

Chapter 7 Deeper Deliberations

7.1 Introduction

This study concludes with two sections that aim to set the research in a broader context than the confines of a single case study. The first part will consider how the distinctive culture that is Sandford Christian College operates in the day-to-day procedure of the school community. The second part, recognising the pivotal significance of the success of the Principal of Sandford Christian College, considers the anatomy of successful leadership in this school compared with the anatomy of successful leadership in non-Christian schools.

7.2 The Culture of the School in Action

During my time in the school I was privileged to witness a range of situations that vividly reflect the culture that the school believed they had created (Twelves, 2000: 74; Senior Minister, p. 6). The reflections that follow were inspired during my data gathering period on site which consisted of three days a week during the second semester 2000. I have drawn largely from my reflective diary, described earlier in Section 3.3.3.

The culture of the school in action has been divided into three parts. The first part centres around their vision, their synergy with their covering church and the building programme that was designed to accommodate their dreams for expansion. The central part addresses the question of how Christian was their culture and the final part considers some reflections on their educational operation.

7.2.1 Vision, Synergy and Buildings

Sandford Christian College shared a common property with their covering church. The site was flat with a series of car parks separating the church buildings from the school. The school buildings were single story brick veneer and built to create two rectangular courtyards. There was no gymnasium or assembly hall. The church at the other end of the plot had both of these facilities, which they shared with the school. At the time of the study, there was excited anticipation that one day they would be able to build their own gymnasium at the school end of the property, thus reducing their dependence on the synergy with the church. When I started my research they had just commenced using a large well-built two-story block, which housed the expansion of both primary and secondary classes. Also during my time there they began to build a new art facility, a timber structure built on piers on account of potential flooding in their adjoining creek reserve (Diary, p. 78, 80).

Sharing the property had many advantages to the school: the indoor facilities on site, the shared car park and a resident groundsman who lived on the property between the school and the church. The physical setting was similar to that described by Peshkin in Bethany Baptist Academy (1986: 32-3), there too the church and the school shared a gymnasium and were separated by a parking lot.

The shared property had generated numerous synergies between the church and the school. For example, the ease with which the school used the church for their weekly chapel service,

which were attended by the whole school every three weeks and primary and secondary schools separately alternating on the remaining weeks (Diary, p. 59-60). Nevertheless, even though they had the use of the church facilities at the opposite end of the car park, open-air assemblies were also held during the week in the main school quadrangle, one for primary students and the other for the secondary students. The assistant principal of each sub school usually conducted these assemblies, which were primarily for administrative purposes, but there was also a prayer and devotion given each time. In conversation with the Assistant Principal, Secondary, he explained that he was working through the Psalms (Diary, p. 63, 66).

The building programme had already cost them dearly and the leadership had just embarked on revising their previous vision. It was now to be a school that would grow to over 1000 students.

In order to help finance the Sandford Christian College building plans, they held a Vision Dinner. A donor paid all expenses and the ticket sales, to over 400 guests, raised about \$8000. There was a big queue to get in, as everyone had to greet the Principal and his wife, who commented that *it reminded her of a wedding reception*. The staff were keen to take the opportunity to meet other staff's partners during their three course dinner, while being entertained by musical items. There was also a formal part to the evening when the future growth plans were unveiled (Diary, p. 13). In the past, the school had had a voluntary building fund, but they had decided to abandon that many years earlier and at the time of the research they used a proportion of their fee income to fund their building projects (Diary, p. 80).

This fund-raising dinner illustrated Sandford's focus on vision and their own capacity to finance the buildings required to support their dreams. The dinner was not opulent; however, it would have seemed out of place in a less affluent suburb. The school community was very fortunate to have a building fund donor that could fund a three-course dinner for over 400 guests. Perhaps another indication of the school community's socio-economic status was illustrated by the fact that all students came to and from school in private cars except for a handful that walked or rode bicycles from the immediate vicinity.

