Gonski Institute for Education

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Evaluation of Griffith Secondary School Reform

Final Report

Final Report:
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Prepared for:
The New South Wales Department of Education

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Executive Summary

Project objectives

How to deliver equitable and inclusive schooling at scale has been an enduring policy problem for government and systems. National and systemic data (e.g., NAPLAN, HSC) indicates that the further a school is located from major cities the lower the level of outcomes. It is indefensible to continue to allow students, staff, and communities to experience such inequities.

The New South Wales Department of Education (DoE) has sought to address these issues through a suite of policies and reforms targeting regional and rural schools. This report is the final output of an evaluation of the Griffith Secondary School Reform, 2018-2021 conducted by a team from the School of Education | Gonski Institute for Education at UNSW Sydney led by Professor Scott Eacott.

Context statement for the project

The consolidation of the two public secondary schools in Griffith (Griffith and Wade) into Murrumbidgee Regional High School (MRHS) is intended to bring about improved outcomes for students (and the town) by harnessing the collective resources, skills, and expertise of the two existing schools and make public education the secondary schooling of choice in the town.

Summary of findings

Year 7-9 growth data from 2021 NAPLAN (the first cohort to enrol into MRHS) were at or above state averages in Reading and Numeracy, indicating a positive trend for student outcomes. However, overall NAPLAN and HSC outcomes at the school remain over-represented in the bottom- and middle-two bands, and under-represented in the top-two bands.

Student well-being has remained stable, but staff well-being is below national benchmarks and building a single school culture has proven difficult as the two sites continue to operate almost independently.

There are enduring reports of inefficiencies and duplication across the two sites as many (not all) staff struggle to work effectively with colleagues across sites. Almost five years after the consolidation announcement there is still not an equivalent educational program 7-12 across the two sites.

Public education in Griffith has suffered reputational damage throughout the consolidation process. The declining rate of students transitioning from public primary schools into MRHS is a glaring example. Addressing this issue and establishing public education as the schooling of choice in the town is dependent on improving systemic reform processes and operations at the school going forward.

Improvement opportunities exist in systemic reform processes and the operations of the school

To further support the DoE and MRHS this Executive Summary is organised around pre-merger developments, the innovative 'one school – two sites' model, school operations (leadership and governance, staff and student well-being, teaching and learning, curriculum and pathways, community satisfaction), significant state-wide issues impacting (but separate to) the reforms, and an overall summary. Taken together, this represents 14 recommendations for the DoE intended to improve the effectiveness of operations at MRHS and inform other DoE initiatives.

PRE-MERGER

As with all major structural changes, there is a period between official announcement and implementation. In the case of the Griffith Secondary School Reform, this per-merger period was controversial, with many lasting effects for staff, students, and the community. These effects have plagued the first few years of operation of MRHS with some staff struggling to accept the reform.

Communicating the original decisions

The public announcement of the merger of Griffith and Wade High School came as a surprise to many staff at the two schools. This created significant uncertainty and unease regarding the immediate future of the schools, jobs, and continuity of public secondary education in the town. Some of the issues could have been avoided by informing staff prior to the public.

> ***Recommendation 1: All decisions regarding changes to the existing provision of education should be communicated to school staff prior to public announcement.***

The rationale, supported by data, for the changes was not made clear to staff and the community. Where appropriate (e.g., without breaking confidentiality) the rationale and data should be communicated to all stakeholders to establish the success criteria for the reforms.

> ***Recommendation 2: The rationale and supporting data be presented to staff to support the decision and used as criteria for evaluation.***

Consultation on models

Community consultation on the proposed changes was a point of contention in the process. Many participants indicated a choice of two options provided and the final decision being a third option. Following issues with the communication of the original decision and rationale, this consultation process further eroded staff and community trust in the process.

> ***Recommendation 3: Community consultation seeking feedback on proposals should explicitly and demonstrably integrate feedback in final product.***

Lead time

The appointment of the new executive principal in October 2017 created a 15-month lead-in time before the commencement of MRHS in January 2019. Based on the data generated, this is too long for all parties. It created an internal tension with line management and policy development. Within existing Industrial Relations conditions, a quicker move from pre-merger to merged leadership and governance arrangements is recommended.

> ***Recommendation 4: Within existing Industrial Relations requirements, once the new principal appointment is enacted, transition to new leadership and governance arrangement should be fast tracked.***

Policy development

The consolidation of the schools and lead-in time for the new executive principal created a tension regarding policy development. Miscommunication as to whether the two sites would work together to develop policies for MRHS, or the executive principal would develop them during his 15-month lead-in time created different expectations.

> ***Recommendation 5: For all new consolidation projects, staff from both sites need to be actively engaged and accountable for the development of local policies and procedures in a timely manner to be implemented at the commencement of the new school.***

THE MODEL

One school – two sites

MRHS is larger than 89.7 per cent of public secondary schools in NSW (*n*=399), and the staff profile of 125.3 FTE is larger than 99 per cent of public secondary schools.[1] The two sites (Griffith and Wade) are 4.2 kms apart. With minimal interaction between staff and students, it is difficult to build a cohesive and robust single school identity focused on achieving the highest possible outcomes for students.

It is however noted that it is difficult to make such claims until a full graduating class has attended MRHS (2024) and that the last two years (2020-2021) have been impacted by the COVID pandemic, significantly reducing interaction and communal meetings. That said, the 'one school – two sites' model has created significant inefficiencies and duplication. Having staff and students separate has done little to establish a new MRHS culture rather than sustaining the previous two school-based cultures and improving outcomes has become (at best) a secondary focus.

[1] See: ACARA - Data Access Program , specifically, the 2021 school profiles.

Recommendation 6: In future consolidation projects, the DoE does not consider the 'one school – two sites' model as an option if the goal is to build a single school culture focused on improving outcomes.

The executive principalship

The executive principalship in a 'one school – two sites' model brings a different set of complexities compared to other schools, including collegiate models. It requires adjustments to executive roles (e.g., deputy principals, heads of department) to ensure efficient site leadership.

Recommendation 7: Executive principalship of a 'one school – two sites' model needs to have matching deputy principal and head of department position descriptions to ensure site-based authority for decision making and day-to-day operations.

SCHOOL OPERATIONS

The evaluation, co-designed with the DoE, focussed on five key areas of MRHS operations: leadership and governance; staff and student well-being; teaching and learning; curriculum and pathways; community satisfaction.

Leadership and Governance

The executive principalship at a 'one school – two sites' school is difficult. The role of deputy principal is heightened with increased delegated authority to sustain day-to-day operations. Head of Departments have a significant role and are a major hinge point in the success of consolidation reforms by delivering on the strategic priorities of the school. However, position descriptions and responsibilities only matter if those in roles are held to account.

Recommendation 8: The 'one school – two sites' model requires a new performance framework that explicitly articulates responsibilities AND accountability for delivering on school-level strategic initiatives.

Staff and Student Well-being

Staff well-being has suffered during the reform (below school and national benchmarks). As time has progressed their experiences have become bifurcated. The influx of new staff, changes in personnel and acceptance of the reform have improved the situation. It has however highlighted the importance of having a clear and explicit purpose and having the necessary systems and structures in place to support staff in the delivery of the school's purpose.

Recommendation 9: To sustain, if not improve, staff well-being during workplace change requires an explicitly articulated purpose (e.g., improving student outcomes), coherence of activities (including responsibilities and accountability for delivery) and working with staff to monitor activities against the articulated purpose.

Non-teaching staff are equally important in school reform. They are often in community- or student-facing roles and they cannot provide the necessary supports that are crucial for day-to-day school operations without being heard and valued in the process.

Recommendation 10: Non-teaching staff (e.g., SAM, SASS, SLSO, GA) need to be included in school-level decision-making that directly impacts on their work and working conditions.

Students have managed the consolidation process better than staff and the community. Their well-being was however compromised during the process, primarily because of the actions of adults within and beyond the school. Attending to Recommendations 1-10 would reduce the number of negative interactions and experiences that impact on students.

To enhance student well-being, and generate a single school identity, greater opportunity for students from both sites to interact and undertake shared curricular and extra-curricular activities would be beneficial.

Recommendation 11: The 'one school – two sites' model requires careful planning of regular and purposeful activities to bring students (and staff) from both sites together to build a shared school identity.

Teaching and Learning

Student outcomes have remained stable (over-represented in bottom and middle bands and under-represented in top bands in NAPLAN and HSC). The 'one school – two sites' model demands the development of equivalent teaching and learning programs across sites to ensure students are not disadvantaged based on the site of enrolment. This is a priority task. As of 2022, and despite the consolidation decision being made in 2017, equivalent programs 7-12 across sites have yet to be achieved.

The consolidation of staff and resources provide a timely opportunity to distribute tasks across a larger number of faculty members, build consistent teacher judgement in performance expectations, and create equivalent (not necessarily the same) programs across sites to ensure no student is disadvantaged based on site of enrolment.

Recommendation 12: Establishing equivalent teaching and learning programs across sites is the priority task for school consolidation projects based on 'one school – two sites' model.

The establishment of equivalent teaching and learning programs is the responsibility of all teaching and executive staff. It is central to the core business of education and fundamental to improving student outcomes.

Curriculum and Pathways

The consolidation was intended to expand curriculum and pathways for students. To this point, this has not been achieved. It is too early to

make comment on pathways. Greater information, supported by data is needed by students, staff and the community to make informed decisions.

> ***Recommendation 13: Students, parents and the community need to be made aware of the criteria to make a course offering viable and alternatives if courses are not available on-site to ensure informed decisions.***

Community Satisfaction

Consolidation projects are controversial. They come with a sense of loss for schools closed and uncertainty regarding how things will be better. In the absence of a single point of information, distrust created during the initial announcement and then informal dissemination networks compromised the profile of the school, and public education, within the community.

The public profile of the school had an impact on staff and student well-being. Significantly, there is evidence that it is beginning to impact on the attractiveness of the school for public primary school students in Griffith. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

> ***Recommendation 14: Consolidation projects require careful planning and resourcing of communication and promotion strategies to disseminate key information and performance messages to the community.***

Significant state-wide challenges will need to be overcome to effectively address these opportunities in Griffith

The Griffith secondary school reform is taking place within a context of major staffing issues, disparity gaps in outcomes and general inequities in Australian education. While these issues are part of the context in which the consolidation has taken place, they are separate. It is important to acknowledge these issues and the impact they have on the school, staff, and students, but they are beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Attracting and retaining high-impact staff has been an enduring issue in regional and rural schools.[2] The number of unfilled vacancies at MRHS has received both local and state-wide media attention.[3] While the school has a specialised staffing arrangement allowing all permanent vacancies to be filled by local choice, those conditions matter little if there are no potential candidates to choose from.

Additionally, Griffith does not attract incentives. This issue has featured in local media.[4] It will remain an issue while schools within relative proximity (e.g., 36 kms) access a range of incentives such as 4, 6 or 8 transfer points, rental or mortgage assistance, and additional pay.

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[2] Eacott, S., Niesche, R., Heffernan, A., Loughland, T., Gobby, B., and Durksen, T. (2021). High-impact school leadership: regional, rural and remote schools. Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australia.

[3] See: NSW COVID: The schools where hundreds of lessons are cancelled (smh.com.au)

[4] See: Murrumbidgee Regional High School took industrial action to highlight increasingly dire circumstances | The Area News | Griffith, NSW

Increasing educator workloads are a systemic issue.[5] The consolidation has amplified workloads for educators. As with all changes, there is a period of intense work followed by improved efficiencies and effectiveness. The combination of factors (e.g., staffing, consolidation) makes it difficult for staff to see a healthy balance of work in the immediate future.

OVERALL

The reform of public secondary education in Griffith remains controversial. The announcement caught many by surprise and early stages of the process eroded staff and community trust in the New South Wales Department of Education. Poor change management within and beyond the school made a contested decision more complex and challenging than it needed to be, with significant impacts on staff well-being.

Despite the upheaval, student well-being has remained stable, with no observable disruption. Achievement outcomes in large-scale assessments (e.g., NAPLAN and HSC) have been sustained and there are positive signs with the first MRHS enrolling cohort (2019 Year 7) performing above state average and similar schools for growth in the 2021 NAPLAN Numeracy test, and comparable with state average (and above similar schools) in Reading.

Staff well-being has been the major casualty of the reform process. There are signs this is improving, but enduring hurt and resistance will take time to overcome. The unfortunate timing of the pandemic amplifying disruptions with the build, the intensification of work in bringing two sites together (which remains incomplete) and staffing issues have contributed to lower staff well-being.

The goal of the consolidation project is improving student outcomes. It is too soon to make definitive statements on the impact of the reform on student outcomes. However, public secondary school students in Griffith have traditionally been over-represented in the bottom and middle bands of large-scale national assessments and under-represented in top bands.

Throughout the consolidation process, there has been considerable reputational damage to public secondary schools in Griffith. This is most evident in the declining transition of public primary school enrolments into MRHS and the rise in enrolments for immediate competitor schools. Anecdotal evidence provided in focus groups confirms the negative image of the school in the community. This requires significant attention and resourcing to address before it escalates any further.

The DoE is committed to the pursuit of excellence and the provision of high-quality educational opportunities for each and every child.[6] The

[5] McGrath-Champ, S., Wilson, R., Stacey, M. and Fitzgerald, S. (2018) Understanding work in schools: The foundation for teaching and learning. NSW Teachers Federation. | McGrath-Champ, S., Wilson, R., & Stacey, M. (2017) Teaching & Learning: Review of Workload. Uni of Sydney

[6] School Excellence Framework Version 2 July 2017 (nsw.gov.au)

Griffith Secondary School Reform aims to provide an innovative and dynamic learning culture underpinned by high-quality teaching and working in partnership with its community to engage and empower students to be confident and flexible in readiness to face local, national and global challenges in a future focussed world.[7]

The reforms have yet to deliver on the promise. The reasons are many, and except for students, all parties have contributed to the current state. To deliver on the possibilities for public secondary schooling in Griffith will require careful planning, resourcing, implementation, and ongoing monitoring of activities targeting the improvement of outcomes for all students. Decisions, those about the school and those within the school, need to be evidence informed and explicitly demonstrable as to how they contribute to student outcomes. If activities do not directly contribute to improving student outcomes, they should not be pursued.

[7] School_Plan_2019_MRHS_5Aug19.pdf (nsw.gov.au)

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Introduction

The New South Wales Department of Education has engaged in significant activity aimed at regional, rural, and remote education. This includes the Rural and Remote Education Strategy (2021-2024), the Rural and Remote Blueprint, initiatives for staff and schools, and commissioning research. Central to these activities is closing the disparity gap in outcomes between metropolitan and regional, rural, and remote schools.

One initiative has been the consolidation of public secondary school provision in Armidale, Ballina, and Griffith. An innovation from the previous collegiate model (with multiple 7-10 schools and a single 11-12 school) as seen in Dubbo, the Central Coast, Newcastle and mid-north coast among others, and distinct from the education precinct model underway in Murwillumbah, consolidation projects bring two existing schools into a new single school. Among the consolidation projects, Griffith is unique with its 'one school – two sites' structure.

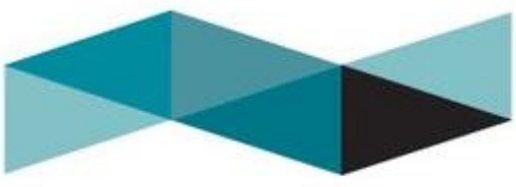
The new secondary school in Griffith – Murrumbidgee Regional High School, consolidating the former Griffith and Wade High Schools – is intended to be an innovative and futures-focused environment model led by an executive principal charged with providing high quality educational leadership to bring about a new era in the provision of public secondary schooling in Griffith. This potential is to be achieved through explicit instructional leadership, and a focus on student well-being all aimed at improving outcomes for students, families, and the community.

This final report provides an overview of the data generated during the engagement with public secondary schools in Griffith (NSW) 2018-2021. Data has been drawn from school and systemic data, questionnaires with staff and students, and focus groups / interviews with the executive principal, school executive, teachers, students, and parents / community members.

Consistent with the goals of the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (Gonski Report, 2.0), the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, and the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, the work is focused on improving the outcomes for students.

Murrumbidgee Regional High School

Commencing on 29 January 2019, Murrumbidgee Regional High School (MRHS) is the consolidation of Griffith and Wade High Schools. Enrolment figures for 2022 (as at 30 March) have MRHS at 1108. There is now close to parity in enrolments at the two sites.



The consolidation has amplified several issues in regional education such as: the barriers and challenges of attracting and retaining high-impact educators; monetary incentives for staff and inconsistencies in systemic processes; difficulties finding quality casual staff; access to high-quality professional learning and ongoing support networks; increasing teacher workloads; and the effective use of technology for classroom teaching and the work of educators and support staff.

While it is difficult to de-couple these from the consolidation reform, they are separate to the scope of this inquiry. Therefore, they are noted, and included in findings where appropriate, but they are not the explicit focus of this work.

Scope of inquiry

The evaluation is a longitudinal study (2018-2021) of the school consolidation reform in Griffith, NSW. There are five focus areas for the evaluation: i) leadership and governance; ii) staff and student well-being; iii) teaching and learning; iv) curriculum and pathways; and v) community expectations.

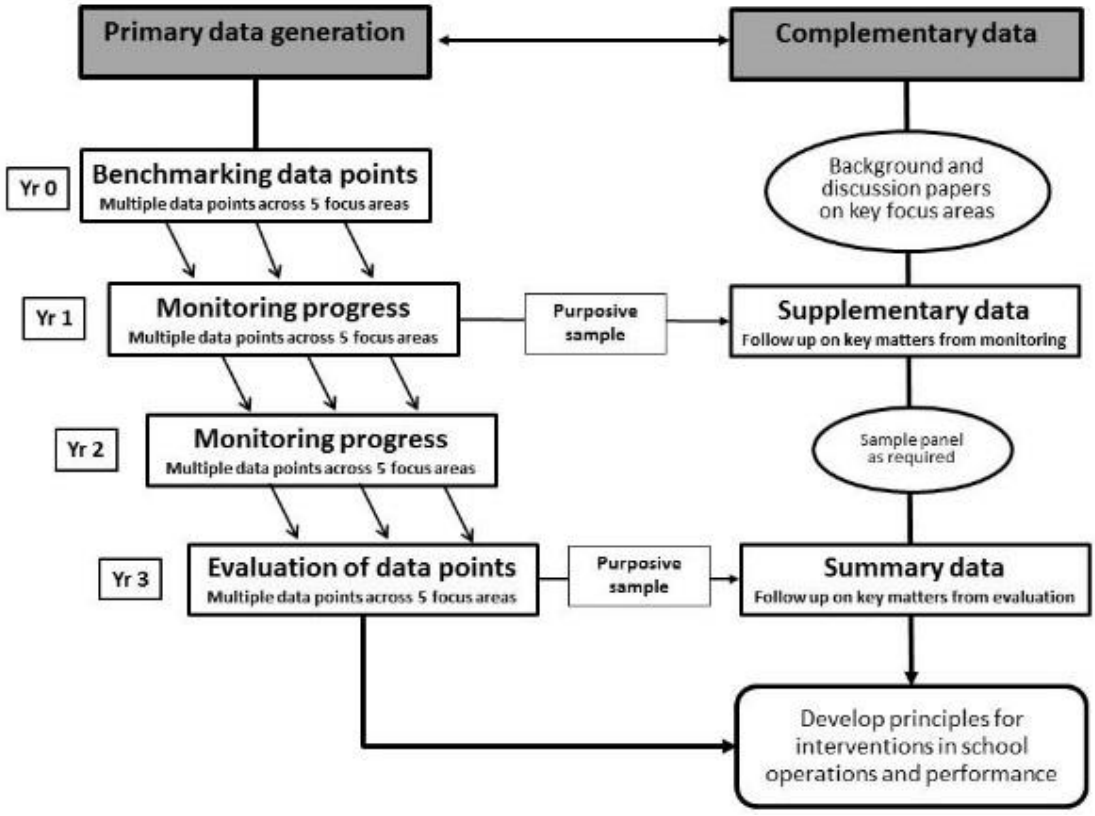


Fig. 1. Evaluation design

Each fieldwork visit by the research team (twice annually pre-pandemic, and then virtually via MSTeams) was followed-up with a short public overview document provided and distributed by the school. An Interim report was released following the first year of operation (Jan 2020) and this final report represents the conclusion of the project by the UNSW team.

Report structure

This report features the collation of data and evidence used through the entire evaluation process – from initial scoping through to establishing benchmarks and then the evaluation period. The key section are:

- Background: provides all of the initial scoping of the reform and the benchmark data provided by the school, system, and generated by the research team;
- Theory of change: articulates the underlying theory of change brought to the project by the research team;
- Evaluation protocol: provides an overview of the background research literature and framework for the evaluation;
- Key evaluation areas: a comprehensive overview of the evaluation of the five key areas identified in collaboration with the Department;
- Recommendations: a listing of the recommendations; and
- Statistical annex: overview of the data generated by the team.

Source: Captains and Vice Captains For 2022 Announced - Murrumbidgee Regional High School (nsw.gov.au)

Background

Regional, rural, and remote students consistently under-perform on all major educational indicators when compared to students in metropolitan locations.[8] With over 1,000 schools, or 43.5 per cent of all NSW public schools outside of metropolitan areas, accepting the disparity gap in outcomes is unacceptable and something needs to be done.

The consolidation of public secondary school provision in Griffith is part of the agenda to improve student outcomes. There is a long history of public education in Griffith and this latest reform is intended to build on that history and best prepare students for the contemporary world. In an increasingly crowded secondary education space, with the well-established Marian Catholic College and the recently opened Verity Christian College, it is timely to seek to enhance the provision of public education in Griffith and focus on improving outcomes.

Consultation on the model

After the initial announcement of the reforms for Griffith secondary school education, the NSW Department of Education proposed two options to the community. The first was to invest $25 million to form a new secondary school on the current Griffith High School site (88 Coolah Street, Griffith), and the second option was to provide up to $10 million to upgrade the existing two public high schools – Griffith and Wade (1-39 Poole Street, Griffith).

The Department engaged Sauce Communications to undertake consultation within the Griffith community regarding the two proposed options. This consultation took place in November-December 2016. This consultation led to the release of the *Griffith Education Project Stakeholder Consultation: Full Report*.

> ***When all evidence collated was considered, it became evident a wide range of views on secondary education within the community exists. While some participants saw little need for change, the majority noted the need for changes in at least some areas to enhance the secondary education available to the Griffith community. A common vision expressed by participants was for a system that provided students with "the opportunity to be the best that they can be whatever their ability and interests".***
>
> **Griffith Education Project Stakeholder Consultation – Full Report, p. 9**

[8] Rural and Remote Education Blueprint final report (nsw.gov.au)

In launching the Griffith Secondary School reform initiative, the Department of Education argued that students need to leave high school with the ability to succeed in society to help build a sustainable future for the region and take hold of the opportunities offered in the local area.

BOX 1. Key issues raised regarding public secondary education in Griffith were:

- **Lack of critical mass to support wide subject choice, specialist and extension subjects;**
- **Insufficiently high expectations of students and what they can achieve – regardless of their ability level;**
- **Greater focus needed on students being able to pursue academic or vocational choices;**
- **Students not achieving to a high enough standard academically or vocationally;**
- **Need to attract and retain more skilled teachers;**
- **Subjects frequently not taught by specialist teachers;**
- **An 'us and them' stigma that is perceived to apply between the two high schools;**
- **Perceived lack of quality secondary education a barrier to businesses attracting employees;**
- **Need for students to be motivated and engaged in order to stay at school; and**
- **Leakage of students away from Griffith after primary school.**

Griffith Education Project Stakeholder Consultation – Full report (p. 9)

During the consultation, the community was asked to indicate their preference in terms of the proposed models for Griffith public secondary schools. There were six possible responses: i) Option 1; ii) Option 1 with changes; iii) Option 2; iv) Option 2, with changes; v) Another option; and vi) No preference. It was noted that many in the community held strong views and that a relatively small proportion of the community was very vocal against the reforms (particularly Option 1). At the same time, several groups (e.g., those representing Tertiary Education providers, Business and Employers, NESB, and Youth Sector) indicated a strong sense of the need for change to improve student outcomes to better prepare children for a rapidly changing world and the need to provide better incentives for teaching staff.

