focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The meta-themes enable an investigation of where there was congruence and contrast between the two cases. Of interest is how the manifestation of the leadership reflected the individuality of each principal and how the context of each school may have mediated the leadership.

6.6.2.1. Strong student focus

Both principals demonstrated that the students at their schools were a priority for them. For Michael, it was significantly the most coded theme from the analysis related to his characteristics and practices. For Robyn, it was less dominant but still evident. This commitment to students was reflected in the culture at both schools and was reported and observed broadly.

The difference for these two principals is in the dominance of these student-centred themes, compared to other characteristics, and how these were translated into practice. For Michael, the data analysis demonstrated that it was clearly central and foremost. He spoke about the students as individuals as well as about the importance of prioritising students in schools in general. His philosophical platform was centred on students above all else in schools. Other participants reported that this overarching commitment to students was the most important aspect of the culture at Tilverton. Teachers and students knew that students always came first. If Michael felt that there was an action required that benefited the students, it became a priority and there was no aspect of the school’s traditions or operations that was more important.

Robyn also demonstrated that students were central to her leadership but she was less directly involved with the students. Leadership actions and decisions that supported a student focussed culture were considered and processed through other filters, such as other leaders, before they were enacted. Robyn considered the needs of the students but within the context and structure of the school. In practice, she had distributed the commitment to developing individual relationships and connections with the students through to all staff. Student connections and relationships were highly valued but, unlike Michael at Tilverton, Robyn did not have a personal connection with every student in the school. Although the expectation that every student would have such a connection with at least one staff member was a key factor of the school culture.

At the time of research, Tilverton was managing rapidly increasing enrolment numbers. These increases had seen Michael implement a new leadership structure of Heads of House. These six teacher leadership positions were intended to distribute the individual commitment to the students to these leaders who had responsibility for approximately 100 students each. The maturity of the Tilverton school culture may have developed sufficiently that the commitment to students was able
to be maintained without Michael’s direct involvement. This may then become more similar to the
arrangements at Fairview.

6.6.2.2. Vision

Both principals had clear understandings of the purpose and direction of their schools, which was
clearly guided by their personal values and philosophies. A vision of what each school should be and
offer to the students was a clear component of the culture in each setting. How this vision was
supported and shared by the principals was slightly different but was predominant in each case.

For Robyn at Fairview, clear values and philosophy was the most identified characteristic theme and
for Michael, the perception of him as visionary was the second strongest characteristic theme
identified. In the practice themes, Michael’s purposeful focus on inspiring shared moral purpose was
the second most coded. Robyn’s sense of having a clear connection to the vision of the school through
her aligned values and philosophy did not translate into an identifiable theme of practice.

Of interest to this cross-case comparison is the intensity of this characteristic in the two principals.
Michael was identified as visionary. He was central to the innovative and transformative approaches
that had been implemented and their success was seen to be a result of his leadership. There was
evidence that the vision was shared widely and that others in the school were becoming more central
to the vision and therefore the transformation. This was a result of Michael’s ability to communicate,
validate and inspire others to connect with this vision. The timing of Michael’s principalship made his
ability to be visionary an important characteristic of his leadership. The school needed strong, clear
and inspiring leadership.

Robyn displayed a clarity of purpose and direction for her school that was underpinned by her clear
values and philosophy. She described this as ‘the heart of her leadership’ and it was identified by many
other participants. However, this characteristic manifested as a well aligned and supportive reflection
of the school culture more so than a driver of it, as was the case for Michael. Robyn had been part of
the establishment and the growth of the culture and was now refining the school culture rather than
creating it. She had worked as an integral part of the collaborative team that had developed the
culture and structure of the school and the focus of her principalship was to grow, develop and
improve on it. Fairview had moved past the stage of establishing their philosophy and culture, where
Tilverton were still in need of the drive of a strong, visionary leader to ensure it happened.
6.6.2.3. Change leadership

This meta-theme of leadership is an area where significant difference is evident between the themes that emerged about two principals. How their personalities and approaches manifested themselves here is interesting in connection with the needs of each school context.

Michael was perceived as a reformer and a risk taker. His approach was fast and determined. He had clear ideas and radical approaches that he wanted to implement and his charismatic, passionate and enthusiastic personality aspects facilitated this. He had to energise the school and inspire drastic change. He leveraged his own background stories, from his schooling experiences and the knowledge he had gained in leadership elsewhere to validate a reform agenda for the school. He also positioned himself as well informed in terms of research evidence to support his image as reformer. He managed risk through a focus on the deficits of the school as it was. He presented the belief that the greater risk was not to try these innovative approaches and with possible school closure imminent it was a belief that many accepted. This context of school crisis also supported him to harness a sense of urgency for change. There was wide acceptance of rapid, and sometimes flawed, change at the school as a consequence of the transformative culture. A constant state of change had become an expectation.

Robyn’s leadership position was of a school that had well established values and vision. She had worked through the earlier, more challenging period of embedding the approaches and the innovative vision and began her principalship at a time when consolidation was a priority. She was confident in the direction of the school and a focus on refining and building support was needed. Her change management was reflective and distributive. She described the benefits of reviewing and adapting practices where necessary and of sharing leadership to broaden the views and perspectives that informed her practice. She valued evidence from data and research as it was important to her reflective processes and decisions about change and improvement. Another important aspect of change and improvement at Fairview was the focus on consolidating school operations through formalising organisational structures and processes. This reflected the increased maturity of the school as well as the increased complexity associated with higher enrolments.

6.6.2.4. Trust

Trust was a core characteristic that was purposefully considered in the research. Trust was explored for both cases across various relationships within each school, including the personal trust that the Principals engendered with those that they worked with.
At both schools, trust was an important aspect of the culture. Trust between students, families and the schools was high. With very few exceptions, the student and parent participants demonstrated appreciation and confidence that the school was operating in a way that supported each individual in their learning and development. There were also high levels of trust evident in different connections across the school, between teachers, teacher to student, and teachers to leadership. This was generally achieved in both settings through a genuine and authentic focus on the students and strong communication and collaboration arrangements.

An important aspect of the trust at both schools was the sense of equity that was promoted. At Tilverton a key policy called the One-Person Policy formalised this equity by stating that no individual in the school, regardless of position, was entitled to higher regard or status than any other person. This manifested in student involvement in all aspects of the school and teachers welcoming the presence and input of students in all situations.

At Fairview, equity was also highly valued and symbolised by the use of first names for all and an absence of school uniform. The student participants reported that they felt respected and trusted and that they respected others.

The principals at the schools supported the trust underpinning the school in different ways. Robyn was very collaborative and it was evident that she developed many important trust-based relationships, particularly with other school leaders and key staff. She also advocated for structures and processes that enabled collaborative and trusting relationships to develop throughout the school. Students and parents reported that they trusted the school, but they did not necessarily feel connected with Robyn. Other staff were more well known to them and this indicated the distribution of this important aspect of the school’s culture.

Michael was more central to the school community perceptions of trust. Parents, students and staff felt that they had relationships with him and he was trusted to have the best interests of the students as central to his practice. He established this by being highly visible and available to students and families. Practices that developed this included long initial meetings with families prior to enrolment, providing his personal mobile phone number to all parents and students, working on the school crossing in the mornings and spending time every day interacting with students in the Resource Centre. Most staff felt well connected to Michael, but even when this connection seemed less strong, staff reported that they trusted Michael’s leadership because he had been successful in turning around the school.
6.6.2.5. **Staff Development**

The principals’ leadership of staff development was the area where there was greatest difference between the cases. Particularly, in evidence of the importance of the development of staff capacity for school improvement.

For Robyn, it was a key area of practice focus and her leadership characteristics of being supportive and empowering as well as interested in professional growth suited this focus well. She believed in the importance of developing teaching capability and supporting staff well-being and leadership development. These were key priorities that were informed by the data. She planned and participated in staff development forums and used the professional review processes effectively and strategically to align teaching professional learning with school improvement needs.