However, despite over fifty references in the qualitative study to unity and excellent relationships within the community, I did observe one illustration of tension between the school and their oversight church predicted by Long who believed that management unconsciously manipulate and exploit employees in similar schools to this one (Long, 1997: 25).

The situation in question related to students being used during the week on the church public address (PA) roster. This meant that from time to time during conferences that ran concurrently with school days, a team of students were required in the church property to manage the sound systems for music teams and visiting preachers. One of the teachers raised the issue with the Assistant Principal, Secondary, commenting that there should be three teams on PA, to minimise the interruption to students' schoolwork. The response was that it was hard to get anything done in the church because of the *red tape*, so the teacher was left feeling that nothing would change (Diary, p. 25).

This tension over the use of students by the church during the week seemed to me to be the result of a history of sharing resources, typical of many growing organisations, and countered by the need for the administration to keep pace with changing expectations. In my view, this

incident did not detract from the countless mutual benefits to the church and the school resulting from their shared property and vision. The fact that the students were being fought over actually would teach them valuable lessons for their adult life even if they did miss out on a few lessons in their teens. They would certainly be learning about responsibility and professionalism in addition to being trained in high-level practical service skills.

7.2.2 How Christian was their Culture?

It is very hard to describe a Christian culture to an outsider. It is one of those things that you know when it is there and you know when it is not. One Friday morning in October, I sat in my car in the car park from 8.30 - 8.50 am. preparing for the day's research. I noted the congestion in the car park and mused over the need of parents to park as close to the school as possible in order to walk their young children into school, in short, the *hand-delivery process*. I also noted that some drivers were clearly driving far too fast for the safety of pedestrian children.

On the one hand, there was the expression of tangible care for their families, although an unwillingness to model self-restraint and the healthy habit of walking from the non-congested other end of the car park. On the other hand, there was either selfishness or thoughtlessness behind some drivers' need for speed or a blatant disregard for other's safety.

All families in the school were described as churched homes as they could not get through the enrolment process unless they could deliver a current pastoral reference from their local church. However, would Sandford's car park look any different from any other school car park? It is my contention that all staff and parents would desire a safe and courteous car park and I am sure that they would have mounted numerous education initiatives to moderate the behaviour of a minority of the community that put children at risk. The fact that some had not yet responded to the messages in my view does not invalidate the Christian core of their culture; it merely reflects their human nature. It in no way contradicts the parent who described the school as *heaven on earth* (Parent FG I, p. 16).

Early in my data-gathering phase, I attended the Primary School Concert (Appendix 3). The Principal opened the event in the church auditorium with a welcome and prayer and the first piece was the 1812 Overture by Tchaikovsky. Most of the items were Christian but there was a very wide range of material. We heard the William Tell Overture by Rossini, the theme music from the film Chariots of Fire, dances called, Let the Sun Shine In and I've Got the Real Thing and a kindergarten song called Practice Being Godly. The main event was a musical with a huge cast called More than Gold. This had been specially written as a parable on the theme of the Olympics. There were gold diggers on the one hand and athletes searching for God's Kingdom on the other (Diary, p. 8-10).

This event was a highlight of my research as it so graphically depicted a community in action, working in unity and doing what they do best, namely preaching the Christian gospel through action. So many were involved with the result that the auditorium was packed to overflowing. Every student in Primary School would have been involved along with their family and extended family in many cases. No one would be able to mistake Sandford Christian College for anything other than a vibrant Christian community, excitedly and energetically living out their Christian faith.

One of the questions on the staff survey that prompted much debate was the one that asked if the staff believed that their work in the school was their Christian ministry (Diary, p. 15). This question was considered in some detail in Section 6.3.3 but here I would like to reflect further on the Primary School Concert in the light of the staff's involvement. Preparation and planning for this pivotal event in the school year would have taken several months. The staff must have been energised by their Christian faith to be part of this epic and to the degree that this was the case for every one of them, their work in the school was their Christian ministry. The level of commitment within and without the school day by the staff and countless parents testified to their commitment to the Sandford Christian College vision.