Table 1. Preferred option (%) during Sauce Communications consultation

Option 1		Option 2		Another option	No preference
Option 1	With changes	Option 2	With changes		
21	6	29	29	12	3
27		58		12	3

Source: Griffith Education Project Stakeholder Consultation – Full Report (p. 11)

Following the release of the Griffith Education Project Stakeholder final report in April 2017, the New South Wales Department of Education confirmed its commitment to enhancing the public secondary education provision in Griffith. A new operating model of '***one school – two sites***' was announced as the best solution for Griffith.

Under this new and unique model for Griffith (and the system), a single school structure (later to be known as Murrumbidgee Regional High School) was created across two sites (see Fig. 2) and would commence operation at the beginning of the 2019 school year. This allowed for approximately 20 months of lead-in time prior to establishment.

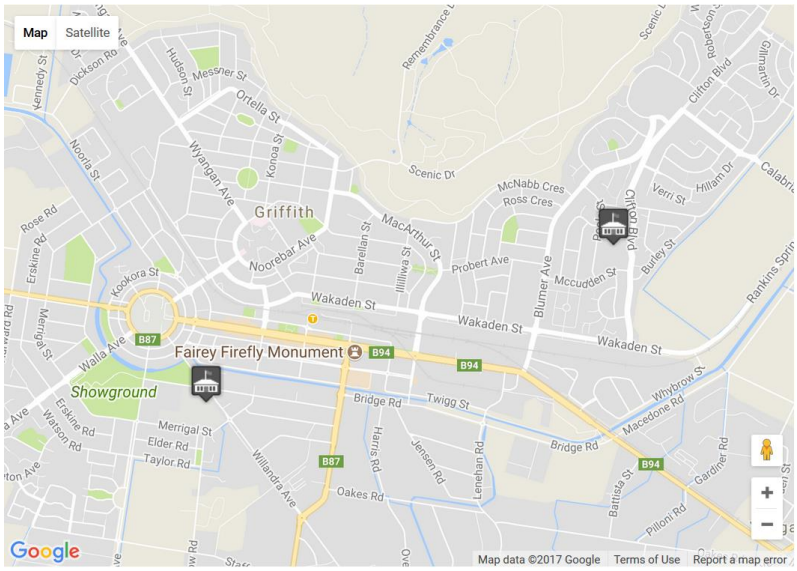


Fig. 2. Map of Griffith displaying location of two sites [source: Google Maps]

The new school – Murrumbidgee Regional High School – is intended to establish an innovative and futures-focused environment, maintaining the two existing sites (Griffith and Wade). The 'one school – two sites' model brought in a new executive principal (Mr Peter King, who commenced in October 2017) charged with providing high quality educational leadership. This unique role – executive principal across two sites – for the system will support instructional leadership opportunities, student well-being, learning and support as well as pathways to university and further training and employment.

MRHS is thought to signal an exciting opportunity for students, teachers, business and industry and the community through expanded curriculum choice, increased career opportunities and investment to the local area. It builds on a lengthy history of public secondary education in the town and the significant footprint of public schooling in Griffith and the Riverina. Below provides an overview of the previous two public secondary schools – Griffith and Wade (taken from their websites in 2017) – from which MRHS finds its genesis.

Griffith High School

Established in 1933, Griffith High School is a well-established comprehensive co-educational high school with a strong focus on academic achievement, sport and the arts. It is recognised for learning and welfare programs, a commitment to improving links with primary schools and innovative programs in vocational education. Griffith High School has a commitment to: developing literacy, numeracy and technology skills; providing a safe, caring and challenging environment; encouraging students to achieve theory personal best; principles of equity and diversity; developing a spirit of citizenship and pride in Australia; and forging strong parent, community and school partnerships.

Based on analysis of publicly available Annual School Reports (up to 2017) and the school's Strategic Plan 2015-2017, there had been improving Higher School Certificate results, increased attendance, and a strong focus on well-being initiatives.

Wade High School

Wade High School was established in 1971 as the second state, comprehensive, coeducational high school in Griffith. It has spacious, well-maintained grounds and good facilities to promote student learning. The school has a special focus on teaching languages and provides an extensive vocational education program.

Students regularly gain high academic results in external examinations in languages and in many other Key Learning Areas (KLAs). Wade high School strives to achieve excellence in teaching, learning and service to the community. The school aims to use all its staff, parent, community and teaching resources to care for the needs of all students and provide the best possible education for every student. Its motto is '*Towards a better world*'.

Based on an analysis of publicly available Annual School Reports (up to 2017), and the school's Strategic Plan 2015-2017, 60 per cent of graduating students are offered a university placement, school-based traineeships (in local businesses for Year 10 students) have been a feature at the school, and Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a key part of the Wade curriculum, particularly through an existing relationship with Riverina Institute.

Enrolment disparities

To understand the provision of public secondary education in Griffith, Figure 3 displays the enrolment (Full-Time Equivalent, FTE) at Griffith and Wade High Schools, 2004-2017 and a synthetic MRHS (generated by combining the enrolment at the two schools over the same period) using data from CESE,[9] and ACARA.[10]

For an extended period (2007-), Wade had the higher enrolment, although the disparity was closing in recent years. Apart from reflecting the expansion of housing in the town, it was reported that Wade enrolled many students from Griffith catchment area amplifying the disparity between the schools.

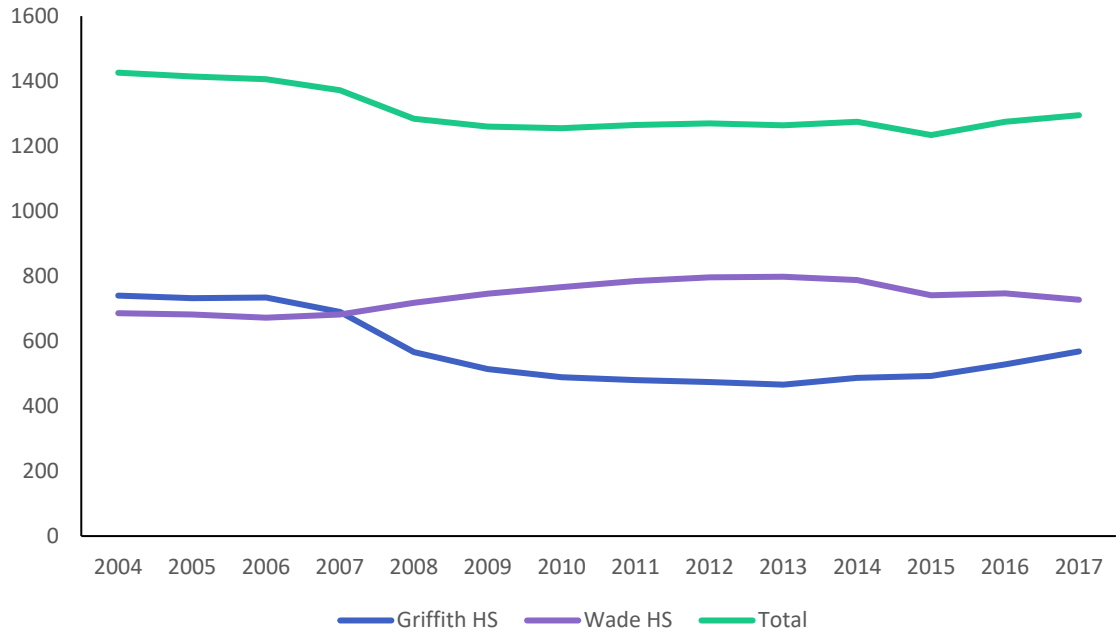


Fig. 3. The enrolment at the two sites and total (2004-2017)

During every visit/engagement by the research team (2017-2022), it was consistently reported by staff, students, and community members that Griffith and Wade High Schools were very different.

Based on school context descriptions in the 2017 Annual School Reports, Wade provides secondary education for 725 students, approximately 8 per cent identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, with other students identifying with Indian, Italian, Pacifica, Anglo, Turkish and Afghani backgrounds. In addition, the school caters for a significant group of students with learning and physical disabilities through its Support Unit (consisting of a behaviour class, two multi-categorical classes and a tutorial centre).

[9] NSW government school enrolments by head count (2004-2018) - Dataset - NSW Education Data Hub
[10] ACARA - Data Access Program

Griffith High School serves a diverse cultural enrolment of 530 students with approximately 15 per cent identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and a further 30 per cent identifying as of Pacific Islander descent.

Figure 4 below displays the school profile against the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantages (ICSEA) reported on the ACARA *MySchool* website. While both schools draw significantly from the bottom 50 per cent, Griffith High School has a greater representation (86 per cent) than Wade (76 per cent).

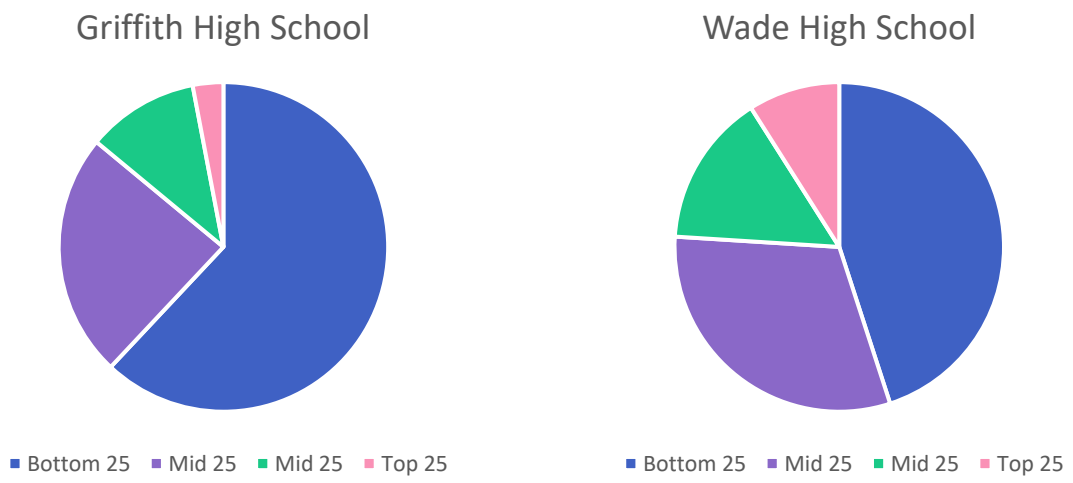


Fig. 4. 2017 ICSEA profile of Griffith and Wade High Schools (source: MySchool.edu.au)

Capturing the attractiveness of public secondary education in Griffith is difficult. However, one measure is the retention of students between the end of primary school (Year 6) into secondary school (Year 7) within the system. In the absence of systemic benchmarks, Table 2 displays the translation rate of Year 6 students at 11 identified feeder schools (including Beelbangera, Binya, Goolgowi, Griffith East, Griffith North, Griffith, Hanwood, Lake Wyangan, Rankin Springs, Tharbogang, and Yoogali) in the period 2015-2018. Despite a slight dip in 2017-2018 (the last year of Griffith and Wade High School enrolment), equivalent to five students, over the previous three years the translation rate was consistently in the high 70 per cent range.

Table 2. Translation of Year 6 public school students into public secondary schools in Griffith

Year	Year 6 Enrolments	Year 7 Enrolments	Conversion Rate
2015 – 2016	295	229	77.6
2016 – 2017	311	245	78.8
2017 – 2018	295	224	75.9

NAPLAN Performance

A key focus of the reform of Griffith public secondary schooling is to improve student outcomes. The below series of tables collate NAPLAN data from the *MySchool* website to demonstrate the percentage of times Griffith or Wade High Schools performed against all schools, and similar schools in the nine years (2008-2016) prior to the consolidation decision. The percentage reflects the number of times the school has been rated well above, above, at, below and well below other schools.

Table 3. Griffith High School NAPLAN Performance against all schools, 2008-2016

		Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading						
	Year 7	78	22	0	0	0
	Year 9	67	33	0	0	0
Writing						
	Year 7	78	22	0	0	0
	Year 9	89	11	0	0	0
Spelling						
	Year 7	22	78	0	0	0
	Year 9	22	67	11	0	0
Grammar & Punctuation						
	Year 7	100	0	0	0	0
	Year 9	89	11	0	0	0
Numeracy						
	Year 7	89	11	0	0	0
	Year 9	89	11	0	0	0
	TOTAL	72	27	1	0	0

Table 4. Wade High School NAPLAN performance against all schools, 2008-2016

		Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading						
	Year 7	11	44	44	0	0
	Year 9	33	44	22	0	0
Writing						
	Year 7	22	44	33	0	0
	Year 9	67	22	11	0	0
Spelling						
	Year 7	0	22	78	0	0
	Year 9	0	56	44	0	0
Grammar & Punctuation						
	Year 7	11	33	56	0	0
	Year 9	11	78	11	0	0
Numeracy						
	Year 7	0	78	22	0	0
	Year 9	11	67	22	0	0
	TOTAL	16	49	34	0	0

Neither Griffith nor Wade are performing in the higher two levels of achievement. With only 18 per cent of cases being at the same level of the average school, 82 per cent of the time, the schools are below or well below other schools.

However, to provide a more equitable comparison, Tables 5 and 6 compare Griffith and Wade against statistically similar schools, 2008-2016.

Unlike the 'all schools' comparison, both Griffith and Wade perform at (64 per cent and 81 per cent respectively) and above (7 per cent and 6 per cent respectively) more frequently. While a stronger indicator of performance, this data needs to be balanced against what appears to be a slip in upper end performance between Years 7 and 9 and in the context of the enduring inequities between regional, rural, and remote schools and urban centres.

Table 5. Griffith High NAPLAN performance against similar schools, 2008-16

		Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading						
	Year 7	11	22	56	11	0
	Year 9	0	22	78	0	0
Writing						
	Year 7	11	22	56	11	0
	Year 9	0	56	33	11	0
Spelling						
	Year 7	0	22	67	11	0
	Year 9	0	0	78	22	0
Grammar & Punctuation						
	Year 7	22	11	67	0	0
	Year 9	0	33	56	0	0
Numeracy						
	Year 7	11	22	67	0	0
	Year 9	0	22	76	0	0
	TOTAL	6	23	64	7	0

Table 6. Wade High School NAPLAN performance against similar schools, 08-16

		Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading						
	Year 7	0	0	100	0	0
	Year 9	0	22	78	0	0
Writing						
	Year 7	0	33	56	11	0
	Year 9	0	67	33	0	0
Spelling						
	Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
	Year 9	0	0	100	0	0
Grammar & Punctuation						
	Year 7	0	0	78	22	0
	Year 9	0	11	89	0	0
Numeracy						
	Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
	Year 9	0	0	100	0	0
	TOTAL	0	13	81	6	0

As the closest geographic competition for secondary education in Griffith, Marian College data represents an important benchmark (mindful of the recent emergence of Verity College). Across all sub-tests of NAPLAN (reading; writing; spelling; grammar and punctuation; and numeracy), Marian outperforms both Griffith and Wade. Although from a different sector (Catholic compared to government), any potential information that can inform parent and broader community perceptions of school quality is important for understanding the impact of Griffith secondary school reform.

Table 7. Marian College NAPLAN performance against all schools, 2008-2016

	Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading					
Year 7	0	0	100	0	0
Year 9	0	0	89	11	0
Writing					
Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
Year 9	0	0	78	22	0
Spelling					
Year 7	0	0	67	33	0
Year 9	0	0	67	33	0
Grammar & Punctuation					
Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
Year 9	0	0	100	0	0
Numeracy					
Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
Year 9	0	0	89	11	0
TOTAL	0	0	86	14	0

Table 8. Marian College NAPLAN performance against similar schools, 2008-16

	Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading					
Year 7	0	0	78	22	0
Year 9	0	0	67	33	0
Writing					
Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
Year 9	0	0	67	33	0
Spelling					
Year 7	0	0	56	44	0
Year 9	0	0	22	78	0
Grammar & Punctuation					
Year 7	0	0	89	11	0
Year 9	0	11	78	11	0
Numeracy					
Year 7	0	0	100	0	0
Year 9	0	0	78	22	0
TOTAL	0	1	72	27	0

A final analysis of historical and competitor NAPLAN performance is an overview of feeder school performance. While caution needs to be exercised given the different sized cohorts, it is of some value to see a snapshot of the performance of public primary school students against all schools.

Table 9. Griffith public primary schools NAPLAN scores v all schools, 08-16

		Well below	Below	At	Above	Well above
Reading						
	Year 3	16	19	52	12	1
	Year 5	16	31	42	11	0
Writing						
	Year 3	14	11	47	22	6
	Year 5	14	15	57	11	4
Spelling						
	Year 3	11	20	44	20	5
	Year 5	12	21	46	20	1
Grammar & Punctuation						
	Year 3	17	20	41	22	0
	Year 5	16	19	56	7	3
Numeracy						
	Year 3	17	17	47	19	0
	Year 5	17	23	49	9	1
	TOTAL	15	20	48	15	2

*Note: No data is available for Rankin Springs Public School due to school size.

An observation from Table 9 is that for the feeder primary schools, 48 per cent of assessments are equivalent to the average for all schools (above the levels achieved by the public secondary schools). However, the 'below' (20 per cent) and 'well below' (15 per cent) are more represented than the 'above' (15 per cent) and 'well above' (2 per cent).

From this macro-level analysis of NAPLAN performance, the data does support the Department of Education's claim that the public secondary schools in Griffith are not performing as well as they could be.

HSC performance

As the primary exit examination, the Higher School Certificate (HSC) is frequently used as the benchmark assessment for secondary schools in New South Wales. Table 10 below displays the percentage distribution across the Bands 1-6+ for the synthetic MRHS in the period 2015-2017.

Throughout the data period, the synthetic MRHS (aggregating Wade and Griffith High Schools) students have consistently been under-represented in the top bands and over-represented in the bottom two bands.

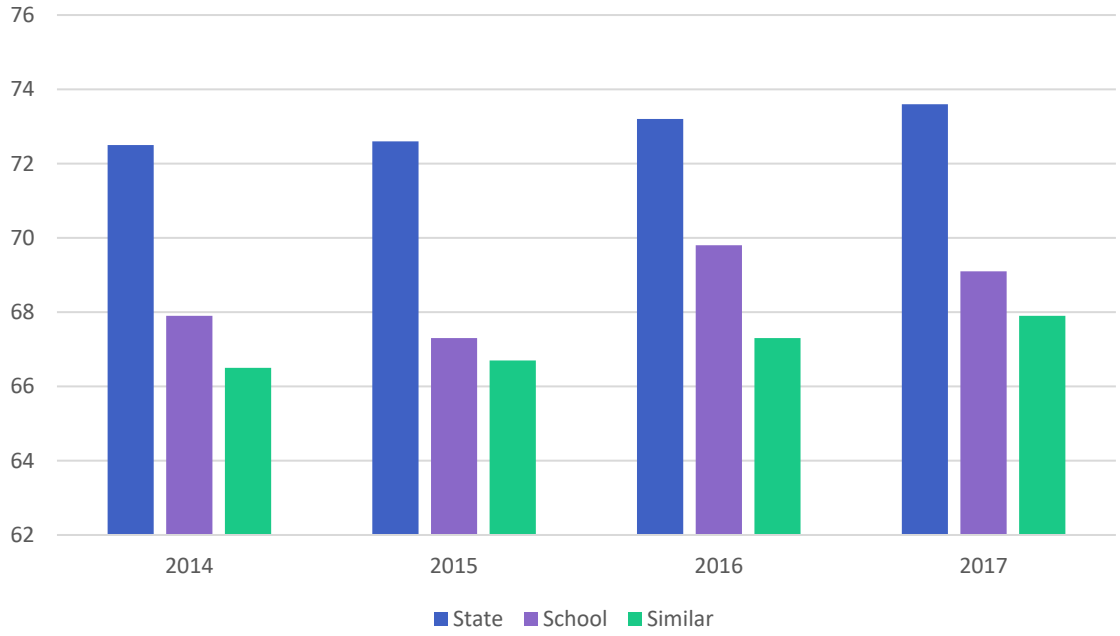
Table 10. Percentage distribution across HSC achievement bands, 2015-2017

Year		N	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Band 6+
2015	MRHS	133	7.2	13.7	27.4	33.0	13.5	2.8
	State		4.2	10.0	22.9	28.0	21.0	7.4
2016	MRHS	131	4.8	15.1	25.1	30.3	20.1	2.2
	State		4.4	9.8	22.7	27.2	21.6	7.7
2017	MRHS	147	7.4	16.4	28.9	24.9	17.5	3.4
	State		5.2	10.1	20.6	27.3	22.4	8.0

Source: NSW Department of Education, Griffith Office

Breaking HSC performance down by subject provides further insights in the performance of MRHS students in the period 2014-2017 (pre-consolidation decision). Following is a select series of HSC data. Figure 5 provides an overview of the performance of students (average score) in English compared with the State and Similar schools (as defined in the DoE data sets).

Fig. 5. Average HSC score in English: MRHS, State and Similar, 2014-2017



Figures 6 and 7 provide the same data for English – Advance and English – Standard for the same groups. Across all tables, MRHS students perform comparable or better than similar schools. However, when compared with all students across the state, MRHS is consistently below.

Fig. 6. English Advanced

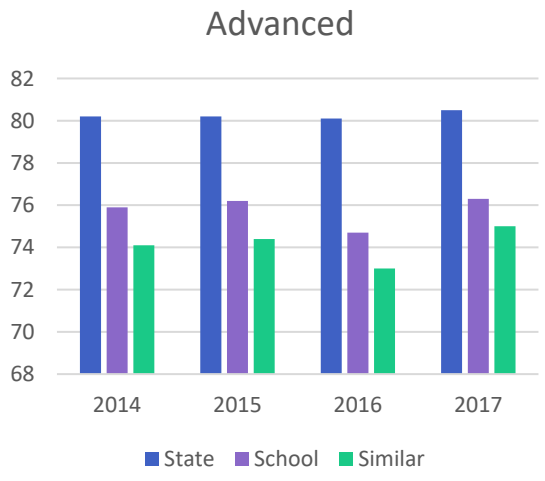
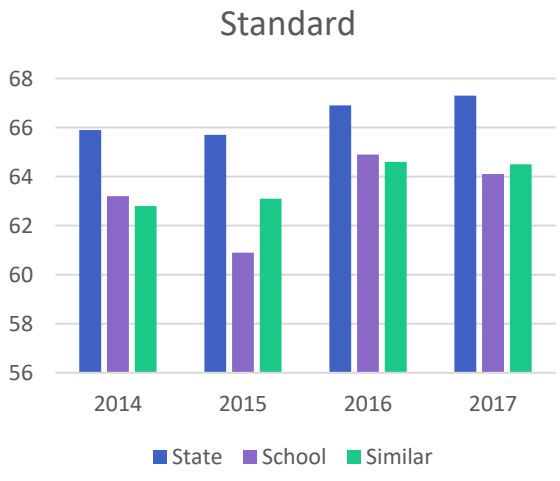
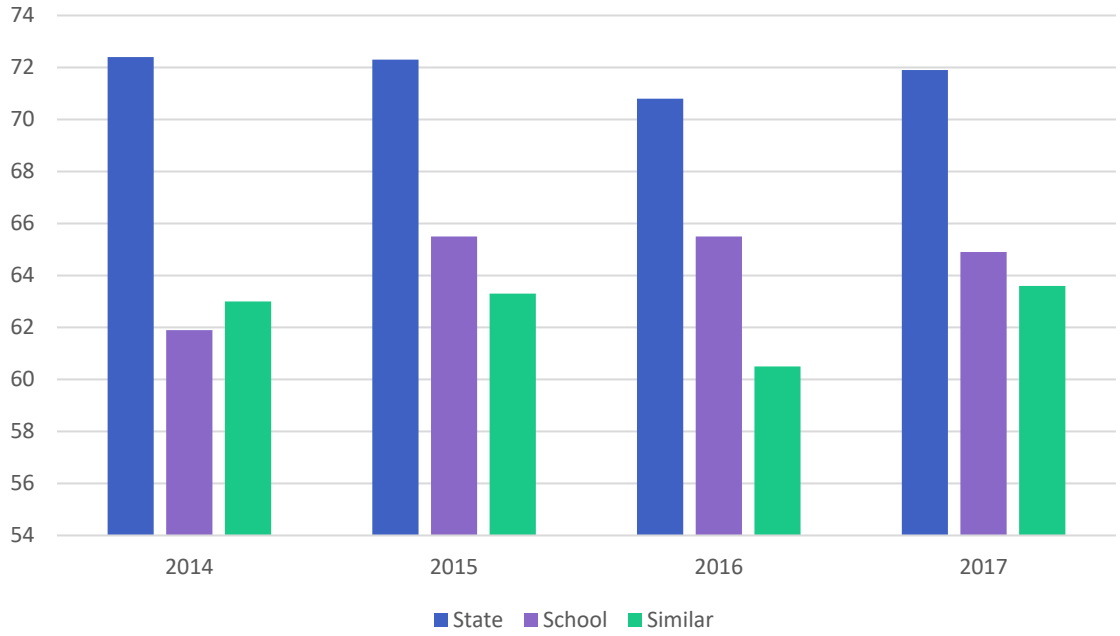


Fig. 7. English Standard



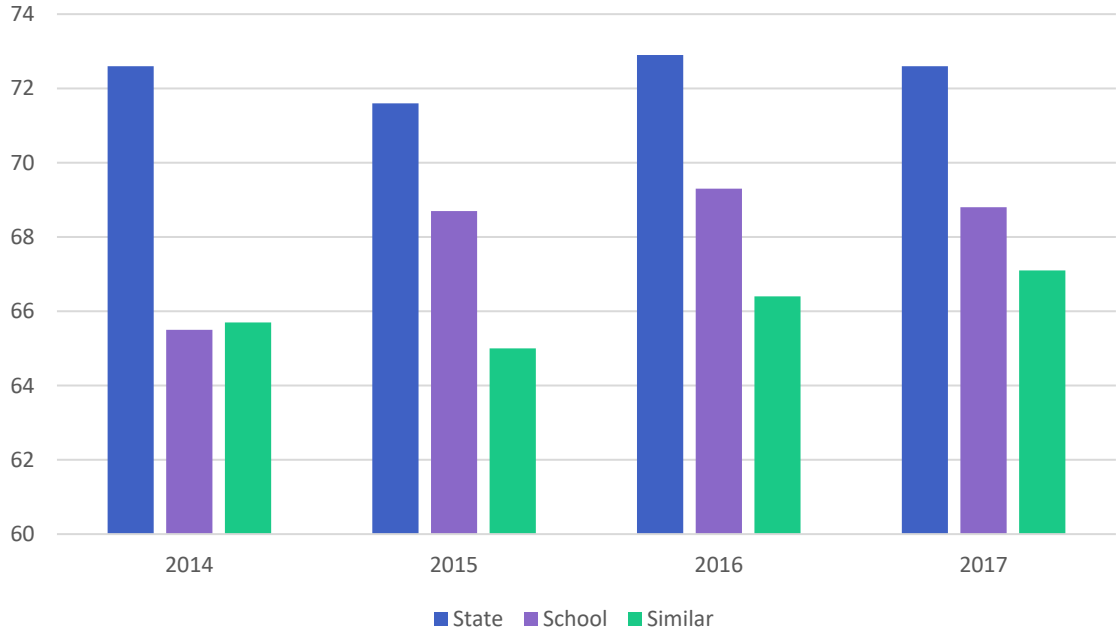
The results in Mathematics are similar (Fig. 8), performing comparable or better than similar schools but still below state average.