Michael’s focus was not on staff development. He was primarily interested in action to support students to control their own learning. Leading changes that enabled this to occur as broadly as possible was his priority. Staff were expected to support this in whatever way was required. Michael had very high and firm expectations of the staff to support the philosophy and the associated arrangements of the school. He did not see value in investing in staff professional learning to improve teacher practice.

One aspect of the enhancement of teaching practice that was common to both schools was the value that was placed on the opportunity to employ staff. Employment processes focused on selecting new staff that were committed to the philosophies of the schools. Both Michael and Robyn, and other staff at both schools, described that consideration of who would suit the culture was a key factor in employment decisions. Both schools had significant opportunities to employ staff, mostly as a consequence of increased enrolments. At Tilverton, there was also a high turnover of staff in the early years of Michael’s principalship where those staff who were not interested in committing to the new approach moved on to other schools.

6.6.2.6. **Personal Approaches**

How other aspects of each principals’ personal approach were able to be interpreted with respect to the context of each school is of relevance here.

Robyn was perceived as calm and assured. She displayed confidence in her beliefs and her leadership practice. She was committed to the direction of Fairview and proud of the achievements of the school. She took her time to consider actions and worked with others to ensure that communication was
effective. Her focus for change was to evolve existing culture toward greater efficiency and effectiveness. This mode of operation suited the needs of the school well. After a period of rapid growth, development and change, her principalship can be characterised as a time to consolidate and refine. To validate all that had been done before by respecting it whilst also aiming for continued improvement. Robyn had also been able to expand her focus to external system responsibilities and opportunities due to the stability and capacity that had been developed at school. This was important to Robyn’s personal leadership development and for the school as it enabled opportunities for broader leadership and facilitated external perspectives to filter in to the school.

Michael’s approach was perceived as dedicated and determined. He was described as energetic and resolute with regard to what needed to be done at the school. He motivated those around him and inspired commitment to the remarkable change in short time frames. His ability to connect others so significantly to the vision was demonstrated by the commitment of others to the radical change program, as well as the tolerance for the unintended consequences and disequilibrium of such a transformative philosophy and approach. The serendipity of Michael’s personality and determination and the need for radical change to avoid closure, contributed to the success at Tilverton. Michael and others recognised that the inspiring story of success at Tilverton could have ended very differently. There are many factors and participants that have contributed to this, but Michaels leadership was no small part.

6.7. Contribution of others to leadership and success

At both schools, there was a broad range of staff and others who were seen to be contributing to the success of the school. Both schools had increased formal diversification of leadership that had reflected growing student enrolments and associated complexities of management and leadership.

Another common factor across both schools was the importance of an assistant principal who was seen as a compliment to the Principal. The assistant principals were both trusted by their principals and their staff. They were perceived as contributing to the success of change initiatives by bringing practical and balanced perspectives for consideration by the Principal.

Both schools also had cultures that invited contribution broadly from others. At Fairview, this was mostly from staff. Structures in place around teams and feedback processes ensured that opportunities were available for all to contribute. At Tilverton, everyone was encouraged to exercise leadership and ideas for initiatives and were just as likely to be instigated and led by a student as by a
staff member. Further at Tilverton, many formal leadership processes and committees were open to all staff and students to contribute to.

6.8. Summary of cross case comparisons

There were many similarities across the cases. The schools both had histories of decline and the principalships being investigated occurred during times of re-establishment. Both schools successfully diverted from ‘traditional’ approaches and attracted enrolments and attention because of commitment to innovative, student-centred approaches.

The schools were at different stages of this journey of improvement. Fairview being over ten years since re-opening and Tilverton about five years since the threat of closure was imminent. This factor of timing was influential in the leadership enacted by the principals and it can be argued that the characteristics and practices of each leader were well suited to the stage of the journey that their school was experiencing.

The success of these two schools was seen in broad measures but also through indications of improvement in standardised measures. The leadership of the principals contributed to success and improvement in both the schools.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the findings presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six in relation to the research literature to answer the research questions for this study:

1. What are the practices and characteristics of principals in high-advantage, improving schools?
2. How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in high-advantage schools?

The cross-case comparisons presented in Chapter Six addressed research question 1. Six meta-themes resulted from the comparison of leadership characteristics and practices that arose from the two case studies presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. These meta-themes will be further considered throughout this chapter.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two provides a research context, background and justification for this investigation of school leadership in high-advantage, improving contexts. This literature informs the discussion of the findings to highlight where this study confirms, validates and extends prior knowledge.

To support the consideration of the research questions the chapter is structured into the following sections:

- Leadership practices and characteristics contributing to school success
- The interaction of context and leadership to shape improvement in high-advantage, improving schools
- Conceptualisation of successful school leadership for improvement in two high-advantage schools

7.2. Leadership practices and characteristics contributing to success

This section builds on the findings of Chapter Six that contributed to answering research question 1: What are the practices and characteristics of principals in high-advantage improving schools? This discussion considers these themes further by reviewing the leadership meta-themes against successful school leadership literature. The proposition presented is that the two principals have contributed to success in the case study schools as their leadership is consistent with knowledge of successful school leadership practices.
Based on evidence from the case-studies, this discussion assumes that both schools are considered successful. There are several indicators of this. Firstly, the successful re-establishment, evidenced by increased student enrolment numbers and high levels of general satisfaction from students, parents and staff. Further, the interest and attention both schools were receiving from the broader community and education sector for their successful and alternative approaches. Both schools were also showing some improvement in measured academic results as indicated by published NAPLAN and VCE results over recent years.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, successful school leadership is well-researched and demonstrates that school leadership influences teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Bishop, 2011; Branch et al., 2013; Day et al., 2010; Dinham, 2007, 2009; DuFour & Marzano, 2012; Fullan, 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Hallinger, 2011; Kokmaz, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). There are commonalities that have emerged, including core leadership practices that are consistently found across contexts (Drysdale & Gurr, 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2010a; Leithwood et al., 2017). Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p. 5) stated that ‘while mastery of these basics provides no guarantee that a leader’s work will be successful in a particular school context, lack of mastery likely guarantees failure. A successful school leader can do more but cannot do less’.

To examine how the leadership characteristics and practices of the principals at Tilverton College and Fairview High School have contributed to school success they have been connected to a conceptual framework of core practices that was presented by Leithwood and Day (2007b). This conceptual framework was shown in the Literature Review (Chapter Two) to be a reliable representation of core leadership practices. It has been reviewed, supported and adapted through numerous research projects (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2009; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2017; Louis et al., 2010; May et al., 2012; ten Bruggencate et al., 2012). Table 7.1 summarises the alignments between the Leithwood and Day (2007b) model and the themes found in this research. Following Table 7.1, each meta-theme is compared and contrasted across the cases and with regard to the literature.
Table 7.1: Leadership Meta-themes alignment with Leithwood and Day (2007b) Core Practices framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASES</th>
<th>Leadership Meta-Themes</th>
<th>Leithwood and Day (2007b) Core Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FHS: Connected to students (personally and through others); supports student centred learning</td>
<td>Building vision and establishing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TC: Committed to students (individual, personal connections); students first</td>
<td>Articulating set of core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong student focus</td>
<td><strong>Vision</strong></td>
<td>Building vision and establishing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FHS: Clear values and philosophy</td>
<td>Building a shared vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TC: Visionary; inspires shared moral purpose</td>
<td>Fostering acceptance of group goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating high performance expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Articulating a set of core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change leadership</td>
<td><strong>Change leadership</strong></td>
<td>Redesigning the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FHS: connected to the school; manages change (reviews and consults); improves organisational structures; evidence based</td>
<td>Building collaborative cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TC: Reformer/risk taker; passionate and enthusiastic; implements rapid change; research backed</td>
<td>Restructuring [and re- culturing] the organisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building productive relations with parents and the community</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting the school to the wider environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td><strong>Staff development</strong></td>
<td>Understanding and developing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FHS: Trust (through others); collaborates</td>
<td>Modelling appropriate values and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TC: Trust (personal and reputational); visible and available; develops relationships</td>
<td>Trust building</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Being visible in the school</td>
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<td><strong>Personal approach</strong></td>
<td>Understanding and developing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FHS: Calm and assured; externally focused</td>
<td>Coalition building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TC: Dedicated and determined</td>
<td>Participates in government decision making organisations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Participates in professional organisations and networks</td>
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<td>Establishes good working relationships with district staff</td>
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<td>Understanding and developing people</td>
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<td>Modelling appropriate values and behaviours</td>
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7.2.1. Strong student focus

Students were a clear priority for both principals. The core practices framework does not sufficiently capture the explicit connection that these principals had to the students in their care. The strong student focus is the substance of each school’s vision and shared moral purpose. Commitment to students underpinned the goals and direction for improvement in both schools.