Finally, my reflective diary recorded on the same page my most memorable comments from the Infant Teacher's in-depth interview. I noted that the interview was excellent and that the teacher felt that the attribute that made the school successful was the *presence of the Holy Spirit* (Diary, p. 15). To attempt to describe the presence of the Holy Spirit in a specific place is fraught with subjectivity. However, under my aim to describe *the culture of the school in action* my notes suggested that the teacher held the belief in a higher power energising the place and equipping them for their works of service for the children. Therefore to the extent that they believed this, they were demonstrating their Christian faith in action. In the words of one of the Junior Secondary students, *the religion is the best thing about Sandford and it's also the worst thing that we can't always apply it* (Junior Secondary FG, p. 1). It was my perception that the community was genuinely Christian but composed of fallible human beings who made mistakes.

7.2.3 Some Reflections on their Educational Operation

During my time in the school community I observed the students in the school grounds in relaxed situations and during intense ball games at lunch times. I was struck by the language of the students and wrote that *they did not use any loose language of the milder type* (Diary, p. 57). It was very easy for me, a non-teaching guest, to pick up the general tone of the schoolyard. It was very impressive. Was this a reflection of the student's church or home backgrounds or the education and modelling from the student's teachers? It was impossible to determine, all I can do is report the facts as I saw them as faithfully as possible.

In my view this observation echoed the previous section's conclusion, namely that the Sandford Christian College community was genuinely Christian as there was tangible evidence that the chief components of the community, the students, were different to their counterparts in other communities. One primary school student had told me that in his previous non-Christian school *everyone swore at each other and the teacher didn't care. The teacher even swore at the kids* (Primary Student FG, p. 13).

The school had a public address system that was used by the administration department and staff alike to give global messages to the whole community. It surprised me that this very intrusive device was used so frequently and, in my view, for purposes at times that could have been addressed in different ways. Examples included, one of the primary teachers interrupting classes for five seconds to announce, *excuse this interruption but would all students stay off the oval at lunchtime as it has been raining very hard and the ground is really wet*. Again, just a few minutes before the end of a day's lessons, the receptionist announced, *please excuse this interruption, the basketball towers are still in place, would the teacher on duty please remove the towers, thank you* (Diary, p. 23). Finally, perhaps the most

astonishing example was at 11.40 a.m. one day during the second session in the morning. An announcement came from reception that said. *To all classrooms, we are looking for 4H, we don't know your whereabouts. We are particularly looking for (boys name) to attend your drum lesson* (Diary, p. 21).

Other interruptions, predominantly after classes, included requests for specific students to come to the office to be picked up or for staff to take a phone call on a particular line. The public address system was certainly a highly effective communication tool within the community to bring people together. However, the particular way it was used reflected an attitude towards the education of their students. It seemed evident that the system was not to be used too much during class time so that work would not be disrupted. Nevertheless, there was one announcement that broadcast to the whole school community, during class time that a teacher had failed to put the basketball hoops away and that they would be in the way of parents' cars at pick up time. The system would certainly have been effective at bringing about the desired action before the end of the school day but at great personal cost to the guilty teacher. To my mind, this announcement reflected not only the power of central control but also the growing pressure on the facilities to provide every conceivable car space. Perhaps the operations of their public address system demonstrated that administration and growth outweighed educational priorities.

In order to understand the College's priorities a little deeper, their entrance scholarship application form for Year 7 in 2001 provided a further reflection. The scholarships were intended for those students who wished to attend but could not afford the fees. The form asked about the applicant's church standing, their previous school's behaviour records and their habits with regard to Bible reading and prayer (Diary, p. 22). The process reflected an emphasis on the Christian background of the prospective students rather than any potential for academic excellence. The scholarship process demonstrated that their enrolment practice was not selective on ability, thus making any excellent academic results all the more impressive while still supporting their primary goal to champion the Christian growth of their students.