Fig. 8. Average HSC score in Mathematics: MRHS, State and Similar, 14-17



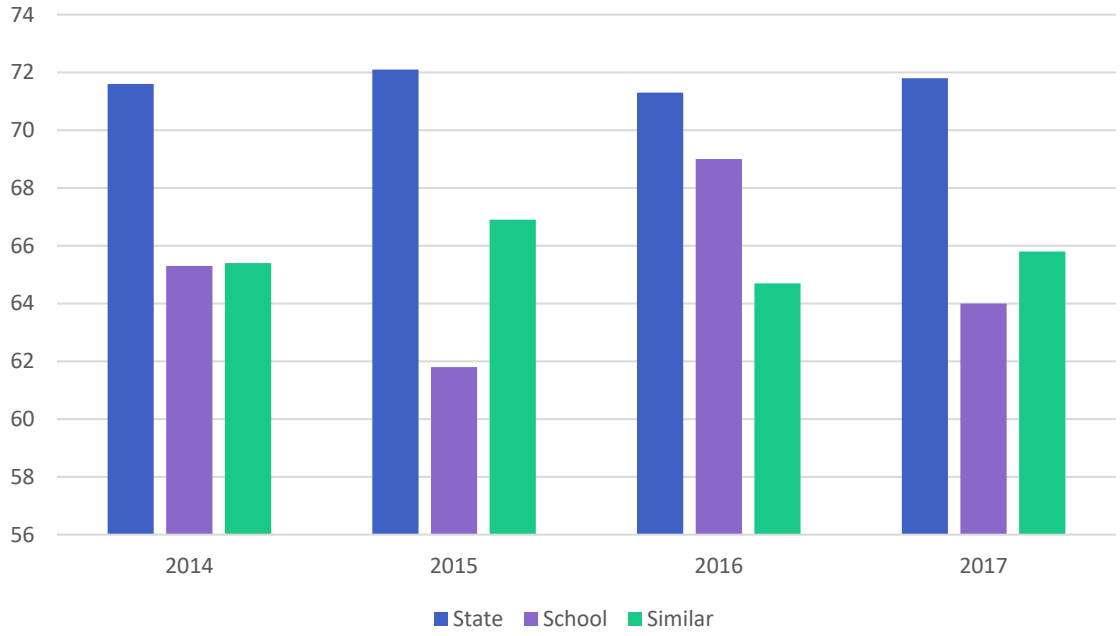
Science displays a similar pattern overtime, with the synthetic MRHS students performing about students in similar schools but below the state average.

Fig. 9. Average HSC score in Science, MRHS, State and Similar, 2014-2017



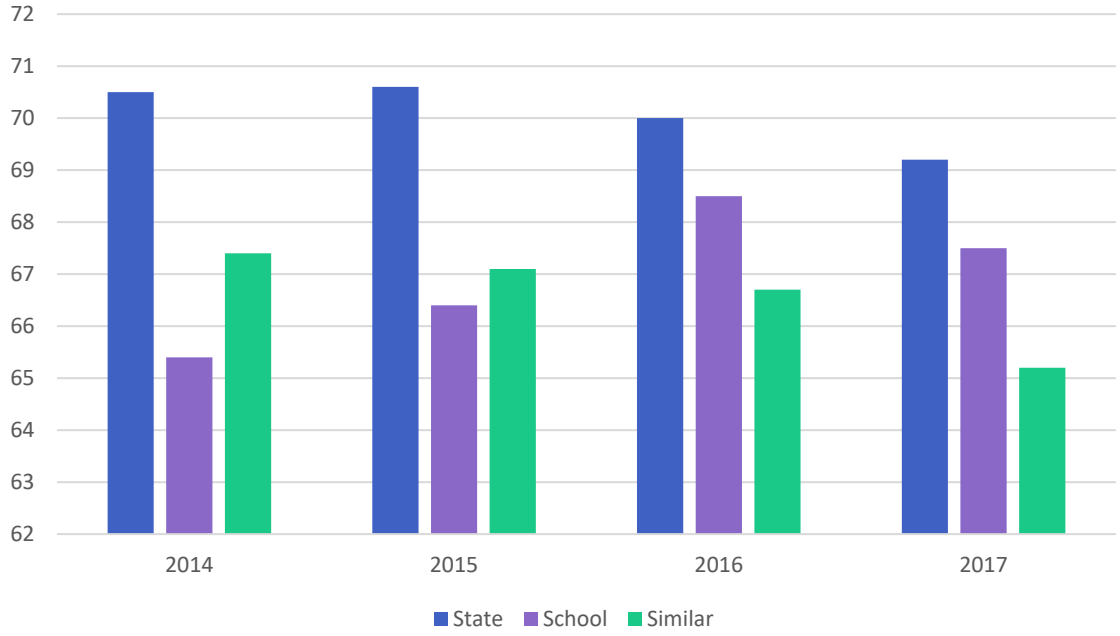
Humanity Society and Its Environment experienced a more variable performance relative to similar schools, but as with English, Mathematics and Science remained below state averages throughout the period 2014-2017.

Fig. 10. Average HSC score in HSIE: MRHS, State and Similar, 2014-2017



Technological and Applied Studies (TAS) had outperformed similar schools the last two years (2016-2017) but remains below state average.

Fig. 11. Average HSC score in TAS: MRHS, State and Similar, 2014-2017



Post school destination

Post-school options are important to current and potential enrolments in a secondary school. Table 11 and 12 draw on data from publicly available Annual School Reports for Griffith and Wade High Schools in the period 2015-2017. The collection of this data is not easily or necessarily robust, so it is important to not make too much of this, but it does provide a data point in understanding changes at the school.

Table 11. Post-school destination (%) of school leavers, Griffith High

	2015			2016			2017		
	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y10	Y11	Y12
Seeking employment	-	-	-	0	16	12	2	4	17
Employment	-	-	-	65	28	27	6	8	26
TAFE entry	-	-	-	15	22	28	3	0	18
University entry	-	-	-	0	0	20	0	0	22
Other	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	-	-	-	20	34	13	0	7	17

Source: Griffith High School Annual School Reports, 2015-2017

Table 12. Post-school destination (%), of school leavers, Wade High School

	2015			2016			2017		
	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y10	Y11	Y12
Seeking employment	7	13	6	7	13	6	1	11	5
Employment	14	13	29	14	13	29	6	18	34
TAFE entry	0	0	8	0	0	8	2	7	11
University entry	0	0	52	0	0	52	0	0	46
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	13	5	0	13	5	0	0	4

Source: Wade High School Annual School Reports, 2015-2017

Curriculum offerings

Tables 13 and 14 provide information based on publicly available Annual Reports. Table 15 provides the comparative data from Marian College.

Table 13. Senior school course offerings, Griffith High School 2015-2017

Course	2015	2016	2017
Agriculture			
Ancient History			
Biology			
Business Services			
Business Studies			
English (Standard)			
English (Advanced)			
Industrial Technology			
Legal Studies			
Mathematics General 2			
PD / H / PE			
Studies of Religion 2U			
Visual Arts			

Table 14. Senior school course offerings, Wade High School 2015-2017

Course	2015	2016	2017
Ancient History	■	■	
Biology	■	■	■
Business Studies	■	■	■
Community & Family Stud	■	■	■
Drama	■		■
English (Standard)	■	■	■
English (Advanced)	■	■	■
Food Technology	■	■	
German Beginners	■		
German Continuers		■	
Hospitality (Food & Bev)	■	■	
Industrial Technology	■		■
Italian Beginners			■
Legal Studies	■	■	■
Mathematics General 2	■	■	■
Mathematics	■	■	
Modern History		■	
PD / H / PE	■	■	■
Senior Science	■		
Society and Culture	■	■	■

Table 15. Senior school course offerings, Marian Catholic College 2014-2017

Course	2014	2015	2016	2017
Ancient History	■	■	■	
Biology	■	■	■	■
Business Services	■	■	■	
Business Studies	■	■	■	■
Chemistry	■	■	■	
Community & Family Stud	■	■	■	
Design and Technology	■	■	■	
Drama		■	■	
English (Standard)	■	■	■	■
English (Advanced)	■	■	■	■
English Extension 1	■		■	
English Extension 2	■	■	■	
Hospitality	■	■	■	
Info Processes & Tech		■		
Industrial Technology			■	
Italian Beginners		■		
Italian Continuers	■			
Legal Studies		■	■	■
Mathematics General 2	■	■	■	■
Mathematics	■	■	■	
Mathematics Extension 1	■	■	■	
Modern History		■		
Music 1	■	■	■	■
PD / H / PE	■	■	■	■
Physics	■	■		
Society and Culture	■	■	■	■
Studies of Religion 1U	■	■	■	
Studies of Religion 2U	■	■	■	■
Visual Arts	■	■	■	

While the data is incomplete, the Tables do give an idea on the spread of senior school offerings available at the schools and a basis for comparison.

Student well-being

The *Tell Them From Me* suite of surveys seek to measure student engagement and well-being and are a regular feature in Department schools. Table 16 displays the aggregate data from the synthetic MRHS (combining Griffith and Wade data) in the period 2015-2017 and in comparison, to the state. It is to be noted that MRHS consistently rated higher than the state average on all measures.

Table 16. Tell Them From Me (TTFM) percentages

Year		Advocacy at school	Expectations of success	Sense of belonging
2015	MRHS State	- -	93 87	80 72
2016	MRHS State	84 69	94 87	80 73
2017	MRHS State	94 70	99 86	79 72

Student attendance

Table 17 displays the attendance data (measured as the percentage of day attended by enrolled students) as reported on ACARA's *MySchool* website for the period 2014-2017. In addition to school data, comparative groups include other regional schools and the state average.

Table 17. Attendance data, Griffith and Wade High School, 2011-2017

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Griffith	84.2	84.9	85.8	83.7	84.1	84.1	83.9
Wade	88.7	87.7	89.1	88.4	89.7	89.1	89.6
Regional	90.4	90.4	91.0	91.2	90.8	90.6	90.6
State	92.1	92.0	92.6	92.9	92.2	92.2	92.1

Throughout this period (2011-2017), both Griffith and Wade have average attendance rates below regional and state average. A key part of improving outcomes is ensuring that students are attending school.

Once at school, students then need to be focused and engaged in tasks that improve outcomes.

Student behaviour

It is difficult to benchmark student behaviour, however for the purpose of this evaluation, the key data is suspensions. Table 18 displays the number of suspensions, by type, at Griffith and Wade High Schools in the period 2015-2017. Long suspensions had been in decline, but short suspensions were rising meaning the total suspensions were higher in 2017 than 2015.

Table 18. Suspensions (by type) at Griffith and Wade High Schools, 2015-17

Reason | Category Name	2015	2016	2017
Long suspension	**102**	**113**	**86**
Criminal behaviour relation to the school	9	11	5
Persistent or serious misbehaviour	35	45	29
Physical violence	51	47	48
Possession or use of illegal substance	3	4	1
Prohibited weapon, firearm or knife	4	4	2
Use of implement as a weapon	-	2	1
Short suspension	**157**	**136**	**181**
Aggressive behaviour	108	94	132
Continued disobedience	49	42	49
Total	**259**	**249**	**267**

The data presented in this section provides a broad overview of performance at Griffith and Wade High Schools in the years leading up to the consolidation into MRHS that can inform the evaluation.

Most of the data presented is publicly available (exceptions include HSC, suspensions and TTFM). This data, in combination with informal social and professional networks contribute to perceptions of the quality of the school within Griffith and the system.

Theory of Change

The consolidation of Griffith and Wade High Schools into Murrumbidgee Regional High School is intended to improve outcomes for public secondary school students in Griffith. Figure 12 shows the *theory of change* that underpins this evaluation.

Initial assumptions are that student outcomes are not as high as they could be, that consolidating schools can improve outcomes, staff want to and are willing to collaborate with colleagues across sites, and that staff, students and the community will embrace the reform.

Key tasks were the consolidation of Griffith and Wade into MRHS and the streamlining of policies and procedures across sites as part of forging a new school identity.

Immediate results include clarity regarding the focus of the school, improved curriculum and pathways, student outcomes and enhanced community satisfaction.

The ultimate goals are that student outcomes are comparable with anywhere in the state and that public education is the secondary school of choice in Griffith.

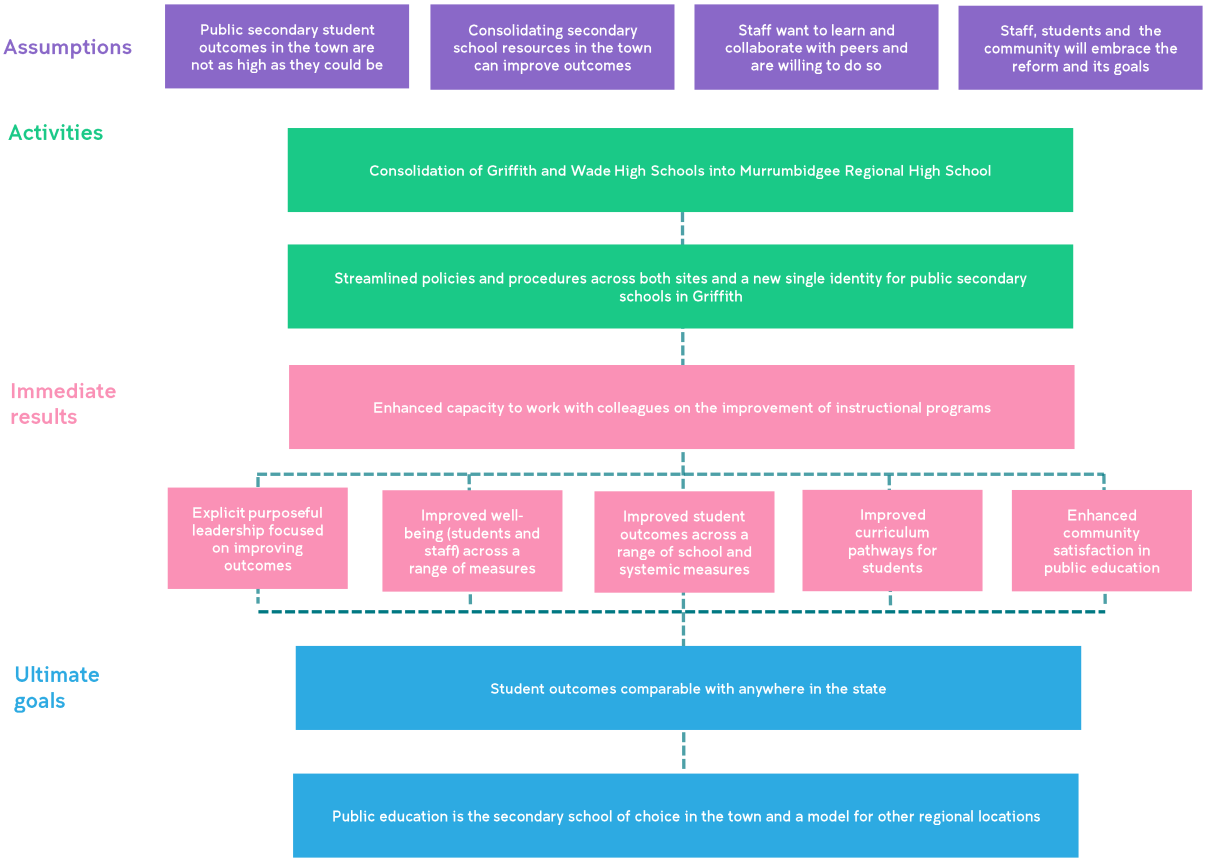


Fig. 12. Theory of change for the evaluation of MRHS consolidation

Evaluation Protocol

Throughout Australia, governments and school systems are currently engaging in substantial activity designed to improve equity, access, and achievement in regional, rural, and remote education.[11] Much of this activity has focused on attracting and retaining teachers and leaders,[12] personal and professional challenges of educators,[13] educational opportunity,[14] and is primarily informed on comparisons with metropolitan centres.[15] The New South Wales public school system is currently undertaking innovative reforms through regional secondary school consolidation in Griffith, Armidale, and Ballina.

There is a long history of school consolidation in the USA dating back to the 1800s[16] and a recent trend in China.[17] It is however a global phenomenon with examples from Denmark,[18] Australia,[19] and Canada[20] among others. In all

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[11] Halsey, R. J. (2017). *Independent review into regional, rural and remote education - discussion paper*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia; Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2013a). *Rural and remote education: Literature review*. Sydney, NSW: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation | Department of Education and Communities; and Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2013b). *Rural and remote education: A blueprint for action*. Sydney, NSW: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation | Department of Education and Communities.

[12] Downes, N., & Roberts, P. (2018). Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004-2016. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, 28*(1), 31-5; and CESE (2013b).

[13] Drummond, A., & Halsey, R. J. (2013). How hard can it be? The relative job demands of rural, regional and remote Australian educational leaders. *Australian Journal of Education, 57*(1), 19-31.

[14] Williams, S.M. (2013). Micropolitics and rural school consolidation: The quest for equal educational opportunity in Webster Parish. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(1), 127-138.

[15] Roberts, P., & Cuervo, H. (2015). What next for rural education research? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, 25*(3), 1-8.

[16] De Young, A. J., & Howley, C. B. (1990). The political economy of rural school consolidation. *Peabody Journal of Education, 67*(4), 63-89; Howley, C., Johnson, J., & Petrie, J. (2011). *Consolidation of schools and districts: What the research says and what it means*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center; LaRosa, L.T.R. (2013). Local schools, rural communities: Consolidation and community in Central Vermont. *Holster Scholar Projects,* 12.

[17] Haibo, Y. (2013). Rebound in dropout rates as a result of rural school consolidation. *Chinese Education and Society, 46*(5), 71- 75; and Xianzuo, F. (2013). The reasons, motivation, and selection of approach to the consolidation of primary and secondary schools in rural areas. *Chinese Education and Society, 46*(5), 9- 20.

[18] Beuchert, L.V., Humlum, M.K., Nielsen, H.S., & Smith, N. (2016). The short-term effects of school consolidation on student achievement: Evidence of disruption. Discussion paper no. 10195. Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor; and De Haan, M., Leuven, E., & Oosterbeck, H. (2016). School consolidation and student achievement. *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organizations, 32*(4), 816-839.

[19] Current examples include reforms in Armidale, Ballina, and Griffith.

[20] Green, J.M. (2015). *Algoma DSB 1 (Bawating and Sir James Dunn into Superior Heights Collegiate and Vocational School, grades 7-12) – final report. School consolidation experience study (SCES)*. Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Education. Green, J.M. (2015). *Algoma DSB 2 (reorganization of grade 7 & 8 programs from Central Algoma Elementary Schools into central Algoma Secondary School, CASS) – final report. School consolidation experience study (SCES). Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Education. Green, J.M. (2015). Durham district school board – final report. School consolidation experience study (SCES). Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Education*.

locations it has been, and continues to be, a controversial reform.[21] With public education being based on the ideals of educating the masses irrespective of background or status,[22] the consolidation of regional, rural, and remote schools raises many issues. This is particularly the case where changes in agriculture and commerce have driven many people into cities.[23]

Early debates on school consolidation centred on transport costs for families,[24] but more recently debates have focused on the optimum school size,[25] and issues of quality, educational opportunity, financial burden, dropout, and risk.[26] Irrespective of global location, school consolidation is a broad term applied to describe the coming together of two (or more) schools and has had a significant impact on the landscape of public education in regional, rural, and remote locations.[27] School consolidation is a complex and long process.[28] Often, the rationale for consolidation is framed as the contemporary paradox of providing equal (with metropolitan counterparts) educational opportunity while reducing spending.[29] However, since the 1970s in the USA there has been mounting evidence of no significant advantage for school consolidation on either measure.[30]

School consolidation is a relatively new reform in Australian and particularly New South Wales secondary schools. Not surprisingly, Australian data is sparse and must be improved to ensure evidence informed decision making and policies to shape ongoing evolution of the operational models adopted. At this point, (i) relatively little is known about how a

[21] Mei, D., Fang, C., & Yuanyan, B. (2013). An empirical study on the effect of school consolidation in rural areas on student achievement. *Chinese Education and Society, 46*(5), 56-70; and Sell, R.S., & Leistritz, F.L. (1997). Socioeconomic impacts of school consolidation on host and vacated communities. *Journal of the Community Development Society, 28*(2), 186-205.
[22] Alsbury, T. L., & Shaw, N. L. (2005). Policy implications for social justice in school district consolidation. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 4*(2), 105- 126.
[23] Blauwkamp, J.M., Longo, P.J., & Anderson, J. (2011). School consolidation in Nebraska: Economic efficiency vs. rural community life. *Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy, 6*(1), 1-20; and Theobald, P., & Nachtigal, P. (1995, October). Culture, community and the promise of rural education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 132-135.
[24] Holland, D., Baritelle, J., & White, G. (1976). School consolidation in sparsely populated rural areas: A case study. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 12*(1), 67-79; Lewis, J. (2003). The long and winding road, consolidation, the separation of school and community. Challenge West Virginia. Retrieved from http://www.challengewv.org/news/long_winding_road.pdf; Sell, R.S., Leistritz, F.L., & Thompson, J.M. (1996). *Socio-economic impacts of school consolidation on host and vacated communities*. North Dakota State Department of Agricultural Economics Report 34; Hillman, A. (2003). *The state of rural education in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania 2003*. Presentation to the House Education Committee, February 5, 2003; and La Rosa (2013).
[25] Monk, D.H., & Haller, E.J. (1993). Predictors of high school academic course offerings: The role of school size. *American Educational Research Journal, 30*(1), 3-21.
[26] Ailei, X., & Zhihui, W. (2013). Consolidating rural schools in China: Policy, issues, and debates. *Chinese Education and Society, 46*(5), 3- 8.
[27] Nitta, K.A., Holley, M.J., & Wrobel, S.L. (2010). A phenomological study of rural school consolidation. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 25*(2), 1-19.
[28] Hongyong, J., & Fenfen, Z. (2013). An exploration and analysis of the modes of rural school consolidation in China. *Chinese Education and Society, 46*(5), 21- 35.
[29] Williams, S.M. (2013). Micropolitics and rural school consolidation: The quest for equal educational opportunity in Webster Parish. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(1), 127-138; Blauwkamp, Longo & Anderson, (2011); and Nitta et al., (2010)
[30] Streifel, J.S., Foldesy, G., & Holman, D.M. (1991). The financial effects of consolidation. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 7*(2), 13-20.

wide range of stakeholders are impacted during and after the consolidation process; (ii) there are few longitudinal studies of school consolidation; (iii) little attention has been paid to school leadership during consolidation; and (iv) few investigations of regional secondary school reform, nationally or internationally, have been undertaken in collaboration with schools, with a view to designing interventions aimed at addressing equity and excellence in educational provision.