For each principal, a student-centred focus was important to their leadership identity and their personal motivations within their roles. Southworth (2009, p. 92) described the desire and responsibility to enhance student learning as core to the motivations of school leaders.

It is this commitment to improving students’ achievements which drives so many individuals to become school leaders. They explicitly seek and want to make a difference to the schools they lead.

These principals considered students not only in terms of outcomes but also empowered students to contribute to the improvement of the school. Students as a resource were utilised through inviting and supporting participation in a variety of operational, organisational and leadership activities.

The meta-theme of strong student focus evident in these two leaders has supported success by providing firm and clear commitments that fortified shared vision and direction and leveraging the capacity of students to support improvement.

7.2.2. Vision

Characteristics and practices that were attributed to this meta-theme were found to be some of the most evident in the work of these two leaders. Where the student focus meta theme above described the substance of the visions and directions, this category considers characteristics and practices that specifically built vision and established direction.

The existence of vision at each school was evident but to differing degrees. At Tilverton, it was explicit and highly evident. At Fairview, it was less prominent but there was a clear and shared understanding of what the school stood for and wished to achieve. Sergiovanni (1984, p. 7) explained how leaders with strong vision influence performance and success,

Students and teachers alike want to know what is of value to the school and its leadership; desire a sense of order and direction; and enjoy sharing this sense with others. They respond to these conditions with increased work motivation and commitment.
The importance of vision as an ‘avenue of influence in school improvement’ (Hallinger & Heck, 2002, p. 4) is particularly relevant as the pursuit of an alternative vision was a goal of the re-establishment journeys. The difference in the prevalence of vision identified at the two schools may be explained by understanding the motivational influence of a preferred alternative perception (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood & Day, 2007a). At Tilverton, where the re-establishment was less mature and the scale of change led by Michael was greater, leadership characteristics and practices that emphasised the vision and direction of the school were more prevalent and explicit. This clearer expression of the preferred alternative vision was necessary to stimulate commitment to the goals of the school.

At Fairview, the culture of the school was more established. The need for explicit communication of a preferred alternative perception had reduced as the vision and direction became more stably embedded in the culture. This was evidenced by a strong school identity observed and reported. For example, interview participants drew attention to strong creativity and arts programs, diversity and inclusivity and the importance of relationships with students. Observations of school tours and information nights supported these perceptions as prospective students and parents demonstrated interest in these aspects.

7.2.3. Change leadership

The meta-theme of change leadership incorporated the highest number of individual themes from the case studies. The need for re-establishment after a specific crisis had provided both schools with opportunity to break with past structures and cultures. This required the leaders to focus on redesigning their organisations.

Robyn led change using measured, considered and collaborative approaches that built on the more drastic, transformative changes that had occurred in the earlier years of re-opening of the school. In contrast, Michael led more radical change and his approaches included taking risks, reforming quickly and transforming with determination.

The difference in change and improvement leadership at the schools can be considered with a reflection on the magnitude of change that was required. Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003, p. 6) suggested that ‘not all change is of the same magnitude. Some changes have greater implications than others for staff members, students, parents and other stakeholders’. Cuban (1990, p. 73) described differences in magnitude of change as first- and second-order change.

First-order changes try to make what already exists more efficient and more effective, without disrupting the basic organisational features, without substantially altering the ways in which
adults and children perform their roles...Second-order changes seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organisations are put together... [and] introduce new goals, structures and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems.

Using this distinction in magnitude, change at Tilverton can be viewed as second-order. The school worked through transformation that was for the most ‘a break with the past [and] outside existing paradigms’ (Walters et al., 2003, p. 7). Michael’s passionate and enthusiastic characteristics, combined with the more recent situation of crisis at the school, supported this more drastic level of change. This combination of situation and leadership characteristics demonstrates consistencies with Kotter’s (2006, 2007, 2012) conceptualisation of transformative change management, particularly:

- a sense of urgency (in the case of Tilverton a reaction to potential closure),
- developing a strong and compelling vision and strategy that is well communicated and that others will commit to,
- highlighting short-term wins and pushing forward with determination.

In contrast, leadership of change and improvement at Fairview can be situated ‘within the existing paradigm [and] consistent with the prevailing values and norms’ (Walters et al., 2003, p. 7) that had previously (albeit recently) been established at the school. Robyn did not need to implement transformative and fast-paced change. The evidence suggested that consolidation of the previous extensive change work was required. Robyn’s leadership of change reflected this while recognising that continued improvement and innovation were important. Emphasis on collaboration, deliberation and focus on impact have been shown to be effective for considered and purposeful change management in educational settings (Fullan, 2002, 2011, 2014). Successful leadership of change at Fairview was a balance of consolidating the essential aspects of the newly established culture whilst embracing opportunity to continue appropriate innovative improvement.

This discussion of change at the two case schools has highlighted two important insights from this research. Firstly, that the histories of the schools had influence on the magnitude of change that these leaders engaged in and therefore, their leadership in these circumstances. Secondly, that some of the characteristics and practices that reflect the individual personalities and approaches of the principals were either serendipitously well suited to the situation of the school, or were heightened by the needs of their school improvement context, or most probably, a combination of both.

7.2.4. Trust

Trust has been regularly identified as an essential element of effective schools (Bottery, 2005; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; Day, 2011; Gurr, 2017; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2016; Louis, 2006, 2007; Sun & Leithwood, 2017; Tschannen-Moran,
2014b; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Research has shown that ‘school leaders who create bonds of trust help create the conditions that inspire teachers to move to higher levels of effort and achievement’ (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 258). Both a recent study by Tschannen-Moran (2014a) and a meta-analysis of four studies by Sun and Leithwood (2017) found that trust in teacher-principal relationships influenced the degree of trust in other key relationships. The combination of trust across these relationships then impacted on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Trust building is a practice aligned with understanding and developing people in the core practices framework. Findings regarding trust in these two cases will be discussed below at two levels, staff trust and broader community trust.

7.2.4.1. Staff trust

At both Tilverton and Fairview, there were variations in reports of trust from staff members who were interviewed. Some of these informants felt that they had a strong trust-based relationship with their principal and others felt this less so. However, all informants indicated that they had trust in the vision and direction of the school and that they generally felt supported in their work.

Robyn at Fairview distinguished between the relational and organisational manifestations of trust by suggesting that although her individual relationships with staff might vary, her approach at an organisational level encouraged trust across the school. She did this by participating in and encouraging collaboration, and by being supportive and empowering others. For example, she described a focus on building trust with her staff through listening and encouraging ideas. Louis (2007) described the interaction of relational and institutional (organisational) trust as influencing each other over time. Relational trust is the result of personal relationships and repeated interactions within an organisation. Institutional trust is the ‘the expectation of appropriate behaviour in organised settings based on the norms of that institution’ (Louis, 2007, p. 3). Louis (2007) contends that both are necessary for effective functioning of organisations and that trust between those involved can both enhance, and be enhanced by, collaborative and distributive practices.