Whichever way the students entered the Sandford Christian College they did appear to work hard. Chapter 4 presented some excellent results from hard work. One day in November 2000 I observed some secondary students outside learning for a test. I reflected that they, the boys, were quite keen to learn the work and I pondered their motivation. Was it the personality of their teacher or their principal? Was it their home background? There certainly seemed to be an intrinsic motivation at work within these boys (Diary, p. 65).

The school tone reflected a community that valued hard work and achieved good results, which in turn attracted new enrolments and led to continuing rapid growth pressures. The students' language in public was inoffensive. There was an administration that would not let one boy miss his music lesson even at the expense of disrupting the whole school with the public address system and their scholarships were based on character above ability. The educational operation of Sandford Christian College was evidently impressive.

7.3 The Anatomy of Successful Leadership in this School compared with the Anatomy of Successful Leadership in Non-Christian Schools

This section, recognising the pivotal significance of the success of the Principal of Sandford Christian College, seeks to compare and contrast his successful leadership with successful leadership in non-Christian schools.

7.3.1 Successful School Leadership Literature Review

As a benchmark for comparison nine studies have been reviewed. They include meta-analyses (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003) and the English (Day & Naylor, 2004) and Australian (Gurr et al., 2003) parts of an international study across eight countries. There are also three robust studies of geographically disparate school groups, 96 schools in Australia (Mulford & Johns, 2004), ten principals in the United Kingdom (Day, 2004) and 150 schools in Canada (Sackney, Walker & Mitchell, 2004). Some of these studies did include passing reference to a small number of Christian and Catholic schools (e.g. Gurr et al., 2003) but broadly they describe the anatomy of successful leadership in non-Christian schools.

This review of the research has identified seven features of the anatomy of successful leadership in non-Christian schools. Most of these features were described in the majority of the studies reviewed. Mutual corroboration was clear across widely diverse settings. The seven features:

1. Values, beliefs, ethics and moral integrity
2. Vision and a predilection for change
3. Care for and development of people
4. Distributed leadership
5. Building community
6. Contribution to student achievement
7. Reflective leaders who learn

Feature 1 Values, beliefs, ethics and moral integrity

Research, that never made claim to be anything other than secular, clearly acknowledged and offered respect to either the implied or explicit Christian foundations of successful school leadership. The studies suggest that these principles have underpinned successful education in the past and will continue to do so in the future, even in the modern secular world where there are increasingly fewer moral absolutes. Mulford and Johns (2004: 74) called for more work to be done on what Leithwood and Riehl (2003) called the ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions of successful school leadership.

Mulford and Johns (2004: 48) described a prerequisite for successful leadership as a set of personal and organizational values that are mutually aligned. They stressed that the principal's values and beliefs informed decisions and actions that affected support for the

individual and, at the school level, the development of school culture and structure (Mulford & Johns, 2004: 73).

One setting claimed that their school's starting point was *their Christian belief that each child was utterly precious and loved into existence, irreplaceable and had to be and deserved to be continually forgiven* (Day & Naylor, 2004: 19). Day and Naylor went on to argue that these underpinning values and beliefs were sufficiently significant to be described as one of their ten themes for success. They described how these values and beliefs became outworked in the schools' locality and how the school community served the needs of the wider community (Day & Naylor, 2004: 20-21).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003: 24-25) applied these same principles for successful school leadership. Here they had in mind successful school communities that intentionally sought to meet the needs of students from backgrounds or with characteristics *that fell outside the cultural mainstream*, recent immigrants, children with handicaps or racially marginalised. Here the underpinning values and beliefs of successful leadership generated ethical action and a fight for social justice. Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003: 12) also recognised the principle that alignment of behaviours with ideals and beliefs generate change. An example was given of a child who had been excluded from three schools and was now making an improvement. Successful school leadership developed communities with moral purpose and the courage to apply their single-minded principles consistently (Day & Naylor, 2004: 16-17).