This chapter articulates a protocol for the evaluation of regional secondary school consolidation within the DoE, with reference to MRHS in Griffith. The protocol is based on a review of research literature,[31] site visits by the research team, and an analysis of documents relating to the Griffith Secondary School Reform agenda. The scope of the protocol is based on the five pillars (leadership and governance, staff and student well-being, teaching and learning, curriculum and pathways, community satisfaction) and the corresponding key evaluation questions, information required, data sources, methods of data generation, and the strength of data. In doing so, it outlines the most appropriate processes for generating data informed decision making to maximise the impact of the reform on educational outcomes.

Leadership and Governance

What do we know so far? School size matters – although there is no perfect size – and has significant implications on how decisions are made and who gets consulted. The overarching tension is in balancing increasing educational opportunity with responsible financial decisions. As a consolidated school, there are challenges and opportunities that are distinct from a traditional secondary school, and this has major impact on how school leadership and governance is perceived.

What do we need to know? There is a need to understand how the two existing schools operate in relation to decision making and consultation. This includes the relations between the principal, executive leadership team, teaching and support staff, students, and the broader community (e.g., AECG). This is a necessary baseline to engage with the changes during the transition to a consolidated school and the early years of operation.

Overview of the evaluation protocol for Leadership and Governance

Key evaluation question	Information required	Data Sources	Method of data generation / retrieval	Strength of data
What is the perceived efficiency and effectiveness of the practices of the school leadership team?	Views from a wide range of stakeholders on the effectiveness and efficiency of school leadership	Primary source (principal, executive, teachers, systemic staff, P&C, SRC)	Interviews (using existing protocols developed by Eacott) Focus groups	Interview / focus group schedule include test for internal validity to maximise quality of data

[31] See: Eacott, S., & Freeborn, A. (2020). Regional and rural school consolidation: a scoping study of research literature. *International Journal of Educational Management, 34*(3), 477-491. doi:10.1108/IJEM-08-2019-0318

What is the perceived effectiveness and efficiency of the new governance model?	Views of a wide range of stakeholders on the governance of the new school model.	Primary course (principal, executive, P&C, SRC) Secondary source (organizational charts, school plans, meeting minutes)	Interviews (using existing protocols developed by Eacott) Document analysis against rationale for consolidation	Schedule includes test for internal validity to maximise quality data Test of coherence between espoused approach and plans / reports

Staff and Student Well-being

What do we know so far? There is a substantial body of literature citing the impact of school consolidation on staff well-being. It often results in uncertainty over job security, increases (perceived and/or real) in workload and work pressure, and sometimes, turnover. Students on the other hand tend to have more positive experiences, cope better, and engage more quickly in a diverse range of educational and social activities. There is however an underlying 'us and them' that takes time and effort to break down.

What do we need to know? It is important to ascertain baseline data on the well-being of staff and students in the lead up to school consolidation. This is important for measuring changes in feelings of support, identity, sense of belonging, and pride in the new school. It will be important to match this data with demographics (e.g., original school site) to engage effectively with interventions and any underlying issues.

Overview of the evaluation protocol for Staff and Student Well-being

Key evaluation question	Information required	Data sources	Method of data generation / retrieval	Strength of data
To what extent do staff feel supported, engaged, and empowered in the decision-making of the school?	Views of all staff on the level of support, engagement, and empowerment	Primary source (teachers, support staff, administrative staff)	Questionnaire (demographic data, working with other teachers [TIMSS], emphasis on academic success [TIMSS], being a teacher [TIMSS])	Use of validated scales from PISA / TIMSS Benchmarking against national and OECD averages
To what extent do students feel a sense of belonging, pride in school, and personal achievement?	Views of students on sense of belonging, pride in school, and personal achievement	Primary source (students)	Questionnaire (demographic data, what do you think of school [TIMSS], sense of belonging [PISA], academic motivation [PISA}, learning culture [TIMSS])	Use of validated scales from PISA / TIMSS Benchmarking against national and OECD averages

Teaching and Learning

What do we know so far? One rationale for consolidation is to improve the educational outcomes for students. To that end, there is a desire to improve student performance data through improved pedagogy. Mixed results

have been reported as to whether school consolidation achieves this end. Frequently, this is discussed in terms of not addressing the underlying reasons for under-performance. In improving student performance data, a key factor is supporting the instructional practices of teachers. With the roll-out of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, it is timely to investigate the supports for teachers.

What do we need to know? Benchmark data for teaching and learning includes school and system level student performance data. This will provide the basis for which any changes in performance can be measured. In addition, it is important to gauge the degree of support staff feel towards improving student performance outcomes. In this way, interventions can be tailored and targeted towards improving student outcomes rather than an assessment of individual teachers – something which a substantial body of literature indicates has a negative effect on staff morale.

Overview of the evaluation protocol for Teaching and Learning

Key evaluation question	Information required	Data sources	Method of data generation / retrieval	Strength of data
To what extent do teachers / support staff feel supported by an explicit performance and development model?	Views of teaching and support staff on the level of support through performance and development model	Primary source (teachers, support staff) Secondary source (compliance data and annual reviews)	Questionnaire Focus group Self-evaluation Accreditation data School-based data	Multi-source data to triangulate claims of levels of support, performance, and impact on educational outcomes
To what extent do improved assets and facilities deliver better pedagogy and student outcomes?	Resource usage data and evidence of changes in pedagogy	Primary source (resource usage data, teachers)	School-based data Focus group	Trend data to correlate with curriculum offerings, student performance data
Have levels of student performance data changed following consolidation?	Data on student performance	Primary source (student performance data)	School-based data Systemic data *MySchool* data	Data will enable benchmarking with sector on value-added measures

Curriculum and Pathways

What do we know so far? Consolidation is often proposed based on increasing curriculum offerings for students. In many cases this is achieved through bringing smaller regional, rural, and remote schools together. Increased pathways, if matched with student performance, are reported to increase the educational opportunities for students and post-schooling destinations. In addition, consolidating schools allows for an economy of scale in investment on facilities. Improved facilities have been found to benefit both students and the broader community, increasing the attractiveness of the consolidated school and helping to build a positive school-community relationship.

What do we need to know? Data is required on the current offerings and enrolment in subjects. This is vital for mapping changes in offerings achieved through consolidation and any shifts in students undertaking subjects.

Overview of evaluation protocol for Curriculum and Pathways

Key evaluation question	Information required	Data sources	Method of data generation / retrieval	Strength of data
Does the provision and uptake of subject choices change following consolidation?	Data on subject offerings and student uptake	Primary source (subject offerings and enrolment data)	School-based data Focus groups	School and systemic data will enable benchmarking with sector and trends overtime
Is there a change in the post-school destination of graduates following consolidation?	Post-school destination data	Primary source (post-school destination data)	School-based data System data	School and systemic data will enable benchmarking with sector and trends overtime

Community Satisfaction

What do we know so far? The perception of the broader community regarding the quality of education provision is a key factor in the employability of graduates and the recruitment / retention of students.

What do we need to know? The perception of the broader community regarding the quality of education provision is a key factor in the employability of graduates and the recruitment / retention of students. It is important to understand existing perceptions and whether these change over time.

Overview of evaluation protocol for Community Satisfaction

Key evaluation question	Information required	Data sources	Method of data generation / retrieval	Strength of data
Is there a change in the retention of students following consolidation?	Student retention data	Primary source (student retention data)	School-based data	School and systemic data will enable benchmarking with sector and trends overtime
Has the perception of stakeholders on the quality of provision changed following consolidation?	Wide range of views on the quality of provision	Primary source (parent, business community, local government)	Focus groups	Trend data to correlate with enrolment, performance and post-school destination

Key evaluation areas

Source: Murrumbidgee Regional High School | Facebook

Leadership and governance

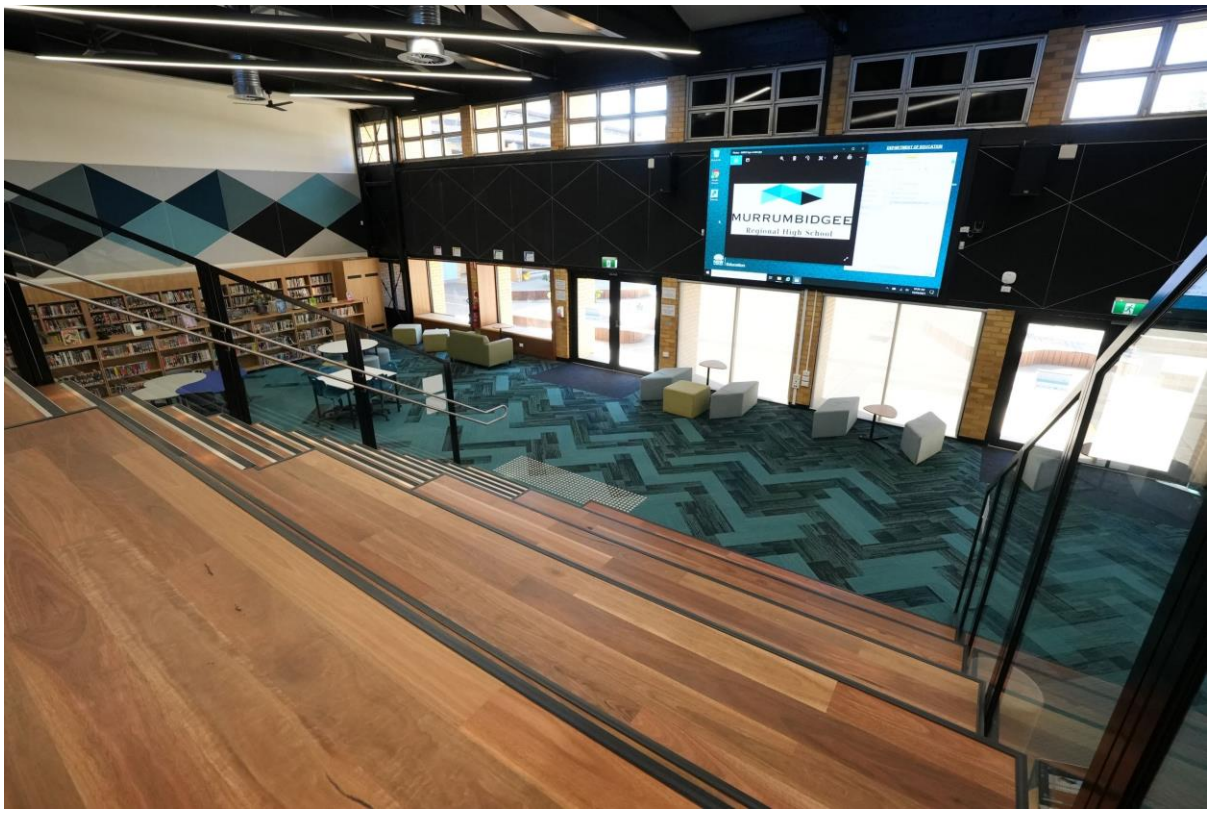
Staff and student well-being

Teaching and learning

Curriculum and pathways

Community satisfaction

Leadership and Governance



Source: [Murrumbidgee Regional High School - Stage 1 completed project (nsw.gov.au)]

> *The structure simply is not working. The Principal is getting pulled in all directions and the Deputies are all over-worked.*
> Teacher, Dec 2019

The unique 'one school – two sites' structure of MRHS creates both challenges and opportunities. If the school is to deliver on the desired innovative delivering of public secondary education in Griffith it would be dependent on an effective and efficient approach to leadership and governance.

Consistent issues or areas for attention raised during the fieldwork (2017-2022) centred on: i) The principalship; ii) organisational structure; and iii) instructional leadership. Despite the reform, the principalship is the only significant change in school structure. The absence an explicit performance framework of clearly articulated responsibilities and accountability for them progress at MRHS has been slower than expected.

The principalship

One of the most confronting changes during the early stages of the consolidation project was the shift from site-based principals to a single executive principal. This is distinct from the college structure common in NSW public secondary schools,[32]

The appointment of the new executive principal (Mr Peter King) in October 2017 created a 15-month lead in time before the official commencement of MRHS in January 2019. Based on the data generated, this is too long (for all involved). It created an internal tension with line management and policy development. As time passed, the decision-making authority shifted between incumbent site-based principals and the incoming executive principal. This added unnecessary complexity to the reform and uncertainty for staff. It is however noted that decisions, especially those impacting on the incumbent principals of Griffith and Wade High Schools, need to be undertaken within existing Industrial Relations rules and procedures. A shorter transition between appointment and commencement could have avoided some complexity.

Having a single executive principal over two sites has cascading implications for school leaders, especially deputies. If effective and efficient school operations are to remain, deputies need to enact increased delegated authority. This is not uncommon in contemporary schools where the principal may regularly be unavailable or off-site. It may require attention to position descriptions to include the expansion of the role. It is noted that MRHS has an above award number of deputies (n=7) currently across the two sites. However, when the employment freeze expires, this situation will change – with implications for remaining deputies.

De-coupling comments on the person in the principalship, it is well-established that the contemporary principalship is a complex and demanding role. Expectations of daily visibility and immediate accessibility seem at odds with the contemporary role in large schools. In-principle, the executive principalship works but it does require attention to the organisational structure surrounding the position.

[32] College structures include multiple 7-10 campuses and a single 11-12 campus. Each campus has a principal, and then the college as an executive principal. Examples of colleges within the system in 2017 (the time of the MRHS decision) include: Brisbane Water Secondary College (Woy Woy and Umina), Callaghan College (Jesmond, Wallsend and Waratah), Chifley College (Bidwill, Dunheved, Mount Druitt, Shalvey), Denison College of Secondary Education (Kelso and Bathurst), Dubbo College (Delroy and South), Georges River College (Oatley, Hurstville Boys, Peakhurst and Penshurst Girls), Great Lakes College (Forster and Tuncurry), Hastings Secondary College (Port Macquarie and Westport), Moree Secondary College (Albert St and Carol Ave), Nirimba College (Wyndham, Quakers Hill, Riverstone and Seven Hills), Northern beaches Secondary College (Freshwater, Balgowlah Boys, Cromer, Mackeller Girls and Manly), Sydney Secondary College (Blackwattle Bay, Balmain and Leichhardt), The Rivers Secondary College (Kadina, Lismore and Richmond River), and Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College (The Entrance, Berkeley Vale and Tumbi Umbi).

Organisational structure

MRHS is larger than 89.7 per cent of public secondary schools in NSW (*n*=399), and the staff profile of 125.3 FTE is larger than 99 per cent of public secondary schools.[33] However, despite the innovative 'one school – two sites' model, the organisational structure of MRHS to this point has remained somewhat unchanged from the two distinct schools – except for the principalship (see Table 19).

Table 19. School leadership positions at MRHS, 2021

	MRHS	Griffith	Wade	Total
Executive principal	**1**			**1**
Deputy principal, (IL)	**1**			**1**
Deputy principal		**3**	**3**	**6**
Head of department				**21**
English		1 (incl LOTE)	1	
Mathematics		1	1	
Science		1	1	
Human Society & its Enviro		1	1	
Technical and Applied Stud		1	1 x IA 1 x HE	
Create and Performing Arts		1		
PD / H / PE		1	1	
Special Education		1	1	
Learning Support		1	1	
Regional re-engagement	1			
VET	1			
Administration	1			
Year advisors				**12**
Year 7		1	1	
Year 8		1	1	
Year 9		1	1	
Year 10		1	1	
Year 11		1	1	
Year 12		1	1	
Welfare advisors				**12**
Aboriginal Education		1	1	
School counsellors	4			
Careers adviser		1	1	
EAL/D		1	1	
Pacific Islander Community	1			
Youth outreach worker	1			

Source: The_Channel_Term_1_Week_3_2021.pdf (nsw.gov.au)

[33] See: ACARA - Data Access Program , specifically, the 2021 school profiles.

There is nothing to suggest that this structuring is inappropriate. However, the two sites (Griffith and Wade) are 4.2 kms apart with minimal interaction between staff and students. This creates implications for school leaders and in particular heads of departments (HoDs).

Effective and efficient execution of the consolidation reform hinges on the ability of HoDs to lead curriculum development, monitor progress, and build collective responsibility for improving outcomes. The role of the HoDs is fundamental to cross-site collaboration, building a single school identity and ensuring equitable (not necessarily the same) program throughout MRHS.

During the early years of the reform one of, if not the greatest task in improving student outcomes at MRHS has been the development of cross-site teaching and learning programs within faculties. Consistent recommendations from the research team since September 2018,[34] have focused on the need to bring staff together for curriculum planning and combining this with explicit articulation of expectations regarding deliverables and matching accountability for the development of cross-site programs in faculties. Up until 2022 fieldwork, faculties have not yet delivered cross-site programs.

A consistent message during the focus groups over the entire four years has been the absence of clearly defined policies and procedures for MRHS. In general, many of the policies can be found at the systemic level (e.g., NSW Department of Education). What has been problematic has been the localised version of policies and inconsistencies in their application.

Initially, the lengthy lead in time for the new executive principal was perceived by some as designed to enable the establishment of policies and procedures for the new school. In contrast, for the incoming appointee, the belief was that working with staff to develop policies and procedures would enable greater ownership and responsibility. This miscommunication led to an internal tension.

Retaining the two sites, and with minimal interaction between them, the sites have continued to operate in a somewhat hybrid model where they are one school in name but still two discrete entities. This complicates decision-making and communication by adding layers for re-interpretation.

Significantly, minimal changes in organisational structure have allowed for the sites to remain somewhat separate. This has reduced the possibility of creating a single school identity. It also makes it possible for tasks to not be completed with responsibility shifting to the structure rather than individuals. Improvement of outcomes is unlikely under these conditions.

[34] See Public Overviews September 2018, June 2019, December 2019, October 2020, August 2021, and the Interim Report 2020.

Instructional leadership

Improving outcomes is dependent on high quality instructional leadership. Data from the staff questionnaire included *Emphasis on academic success (leadership)* which serves as a proxy for instructional leadership (Table 20). After a decline in ratings 2018-2020, 2021 saw an increase across all items (although still below the national benchmark). At no point in the four years have more than 50 per cent of staff indicated high or very high on any of the four items. Greater clarity of the school's goals coupled with collaboration and support for and among teachers with be important for delivering the desired improved outcomes for students.

Table 20. *Emphasis on academic success (leadership)*

	Australia	Percentage of teachers indicating high / very high 2018 (*n*=92)	2019 (*n*=80)	2020 (*n*=57)	2021 (*n*=83)
Clarity of the school's educational objectives	56.6	30.5	6.2	14.3	44.6
Collaboration between school leadership and teachers to plan instruction	44.1	20.7	7.4	12.4	14.7
Amount of instruction support provided to teachers by school leadership	40.6	20.7	7.4	8.7	26.5
School leaderships' support for teachers' professional learning	52.7	35.8	22.2	28.0	36.1

Summary

Leadership and governance at MRHS have been a problematic area. The executive principal and lack of site-based principals has been a difficult approach for many staff, students, and the community to accept. It has created cascading issues for deputies and the execution of their role. The lack of major disruption in the organisational structure and minimal interaction between the two sites has made it difficult to establish a single school identity.

Establishing a stronger organisational culture at MRHS was dependent on bringing staff from both sites together to develop, implement, monitor, and where necessary revise teaching and learning programs, policies and procedures, and shared activities. This has proven difficult.

Acknowledging that the two sites have different histories and trajectories, establishing MRHS organisational culture is dependent on staff being willing to compromise for the good of the school going forward. This is not to deny the uniqueness of each site, but to centre the importance of establishing MRHS principles, not necessarily prescription, that allow the new school to thrive. It is possible to retain site-based history while building a new narrative for public secondary education in Griffith.

Consolidating the resources of the two sites should have created greater critical mass of expertise in faculties. This would have reduced administrative load in the development of teaching and learning programs through division of labour coupled with greater enrichment of those programs courtesy of drawing on diverse staff expertise. The efficiencies possible through the 'one school – two sites' model have yet to be achieved due to difficulties connecting across the two sites. In the absence of an explicit accountability framework for the delivery of shared teaching and learning programs, they have not been achieved.

As one staff member stated:

> ***Too much time has been spent on 'how to make the model work' rather than focusing on how to improve student outcomes.***

Leadership and governance of the 'one school – two sites' model in Griffith has not achieved the desired efficiencies and effectiveness to this point. Lack of role clarity matching the contemporary demands of school leadership positions and the absence of a performance framework (responsibilities and accountabilities) have created a situation where it is easy to blame the reform process or structure for not delivering. Attribution of the cause for the level of efficiency and performance cannot solely be directed at the model as many confounding variables have limited its implementation and operations in the period 2018-2021.

Staff and Student Well-Being

Source: Murrumbidgee Regional High School - Stage 1 completed project (nsw.gov.au)

> *Staff morale is at an all-time low.*
> Teacher, Dec 2019

School reform brings significant possibilities and problems for staff and student well-being. Having staff – both teaching and non-teaching – feel supported, engaged, and empowered in decision-making is vital for MRHS. So too is creating a sense of belonging and pride in the school for students.

The first few years of MRHS has been difficult on staff. In addition to the consolidation, the building works and pandemic have amplified many of the stresses that come with change. The consolidation has also been experienced differently by teaching and non-teaching staff.

Students, for the most part, have coped much better with the change. Where their well-being has been most compromised is when staff or community members have spoken negatively about the school.

Teacher well-being

There were two key sources of data on teacher well-being, the annual questionnaire and bi-annual focus groups. The reported experiences of teaching fluctuated throughout the evaluation period.

Each field engagement by the research featured between 12 and 25 focus groups with staff. This enabled a reach of approximately 60 staff per visit.

During the initial research visits (2018-2019), staff morale was very low. There was almost universal disappointment with the consolidation project, from the announcement through to the implementation. A representative sample of quotes from staff include:

> *The merger is a total disaster. Staff are breaking and no one cares.*
>
> *It is impossible to work together across sites, there is no time to meet, our students are so different, it simply will never work but no one will admit it was the wrong decision.*
>
> *There is no clarity on why the decision was made, and no clear plan for how this solution [one school – two sites] will make it better.*
>
> *It feels like we are constantly at sea, but there are no life boats for people.*

As time progressed and more new staff were introduced to the school, the experiences of staff became more bifurcated. While a portion of the staff continued to experience the consolidation as a negative and traumatic exercise proving difficult to overcome, others were more optimistic of the possibilities.

> *The school is coming together. Leadership is decisive or assertive in what needs to happen. There is still work to be done, but it is a start.*
>
> *We are doing more things together, like Harmony Day, Cinderella, and the students are doing fine.*
>
> *The pandemic helped people focus on what really matters, and that has helped the staff in working together for the students.*

The challenges for staff well-being centre on the ability to focus on the agenda (improving student outcomes) and developing the systems and structures necessary to enable that to happen.

Key data from the teacher questionnaire focused on staff's 'thoughts on being a teacher'. Table 21 displays the data from the period 2018-2021. There have been inconsistent patterns in the data over the evaluation. All items dropped in 2019 (the first year of the consolidated school) and most experience and upward trend in the following years (2020-2021). All items remain, despite any positive trend, well below the national benchmark.

Only 51.8 per cent of teachers find their work 'full or meaning and purpose' and 48.2 per cent are inspired by their work. In a positive trend, 79.5 per cent of staff in 2021 indicated being satisfied with being a teacher at MRHS, this is up from a low of 23.8 per cent in 2019.