Interview participants at Tilverton College reported that trust was enhanced by respect for what Michael had achieved, as well as his open, honest and committed approach. An interesting observation of trust at Tilverton was a question of its presence during the earliest period of extensive and disruptive change. Some research has suggested that trust in leadership is a pre-requisite to effective change (Kaser & Halbert, 2009; Louis, 2006). Tomlinson (2014, p. 91) connects trust in leadership with the influence of their vision,
Before individuals are willing to dedicate their efforts to a vision, the visionary must prove that vision to be compelling – and prove himself or herself trustworthy.

At Tilvertont, significant change was implemented by Michael immediately on his appointment. This was before he had the opportunity to demonstrate the behaviours and attitudes that the research suggests would encourage others to trust him. An explanation is that the situation of crisis at the school either fasttracked the development of trust, or negated the importance of trust in leadership. With closure as an alternative to the vision Michael was suggesting, participants may have used a risk-versus-reward analysis in their decisions to support the transformative and fast-paced changes. Kotter’s (2006, 2007, 2012) concept of the motivating influence of a sense of urgency supports this premise.

### 7.2.4.2. Community trust

The importance of trust being developed more broadly with the community was described in a summarising analysis of the ISSPP research,

> A standout characteristic of the principals is the degree to which they are respected and trusted by their school communities... Acting with integrity and being transparent about their values, beliefs and actions, modelling good practice, being careful to ensure fairness in how they deal with people, involving many in decision making, are qualities and practices that engender respect and trust. (Gurr, 2015, p. 139)

Tschannen-Moran’s (2014b) theory for developing trust for successful school leadership suggested five facets of trust. These are: benevolence; honesty; openness; reliability; and competence. The two principals demonstrated these facets of trust in their work in ways that were responsive to the circumstances at their schools.

Almost all the students and parents that participated in interviews demonstrated respect for the two principals and trusted them to lead the school in the right direction. At Tilvertont this was more strongly associated personally with Michael. His commitment to communicating with families and to being visible and available to students enhanced their belief in his benevolence, openness and honesty.

At Fairview, there was less indication of community trust pertaining directly to Robyn. Although there were students and parents who described their connections with Robyn, several had not met her and others didn’t feel that they knew her well. They all demonstrated trust in the school and described connections to other key staff, such as the Assistant Principal and year level coordinators.

At Tilvertont, Michael was the community’s figurehead for commitment and trust in the school. He prioritised connecting with students and parents and was seen as honest, available and as having a
high level of integrity for what he believed in. At Fairview, there was high levels of trust and commitment from the community to the school more generally. Trust at Fairview was more broadly a trust in the culture and the organisation rather than a specific leader.

### 7.2.4.3. Trust summary

Considering the evidence at the levels of staff and community there was a difference between the schools regarding the importance of the individual principal in the occurrence of trust. Although both principals had undertaken successful practice to build trust, at Tilverton this was centred more individually on Michael. At Fairview, the trust was attributed more broadly across the organisation. To distil these observations, it appears that at Tilverton, trust in the organisation was influenced by trust in Michael’s determined and confident leadership, which was a lifeline in a time of crisis. At Fairview, there were high levels of organisational trust and Robyn was trusted and appreciated for her commitment to and connection with the journey of the school.

### 7.2.5. Staff Development

Developing the capacity of staff within a school is a critical way that leadership has influence on student achievements. This is demonstrated in the core practices framework in the two areas of understanding and developing people and managing the teaching and learning program. These principals developed the capacity of their staff to enhance the learning of the students and the overall success of their schools but their approaches to this were different, with one exception. At both schools, the management of recruitment resulted in the employment of staff that were aware of and committed to the innovative approaches. This was seen to be a contribution to success at both schools.

Robyn’s most commonly coded practice theme was develops staff capacity demonstrating that her attention to this was an important factor of her leadership. She was regularly involved in planning and participating in staff professional learning. Robinson et al. (2009, p. 42) found principals ‘promoting and participating in teacher learning and development’ to be the leadership dimension that had the highest effect size on student outcomes. Robyn was also committed to her own professional growth. She modelled a commitment to growth and development and expected it from others. Her supportive and empowering nature provided space for staff to try new ideas and be creative within the agreed philosophies of the school. She showed commitment to providing individualised support and consideration in this way, as well as through formal professional appraisal processes.
Michael’s approach to staff development was not only inconsistent with Robyn’s but also arguably different to the accepted approach found in school leadership research and practice. He expressed a belief that a focus on improving teacher capacity was not a productive use of time or resources. He attributed development of the capability of staff at Tilverton to recruitment practices. Michael holds high expectations of staff and this may have contributed to their development. Having high expectations has been a consistent theme of successful school principals in the research literature (Dinham, 2005; Gurr, 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2009; Shatzer et al., 2014). However, at Tilverton there was indication that these expectations, in the absence of detailed and explicit supportive practices, did not consistently result in effective staff development.

Gathering aligned and motivated staff together was a key aspect of these two schools. Where there was stronger vision and higher expectations of staff at Tilverton there was less specific focus on staff capacity development through traditional approaches such as professional learning. At Fairview, where the transformed culture was more mature and the change less rapid, leadership was significantly more focused on staff capacity building activities.

### 7.2.6. Personal approaches

The final meta-theme incorporated those characteristics and practices that were considered a reflection of the Principal as an individual. The three themes included here are aligned with the core practice framework particularly in connection to *coalition building* for Robyn’s work on external leadership activities such as working on departmental and regional initiatives and coalitions. The personal characteristics of ‘calm and assured’ for Robyn and ‘dedicated and determined’ for Michael can be considered to align with *modelling appropriate values and behaviours* as a part of *understanding and developing people* as they set a tone for interactions and more broadly for the culture of the schools.

As well as being discussed in connection with the core practices, the personal approaches of these two principals can be compared with the findings from research literature of the common personal factors of successful principals (see for example: Dinham, 2005; Gurr, 2017; Leithwood, 2005). These include dispositions, skills and cognitive styles such as: passion and enthusiasm for education; values around social justice and equitable education for all; persistence, optimism and dedication to achieving goals; emotional sensitivity to school community members; high level interpersonal and communication skills; cognitive flexibility; intelligence; open-mindedness; and creativity, imagination and lateral thinking in regard to problem solving (Dinham, 2005; Leithwood, 2005).
The themes of ‘externally focused’, ‘calm and assured’ and ‘dedicated and determined’ are just some of the dispositions, skills and cognitive styles of the two principals. In considering broader evidence from the cases, many of the dispositions, skills and cognitive styles listed above were observed or reported. This is particularly true for passion and enthusiasm for education, values around social justice and equitable education, open-mindedness and creative, imagination and lateral thinking in regard to problem solving. While both principals displayed the remaining characteristics also, different strengths were evident. Michael strongly displayed persistence, optimism and dedication to achieving goals which assisted with the rapid and effective transformational change. Robyn’s strengths in emotional sensitivity and high level interpersonal and communication skills enabled her collaborative approach and the greater distribution of leadership.

7.2.7. Section summary

Comparing the themes of characteristics and practices of the two principals to research literature has shown that there were relevant, impactful and successful leadership actions employed at both schools. Many of these characteristics and practices were generally observed in both leaders but deeper comparison and contrast illustrated that there were many differences that suited the needs of each school.

The research literature contention that there are fundamentals of successful leadership has been shown as evident in these two high-advantage, improving schools. The importance of contextual sensitivity in leadership was also evident. This discussion turns to considering specific contextual categories to further investigate this.