Feature 2 Vision and a predilection for change

Successful school leaders are visionary and apt to *live on the edge – we do it our way* (Day & Naylor, 2004: 13). This accords with Leithwood et al.'s (2004) first principle that the leadership must *set the direction*, Day's (2004: 7) *passion for commitment* to a sustained sense of identify and purpose and Mulford and John's (2004: 73) harmony between the core values and beliefs of the principal and the shared vision for the school. Further, Leithwood et al. (2004: 8) established the link between the school's improvement agenda and the need for the school's structures to be malleable in order to accommodate, redesign and change.

Everyone thrives on having compelling and challenging, but achievable, goals. Gurr noted successful school leaders were expert at redesigning their schools and this feature was central to their leadership (Gurr, 2003: 32). It has been recognised that educational leaders can help by identifying and articulating their school's vision for school improvement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003: 17). Then they direct structural changes to establish positive conditions for teaching and learning through modification of the nature of tasks, the organisation of time and space, routine operations and the development of material resources to enhance the learning environment for students and teachers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003: 20).

Feature 3 Care for and development of people

Students of all ages agree that a characteristic of good teachers is their care for students in their charge. They have been described as *encouraging* as opposed to being *indifferent to the individual*, the hallmark of bad teachers. Therefore it is hard to imagine a successful school leader who does not similarly place a high priority on *connectedness* with students, staff and

parents. One head in Day's (2004: 10) study was *passionate about schools preparing young people to make a difference in the community that they work in*. Thus exemplifying this head's desire to see the school successful, not only in helping students gain enhanced academic outcomes, but also fully developed characters and personalities that would be catalysts for change in their adult environments. Care and compassion, built on shared vision, are key features of successful leadership (Day, 2004: 4).

Successful principals are only as successful as their staff. Therefore they build their staff's optimism and enthusiasm, increase their intellectual stimulation, reduce their frustrations and transmit their own sense of mission with the result that the staff are able and willing to give more effectively and energetically into the vision of the school (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003: 19). From Gurr's perspective, while the role of the principal was seen as important to the success of a school there was consistent acknowledgement of the significant contribution of staff. All staff could be empowered to exercise leadership that influenced both the classroom and the school community in general (Gurr, 2003: 32).

Expressed another way, successful principals placed great emphasis on building teaching and learning communities. Day and Naylor (2004: 33) called this building internal capital through collectivity. These communities endeavoured to champion teamwork, networking, risk-taking and continual professional development. Here the head teachers' role was key to building a heightened sense of ownership, purpose and morale among their staff.

Feature 4 Distributed leadership

As staff are extended and encouraged in their work, some aspects of the leadership roles, previously the preserve of the principal alone, have been distributed across the wider school community. There has been widespread support for the idea that leadership should not be confined to those in formal managerial or leadership roles but there is little empirical evidence as yet (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003: 15-16).

Harris (2004) conceded that distributed leadership was beneficial to capacity building within a school community that in turn would lead to school improvement but she called for further research to confirm the connection between distributed leadership and improved student learning outcomes. In this context, she also asked questions relating to the forms of leadership that would lead to sustainable school improvement and what kinds of leadership would be most effectively distributed to others within the community. Mulford and Johns (2004) quote research demonstrating that distributed leadership across administrators and teachers that actively involved them in the core work of the school, did improve student outcomes (Mulford & Johns, 2004: 50-51).

Distributed leadership has been shown to further develop teacher's professionalism, another aspect of developing people within the organisation. This is especially notable where teachers are empowered in areas that are important to them (Gurr et al., 2003: 21; Harris, 2004).