Table 21. Thoughts on being a teacher

	Percentage of teachers indicating often / very often				
	Australia	2018 (*n*=92)	2019 (*n*=80)	2020 (*n*=57)	2021 (*n*=83)
I am content with my profession as a teacher	86.1	61.9	37.5	52.7	59.1
I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school	81.9	52.2	23.8	47.4	79.5
I find my work full of meaning and purpose	83.5	60.8	35.0	46.4	51.8
I am enthusiastic about my job	87.8	67.4	42.5	52.6	62.7
My work inspires me	78.3	58.7	35.1	44.6	48.2
I am proud of the work I do	93.4	78.3	67.5	73.7	71.1
I am going to continue teaching for as long as I can	79.0	58.7	48.1	59.7	55.4

Staff absence data provided by District Office has shown a reduction in the average number of days (all forms of leave) from 25.15 days (2019) to 22.71 (2020), both below state average (35.98).

The challenge for MRHS is how to capitalise on the positive trend in staff being satisfied in being a teacher at the school while also acknowledging the hurt experienced by many during the consolidation process.

School Administrative and Support Staff (SASS) and Student Learning Support Officer (SLSO) Well-Being

Not explicitly mentioned in the original project brief, School Administrative and Support Staff (SASS) and Student Learning Support Officer (SLSO) were included in focus groups from the end of 2018.

The exclusion of SASS and SLSO staff from discussions and consultations regarding the consolidation reform had a negative impact on their well-being.

Consultation with SASS was needed in the lead-up to consolidation was needed to ensure seamless migration from two operating systems into one. With the establishment of the new school (MRHS) and the retirement of existing school codes (Griffith and Wade), there was potential for substantial data loss – both historical and contemporary – necessary for the effective operation of the school.

What this highlights is the influential role of non-teaching staff in the administration and management of a school. Insights into the capacity and capability of technological infrastructure to ensure seamless transition is best sourced for those working with the systems daily.

SLSO staff were similarly excluded from substantial consultation processes. In addition, their line management changed or was less clear than it needed to be to ensure optimal operations within and across sites. This compromised their ability to deliver the highest quality support to educators and students.

Further impacting on SASS and SLSO well-being was not being granted space in the new staffrooms. This created, or amplified, a partition between teaching and non-teaching staff at the school.

All these impacts could have been avoided with greater integration of SASS and SLSO staff in consultation processes and planning.

Student Well-Being

Improving outcomes requires students' feeling positive about themselves and their opportunities. While students (e.g., student representative council) did participate in focus groups during research team visits, the primary data source was the student questionnaire. The number of respondents for the student questionnaire were 689 (2018, 58 per cent response rate), 642 (2019, 51 per cent), 208 (2020, 17 per cent – impacted by pandemic

restrictions and shift to online) and 586 (2021, 50 per cent). This represents a response rate of approximately 50 per cent (except for the disrupted 2020 round).

Table 22 displays the data for what students think about school.

Table 22. What do you think about school?

	Percentage of students who reported agree (a little / a lot) with the following statements													
	I like being at school		I feel safe when I am at school		I feel like I belong at this school		I like to see my classmates at school		Teachers at my school are fair to me		I am proud to go to this school		I learn a lot at school	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
2018	69.2	(.03)	76.8	(.03)	72.1	(.03)	89.7	(.03)	68.9	(.04)	69.1	(.04)	74.3	(.03)
2019	61.9	(.04)	71.0	(.04)	68.3	(.04)	87.6	(.03)	62.0	(.04)	57.0	(.04)	63.6	(.04)
2020	64.4	(.02)	81.7	(.02)	72.3	(.02)	84.3	(.02)	71.9	(.02)	67.5	(.02)	73.6	(.01)
2021	64.4	(.03)	75.2	(.03)	72.8	(.03)	86.1	(.03)	72.7	(.03)	68.5	(.03)	76.2	(.02)
Australia	77.0	(.01)	83.0	(.01)	75.7	(.01)	90.3	(.01)	77.1	(.01)	79.7	(.01)	84.2	(.01)

While below the national benchmark, the items have remained relatively stable across 2018-2021. The initial year of the consolidation (2019) did have the lowest scoring year of the evaluation. Consistent with research literature, based on this data students were less impacted by the consolidation than teachers.

Establishing a new culture in MRHS requires students (and staff) to identify with the new school. Sense of belonging is intended to capture how attached students are to school and feel welcome in the environment. Table 23 displays the data in the period 2018-2021 (the three negative items are reverse coded to facilitate comparability across items). An interesting item (although still a single item) is 'I feel like I belong at school' in which the data is above national average.

Table 23 Sense of Belonging

	Percentage of students who reported agree/disagree with the following statements											
	I make friends easily at school (agree)		I feel like I belong at school (agree)		Other students seem to like me (agree)		I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school (disagree)		I feel awkward and out of place in my school (disagree)		I feel lonely at school (disagree)	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
2018	79.7	(.03)	73.7	(.03)	80.6	(.03)	80.7	(.03)	69.6	(.03)	84.6	(.03)
2019	71.2	(.03)	67.5	(.04)	76.8	(.03)	76.2	(.04)	76.2	(.03)	81.0	(.04)
2020	73.5	(.02)	70.0	(.02)	79.7	(.03)	74.3	(.02)	72.5	(.03)	85.0	(.03)
2021	74.0	(.02)	80.2	(.03)	81.3	(.03)	75.5	(.02)	74.6	(.03)	65.6	(.03)
Australia	79.4	(.40)	71.9	(.50)	87.6	(.40)	76.5	(.30)	78.2	(.30)	83.5	(.30)
OECD	77.7	(.10)	73.0	(.10)	82.1	(.10)	82.8	(.10)	80.9	(.10)	85.2	(.10)

Supplementing the evaluation questionnaire is school-based data (e.g., Tell Them From Me). Table 24 and Figure 13 displays the TTFM data provided by the Department of Education office, Griffith for MRHS. It is reported in two different ways and over two different time series (with the period after the consolidation decision announced shaded).

Table 24. Tell Them From Me (TTFM) percentages

Year		Advocacy at school	Expectations of success	Sense of belonging
2015	MRHS State	- -	93 87	80 72
2016	MRHS State	84 69	94 87	80 73
2017	MRHS State	94 70	99 86	79 72
2018	MRHS State	80 71	93 87	80 71
2019	MRHS State	90 70	99 86	78 70

Figure 13 provides the data from MRHS, the state and similar for students who indicated 'high' for both expectations and sense of belonging. Across the data points (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2021) there is a downward trend for all three groups.

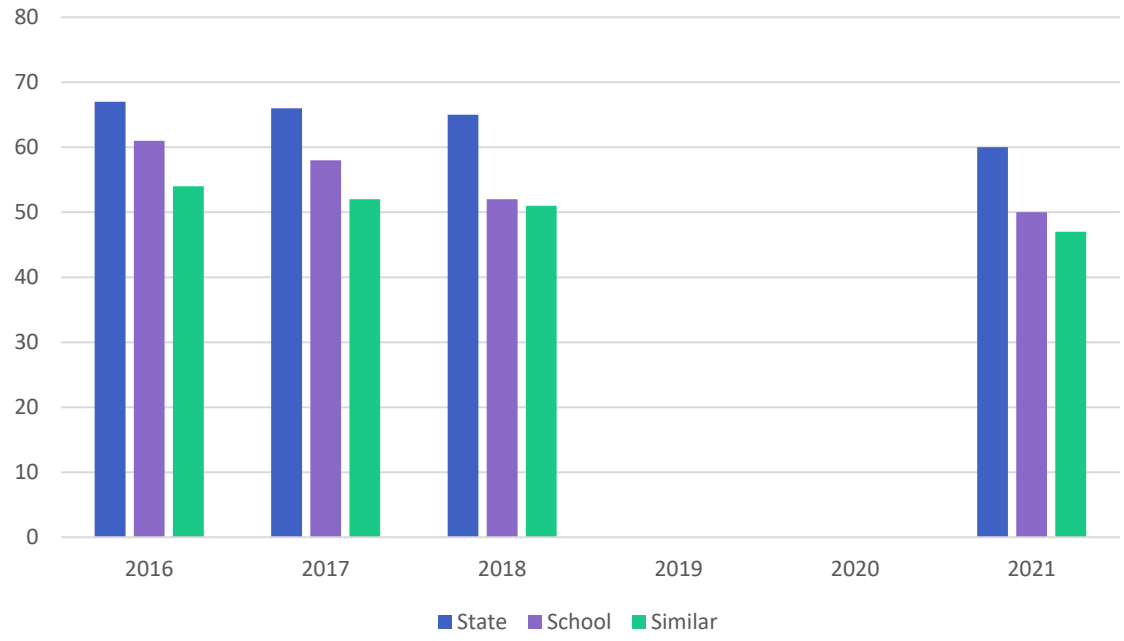


Fig 13. Percentage of students indicating high for expectations and sense of belonging in TTFM survey, 2016-2021

Student attendance data provides useful insights into student well-being. Table 25 displays the attendance for public secondary school students in Griffith for the period 2015-2021. Mindful that the last two years have been impacted by the pandemic, there is no observable shift in student attendance following the consolidation decision.

Table 25. Student attendance (%), MRHS 2015-2021

Yr	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021
	MRHS	State	MRHS	State	MRHS	State	MRHS	State	MRHS	State	MRHS	State	MRHS
7	91.9	92.7	92.1	92.8	91.0	92.7	89.0	91.8	87.6	91.2	92.3	-	87.1
8	87.9	90.6	88.4	90.5	88.1	90.5	88.1	89.3	84.8	88.6	89.8	-	83.4
9	85.0	89.3	84.1	89.1	87.7	89.1	86.1	87.7	84.5	87.2	90.9	-	80.6
10	84.9	87.7	81.9	87.6	80.2	87.3	83.2	86.1	80.7	85.5	87.9	-	77.2
11	76.7	88.2	85.3	88.2	78.2	88.2	82.5	86.6	83.9	86.6	88.1	-	80.7
12	82.9	89.9	87.9	90.1	87.0	90.1	82.9	89.0	81.9	88.6	90.5	-	78.3
ALL	**84.9**	**89.7**	**86.6**	**89.7**	**85.7**	**89.6**	**85.3**	**88.4**	**84.0**	**88.0**	**89.9**	**-**	**81.4**

Source: NSW Department of Education, Griffith Office

In focus groups with staff and parents and community members, student behaviour was mentioned as in decline and a sign of negative student well-being. To provide some data check for this claim, Table 26 provides an updated overview of suspension data from MRHS.

Data from student focus groups indicates perceptions of losing (quality) teachers, deteriorating student behaviour, and their learning being impacted by stressed out or over-worked teachers.

Table 26. Student suspension data (2015-2021) at MRHS.

Reason | Category Name	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Long suspension	**102**	**113**	**86**	**100**	**88**	**60**	**61**
Criminal behaviour relation to the school	9	11	5	3	4	1	2
Persistent or serious misbehaviour	35	45	29	42	31	22	20
Physical violence	51	47	48	50	53	34	33
Possession or use of illegal substance	3	4	1	1	-	2	1
Prohibited weapon, firearm or knife	4	4	2	4	-	1	4
Use of implement as a weapon	-	2	1	-	-	-	1
Short suspension	**157**	**136**	**181**	**182**	**165**	**165**	**109**
Aggressive behaviour	108	94	132	141	118	134	63
Continued disobedience	49	42	49	41	47	31	46
Total	**259**	**249**	**267**	**282**	**253**	**225**	**170**

The official suspension data from the school indicates a declining trend in both long and short suspensions. This data was challenged by staff during focus groups, with some claiming that the decline was due to a relaxation in expectations and consequences for student behaviour.

Data from student focus groups during 2019-2021 demonstrated a perception that their learning was being compromised by a loss of (quality) teachers, deteriorating student behaviour, and stressed out and over-worked teachers.

Student well-being is fragile. The student questionnaire data indicates that students are resilient yet focus group data draws attention to the complexity of well-being and how it is significantly influenced by others.

Summary

Staff well-being has been a major casualty of consolidation project. There are many aspects to this well-being crisis. The announcement was poorly handled compromising staff experience, early implementation was less than optimal and too much attention has been focused on trying to make the model work rather than achieving the goal of improving student outcomes.

In contrast, student well-being has been sustained, although they are aware of the impact the reform has had on staff. The fragility of student well-being will need constant monitoring.

Working together across sites has proven difficult, and combined with increasing workload in education, there remains significant challenges for staff well-being, but some positive signs of a shift.

Teaching and Learning

Source: Murrumbidgee Regional High School - Stage 1 completed project (nsw.gov.au)

> *Have we even merged? It is not about what Griffith or Wade used to do, but what is Murrumbidgee doing?*
> Student, Dec 2019

You cannot improve outcomes without attention to teaching and learning – the core business of schooling. It is well-established that the fastest route to improved outcomes is through attention to the quality of instruction in classroom.[35]

Consistent issues raised with the research team include the absence of equivalent teaching and learning programs across sites, inconsistent teacher judgement or behaviours, and the lack of a shared MRHS culture of teaching and teachers' work. This has flow on effects to students.

[35] See: Robinson VMJ, Lloyd CA, Rowe KJ. The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 2008;44(5):635-674. doi:10.1177/0013161X08321509

Emphasis on academic success

Table 20, earlier in report, displayed the data for 'Emphasis on academic success (leadership), in the following three tables the focus is on teachers (27), students (28) and parents (29).

Part of understanding the success of MRHS in improving outcomes for public secondary school students in Griffith is attention to the expectations staff hold and their perceptions of colleagues, students, and parents to achieving the best outcomes.

The 'Emphasis on academic success (teachers)' data indicates a very low percentage of teachers responding to the items with high or very high. Each item is at or lower than it was in the 2018 benchmark, and all items are well below the national average.

Table 27. Emphasis on academic success (teachers)

	Percentage of teachers indicating high / very high				
	Australia	2018 (*n*=92)	2019 (*n*=80)	2020 (*n*=57)	2021 (*n*=83)
Teachers' understanding of the school's curricular goals	71.3	43.5	27.2	36.9	31.7
Teachers' degree of success in implementing the school's curriculum goals	64.2	41.3	24.4	36.7	29.2
Teachers' expectations of student achievement	65.3	38.0	32.5	36.8	37.5
Teachers' working together to improve student achievement	63.6	42.4	30.9	39.5	33.7
Teachers' ability to inspire students	56.8	32.6	21.3	38.6	32.8

The 'Emphasis on academic success (students)' data is lower than teachers. As with the teacher data, it is well below the national average. There was no significant difference between the two sites (descriptive and comparative data can be found in the statistical annex of this report).

The low number of staff indicating high or very high is problematic and requires intervention if the desired improvement in outcomes is to be achieved by students at MRHS.

Outside of school factors have been well-established as having an impact on student outcomes. Table 29 displays data from the teacher survey relating

to the 'Emphasis on academic success (parents). The low level of parental emphasis on academic success is contrary to focus group and submission data from parents and community members.

Table 28. Emphasis on academic success (students)

	Australia	Percentage of teachers indicating high / very high 2018 (*n*=92)	2019 (*n*=80)	2020 (*n*=57)	2021 (*n*=83)
Students' desire to do well in school	35.3	13.1	6.3	14.3	8.4
Students' ability to reach the school's academic goals	36.8	18.4	15.0	29.8	20.3
Students' respect for classmates who excel at school	44.0	21.7	9.9	18.4	18.4

Table 29. Emphasis on academic success (parents)

	Australia	Percentage of teachers indicating high / very high 2018 (*n*=92)	2019 (*n*=80)	2020 (*n*=57)	2021 (*n*=83)
Parental involvement in school activities	21.7	6.5	4.9	5.4	4.8
Parental commitment to ensure that students are ready to learn	25.0	5.5	3.7	7.3	2.5
Parental expectations of student achievement	40.7	20.7	13.6	26.8	15.9
Parental pressure of the school to maintain high academic standards	39.1	20.7	23.5	24.6	21.7

The data generated from the teacher questionnaire relating to the emphasis on academic success of leadership, teachers, students, and parents is not positive. All measures are well below national benchmarks and potentially concerning for the consolidation reform and its agenda of improving student outcomes.

To better understand the teaching and learning conditions it is necessary to gather students' motivation for learning and their perceptions of teacher support.

Motivation and support

Research has demonstrated that students cope far better with consolidation reforms than other groups. Table 30 displays the students' achievement motivation measure data generated through the annual student questionnaire. Throughout the evaluation period (2018-2021), students' self-reporting of their achievement motivation has remained constant, albeit slightly lower than national benchmark.

Table 30. Students' achievement motivation (2018-2021)

	Percentage of students who reported agree/strongly agree with the following statements									
	I want top grades in most or all of my classes		I want to be able to select from among the best opportunities available when I graduate		I want to be the best, whatever I do		I see myself as an ambitious person		I want to be one of the best students in my class	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
2018	84.6	(.03)	89.0	(.03)	85.4	(.03)	73.4	(.03)	73.3	(.03)
2019	83.1	(.03)	90.1	(.03)	84.4	(.03)	70.1	(.03)	71.1	(.04)
2020	82.2	(.02)	93.2	(.03)	83.1	(.03)	70.5	(.03)	69.1	(.02)
2021	83.2	(.02)	89.7	(.03)	83.0	(.03)	72.6	(.03)	73.4	(.03)
Australia	89.2	(.60)	95.8	(.60)	86.7	(.50)	81.0	(.50)	74.2	(.40)
OECD	83.4	(.10)	92.7	(.10)	65.3	(.10)	71.1	(.10)	59.2	(.10)

Motivation is impacted by the perceived degree of teacher support for learning. Table 31 displays the data from the student questionnaire relating to the perceived teacher support for student learning throughout the evaluation period.

It is unlikely to have 'all lessons' optimised, but scores of 12.6-15.3 per cent of students indicating that 'The teachers shows an interest in every student's learning' in all lessons is arguably lower than might be expected. However, if taking 'most lessons' and 'all lessons' as an appropriate response, greater than 50 per cent of students indicated the perception of being supported by their teachers.

Across both achievement motivation and perceived teacher support there is sufficient infrastructure to assist student learning.

Teaching is however a collective endeavour. Even if it appears as an individual task, it is the support of colleagues and the collaborative environment that improves teaching. Table 32 displays the data for the 'Working with other teachers' scale from the teachers' questionnaire. As with all measures, MRHS scores at a level below the national average.

Table 31. Perceived teacher support

	Year	Percentage of students who reported perceived frequency of teacher support			
		Never or hardly ever	Some lessons	Most lessons	All lessons
The teacher shows an interest in every student's learning	2018	9.4	34.3	39.0	15.3
	2019	12.0	36.7	37.2	14.1
	2020	6.7	39.6	41.1	12.6
	2021	6.3	35.7	42.7	15.3
The teacher gives extra help when students need it	2018	8.3	20.7	41.0	27.7
	2019	9.0	29.7	40.5	20.8
	2020	5.2	36.1	38.5	20.2
	2021	6.6	28.2	45.5	24.1
The teacher helps students with their learning	2018	6.0	17.2	39.8	34.9
	2019	7.7	19.2	44.5	28.5
	2020	3.4	26.0	44.2	26.4
	2021	5.1	25.5	37.5	31.8
The teacher continues teaching until students understand the material	2018	11.3	27.0	39.3	20.6
	2019	14.7	33.9	32.4	19.0
	2020	10.6	35.7	33.8	19.8
	2021	9.9	34.4	35.9	19.7
The teacher gives students an opportunity to express their opinions	2018	10.0	30.4	35.6	22.2
	2019	14.9	30.7	36.7	17.8
	2020	12.1	33.0	40.8	14.1
	2021	10.4	31.0	39.8	20.1

Table 32. Working with other teachers

	Australia	Percentage of teachers indicating often / very often			
		2018 (*n*=92)	2019 (*n*=80)	2020 (*n*=57)	2021 (*n*=83)
Discuss how to teach a particular topic	72.8	59.8	53.9	68.4	60.3
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials	68.4	57.6	45.1	59.6	44.5
Share what I have learned about my experience	65.7	66.3	47.5	77.2	54.3
Visit another classroom to learn more about teaching	18.8	26.1	22.5	23.2	12.0
Work together to try out new ideas	44.1	44.6	31.3	48.3	32.9
Work as a group on implementing the curriculum	71.0	53.3	47.5	64.9	44.5
Work with teachers from other grades to ensure continuity in learning	47.1	39.1	27.9	33.9	28.9

Variability in teaching expectations and support for students has been a consistent message during the focus groups over the period 2019-2021. It was an increasingly common topic for student focus groups in 2019-2020.

The absence of MRHS specific teaching and learning programs, rather than adopting a Griffith or Wade site program, created difficulty in ensuring consistent teacher judgement and practice across sites. This is not to say that classes need to look the same across sites, but there needs to be equivalence of programs so that students are not disadvantaged based on site of enrolment.

Inconsistent expectations from students (e.g., quality and quantity of work), teachers (e.g., feedback, supports / scaffolds), and resources / materials (e.g., descriptions, marking criteria) create not just inequities for students, but a negative perception of some teachers, faculties, or sites – all with implications for the reputation and profile of MRHS.

Student outcomes – higher school certificate

The goal of the school consolidation was improving outcomes for public secondary school students in Griffith. There are many possible measures of school success. For NSW secondary schools, the Higher School Certificate (HSC) is a key marker. Table 33 displays the distribution of students across achievement bands in the period 2015-2020 (with the period post-reform shaded). Cohort effects make it difficult to compare year-by-year results, but overall MRHS remains under-represented in the top two bands and over-represented in the bottom two. This has not changed since the reform, however there is yet to be an enrolling class graduate from MRHS.

Table 33. HSC performance distribution across Bands 1-6+ (2015-2021)

Year		N	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Band 6+
2015	MRHS State	133	7.2 4.2	13.7 10.0	27.4 22.9	33.0 28.0	13.5 21.0	2.8 7.4
2016	MRHS State	131	4.8 4.4	15.1 9.8	25.1 22.7	30.3 27.2	20.1 21.6	2.2 7.7
2017	MRHS State	147	7.4 5.2	16.4 10.1	28.9 20.6	24.9 27.3	17.5 22.4	3.4 8.0
2018	MRHS State	99	3.3 4.1	10.9 10.6	30.1 21.8	32.6 27.3	18.4 22.6	3.0 7.2
2019	MRHS State	108	6.2 3.8	17.7 10.9	23.0 22.7	31.1 27.3	16.6 21.3	3.2 7.5
2020	MRHS State	116	4.4 4.3	17.5 11.2	24.5 22.2	28.5 27.7	20.5 21.6	1.3 7.3
2021	MRHS State	109	10.9 4.0	13.9 10.2	31.9 22.3	25.6 27.6	13.4 22.3	4.4 13.6

To further nuance the HSC performance of students from MRHS, below is a series of figure and tables displaying data at the individual subject level, 2014-2020.

Across all subjects, cohort size can create fluctuations in scores. The figures and tables are provided as a snapshot and do not necessarily reflect the weighted means.

The data is reported at the state, school (MRHS), and similar school level to gain a better understanding of the performance of students at MRHS. The red partitioning line reflects the timing of the announcement of the consolidation project.

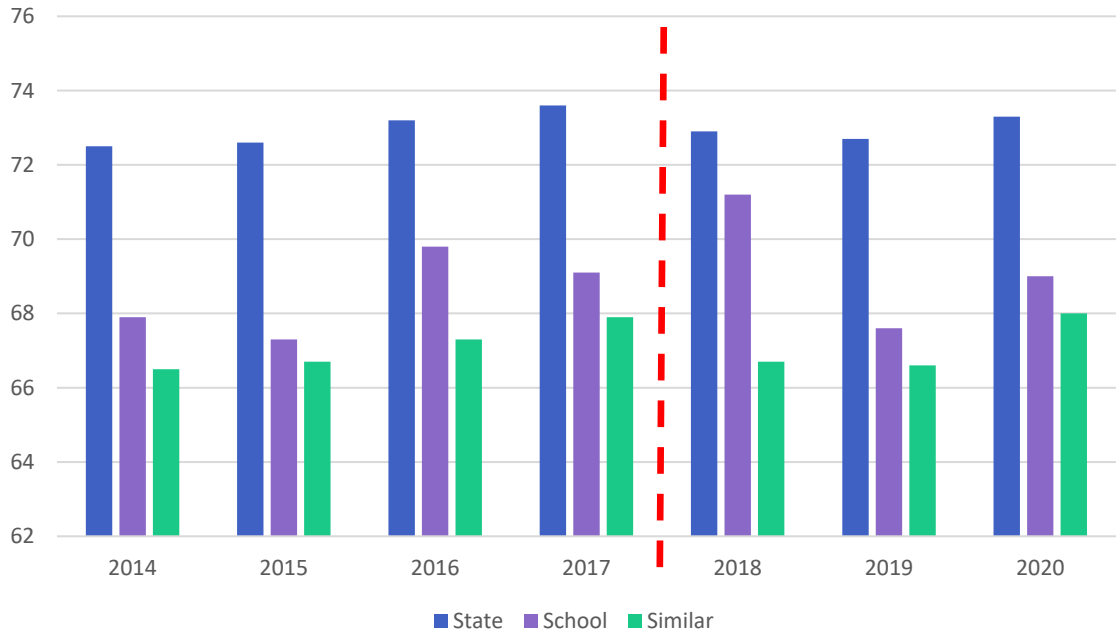


Fig. 14. Average English HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Table 34. Average English (Advanced, Standard) HSC Score, MRHS 2014-2020

Course		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Advanced	State	80.2	80.2	80.1	80.5	80.1	80.0	80.8
	MRHS	**75.9**	**76.2**	**74.7**	**76.3**	**73.9**	**76.5**	**75.9**
	Similar	74.1	74.4	73.0	75.0	74.5	74.1	75.3
Standard	State	65.9	65.7	66.9	67.3	66.7	67.3	68.1
	MRHS	**63.2**	**60.9**	**64.9**	**64.1**	**68.6**	**66.3**	**63.9**
	Similar	62.8	63.1	64.6	64.5	63.1	64.0	66.0

While MRHS students consistently performance below state average, they do perform better (or at least comparable) to similar schools. The enduring challenge is how to address the disparity gap between the state average and the school performance.