7.3. The interactions of context and leadership to shape school improvement

This discussion now adjusts the perspective to focus on the contexts of these two schools. Findings from the two case studies are integrated with research literature to consider the influence of context on leadership, and how leadership in these two cases may have been mediated by the high-advantage, improving school contexts. These insights contribute to answering the second research question ‘How have context and leadership interacted to successfully shape school improvement?’ This section contends that the contextual influences fall into two categories: broad and instigating; and, local and enabling.
7.3.1. Broad instigating contextual influences

All schools face challenges from the contextual forces of broader community, national culture and the society that they operate within. Pressures of responding to fast-paced change, technology, diversity, environment, globalisation and individualisation are just some of the modern dilemmas that school and school systems are managing (Mulford, 2008; Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Caldwell and Spinks (2013) proposed that governments and schools must go beyond ‘improvement’ to meet these broad challenges. ‘They must plan for the transformation of their schools. They will not achieve this outcome by trying harder to do the same things that have been done for years during a period of decline’ (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013, p. 1).

Such broad contextual factors influenced the improvement trajectories of these schools. At both schools, the path taken for re-establishment after the turning point of crisis demonstrated a commitment to seek new and innovative approaches. Transformational improvement was sought rather than trying harder to do the same things as previously, or implementing approaches seen as ‘best practice’ in other schools.

Best practice is an approach to addressing improvement needs by identifying, codifying, familiarising and adopting strategies that have proven successful in other settings (Hannon, 2008). These schools went beyond best practice and leveraged their circumstances to introduce ‘next practices’ which are ‘emergent innovations that open up new ways of working’ (Hannon, 2008, p. 79). Hannon (2007, p. 5) suggested that next practices include ‘significantly changed methods of service delivery, organisation or structure which, if shown to be successful, would hold implications for the wider system’. Next practices are:

- in advance of hard evidence of effectiveness
- not (yet) officially sanctioned and therefore entail some risk
- consciously designed with an awareness of the strengths and limitations of conventional ‘best practice’
- generated by very able, informed practitioners aware of the existing knowledge base
- informed by critical scanning of the wider environment
- directed at serious contemporary problems
- user focused. (Hannon, 2007)

Next practice approaches were evident at both schools as responses to the broader challenges. Tilverton demonstrated this more dramatically and comprehensively at the time of research. The scale of innovation and diversion from ‘traditional’ approaches was illustrated by the following comment in the school’s 2014 review documentation.
With great entrepreneurship, in highly innovative ways and informed by current research, the College is leveraging its resources in a coherent way to create a vibrant, student-centred, learning environment. The scope of innovation is breathtaking. (Peer Review Report, 2014)

The evidence that Tilverton demonstrated next practice and innovation more so than Fairview may be a function of the proximity in time to the period of crisis. When Fairview re-opened in 2004, aspects of the middle years’ approach adopted were innovative and implementation at the whole school level was unusual. However, middle years’ approaches were supported by research and sanctioned the DET.

The re-establishment of Fairview with innovative and alternative approaches has had lasting impact on the culture and the leadership at Fairview. There is an ongoing interest in responding to perceived challenges with ‘next practice’ approaches. This is balanced with the maturity of the re-establishment and confidence in the fundamentals of their approach. Fundamental aspects of the approach are now considered as ‘non-negotiables’.

I can tell you what’s not negotiable, we are never going to be a school that puts kids in rows and ignores what they need to improve... That’s non-negotiable. It’s non-negotiable we have 90 minute sessions... It is non-negotiable that we will have Advisory every morning... that’s a fundamental principle of how you get to know students... It is non-negotiable that we will work in teams... And that team is a multi-disciplinary team. (Fairview Principal)

These aspects have been reviewed, evaluated, refined and shown to be reliably consistent with the vision and values of the school. These approaches that were ‘next practice’ when the school reopened, became ‘best practice’ for this school. Robyn balanced an openness to new ideas and innovative approaches (next practice), with the embedded best practice, an approach to improvement that is advocated by Hannon (2008, p. 81)

It is not argued that a focus on ‘next practice’ should replace the need for leaders to deploy evidence-based strategies to improve schools. However, these are insufficient for the challenges that confront us, and it is vitally important that needed innovation arises from the work of skilled and creative practitioners – increasingly co-created in conjunction with their learners.

An extension of this contention is that Tilverton was moving toward more measured enactment of innovation and transformation. Although rapid and disruptive changes were still evident at Tilverton, key aspects of the approach had moved to non-negotiable features. This step toward ‘best practice’ is evidenced by the interest that the school was receiving. Towards the end of the research period Michael had started working with other schools to replicate some of Tilverton’s key approaches. To continue this logic, both schools are at different points on a continuum between ‘next practice’, being new and untested approaches, and ‘best practice’ where these approaches are proven successful and are accepted by others.
The responsiveness of the leadership and community at both schools to the broad contextual influences led to the instigation of the disruptive, innovative and transformative improvement trajectories that have been evidenced. Leadership appropriately balanced between ‘next’ and ‘best’ practice at these schools worked toward a desire to ‘recast today’s schools in a form more suitable to the needs of tomorrow’s students’ (Leithwood, 2008, p. 75).

### 7.3.2. Local enabling contextual influences

Where the broad influences discussed above inspired the innovative and transformative re-establishment approaches, the local contexts of the schools can be considered to have enabled and supported these different approaches. Three categories for considering the contextual influences in these cases will be used: 1) institutional; 2) socio-economic and community; and 3) school improvement history. These three categories are an amalgam of the frameworks from the following two models from the research literature:

1. Hallinger’s (2016) framework which was based on earlier work by Bossert et al. (1982), which discussed institutional, community, national cultural, economic and political conditions.
2. Braun et al.’s (2011) four dimensions of contextual factors of situated, material, professional and external.

**Institutional context** aspects refer to the influences of the education system within which these schools operate. Hallinger (2016) includes state and regional organisation, and policy aspects. Braun et al. (2011, p. 588) described these influences as external and incorporating ‘local authority support [and] pressures and expectations from broader policy contexts’.

**Socio-economic and community context** combines evidence of the effect of advantage levels and the alignment of the specific communities of the schools. This category incorporates Hallinger’s (2016) ‘community’ and ‘economic’ classifications and takes into account aspects of the ‘situated’ contexts described by Braun et al. (2011) such as location, enrolments and settings.

**School history context** draws on Hallinger’s (2016) four characterisations of ‘school improvement’ trajectories and aspects from the ‘professional’ and ‘situated’ classifications of Braun et al. (2011).

Using these three categories the local aspects that were identified in the evidence from these cases is further considered in the following sections.
7.3.2.1. Institutional Context

The ‘systems’ within which schools operated influence school leadership through aspects such as policy, accountabilities and administration structures (Bossert et al., 1982; Braun et al., 2011; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016; Hallinger, 2016). In these two cases, the relationships with the Victorian DET were of interest. The Victorian government education system was an early adopter of autonomy and self-management practices and has continued to allow schools high levels of self-control since the mid to late 1980’s (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013). Consistent with the self-management philosophies of the system, these schools had relatively high levels of control over many aspects, including staffing and resourcing. Fairview High School was closely supported by the DET whilst planning for, and undergoing re-opening. In contrast, Tilverton had very little support from the DET for re-establishment following recommendations for school closure. Robyn was connected to the region and explained that she felt a responsibility to contribute to system wide improvement. Michael’s leadership attended less to system connections and he creatively negotiated and navigated expectations and accountabilities when necessary. By the time of the research, Tilverton had started to be recognised by DET for their significant improvement.

For these two schools, the institutional contexts of connection with the Victorian DET enabled their improvement journeys through the flexibility and autonomy available to them to make decisions and allocate resources as needed.

7.3.2.2. Socio-economic and community context

As has been described, the schools were selected for this research based on their levels of high educational advantage. Research suggests that students from higher advantage backgrounds have greater access to school choice, higher parental engagement in their learning, higher expectations, and more positive attitudes toward education (Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999; Leithwood et al., 2010a; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014; Villavicencio, 2013).

Branch et al. (2013) found that principals are more likely to stay for longer tenures in higher advantage schools and that those principals that do stay on are more effective in influencing student learning. In these cases, the principals had been in their role for more than five years and their influence on the staff, community and students was evident.