Feature 5 Building community

Features three and four naturally build community in and of themselves and the intentional building of an inclusive community with sustained involvement was one of Day and Naylor's (2004) themes that made a difference in successful headships. Their research had identified *a true community spirit* as an outcome from a head teacher reinforcing to people how good they were and them eventually believing it. They reported that successful head teachers devoted ample time to parents and were aware of the cultural and religious needs of their families. In fact, they are treated as partners in the education of their children. Typically, a sense of teamwork would develop between the staff and the parents with a focus on the individual rather than the profession (Day & Naylor, 2004: 17, 30-32, 39).

Gurr et al.'s (2003) contemporary model of educational leadership comprises three levels. The first level of impact of successful leadership focuses on the teaching and learning environment. The second level of impact follows this. Here the *school capacity* is considered, that is the leader's capacity to build personal, professional, organisational and community capacity. The third and final level of impact recognised *other influences*. These could include internal or external aspects, school size, demographics and stakeholder interests and priorities (Gurr et al., 2003: 33-34). Gurr's team established the building of community as a central feature of successful school leadership from their case studies in Victoria. Their model recognised the progressive impact of the school's leadership and in the second and third levels recognised the importance of engagement with the wider community. This theme was also acknowledged by Day (2004) in his section on passion for commitment where he referred to the need for *intellectual and emotional engagement with all stakeholders* if success was to be assured (Day, 2004: 7).

Feature 6 Contribution to student achievement

There is a plethora of measurable variables that impact on student outcomes including family background, intellectual ability, high-quality pedagogy and many more. However, school leaders also play their part even though their effect is usually indirect through the processes and influences they control. Typical ways successful leadership has been seen to influence student outcomes have included vigorous selection of staff, defending the school from distractions to its learning focus and the frequent monitoring of activities (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003: 10).

Gurr et al.'s (2003) model, described under Feature 5, starts with a level one impact of a successful school leader who positively influences teacher pedagogy, curriculum design and assessment measures to bring about improvements in student outcomes (Gurr et al., 2003: 33). This position has been echoed by Day (2004) in his treatment of the leader's passion for achievement. It seems incongruous to imagine a successful school leader who was not passionate to see their students attain their potential. Day argued that an effective measure of success was high student attendance and high teacher retention (Day, 2004: 3).

Feature 7 Reflective leaders who learn

Finally in this review of the anatomy of successful leadership in non-Christian schools, successful leaders have been understood to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their school's practices and their leadership's impact on student learning (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003: 12).

Mulford and Johns (2004) reported on a values-led contingency leadership model that concluded with an emphasis on continuing professional development, the leaders who learn, and a reflective stance that continually challenged self, adopting critical thinking and emotional intelligence (Mulford & Johns, 2004: 48). Day (2004) also highlighted that successful leaders need to be *continually willing to reflect upon experience and the context in which practice occurs and to be adaptable* (Day, 2004: 7).

The sevenfold anatomy of successful leadership in non-Christian schools was seen to be underpinned by the values, beliefs and ethics, held by the principal and shared by the community, which directly influenced their behaviours. The successful leadership articulated vision and precipitated change while fostering a focus on care for the individual and the development of staff and students alike. Leadership was shared or distributed across many empowered individuals who placed high importance on the building of community capacity. The product of successful leadership was always seen to be improved student outcomes in both academic as well as personality and character traits and the leadership was continually reflecting and learning in order to refine their school performance even further.

7.3.2 The Anatomy of Successful Leadership of Sandford Christian College

The research reviewed in the previous section has sought to reflect an international benchmark of current understanding of successful school leadership. The final section considers the single case study of the leadership of Sandford Christian College in the light of the sevenfold features of the anatomy of successful leadership in non-Christian schools.

Feature 1 Values, beliefs, ethics and moral integrity

The similarities between the Principal of Sandford Christian College and the benchmark studies are striking. The Principal has held overtly Christian values throughout his long career in Sandford. It was evident that his appointment depended on them and it is my contention that his close relationship with the Senior Minister of the covering church would not have developed had he not shared the same values and beliefs. His alignment with the church on these matters of the heart has underpinned his success as the leader of the school, certainly from the church people's perspective.