Figure 15 displays the average HSC data Mathematics and Table 35 provides nuance at the course level.

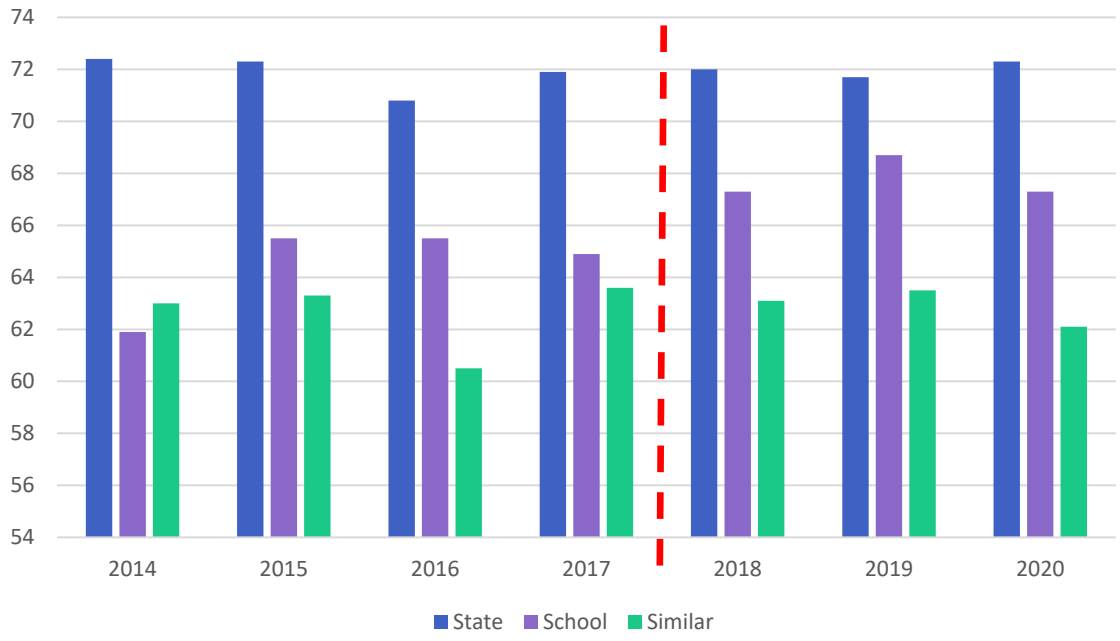


Fig. 15. Average mathematics HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Table 35. Average mathematics (extension, advanced, standard) HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Course		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Extension 1	State	81.8	82.4	82.6	80.3	80.3	80.6	79.1
	MRHS	**65.8**	**70.2**	**64.0**	**82.0**	**76.0**	**59.5**	**71.4**
	Similar	69.6	70.3	64.7	72.4	68.1	56.2	62.6
Advanced	State	77.3	77.1	76.8	76.8	77.4	76.9	77.7
	MRHS	**70.0**	**76.7**	**70.5**	**66.9**	**75.5**	**71.4**	**72.4**
	Similar	68.4	67.9	63.4	70.5	69.7	66.1	66.9
Standard	State	65.8	65.5	64.9	64.9	66.4	67.7	65.1
	MRHS	**60.3**	**62.4**	**63.8**	**63.7**	**65.5**	**69.4**	**64.9**
	Similar	60.8	61.2	59.5	60.4	60.6	63.3	60.5

Figure 16 displays the data for science, with Table 36 nuancing the data to individual course level.

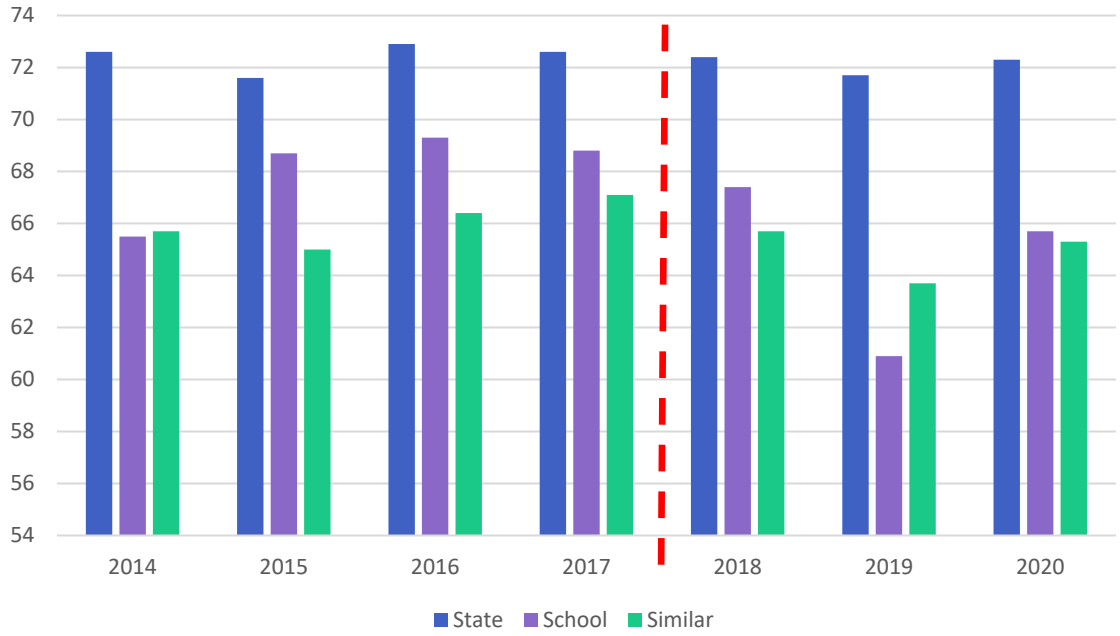


Fig. 16. Average science HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Table 36. Average science (biology, chemistry, physics) HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Course		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Biology	State	70.3	69.6	72.3	72.7	72.6	69.9	70.8
	MRHS	**65.3**	**67.5**	**72.7**	**71.4**	**69.1**	**64.6**	**65.5**
	Similar	65.4	64.7	66.7	67.5	66.2	64.4	65.5
Chemistry	State	75.5	75.5	75.2	74.7	74.4	74.7	74.8
	MRHS	**62.3**	**67.7**	**69.3**	**70.7**	**64.6**	**66.3**	**57.7**
	Similar	65.5	67.8	66.5	67.6	65.1	64.1	65.7
Physics	State	73.2	72.2	72.1	72.8	72.6	72.1	73.0
	MRHS	**74.3**	**66.5**	**64.7**	**60.7**	**69.4**	**53.0**	**69.3**
	Similar	65.8	63.7	63.6	65.7	64.4	60.3	63.3

The consistent trend across English, mathematics, science, and human society and its environment (Figure 17 and Table 37 on next page) is that MRHS students perform comparably, and often better, than similar schools but below the state average. The consolidation reform is intended to reduce this disparity gap.

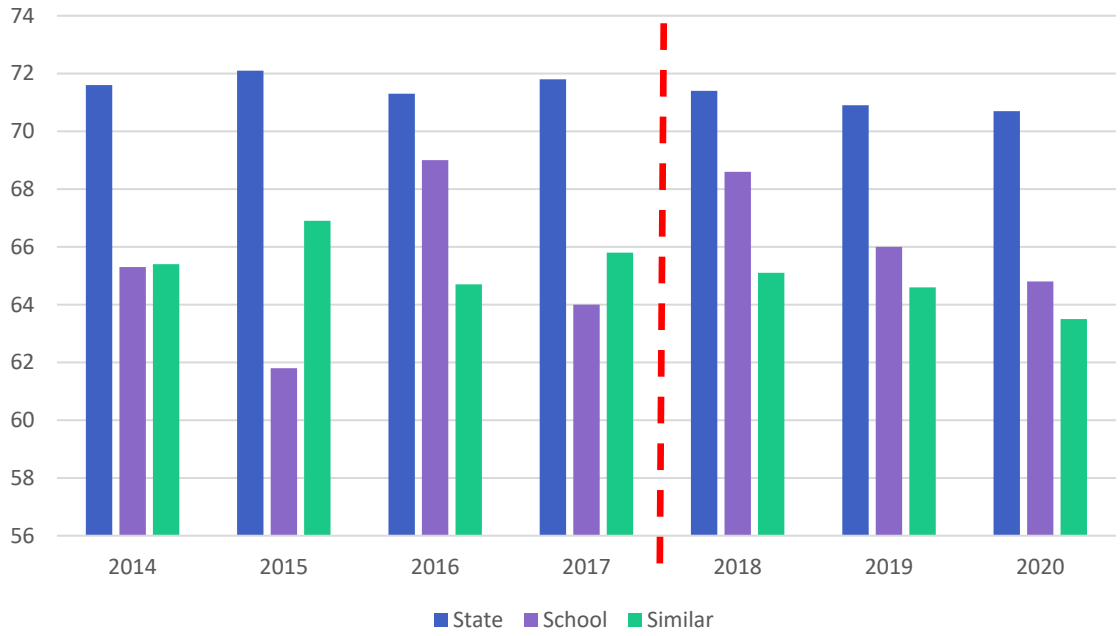


Fig 17. Average HSIE HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Table 37. Average HSIE (business studies, legal studies, modern history, society and culture) HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Course		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Business Studies	State	71.4	71.2	70.6	70.2	70.7	68.6	68.6
	MRHS	**68.0**	**66.8**	**67.9**	**63.9**	**68.3**	**65.8**	**57.7**
	Similar	66.6	67.4	64.4	65.1	65.7	63.2	61.5
Legal Studies	State	70.7	72.5	72.3	73.7	72.2	70.6	72.1
	MRHS	**62.7**	**64.4**	**67.4**	**66.3**	**79.2**	**60.5**	**65.8**
	Similar	65.0	67.0	65.0	68.6	65.2	64.8	65.4
Modern History	State	72.3	72.7	71.4	70.6	70.5	70.3	68.9
	MRHS	**74.5**	**58.8**	**66.6**	**65.7**	**65.6**	**68.5**	**64.4**
	Similar	63.8	66.5	64.2	63.4	63.4	62.6	59.1
Society and Culture	State	76.1	76.8	77.0	76.7	76.4	76.0	76.3
	MRHS	**86.3**	**60.6**	**76.3**	**75.9**	**72.3**	**78.0**	**73.5**
	Similar	70.3	70.7	70.1	73.2	69.5	72.0	70.1

The final subject included in this snapshot of HSC performance is Technical and Applied Studies (TAS). As with other subjects, cohort size changes make time series comparison difficult, however Figure 18 displays positive outcomes for MRHS in TAS in 2018 and 2020 with performance comparable to anywhere in the state, and consistently above similar schools since 2016.

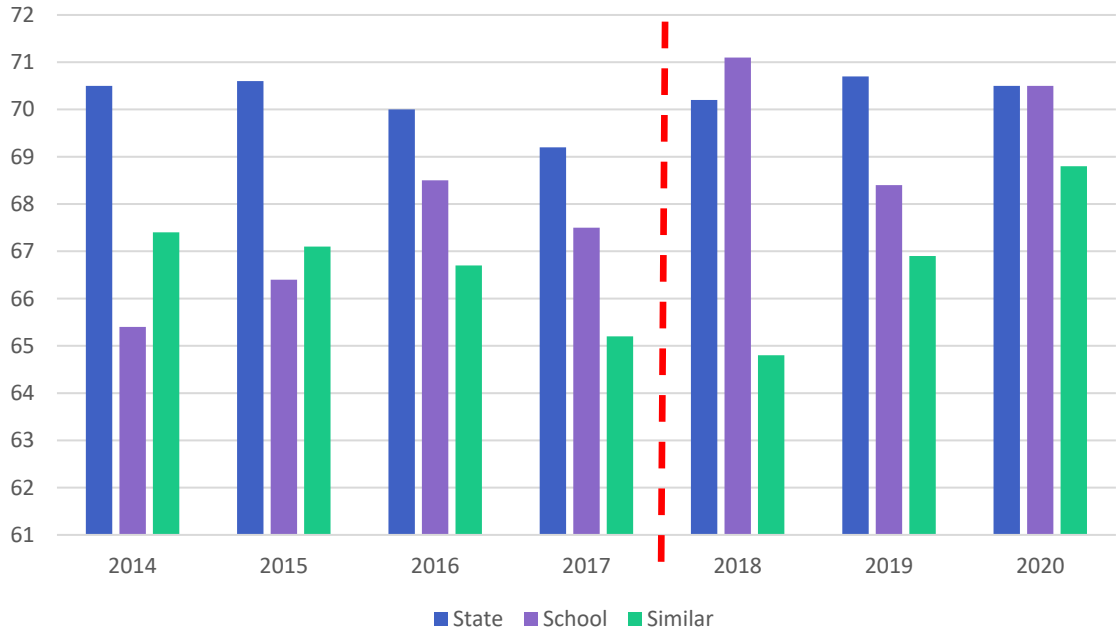


Fig. 18. Average TAS HSC score, MRHS 2014-2020

Table 37. Average TAS (creative arts) score, MRHS 2014-2020

Course		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Creative Arts	State	76.5	77.1	77.5	77.8	78.8	78.3	78.9
	MRHS	**71.7**	**75.4**	**74.5**	**71.5**	**74.4**	**76.2**	**79.8**
	Similar	72.9	74.4	74.0	74.5	74.9	74.4	76.5

Student outcomes – NAPLAN

Student performance in NAPLAN, while only a single measure provides further context to outcomes at MRHS. Specific attention is granted to Year 7 Reading and Numeracy, then Year 9 Reading, Writing, and growth.

Figure 19 displays the distribution of MRHS students across the bottom two bands, middle two bands, and top two bands in the period 2010-2021. While there has been some movement in the percentages, when compared with the state and similar schools MRHS remains over-represented in the bottom two and middle two bands and under-represented in the top two bands. There is an opportunity to move a proportion of those middle two band students into the top two bands.

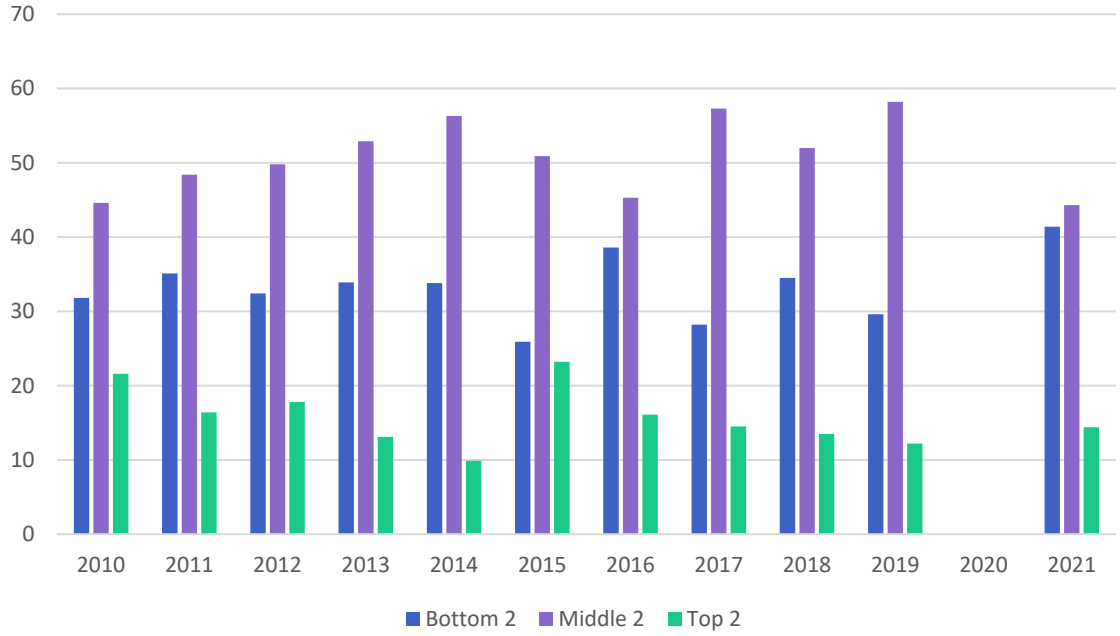


Fig 19. Year 7 Reading NAPLAN, distribution by bands, 2010-2021

Similarly, in Year 7 Numeracy, public secondary school students are over-represented in the bottom and middle two bands compared with the state and similar schools (Figure 20). Since 2016, the percentage of students in the top two bands has matched similar schools – whereas previously MRHS linked students were higher.

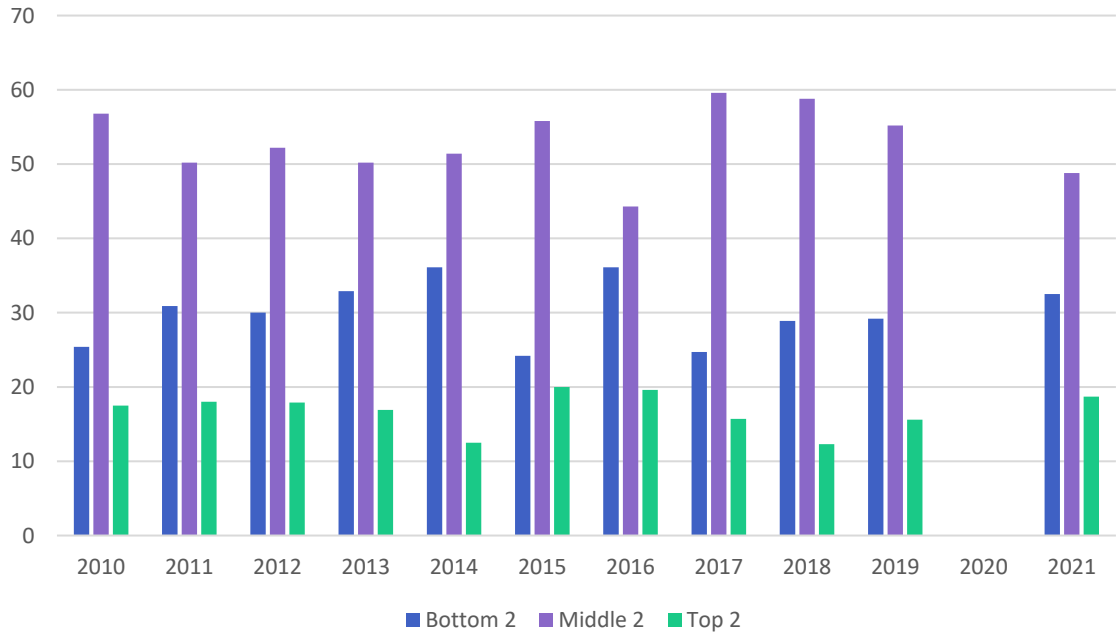


Fig 20. Year 7 Numeracy NAPLAN, distribution by bands, 2010-2021

As Year 9 represents a mid-point of secondary studies, student performance provides better insights into practices at MRHS. Consistent with the Year 7 data, public secondary school students in Griffith are over-represented in the bottom two and middle two bands and under-represented in the top two.

In Reading, three of the last five years (excluding 2020) the number of students in the top two bands is below not only the state but also similar schools.

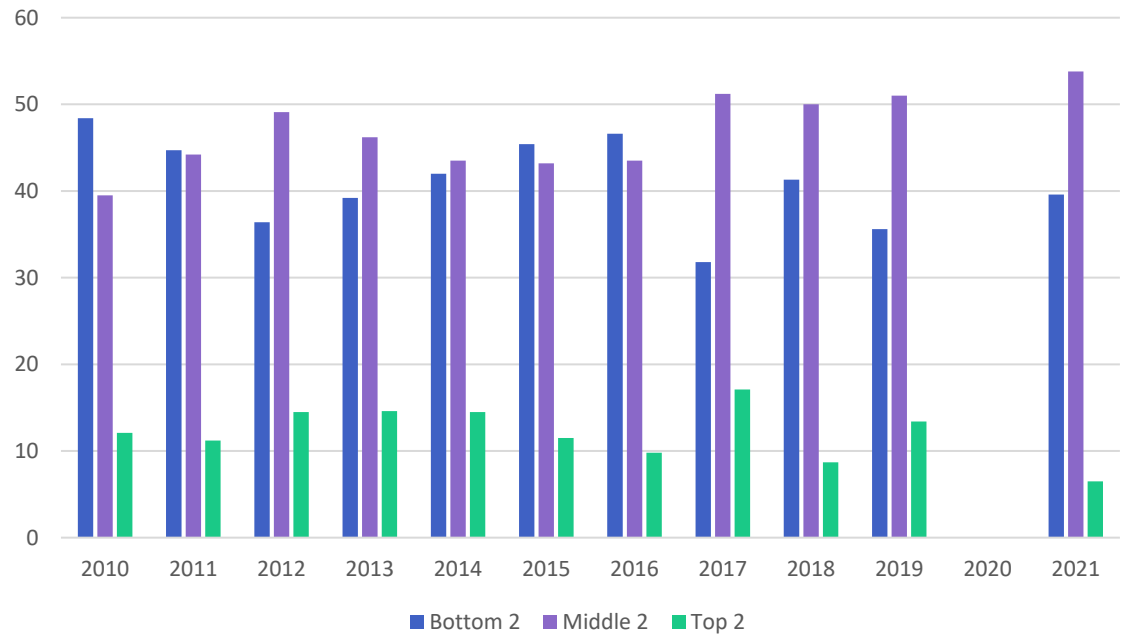


Fig. 21. Year 9 Reading NAPLAN, distribution by bands, 2010-2021

In Numeracy, the same pattern remains with an over-representation in the bottom and middle two bands and under-representation in the top two bands. There has been a reduction in the number of students achieving in the bottom two bands (more pronounced than this improvement in Reading).

The fewer students in the bottom two bands have been matched with an equal (or greater) rise in the number of students achieving in the middle two bands.

Achievement in the top two bands has fluctuated between cohorts from a high of 16 per cent (2015) to a low of 6.6 per cent (2021).