School choice was an important component of the degree to which each community supported their school and each principal. In Victoria, families are free to choose a school from all those on offer across
government, catholic and independent sectors. In the locations of both these schools there were many other schools within reasonable distances. Some students attending Tilverton and Fairview were travelling significant distances past many other options. The schools attracted and grew communities of families that chose the style of education that was offered over other options. Their approaches differentiated them within the local market of education provision. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that most who selected these schools had expectations, beliefs and values that aligned with what the school offered.

Doherty (2008) found from a case study of a successful principal in a high-advantage, independent school in Victoria that there was reciprocal influence between the leadership and the aspects of the wider community that were affiliated with the school. The study showed that the ‘traditional culture and identity of the school was a strong contextual feature for both influencing and being influenced upon by the principal’s behaviour as school leader’ (Doherty, 2008, p. 110).

Contending that the communities were supportive, and empowered the innovative improvement trajectories of these schools, leads to a consideration of what was important in terms of success for students. Researchers have questioned the meaning of school success across different communities (Stoll & Myers, 1998). Brouilette (1996), suggested four common ways of viewing the purposes of schooling: 1) humanist, where students are prepared for citizenship; 2) social efficiency, preparing students for jobs; 3) developmentalist, helping students reach their personal potential; and, 4) social meliorist, enhancing social equity through schooling. Although these case studies do not provide specific evidence to suggest participant’s opinions of the purpose of schooling, the analysis of how the participants viewed the success of two schools showed that providing students opportunities to reach their potential (developmentalist) was important. It was also evident from observations and principal interviews, that citizenship and equity within the schools was important (humanist). How these core beliefs of the community might impact the work of the principals is then a consideration. Hallinger’s (2016) review of research across different nations found that leadership of school success is different based on socio-economic and cultural difference.

Educational leadership is value-driven and leaders achieve results through people. Different socio-cultural contexts evidence different value sets as well as norms of behaviour... Scholars concluded that in order to achieve results, leaders must adapt their leadership styles in ways that are consonant with the prevailing values and norms in their different socio-cultural contexts. (Hallinger, 2016, p. 7)

In these two cases, a reciprocal influence process seemed to have occurred in line with the contention from the research of Doherty (2008). The school leadership was influenced by the prevailing values and norms of their communities, and, the leadership and vision of the schools attracted families for
whom the philosophies were appealing. Through this alignment and cumulative mutual influence, the validity of the purpose for schooling in these settings was enhanced. This enabled continuation of the innovative improvement trajectories. Research suggests that strong, aligned community can enhance school improvement and student success (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Doherty, 2008; Glaeser, Laibson, & Sacerdote, 2002; Jeynes, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2010b).

At Tilverton and Fairview the communities supported the principals to implement change agendas in the knowledge that they were aligned with the interests of parents, students and teachers who had chosen these unique schools.

7.3.2.3. School history context

The historical context of schools is a recognised influence on leadership and improvement (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016, 2017; Day & Sammons, 2014; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002). Hallinger (2016) frames this historical contextual perspective as that of the school improvement context and his review suggests that ‘in concert with other context features, a school’s improvement trajectory defines the nature of the principal’s leadership challenge’ (p. 11). For the two principals in these case study schools, the nature and timing of the improvement context is particularly relevant to their leadership characteristics and practices and the initiation of improvement strategies (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2010).

As has been described, both schools had recent histories of crisis and associated re-establishment journeys. The tenure of these two principals occurred at different phases of the re-establishment and therefore, the improvement context at that time had different influences on these two principals.

Michael’s principalship was ensconced in deep crisis from the beginning of his tenure. When he started Tilverton could be categorised as ‘ineffective’ based on the four broad categorisations of school improvement trajectories identified in empirical studies (Day, 2005; Gray et al., 2003; Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 2011). ‘Ineffective’ schools are evidenced by poor and/or declining performance in student learning over time (Hallinger, 2016, p. 11). At the time of Robyn’s principalship appointment her school could be categorised as ‘coasting’ as there had been limited student performance improvement (Hallinger, 2016).

Given these improvement histories, both principals were tasked with an improvement challenge. However, the sense of urgency differed. Michael’s approach needed to be swift and decisive. Fairview was more settled in a process of improvement and Robyn’s leadership was aligned with the approach
already established. The leadership that was evident suited the stage of improvement needed. Day et al. (2010, p. 12) identified three broad phases of leadership for school improvement.

1. Early phase, characterised by:
   - improving physical environment to create more positive, supportive conditions for teaching and learning
   - setting, communicating and implementing school-wide standards for behaviour
   - restructuring senior leadership teams’ roles and responsibilities
   - implementing recruitment and performance management systems for staff

2. Middle phase, characterised by:
   - wider distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities
   - more regular and focused use of data to inform decision making

3. Later phase, characterised by:
   - personalising and enriching the curriculum
   - wider distribution of leadership

Comparison of the leadership practices of Michael and Robyn can be loosely associated to these phases. Michael was more involved with activities included in the early phase than Robyn was. However, both leaders worked to personalise and enrich the curriculum as a priority of their leadership. Leadership distribution patterns presented in these phases are consistent with what was found in these schools where leadership was shared more broadly as the re-establishment matured.

Day et al. (2010, p. 15) address the possibility of non-conformity to the specifics of the phases in a claim which asserts that ‘Heads [principals] grow and secure success by layering leadership strategies and actions’. This claim describes the discretion and judgement applied by leaders about the ‘timing, selection, relevance, application and continuation of strategies’ based on the specific needs of their schools and this was evident in the cases.

7.3.3. Conclusions on Context

The leadership and improvement trajectories in both the case study schools were influenced by aspects of context. As has been asserted, context is complex and leaders need to be acutely sensitive to various aspects of their own school contexts. The contextual influences in these two schools have been conceptualised at two levels: broad and local.

The broad contextual influences include social and educational aspects that are considerations for education generally. In these two schools and for these two leaders, the innovative improvement strategies implemented were instigated by acknowledgement of these challenges and the desire to address these concerns for their students and communities.
Local school contextual influences include, the institutional aspects of the governing system, the advantage capacity and alignment of the community, and the school’s improvement history. In the case of these two schools, these aspects enabled the pursuit of alternative approaches. Local factors enhanced the capacity and confidence of the leaders to continue with the innovative improvement trajectories. As the transformations continued, the schools attracted enhanced support from their communities and their governing institutions and systems. In summary, leadership and context interacted through reciprocal influence for innovative improvement that transformed these schools.

7.4. Conceptualisation of successful school leadership for improvement in two high-advantage schools

The final section of this discussion synthesises the findings and contentions described above and considers how they affirm and extend predominate conceptualisations of school leadership in the research literature. This section also reflects on insights from this study that may be avenues for further investigation to advance the knowledge of school leadership in specific directions. This section culminates in a model of successful school leadership for improvement in high-advantage schools that aims to ‘help make sense of and explain [the] complex ideas and relationships from [the] research [and] provide a conceptual map for testing ideas and guiding future research’ (Drysdale & Gurr, 2017, p. 171).

7.4.1. Contribution to School Leadership Theories

Comparing and contrasting findings from this study to the broader literature shows how they contribute at a theoretical level. This includes indication of areas where there is support and affirmation for theoretical models and where further contemplations, extension or investigation would be valuable.

7.4.1.1. Leadership for learning

As shown in Chapter Two, there are many theories of school leadership that have been explored and advocated. The conceptualisation that was found to be currently most relevant from the review of the literature was an integrated theory commonly termed Leadership for Learning or Learning-centred Leadership (Hallinger, 2011; MacBeath & Cheng, 2008; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Paletta, Alivernini, & Manganelli, 2017; Southworth, 2009; Tutt & Williams, 2013). The most useful model of Leadership for Learning for this discussion is that by Hallinger (2011) which was developed from a
review of four decades of school leadership research. Hallinger’s model, shown in Figure 7.1, collates and conceptualises the aspects of successful leadership characteristics, practices and context.