The distinctively Christian values, beliefs and ethics have been the foundation on which the school was born. Church people were convinced that God had called them to found the school by partnership with Christian families in the nurture of the Christian faith in their children while providing a characteristically Christian education. Without the underpinning of these values, beliefs and ethics the school would not continue in its present form. In the same way as the literature has found these attributes to be essential in successful leaders in non-Christian schools per se, I would argue, they are even more important for the credibility of Sandford Christian College.

The Principal's moral integrity has been recognised by most participants in this research. It was one of the first characteristics discussed in surveys, interviews and focus groups, without any prompting by the researcher. Moral integrity was frequently spoken about in the context

of a defining reason for the school's success and as a way of describing the community's personal encounters with the Principal.

Feature 2 Vision and a predilection for change

The Principal of Sandford Christian College along with the Senior Minister of the overseeing church, were renowned for their passion for a progressive vision. During the Principal's career as leader of the school he has navigated the community through their vision for a school of 300, then a school of 600 and finally their vision for 1000 students. Some have criticized him for being too focussed on growth and the task to hand, but many more have appreciated his attention to detail and the harmony he has shown between the Christian values that underpin the school and the practical needs of the rapidly growing community.

In addition to responding to the extensive demands for new buildings to accommodate growth, the Principal also made radical changes to the senior management team resulting in, at the time of the study, the smallest team for some time. The team comprised the two assistant principals over the secondary and junior grades respectively, together with the business manager and the principal.

Finally, in line with the literature, the Principal was effective at articulating the vision. During the study, he increasingly revealed elements of the vision in staff meetings both to remind the long serving staff of the rationale for changes to procedure and structure and also to paint the vision clearly for the increasing number of new staff who were taken on due to growth, yet did not have the benefit of experiencing some of the hard times early in the history of the school. The Principal also orchestrated Vision 2000, a sponsored dinner for staff and parents alike when the plans for the 1000 students were unveiled.

Feature 3 Care for and development of people

The Principal took a personal interest in the individual students. They spoke very warmly about his personal connection with each of them. They sensed a genuine concern on his part for them to reach their potential while at Sandford Christian College. A past student, now a teacher, who received corporal punishment at his hand, spoke warmly of the way the school had developed over the years and how it was now much better than it had been, despite being the best Christian school the teacher's father could find on moving to Victoria from Tasmania. There was never any suggestion that the Principal's care and desire to see people develop was not genuine.

The Assistant Principal Secondary spoke of modelling his leadership on his Principal's style. The Assistant Principal Secondary was recognised as having brought great improvement, particularly in terms of academic rigour to the secondary department and in this sense, it can be seen that the Principal has developed his Assistant Principal Secondary to be a better leader.

The staff frequently spoke of the high morale in the school and their freedom to express themselves in the school community. Because all of the staff were Christians, they felt that their Christian ministry and their teaching were complementary to each other. Some held particular responsibilities within their local churches while others considered their work in

the school to be their primary Christian ministry. One teacher described working in Sandford Christian College like teaching in heaven on earth. In comparison with the state benchmarks, the school's morale was extremely high, especially considering the stresses and strains generated by their rapid growth. This statistic reflected a school community that felt cared for and who were being developed as students and teachers.

Feature 4 Distributed leadership

One of the overarching themes of the study has been the increasingly collaborative leadership style of the College. The rapid growth has necessitated the move from the more autocratic style of the first principal through to the more inclusive style observed at the time of the study. The current Principal himself recognised that he had undergone several changes in leadership style during his principalship and that he was still seeking to be more inclusive by finding ways for those currently not within the school's decision-making group to participate if they so desired.

The senior management team was the most tangible expression of distributed leadership within the community but there were many other teams and layers of leadership that worked together to fulfil the common vision. Notably the co-ordinators of curriculum areas, the learning support unit, the wet-weather co-ordinator and the primary curriculum co-ordinator.