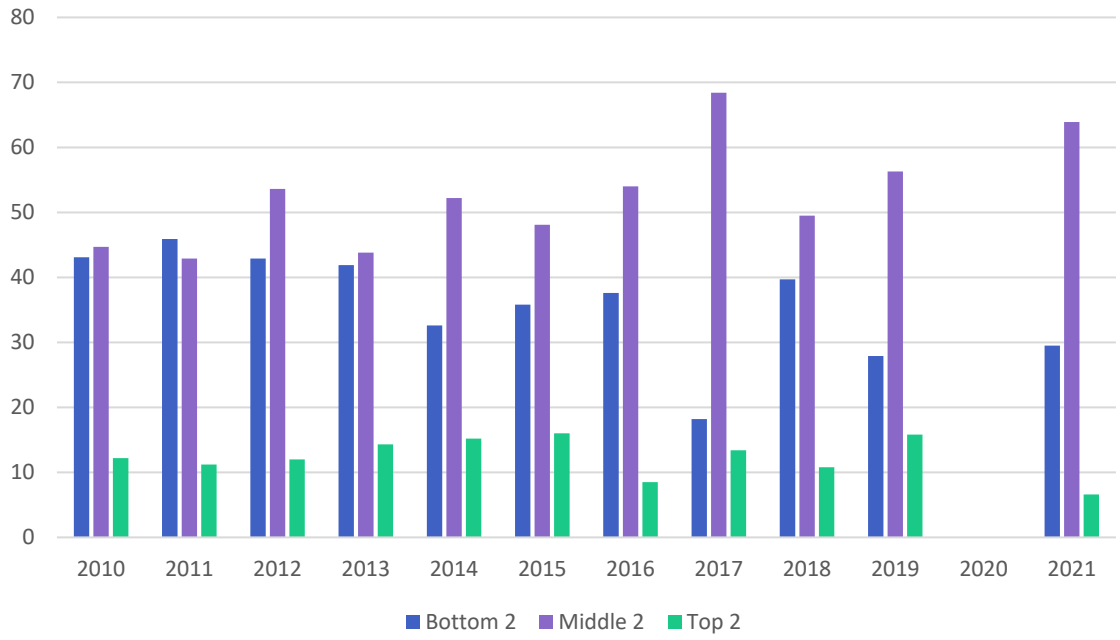


Fig 22. Year 9 Mathematics NAPLAN, distribution by bands, 2010-2021

Growth between Year 7 and 9 is an indicator of the impact of education at MRHS. Continuing to focus on Reading and Numeracy, Figures 23 and 24 displays the percentage of students achieving at or above expected growth in between Year 7 and 9.

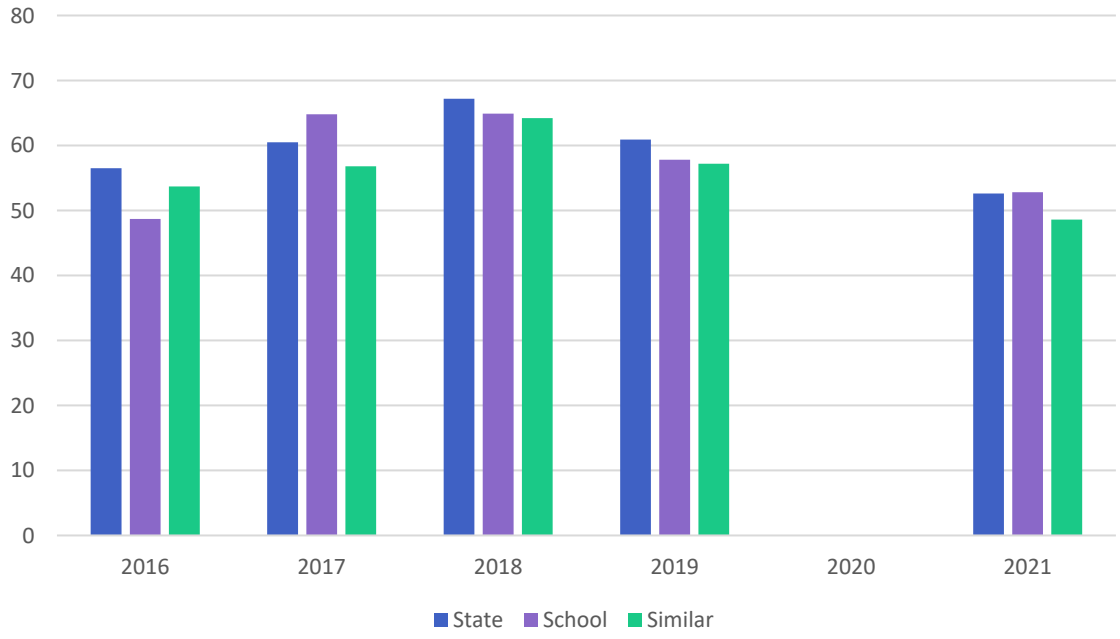


Fig. 23. Percentage 'at or above expected growth' Year 7-9 NAPLAN Reading

The percentage of students achieving 'at or above expected growth' in Reading has increased since 2016 but has been declining the last three years. In 2021 it was comparable with the state average.

In Numeracy, the percentage of students achieving 'at or above expected growth' in greater than 2016 and has been increasing for the last three years (although below a 2017 peak). In 2021, the achievement of the students at MRHS was greater than that of the state average and similar schools.

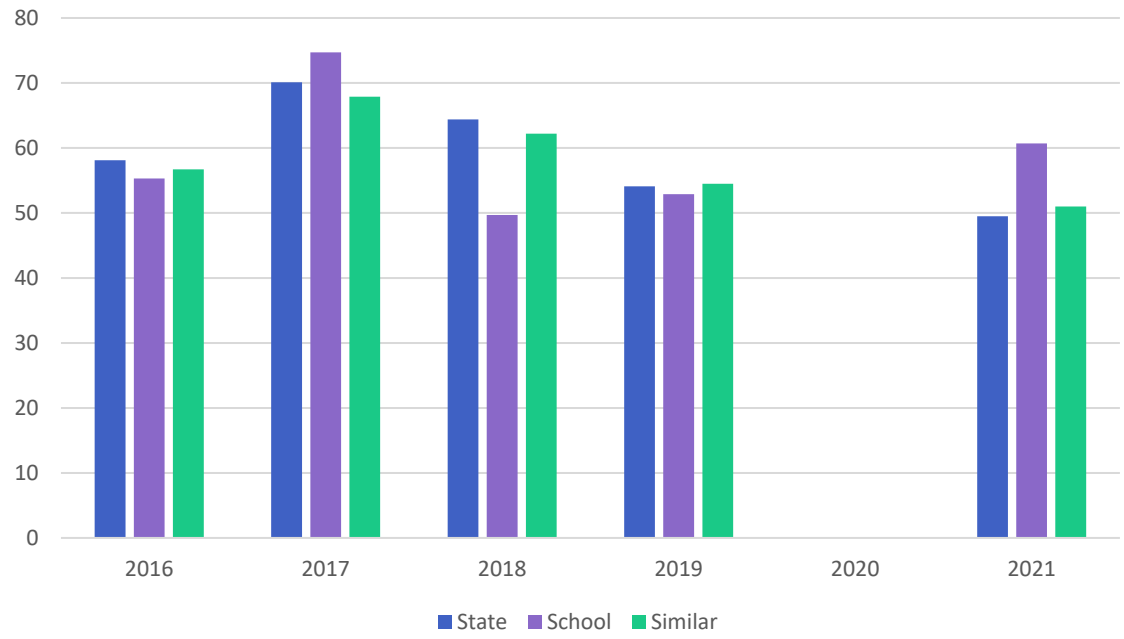


Fig. 24. Percentage 'at or above expected growth' Year 7-9 NAPLAN Numeracy

The first cohort enrolled in Year 7 as MRHS reached Year 9 NAPLAN in 2021. While there was a full school of students, this cohort were the foundation class for MRHS and will be the first to graduate having attended the school from Year 7 to Year 12. This makes their performance in Year 9 NAPLAN (2021) of significance as it is the first large-scale assessment growth data for MRHS.

Figure 25 below displays the percentage of students performing 'at or above expected growth' compared to similar schools and the state.

The most significant data in this figure is that in four of the five domains (reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy), the percentage of students performing at or above expected growth at MRHS exceeds the state average and that of similar schools.

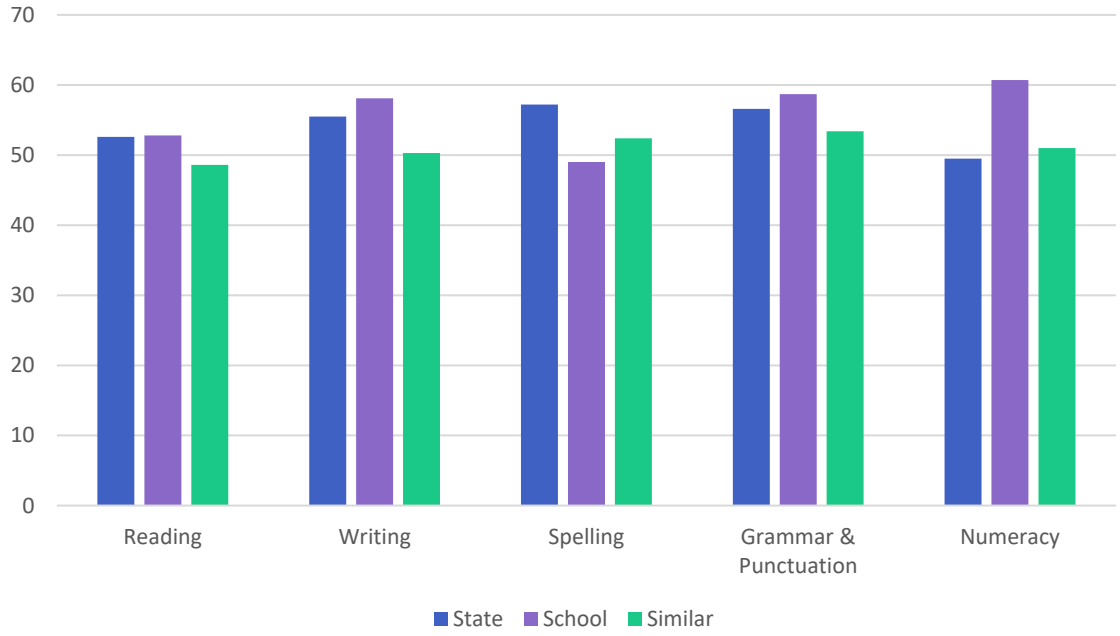


Fig. 25. At or above expected growth, Year 9 NAPLAN MRHS 2021

Despite the disruptions from the consolidation reform, declining staff well-being, building work on sites, the students enrolled in MRHS have performed as well as anywhere in the state.

Summary

Teacher perceptions of the emphasis on academic success of colleagues, students and parents is lower than might be expected, but this is potentially correlated with poor staff well-being. In addition, there is potential in bringing staff together to work collaboratively on teaching and learning initiatives.

Students' achievement motivation has remained stable optimal during the consolidation process. There is room for improvement in the perception of teacher support for students.

Student outcomes have remained stable since the consolidation. There is an enduring pattern of over representation in the bottom and middle two bands of NAPLAN and similar with HSC. NAPLAN data is however showing a positive trend in reducing the percentage of students in the bottom two bands with potential to further shift those in the middle bands towards the top two. Most significantly, 2021 Year 9 NAPLAN growth (the first complete MRHS cohort) performed as well as anywhere in the state.

Curriculum and Pathways

Source: [Murrumbidgee Regional High School - Stage 1 completed project (nsw.gov.au)]

> *This was supposed to be about creating more opportunities and choice. I am just not seeing that.*
> Parent / Community member, Dec 2019

One of the articulated benefits of the school consolidation reform was that MRHS would be able to offer greater curriculum choices that would have an impact on the post-school destination outcomes for students in the town. This would be achieved by harnessing the resources – both teachers and students – of the two sites. Currently, the consolidation has yet to offer an enhanced suite of curriculum offerings creating uncertainty for different groups.

New curriculum initiatives (e.g., passion electives) served as a distraction rather than improvement as the school consolidated resources.

It is too soon to comment on the impact of the new build on post-school destination pathways, especially as MRHS is yet to have a newly enrolled cohort graduate.

Subject choice

For parents / community members, and more importantly students, any perception of a reduction in subject choice is not desirable. From data generated in focus groups with students, staff, and parents and community members over the period 2018-2021 there is a perception that the subject choices available for students, particularly in the senior years, have at best remained constant and at worst been reduced since the school consolidation reform took place.

It is difficult to extract historical data on course offerings. Using Annual School Reports (which only report those courses with >10 enrolments), as these are crucial documents for how external people judge schools, Table 38 displays the course offered at MRHS.

While the data in Table 38 is incomplete, it does point to a significant issue for the school with regards to curriculum offerings. If the range of course offered is not expanded through the consolidation this potentially compromises the attractiveness of the school.

Table 38. Senior courses offered at MRHS

Course	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Agriculture						
Ancient History						
Biology						
Business Studies						
Community & Family Stud						
Drama						
English (Standard)						
English (Advanced)						
Food Technology						
Geography						
German Beginners						
German Continuers						
Hospitality						
Industrial Technology						
Italian Beginners						
Legal Studies						
Mathematics General 2						
Mathematics						
Mathematics Standard 2						
Modern History						
Music 1						
PD / H / PE						
Physics						
Senior Science						
Society and Culture						
Studies of Religion 2U						
Visual Arts						

Further complicating the number of course offerings is the past practice in Griffith that involved students working across both sites (schools at the time) and even with Marian College for subjects with low enrolments. In short, the value-add of the consolidation is not clear for subject choices.

Distance education offerings, such as those from Dubbo or Aurora College, remain an option for students. However, as articulated by some senior students, they are not as effective as having face-to-face communication with a teacher and classmates or having a teacher available on-site to assist with immediate matters.

It is however noted that for a course to run it does require a viable number of students to cover teaching workload. As expressed in previous reports to the school, it has been recommended that MRHS make explicit to students, teachers, parents, and community members what is required for a class to run, and if a class does not run on-site what the options are for students.

New curricular initiatives

With the commencement of MRHS, new initiatives such as Passion Electives and Learning Coaches were introduced to expand the curriculum offerings for students.

Issues regarding these initiatives were raised by staff, students, and parent and community focus groups. Recommendations for scaling back the number of initiatives at MRHS, including Passion Electives and Learning Coaches, were made in November 2018, July 2019, and again in January 2020. It was proposed that greater emphasis be given to establishing shared teaching and learning programs across the two sites (which remains an enduring concern).

The primary concern with add-on initiatives were perceptions of variable quality and inefficient use of instructional time.

Any initiative added to a consolidation reform needs to be assessed for how it explicitly contributes to the objective of improving student outcomes. If it does not generate the necessary capacity or infrastructure to support staff and students in improving outcomes, they should be delayed or abandoned.

To ensure this is the case, MRHS should establish a process to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of any extra-curricular activity and sustain, revise, or dis-establish based on achievement of expected outcomes.

Post-school destination

A long-term goal of the school consolidation is a positive impact on the post-school destination of graduates. It is too early to make a definitive statement on any changes that can be attributed to the consolidation.

Table 39 displays the post-school destination data, as reported by the school, for the period 2018-2020 (following the decision to consolidate).

The cohorts featured in the table were all enrolled under the previous two schools – Griffith and Wade – and the 2019 onwards cohorts graduated as MRHS.

Table 39. Post-school destination data, MRSH 2018-2020

	2018			2019			2020		
	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y10	Y11	Y12
Seeking employment	1	18	11	1	17	11	0	0	15
Employment	6	14	31	6	13	32	15	20	25
TAFE entry	2	4	14	3	4	15	15	5	15
University entry	0	0	38	0	0	39	0	0	20
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	55	40	10
Unknown	0	2	6	0	1	3	15	35	15

Source: MRHS Annual School reports, 2018-2020

Summary

The consolidation reform holds the potential to combine the resources of the two sites to offer public secondary school students in Griffith the broadest possible curriculum.

To this point, there has not been a significant change in the provision and uptake of subject choices at MRHS. There has been some concern from students, staff, and parents and community members that fewer choices have eventuated.

Post-school destination data has not evidenced any substantial changes – within the limits of the data generation process. Issues such the pandemic have potentially impacted the destination of graduates the last two years.

Community Satisfaction

Source: [Murrumbidgee Regional High School - Stage 1 completed project (nsw.gov.au)]

> *Where is the benefit for kids in Griffith? How is this merger improving outcomes?*
> Parent / Community member, Dec 2019

The significance of community satisfaction is heightened in regional, rural, and remote communities. Griffith is no exception. There is also significant flow on effects for communities if families choose to send their children to different schools – often outside of town. Put simply, providing high-quality public secondary education is integral to the social and economic fabric of Griffith.

Consolidating Griffith and Wade High Schools into MRHS has been a controversial topic within the community since at least 2017. Substantial community attention has been focused on the process, its successes, and issues. Community groups have organised to resist the consolidation and the consolidation has divided many within the community.

As key measures of community satisfaction this chapter reports on student attraction and the perceptions of parent and community members, staff and students from focus groups.

Attracting students

An initial measure of the success of MRHS is whether it retains if not advances enrolments in public secondary school in Griffith. Figure 26 displays the enrolment trend (expending Fig. 3) for the period 2004 to 2020 using ACARA data (and supplementing with 2021 enrolment data from the Department of Education, Griffith office). Overall, the school has remained relatively stable during this initial period with a slight decline in 2021.

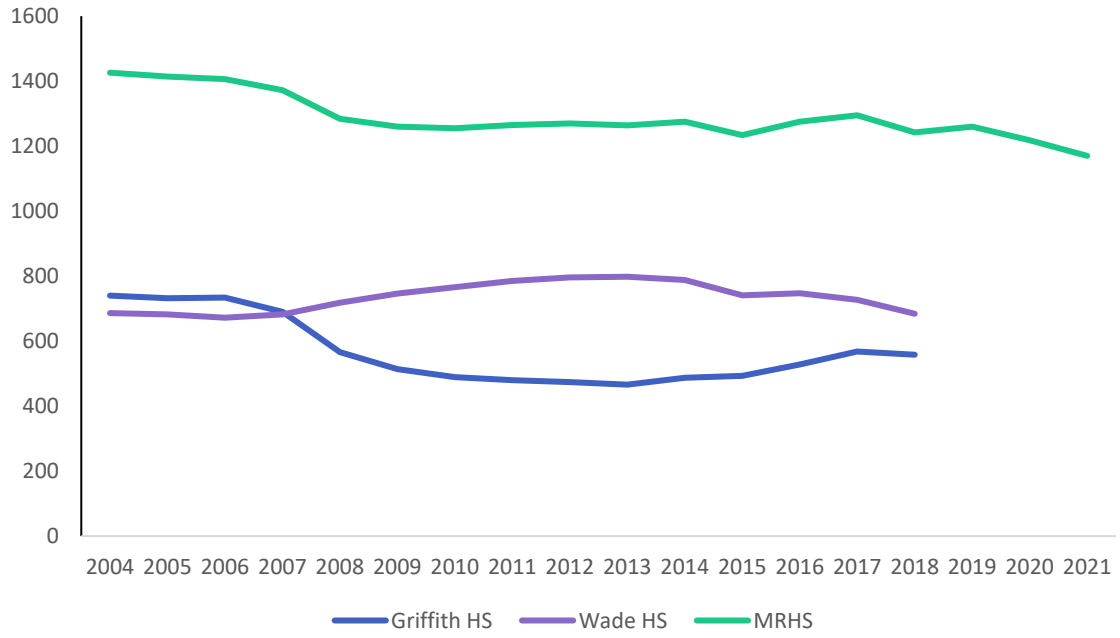


Fig. 26. Enrolment in MRHS, 2004-2021

Concern has been raised that students are exiting public secondary education in Griffith and enrolling in Marian Catholic College (Griffith), Verity Christian College (Griffith) or St Francis De Sales Regional College (Leeton). Consistent feedback from parents and community members and staff focus groups were that multiple buses are taking students to Leeton each day. Table 40 displays the enrolment of Marian, Verity and St Francis in the period 2014-2020 using ACARA data.

Both Marian and St Francis have increased enrolment since 2017 (the decision for the consolidation). Marian's enrolment has increased by 10.7 per cent, and St Francis by 9.3 per cent (exceeding any level since 2014). In the same period, MRHS had decreased by 10.2 per cent. Across Marian, MRHS, Verity and St Francis, 43.3 per cent of all students attend MRHS.

Table 40. Enrolment at major competitor schools, 2014-2021

School	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Marian College	645	657	641	643	655	687	703	712
St Francis	711	711	699	666	649	654	711	728
Verity Christian					25	27	49	95

Source: ACARA school profiles

To better understand the attractiveness of MRHS to students we can investigate the trend of translating public primary school enrolments into secondary enrolments within the town. Table 41 (extending Table 2) draws on data provided by the NSW Department of Education, Griffith Office in August 2020 to show the number of students in years six enrolled in public feeder primary schools that translate into year seven enrolments at MRHS.

Table 41. Translation of Yr 6 public primary school students into Yr 7 at MRHS

Year	Year 6 Enrolments	Year 7 Enrolments	Conversion Rate
2015 – 2016	295	229	77.6
2016 – 2017	311	245	78.8
2017 – 2018	295	224	75.9
2018 – 2019	295	212	71.9
2019 – 2020	321	214	66.7
2020 – 2021	295	170	57.6[36]

Source: NSW Department of Education, Griffith Office

While the number of students in year six has remained relatively constant, the translation into public secondary school in Griffith has been in decline since the decision to consolidate the two high schools. This trend has been amplified since the official commencement of MRHS (Jan 2019) with the 2020-2021 translation rate only 80 per cent of what it was in 2018-2019. This trend is problematic for MRHS and requires immediate action to prevent further slide.

To further nuance this data requires analysis of enrolment within the feeder primary schools to test whether there are other exit points. Figure 27 displays the enrolment data for feeder primary schools for the period 2004-2021.

There is considerable variability in the enrolment across the schools. At face value, there is no immediate observable disruption in enrolments aligning with the consolidation of the public secondary schools. However, Figure 28 provides the data at an aggregate level.

[36] As at 18 August 2021

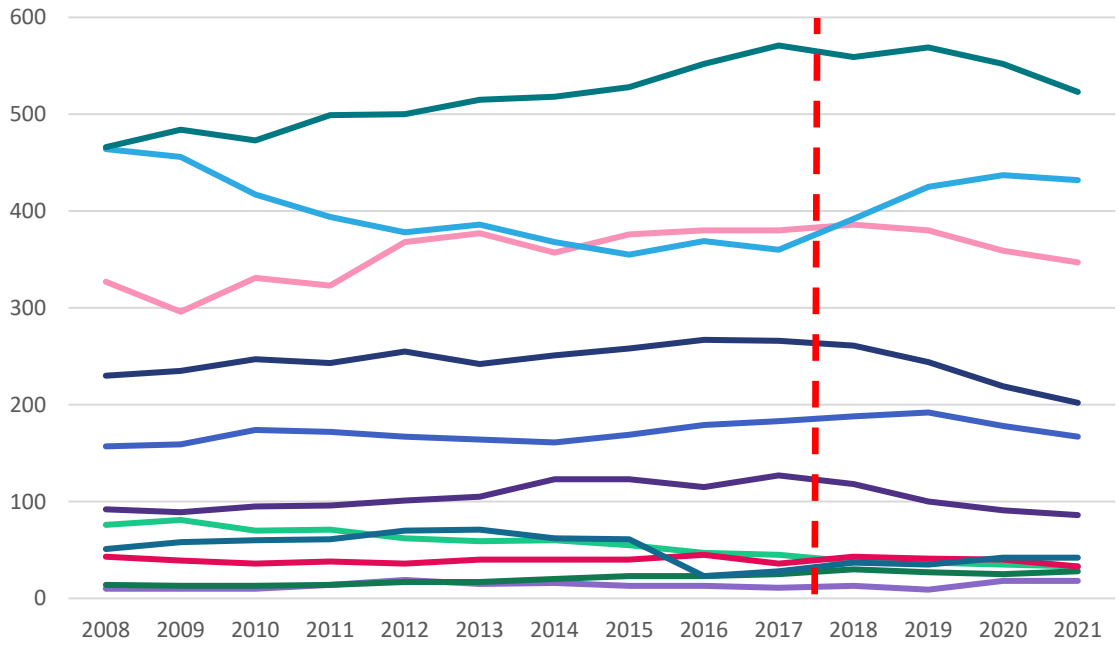


Fig. 27. Enrolment in feeder primary schools (individual schools), 2008-2020

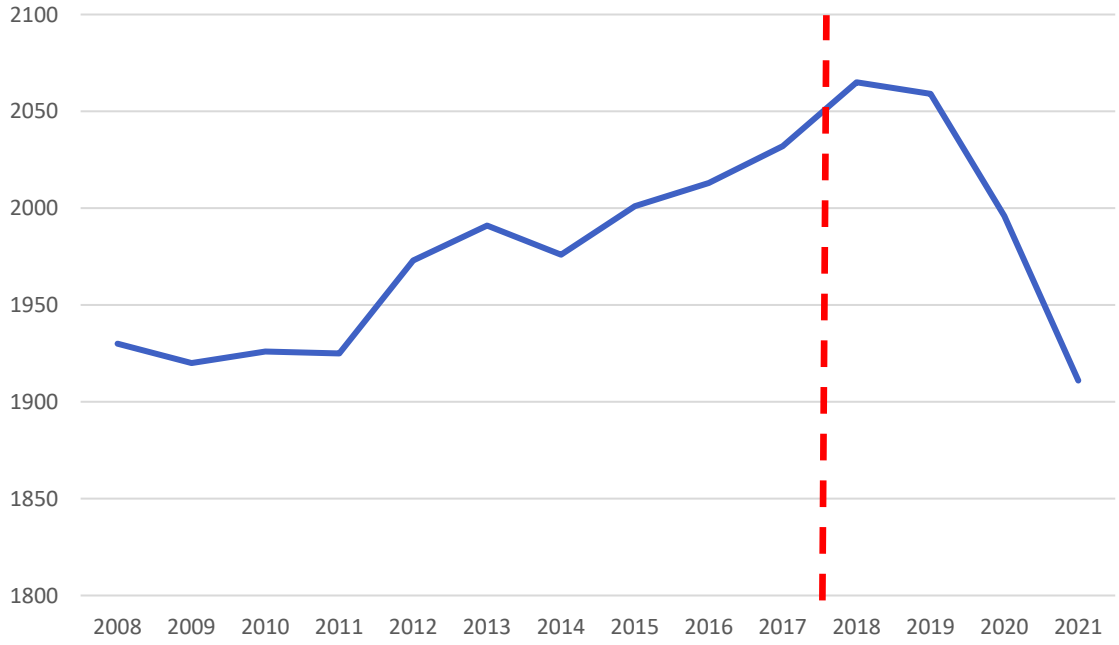


Fig. 28. Enrolment in feeder primary schools (aggregate), 2008-2021

After a peak in 2018, there has been a 7.5 per cent drop in public primary school enrolments. It is however problematic to simply attribute this to the consolidation. Table 41 draws on census data from 2001-2016 to displays the population, average children per family and the distribution of enrolment in public, catholic and independent schools.