![Figure 7.1: A synthesized model of leadership for learning (Hallinger, 2011, p. 127)](image)

Hallinger (2011, p. 127) described this model as a ‘wide-angle lens for viewing the contribution that leadership makes to school improvement’ and so it is useful as a broad instrument to generalise findings concluded from this research. Aspects of the model that this research has affirmed include:

- The well supported contention that the impact of leadership is predominantly indirect and leadership influence on students is mediated by 1) Vision and Goals, 2) Academic Structures and Processes, and 3) People capacity.
- The influence of leaders’ beliefs and values, and knowledge and experience
- The connection of the leadership influence to the organisational and broader context.

The leadership at Tilverton and Fairview also provides opportunity to reflect on Hallinger’s suggestion that a theory of ‘leadership for learning’ ‘has come to subsume features of instructional leadership, transformational leadership and shared leadership’ (2011, p. 126). Each of these research schools illustrates that effective leadership is ‘shaped by and responds to the constraints and opportunities extant in the school organisation and its environment’ (Hallinger, 2011, p. 127) by layering leadership strategies and actions using a portfolio approach that applies aspects of these leadership theories and ideas as required (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2017).

Where ‘leadership for learning’ as a theory is less clearly affirmed from this study is in regard to the centrality of students in the work of these principals. Hallinger’s (2011, p. 127) model describes leadership as ‘directed explicitly, though not solely, towards student growth, and particularly learning outcomes.’ The principals included in this study were interested in developing young people according
to their individual interests and importantly placed high value on provisions that supported student wellbeing and engagement with their schools. It is also the case that these two principals had more direct and influential connections with students than this model illustrates. Particularly at Tilverton, it was evident that the direct interest and support of Michael was appreciated by the students and influenced their educational experiences. Quantitative measures of direct impact that these relationships may have had are outside the scope of this study but it was clear that Michael prioritised and attended directly to students needs and facilitated their extraordinary levels of involvement in all aspects of their school. In relation to Hallinger’s model, this evidence could suggest that students be considered as a part of the ‘people capacity’ level of influence of leadership. This is a shift from students considered primarily at an outcome level in the model. This is a perspective that may be worthy of greater attention from leadership in many contexts.

7.4.1.2. Leadership for innovative transformation

As this research has demonstrated, the leadership leveraged the school contexts to move beyond prevalent structures and provision of education. The magnitude to which the leaders innovatively transformed was varied, and the time of tenure of the principals was a consideration for this. Insights into leadership of these successful transformations affirm and extend on the innovative leadership research literature evidence presented in Chapter Two.

The literature reviewed presented some characteristics and practices of innovative leadership that were evident in these leaders such as being keen observers, questioners and experimenters (Dyer et al., 2011). As Tonkin’s (2016) research found, these leaders displayed a range of behaviours and balanced various perspectives on their leadership and the school improvement journey that facilitated an innovative approach. There was evidence that these principals demonstrated behaviours that extended from core practices of successful principals to those that have been shown to support innovation, for example, ‘seeking out new opportunities and daring to be different’ and ‘holding student centred values and seeking out student voice’ (Tonkin, 2016, p. 213). These leadership skills and behaviours, combined with the contexts of the schools, saw responses to challenges that reflected a disposition to think otherwise (Barth, 2001), a skill that Leadbeater (2012, p. 25) articulated,

Innovators meet frustration not with complaints, but with a commitment to devise more effective solutions. But this often requires innovators to break with conventional thinking and challenge orthodox models.

It was demonstrated in the cross-case comparisons there are many aspects of the two cases that are consistent, but it was Michael at Tilverton who displayed the more exceptional and concentrated
characteristics and practices that supported the rapid transformation of his school. The hypothesis is that Michael employed innovative leadership more readily for two reasons. Firstly, his personal characteristics such as being determined, a visionary, and willing to take risks, were well suited to the situation. Secondly, that Tilvertion was more keenly influenced by the context of crisis as it had been a more recent occurrence in the school’s history.

7.4.1.3. Suggestions for further research of innovative transformation

Although this research has resulted in insight into the innovative leadership and approaches at these two schools, this was not a primary intention of this study. Further investigation into the innovative approaches at these and other successfully re-established and transformed schools may provide useful understanding of leadership characteristics and practices for this specific purpose. A speculation that may be affirmed or extended through further research is that of the magnitude of innovation requiring different leadership approaches and that it is more likely in certain contexts. For example, this study suggests Michael’s approach could be seen as disruptively innovative leadership and Robyn’s approach seen as more sustainably or incrementally innovating for improvement (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2011; Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald, 2015).

Another idea arising from this study is that empowerment of the students was a resource for improving the schools. To differing degrees, student agency and capacity supported change and improvement. Their involvement in these ways resulted in important broad outcomes for the students and the schools. The leadership was focused not just on student learning as an outcome but also on involving students in the processes and structures for improvement of the school. This is an assertion that has been explored by some researchers that are interested in applying student-focused models of innovative improvement to the education sector (Barth, 1986; Christensen et al., 2011; Zhao, 2006, 2012) but this area of enquiry may be a resource for further knowledge to improve and transform schools in ways that meet modern challenges.

7.4.2. A model of successful school leadership for improvement in two high-advantage schools

Following from the above connections of general and broad findings from this research, attention is now turned to presenting the findings as a conceptual model. The model captures the connections between leadership, context and impact. It provides a framework for reviewing, employing and testing contentions from this research in other situations or through future research.
As a foundation for the development of this model, the ISSPP successful school leadership model developed by Drysdale and Gurr (2011, 2017) was used. That model was particularly well suited as a starting point for presenting these findings for two reasons. Firstly, it summarised the extensive findings from the ISSPP cases, which are methodologically aligned with this study. Secondly, the model captured key aspects of the purpose and research questions of this study through consideration of principal leadership practices and characteristics, the context in which this leadership is being enacted and the integration of these for improvement. (see Chapter Two for further description of the Drysdale and Gurr model).

A model of successful school leadership in two high-advantage improving schools is presented in Figure 7.2 below and includes these adjustments from the Drysdale and Gurr (2011, 2017) model:

- Context has been amplified in predominance and separated into the broad influences and local influences. Contextual factors have also been more closely interconnected with leadership.
- The culture of the school has been conceptualised as holistically encompassing the three levels of interventions that occur at the school and impacting on outcomes.
- The interconnected leadership and school context have been shown to have influence on the culture and interventions at all levels.

Aspects of the model are further discussed and explained below Figure 7.2.
Figure 7.2: Successful school leadership in two high-advantage, improving schools.
7.4.2.1. Context

The influence of context in these cases was highly evident and can be considered at two levels. Firstly, broad and instigating issues of social and educational concerns that inspired the innovative improvements of these schools. Both schools, at the height of their innovative changes, were working towards goals that set them apart from most other equivalent schools. High levels of understanding of the broad issues were important in sustaining their commitment to their approaches. It was important that the two principals were sensitive to these issues and responded to broader challenges in ways that influenced the improvement journeys.

Secondly, the local school contextual influences enabled and supported the approaches to improvement. From the history of crisis providing opportunity to break with the past and facilitate a ‘thinking otherwise’ culture, to the cumulative support of the aligned school community, aspects of the local culture contributed to the improvement trajectory of transformation.

7.4.2.2. Leadership and school context connections

The school context has been re-conceptualised in this model to be more entwined with leadership. This reflects the findings from these two schools that the history, community, vision, philosophy and core aspects of the organisation were mutually influential and complementary to the key aspects of each of the leaders. With strong alignments in visions and values; attitudes, personal qualities and philosophies; leadership practices and organisational structures all being evident.

Building on prior conceptualisations and contentions of the importance of considering school leadership situated in context, this research found that they were reciprocally developed. In these two examples of successful re-establishment, leadership and context corresponded and evolved together to support improvement.