There was some criticism from a small number of staff that too much power was held within the senior management team, but my view is that the structure was justified by the complex needs of the building programme at the time. In response to this, the Principal did establish a new protocol in 2000 that released the head of each subject area due for a new building, to research other schools and to make recommendations for the design of their new facility. This was a very effective strategy as it increased the ownership of the various projects and enabled the staff to appreciate what were practical design features and what were too extravagant and could not be afforded.

Feature 5 Building community

The enrolment and recruitment processes were extremely thorough. The Principal himself directed both though each process was a team effort. The former process comprised the enrolments officer and the two assistant heads; the latter also consisted of the assistant heads and for secondary grades the subject co-ordinators. In this way, the Principal maintained a very keen interest in the growing community. He understood each family's circumstances very well, as they operated a policy of not allowing school fees to deny enrolment to needy families who were convinced of the benefits of the school's Christian education. The Principal also understood the socio-economic dynamics of the school's demographic as he made annual adjustments to the fee level to stretch families but not to price Christian education beyond their means. He certainly understood his community very well and spent much time and placed great priority on addressing concerns even if the school did not always achieve their objectives immediately.

This was true for the parental concern to see the abolition of the personalised Christian education modules that children worked through at their own pace. This system was instituted in the early days of the school when they could not recruit sufficient qualified staff.

It was phased out over many years in deference to those parents who continued to passionately believe in the system as it had worked for their children very well. The phasing out of the system went through a number of consultation phases with all stakeholders being consulted. It was a very democratic process.

At the time of the study, the school had not had to consider marketing, on account of the excellent word-of-mouth testimonies from current parents. There was a positive community spirit built up over many years. The Principal's positive encouragement of students, teachers and parents alike had been evident to all.

The covering church's stake in the school was also a significant factor in the build up of the positive community spirit, but despite the continued growth of the church, there were an increasing number of children coming from other churches. This development caused the Senior Minister to ponder what the governance system for the school might look like in future years as up until then, the board of governance for the school was almost entirely made up of the covering church's people and he wondered how long that would continue.

Feature 6 Contribution to student achievement

As the school has grown, so has the level of the student achievement. The past student survey revealed that the school in the early days was very different to the one studied in depth in 2000. In the early days, the restricted curriculum, the untrained staff and, in some people's minds, an overly harsh discipline system had left some past students very disappointed with their school experience.

In contrast, the current students and parents both felt that the education was excellent. Some articulate students spoke with genuine disappointment about some of their friends who had left the school and were now no longer working as hard and their lives were no longer on track. They appreciated the hands on personal interest shown them by their teachers.

Maths was perceived to be weak by some but the increasing academic expectations of the secondary students in particular, along with the appointment of excellent staff, were gradually dispelling these earlier impressions. The year 12 students' Victorian Certificate of Education results in the year of the study, the first class to complete Year 12, outperformed all other comparable schools on the league tables. The Principal was understandably delighted, given that the initiative had been very costly to establish and was now justified by the students' results!

Feature 7 Reflective leaders who learn

The Principal was continually reflecting on his own leadership and repeatedly making modifications to his style. From the first stages of this study, he was passionately interested in the findings. He made as much time available to me as I needed, both for the formal interviews, which always ran over, and the informal meetings when we discussed the rationale for a survey or we analysed the results together.

The College Board and the Principal were greatly appreciative of the interim results, presented as the Development Review and the Past Student Survey. The Principal has been

using modified surveys in the years following the study in order to measure changing perceptions. He was always known as a principal who would never be afraid to ask questions. He networked widely, especially at each key growth phase in the life of the College.

The Principal's leadership of Sandford Christian College was probably the most significant contributory factor in the success of the school. Further, it is my contention that the features that describe the anatomy of his successful leadership of a Christian school would also be regarded as very successful in the leadership of a non-Christian school.