7.4.2.3. Culture

The interventions have been situated within the culture of the school. This model recognises the strong influence of context and leadership on school culture that were found in this study. This can be attributed back to the crisis turning points for both the schools which had significantly damaged the prior cultures. This enabled the schools to more readily respond through re-establishment and restructuring that significantly adjusted the cultures of the schools. The emergence of these cultures
as exceptionally student-focused, innovative and embracing change, reflects the contexts and the
leaders.

7.4.2.4. Interventions

The interventions that have been noted and included in this model conform with Drysdale and Gurr’s
differentiation based on levels. What is of interest from this research is that the flow of influence of
leadership has been strongly focused in the literature as being mediated through teachers. While this
is evident at both these case schools, these school leaders have also worked to empower students to
take control of their learning. This is a core aspect of the approach at Tilverton in particular, and
leadership there has had a greater direct connection at the student level. This impact however, is still
indirect in terms of impact on outcomes but rather than being filtered only through teacher level
interventions, it is also filtered through student level interventions.

7.4.2.5. Outcomes

This model conceptualises the findings from this study that school improvement cannot be achieved
without combined and aligned efforts of many within a school. Guided by shared philosophies and
visions, leadership draws together the community, motivates others and facilitates the actions needed
to achieve change and improvement. Outcomes resulting from this have been conceptualised at a
student level and a school level. Student level outcomes were broad with both schools valuing
empowerment, satisfaction, well-being and engagement in post-school pathways, as well as
performance measures.

The schools were seen as successful, firstly because they were both operating viably after threats to
their existence. Strong enrolments, improving reputations and external interest in their approaches
that validated their unconventional improvement choices were indications of success. These schools
can also claim to be influential more broadly in the education sector with their brave choices to
address broad concerns being adopted and adapted for other settings.

7.5. Conclusion

This discussion of the findings has integrated the evidence from these two case studies with the
research literature to answer the research questions and highlight where the broad body of
knowledge has been affirmed and extended. Insights were presented that suggest areas for further
consideration. The contentions advanced from this research are summarised below in respect to the research questions and, in a section that acknowledges extended insights and speculations.

7.5.1. Research question 1: What are the practices and characteristics of principals in high-advantage, improving schools?

This study found that the leadership practice and characteristics of these two principals could be considered within six meta-themes:

- Strong student focus
- Vision and direction
- Change and improvement
- Trust
- Staff development
- Personal approach

Within each meta-theme, variance in practices and characteristics were evident between these two principals. Their attention to these areas were moderated by their personal and professional approaches and histories, and mediated by the situations of their schools.

Evidence of leadership characteristics and practices from these case studies was compared to a highly regarded and verified conceptualisation of successful leadership (Leithwood & Day, 2007b) and further explored with other relevant research literature. This demonstrated that the leadership evidenced in these cases was aligned with accepted successful characteristics and practices. Consideration of the differences and similarities of the two principals highlighted that their leadership was influenced by context. The leaders effectively adjusted the balance of their practices in ways that were sensitive to the context.

7.5.2. Research question 2: How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in high-advantage schools?

The broad and local contexts of these two schools interacted with the leadership to instigate and enable innovative improvement trajectories that transformed the schools. Leaders and the school communities were cognisant of broad social and educational challenges and these served as initiators for the unconventional approaches implemented. The local contextual factors of community, school history and institutional circumstances then enabled and supported the continuation of improvement and facilitated these approaches to be embedded into the schools’ cultures. In several ways, the contexts and the leadership were reciprocally influential and mutually empowering.
7.5.3. Speculations and possibilities for further research

This research aimed to investigate leadership in specific contexts of high-advantage and improvement. The case study schools unintentionally had many similarities in their approaches to education and their willingness to innovate and provide alternatives to traditional secondary schooling structures. They also had similarities in their recent histories that had required significant re-establishment and re-structuring. This study is of two bounded cases and therefore findings cannot be generalised beyond these specific schools. Further research to investigate if innovative leadership responses are common, or more likely, in high-advantage schools in need of improvement would be of interest.

The findings of leadership characteristics and practices in these case study schools suggest that where more radical transformation was required, more extreme and determined leadership was evident to enact change. This leadership approach to re-establishment resulted in disruptive innovation that transformed the school. Further research of leadership that disrupts an organisational culture by implementing radical and holistic change may provide useful insights for school leadership theory. In current times where there are vocal calls for far-reaching changes to education in general, this evidence may be beneficial.

The final speculation and area for possible further research relates to the centrality of students to the work of these two leaders. Predominate theories of leadership suggest that leaders consider student learning outcomes as central to their work. The research literature suggests that to impact student learning, leaders must concentrate efforts on improving the mediating factors such as vision and direction, teaching and learning and school capacity. In these schools, there was also direct attention and resourcing situated with students. These leaders were interested in the broader engagement, enjoyment and success of the students in their schools and they recognised the capacity of students to be involved in improvement of their own schools. Research that investigates the capacity of students as a resource for contributing to school improvement may provide novel and useful insights that could inform practice in many settings.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL OVERVIEW

PRINCIPALS

Three interviews were conducted with each principal. In accordance with the nature of the semi-structured interview methodology the researcher chose questions that responded to the flow of the conversational style of the interviews. The following protocols guided each interview.

Interview 1

We would like to know about the school. Can you comment on matters such as the school’s climate and culture, the feel of the school on a daily basis, the quality of teaching and learning, the strengths and challenges of the staff and leadership team?

Can you describe the key characteristics of the school, including the strengths and challenges?

How would you describe the levels of trust within this school?

How would you describe your leadership at [school name]?

Please tell us about how you lead change?

Describe the level of support that students and their families need to improve student achievement?

How do you see your role in relation to the many stakeholders at this school?

How do you affect/influence teachers’ work in the school and in the classroom? Is this influence direct or indirect? (Probe for values, skills, dispositions and strategies)

Interview 2

Is the school successful? What makes this school successful?

How have you contributed to the successes of the school?
Thinking about results over recent years, is the school performing as well as it should? What are the reasons for this?

Define what you understand by ‘results’ (academic and social). What are you doing to improve the students’ results?

How do the school’s results influence your everyday work in the school and that of the teachers?

Where is the school on its improvement journey?

We would like to know about staff development and capacity building at this school.

Describe how the school has improved from when you began at the school.

How do you lead the curriculum and instructional activities?

Describe the school-community relationships.

How are you (as principal) negotiating the policy context?

Can you describe features of the wider context that impact on the school and your work as principal?

Interview 3

*Interview 3 included a number of specific follow up questions that had arisen from initial analysis of the data collected. The questions below also guided this interview.*

We would like to know more about you, how you became the leader you are, and what drives you to be a principal.

Describe the plans for improvement of student growth

What are, in your opinion, the key leadership strategies to change an underperforming school into a successful one?

What was your greatest success last year? Why? Can you give concrete examples? What did you learn from this success?
What are/should be the (three) most important qualities of a successful principal?

What prevents you from becoming an even more successful school?

NON-PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS

The specific questions used depended on the category of participant (Leading Teachers, Teachers, Students, Parents and School councillors). The following are examples from the transcripts of the types of questions that were asked of the non-Principal interviewees to provide insight into the leadership characteristics and practices:

Can you tell me about the leadership of the school?

How do you think the Principal manages the school?

What is the Principal’s leadership style?

How does s/he communicate with the community?

What are the key things about the Principal that have improved the school?

How would you describe the Principal’s leadership of the school?

How does the Principal encourage support for the vision of the school?

How does the Principal manage change?

How does the Principal support you/your child in your teaching/learning?

What do you think drives the Principal?

How does the Principal communicate and develop relationships?

What is the level of trust between the Principal and [others]?

What are the current challenges for the school and how are they being managed?

What are the plans for improvement at the school and how is this being led?

Do you have any disappointments in the Principal’s leadership?