Table 41. Census data on Griffith, 2001-2016

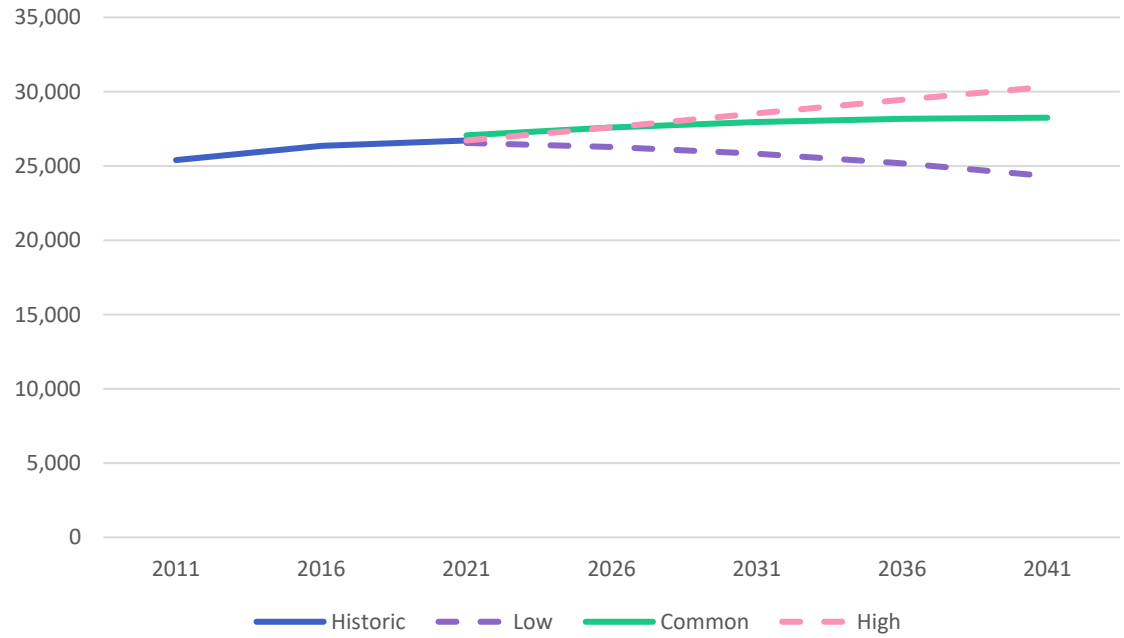
	2001[37]	**2006**[38]	**2011**[39]	**2016**[40]
People	23,805	23,800	24,364	25,641
Families	6,176	6,137	6,310	6,337
Average children per family				
form families with children	2	2	2	2
for all families	0.9	0.9		0.8
Education				
Pre-school	421	449	497	493
Primary – Government	1,792	1,682	1,624	1,641
Primary - Catholic	773	634	611	564
Primary – Other Non Government	7	30	29	20
Secondary – Government	1,154	1,103	1,010	1,005
Secondary - Catholic	425	472	619	588
Secondary – Other Non Government	10	29	34	43

Public schools have been the dominant enroller for children and youth in Griffith for at least the last 20 years (and arguably since the inception of public schooling in the town).

While primary school enrolment has remained relatively stable over the full period (69.7% in 2001; 71.7% in 2006, 71.7% in 2011, 73.8% in 2016), public secondary school market share is below 2001 levels (72.6%) but has remained steady in the last three census (62.5% in 2006, 60.7% in 2011, 61.4% in 2016).

To further understand these shifts in enrolment there is a need to look at population trends in Griffith. Figure 29 draws on historical data (2011 and 2016 ABS census) and NSW Government projections of population (using common-planning assumptions, low- and high-series). Unlike the state average of 1 per growth per year, Griffith is expected to only grow by 0.28 per cent.

[37] 2001 Census Community Profiles: Griffith (C) (abs.gov.au)
[38] 2006 Census Community Profiles: Griffith (C) (abs.gov.au)
[39] 2011 Census QuickStats: Griffith (C) (abs.gov.au)
[40] 2016 Census QuickStats: Griffith (C) (abs.gov.au)



Source: Full NSW population projections –

Fig. 29. Historical and projected population in Griffith LGA (2011-2041)

To bring this data to the specific level for secondary schools, Figure 30 displays the data for the 10-14 year old population in the Griffith LGA in the period 2011-2041. Based on all planning projections (common, low and high) it is anticipated that the number of 10-14 year olds will decline.

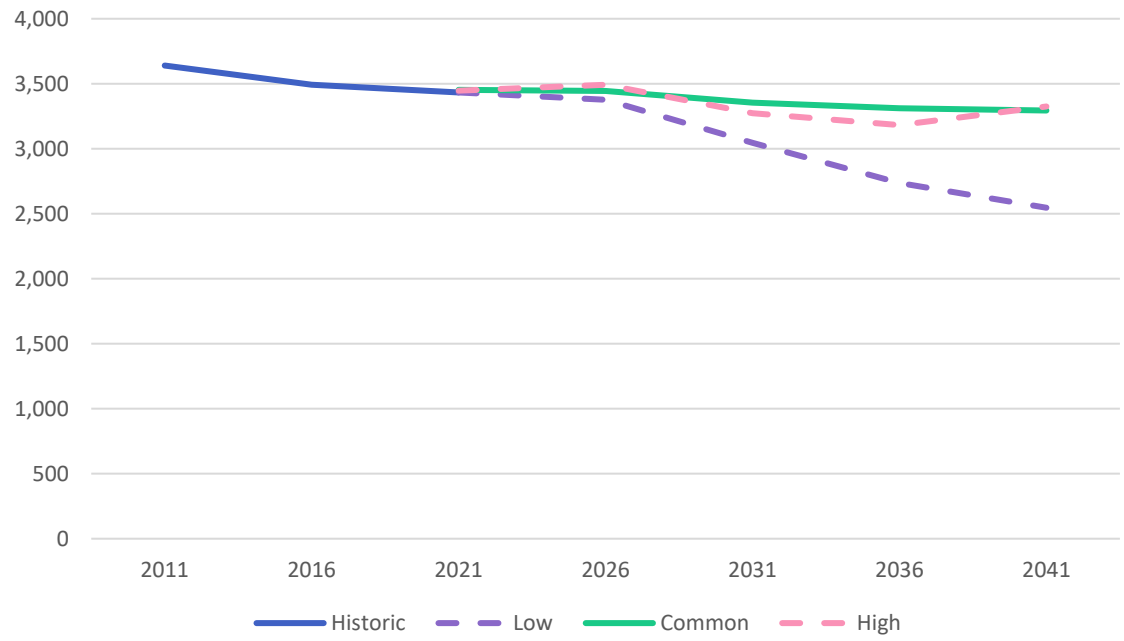


Fig. 30. Historical and projected 10-14 yr old population (2011-2041)

There is complexity in understanding changes in enrolment. In many cases, issues raised by participants were not as supported by the data as might be expected. That said, the underlying issue of the school's attractiveness remains an area of concern. Evidence of the declining translation of public school year six enrolments into year seven at MRHS the following year is an immediate and pressing issue for the school and the Department. Perceptions of the school within the community are significantly important to addressing this issue.

Retention of students

Having attracted students, the next key indicator is retaining them. The two key hinge points in secondary school are retention from Year 10 to Year 11, and Year 10 through to Year 12.

Table 42 displays the retention of students at MRHS (or Griffith and Wade) in the period 2015-2021, sourced from the Department of Education Griffith Office. The consolidation decision was made in 2017. Since that time, the overall retention has improved, and this has primarily been achieved through greater retention of male students (69% in 2017-2018 to 89% in 2020-2021). Female students have fluctuated between 85 and 93 percent.

Table 42. Retention of students (%) from Year 10 into Year 11

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
ALL	89.2 (198/222)	77.0 (151/196)	80.9 (174/215)	80.5 (169/210)	88.0 (192/219)	88 (206/235)
Girls	96 (104/108)	83 (65/78)	93 (99/107)	85 (99/117)	91 (92/101)	86 (95/110)
Boys	82 (94/114)	73 (86/118)	69 (75/108)	75 (70/93)	85 (100/118)	89 (111/125)

Table 43 displays the data for retention from Year 10 through to Year 12 two years later. The overall percentage in 2019-2021 was like 2014-2016, with fluctuations over time. Male students remain more stable than female.

Table 43. Retention of students (%) from year 10 to Year 12

	2014-2016	2015-2017	2016-2018	2017-2019	2018-2020	2019-2021
ALL	58 (134/231)	70 (155/222)	54 (105/196)	63 (136/215)	66 (139/210)	59 (130/219)
Girls	64 (77/121)	83 (90/108)	51 (40/78)	77 (82/107)	74 (86/117)	67 (68/101)
Boys	53 (58/110)	57 (65/114)	55 (65/118)	51 (55/108)	57 (53/93)	53 (62/118)

Perceptions of the school

The public profile of public secondary education in Griffith has taken a substantial hit during the consolidation process. The initial announcement – both its content and the act of delivery – caused great unrest among staff, students, and the community. Trust between the Department and decision-makers and the school and community was arguably at an all-time low. This erosion of trust and goodwill has yet to be restored.

Considerable resistance to the consolidation has been raised by staff and a very vocal – even if minority – group of community members. Numerous articles in the local media and public events have formed part of a campaign against the reform. This resistance has to some extent reduced but remains present.

For a variety of reasons, substantial mis-information about the school circulated within the community. The source of this mis-information or just talking ill of the school were multiple. Lack of information, or slow processes (e.g., the name of the school took a substantial amount of time) created uncertainty. Staff, often – although not always – inadvertently shared conflicting or partial information about the school in the community.

Throughout the entire evaluation period there were groups (both staff and parents and community members) who sought to separate the schools. While this persists, it will be difficult for the MRHS to optimise outcomes.

Importantly, the impact on student outcomes and their well-being needs to be a priority. During the 2021 engagement by the research team students spoke of their disappointment with how the school was being discussed within the community and the negative impact it was having on them.

> ***We [students] are doing our best. The staff are doing their best. It is so sad when there are people out in the community bad mouthing the school and the work we do.***
>
> Student leader, Aug 2021

Building the public profile

Resistance to the consolidation reform started with the initial announcement. This created a situation where the reform was looked upon negatively and distrust in the system meant the school was facing an uphill battle to build a positive public profile.

Significant infrastructure projects were always going to take time and be disruptive to students and staff. Changes in student outcomes and post-school destination data were similarly going to take time.

Finding the balance between potential and contemporary reality for MRHS would require careful curation. Following the initial announcement, the management of the public profile of the school was not well handled by the school or the system. A further divide between the system (and particularly the Regional Director and Director, Educational Leadership), the incoming school principal, staff and the parents and community emerged.

Focus group data from 2021 indicates a more positive trend in the profile of the school. The establishment of greater social profiles (Figure 30) has helped get positive stories into the community. This could be further expanded through local print media.

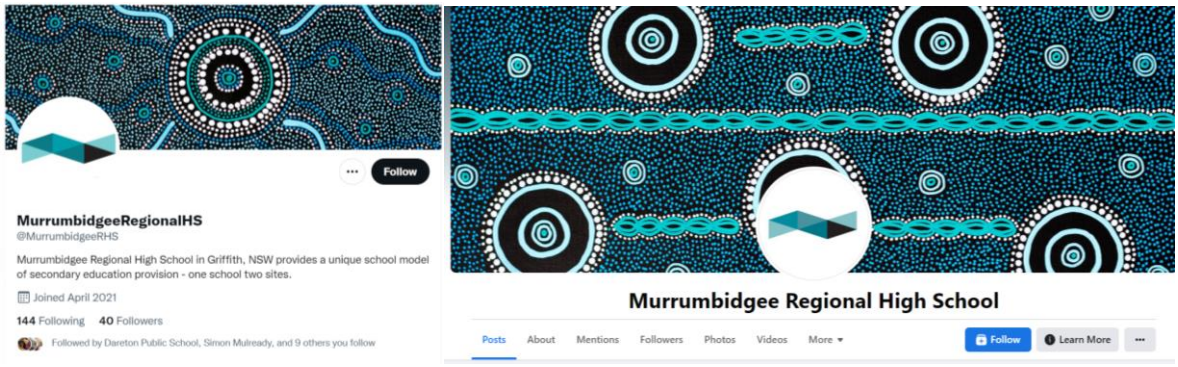


Fig. 30. MRHS Twitter and Facebook banners (Feb 2022)

Summary

The community satisfaction with public secondary schooling in Griffith has taken a hit with the consolidation reform. A decline in enrolment, most observable in the conversion of public primary school students into MRHS, highlight an image problem. This is not surprising given the sustained campaign against the consolidation within and outside of the school. With Stage 1 of the build complete and recent positive outcomes (e.g., NAPLAN and HSC), it is timely to reinvigorate the public narrative of MRHS.

Recommendations

Source: Murrumbidgee Regional High School - Stage 1 completed project (nsw.gov.au)

Below is a list of 14 recommendations built on the previous chapters.

Pre-merger

Communication of the original decision

Recommendation 1: All decisions regarding changes to the existing provision of education should be communicated to school staff prior to public announcement.

Recommendation 2: The rationale and supporting data be presented to staff to support the decision and used as criteria for evaluation.

Consultation on models

Recommendation 3: Community consultation seeking feedback on proposals should explicitly and demonstrably integrate feedback in final product.

Lead time

Recommendation 4: Within existing Industrial Relations requirements, once the new principal appointment is enacted, transition to new leadership and governance arrangement should be fast tracked.

Policy development

Recommendation 5: For all new consolidation projects, staff from both sites need to be actively engaged and accountable for the development of local policies and procedures in a timely manner to be implemented at the commencement of the new school.

The model

One school – two sites

Recommendation 6: In future consolidation projects, the DoE does not consider the 'one school – two sites' model as an option if the goal is to build a single school culture focused on improving outcomes.

The executive principalship

Recommendation 7: Executive principalship of a 'one school – two sites' model needs to have matching deputy principal and head of department position descriptions to ensure site-based authority for decision making and day-to-day operations.

School operations

Leadership and governance

Recommendation 8: The 'one school – two sites' model requires a new performance framework that explicitly articulates responsibilities AND accountability for delivering on school-level strategic initiatives.

Staff and student well-being

Recommendation 9: To sustain, if not improve, staff well-being during workplace change requires an explicitly articulated purpose (e.g., improving student outcomes), coherence of activities (including responsibilities and accountability for delivery) and working with staff to monitor activities against the articulated purpose.

Recommendation 10: Non-teaching staff (e.g., SAM, SASS, SLSO, GA) need to be included in school-level decision-making that directly impacts on their work and working conditions.

Recommendation 11: The 'one school – two sites' model requires careful planning of regular and purposeful activities to bring students (and staff) from both sites together to build a shared school identity.

Teaching and learning

Recommendation 12: Establishing equivalent teaching and learning programs across sites is the priority task for school consolidation projects based on 'one school – two sites' model.

Curriculum and pathways

Recommendation 13: Students, parents and the community need to be made aware of the criteria to make a course offering viable and alternatives if courses are not available on-site to ensure informed decisions.

Community satisfaction

Recommendation 14: Consolidation projects require careful planning and resourcing of communication and promotion strategies to disseminate key information and performance messages to the community.

Statistical Annex

1.0 Focus groups

After an initial visit speaking to representatives from the Department of Education, Griffith and Wade High Schools (principals, teachers, students), and parents and citizen associations, each research engagement included focus groups. The table below provides a descriptive overview of the number and scale (approximate reach) of focus groups.

Table SA1.0. Focus groups and approximate reach, 2018-2022

	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022
Participant group	Jun	Nov	Jun	Dec	Jun*	Oct	Apr*	Aug	Mar
School leaders	6	3	3	3	-	2	-	2	3
Teaching staff	4	6	6	3	-	20	-	24	21
Non-teaching staff	-	2	2	2	-	1	-	1	1
Students	2	2	3	3	-	1	-	1	-
Parents and community	1	1	2	2	-	2	-	2	2
Total participants	64	72	106	108	-	100	-	120	52

* Postponed due to pandemic restrictions and personal circumstances.

2.0 Teacher questionnaire

The Teacher questionnaire was constituted through a series of scales used in large-scale assessment exercise 'TIMSS'. The scales of 'working with other teachers', 'emphasis on academic success', and 'being a teacher' provided the basis of analysis for staff well-being. The below tables display the descriptive data for the scales for each year of the evaluation aggregated to the school level.

2.1 School level

Table SA2.1a. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2018 (*n*=92)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers	7	1-4	2.597	.787	3	.190	.251	-.485	.498
Emphasis on academic success – teachers	5	1-5	2.576	.650	3	-.044	.251	-.163	.498
Emphasis on academic success – parents	4	1-5	3.543	.818	4	-.204	.251	.203	.498
Emphasis on academic success – students	3	1-5	3.141	.750	3	.241	.251	.676	.498
Emphasis on academic success – leadership	4	1-5	3.130	.773	3	.061	.251	.084	.498
About being a teacher	7	1-4	2.761	.761	3	-.329	.251	-.052	.498

Table SA2.1b. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2019 (*n*=81)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers	7	1-4	2.247	.830	2	.179	.267	-.509	.529
Emphasis on academic success – teachers	5	1-5	3.037	.782	3	-.065	.267	-.484	.529
Emphasis on academic success – parents	4	1-5	3.889	.837	4	-.311	.267	-.517	.529
Emphasis on academic success – students	3	1-5	3.580	.835	3	.268	.267	-.645	.529
Emphasis on academic success – leadership	4	1-5	3.802	.914	4	-.298	.267	-.256	.529
About being a teacher	7	1-4	2.346	.854	2	.127	.267	-.568	.529

Table SA2.1c. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2020 (*n*=57)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers	7	1-4	2.684	.805	3	.007	.316	-.523	.623
Emphasis on academic success – teachers	5	1-5	3.193	.718	3	.293	.316	.117	.623
Emphasis on academic success – parents	4	1-5	2.737	.745	3	-.065	.316	-.304	.623
Emphasis on academic success – students	3	1-5	2.912	.635	3	-.364	.316	.775	.623
Emphasis on academic success – leadership	4	1-5	2.737	.936	3	.017	.316	.178	.623
About being a teacher	7	1-4	2.667	.893	3	.098	.316	-.870	.623

Table SA2.1d. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2021 (*n*=83)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers	7	1-4	2.313	.661	2	.335	.264	.207	.523
Emphasis on academic success – teachers	5	1-5	3.205	.694	3	.374	.264	.317	.523
Emphasis on academic success – parents	4	1-5	2.711	.595	3	-.165	.264	-.018	.523
Emphasis on academic success – students	3	1-5	2.807	.689	3	-.187	.264	1.398	.523
Emphasis on academic success – leadership	4	1-5	3.012	.789	3	-.480	.264	.683	.523
About being a teacher	7	1-4	2.747	.794	3	.039	.264	-.656	.523

2.2 Site level

Table SA2.2a. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2018

Scale	N	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers									
Wade	55	1-4	2.691	.767	3	.088	.322	-.488	.634
Griffith	37	1-4	2.432	.801	2	.404	.388	-.186	.759
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	55	1-4	2.436	.601	2	-.012	.322	-.337	.634
Griffith	37	1-4	2.784	.672	3	-.297	.288	.380	.759
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	55	1-5	3.291	.854	3	.133	.322	.358	.634
Griffith	37	3-5	3.919	.595	4	.017	.388	.009	.759
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	55	1-5	3.164	.811	3	.119	.322	.511	.634
Griffith	37	2-5	3.108	.658	3	.506	.388	1.082	.759
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	55	1-5	3.091	.752	3	-.152	.322	.364	.634
Griffith	37	2-5	3.189	.811	3	.292	.388	-.243	.759
About being a teacher									
Wade	55	1-4	2.727	.757	3	-.293	.322	-.034	.634
Griffith	37	1-4	2.811	.776	3	-.405	.388	.120	.759

Table SA2.2b. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2019

Scale	N	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers									
Wade	37	1-4	2.486	.837	2	.045	.388	-.441	.759
Griffith	44	1-4	2.045	.776	2	.232	.357	-.506	.702
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	37	2-5	2.757	.683	3	.350	.388	-.769	.759
Griffith	44	1-5	3.273	.788	3	-.535	.357	.486	.702
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	37	1-5	3.291	.854	3	.133	.322	.358	.634
Griffith	44	3-5	3.919	.595	4	.017	.388	.009	.759
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	37	2-5	3.432	.765	3	.240	.388	-.135	.759
Griffith	44	2-5	3.705	.878	4	.199	.357	-.981	.702
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	37	2-5	3.595	.798	4	.193	.388	-.448	.759
Griffith	44	1-5	3.977	.976	4	-.739	.357	.380	.702
About being a teacher									
Wade	37	1-4	2.378	.758	2	.033	.388	-.220	.759
Griffith	44	1-4	2.318	.9234	2	.201	.357	-.760	.702

Table SA2.2c. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2020

Scale	N	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers									
Wade	27	1-4	2.815	.736	3	-.314	.448	.233	.872
Griffith	30	1-4	2.567	.859	2	.305	.427	-.609	.833
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	27	1-5	3.222	.641	3	-.222	.448	-.494	.872
Griffith	30	1-5	3.167	.791	3	.580	.427	.421	.833
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	27	1-5	2.852	.770	3	-.279	.448	-.048	.872
Griffith	30	1-5	2.633	.718	3	.094	.427	-.189	.833
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	27	1-5	2.889	.641	3	-.855	.448	2.322	.872
Griffith	30	2-5	2.933	.640	3	.054	.427	-.352	.833
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	27	1-5	2.778	.934	3	-.132	.448	.632	.872
Griffith	30	1-5	2.700	.952	3	.149	.427	.104	.833
About being a teacher									
Wade	27	1-4	2.741	.813	3	.065	.448	-.627	.872
Griffith	30	1-4	2.600	.968	2	.185	.427	-1.003	.833

Table SA2.2d. Teacher questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2021

Scale	N	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Working with other teachers									
Wade	37	1-4	2.486	.651	3	-.267	.388	-.126	.759
Griffith	46	1-4	2.174	.643	2	.878	.350	1.777	.688
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	37	2-5	3.216	.630	3	.514	.388	.939	.759
Griffith	46	2-5	3.196	.749	3	.323	.350	.064	.688
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	37	2-3	2.757	.435	3	-1.248	.388	-.471	.759
Griffith	46	1-4	2.674	.701	3	.150	.350	-.342	.688
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	37	2-5	2.838	.553	3	.957	.388	5.764	.759
Griffith	46	1-4	2.783	.786	3	-.448	.350	.100	.688
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	37	2-4	3.216	.584	3	-.049	.388	-.226	.759
Griffith	46	1-5	2.848	.894	3	-.275	.350	.248	.688
About being a teacher									
Wade	37	2-4	2.919	.722	3	.124	.388	-.998	.759
Griffith	46	1-4	2.609	.829	3	.126	.350	-.564	.688

2.3 Scale loading

Ensuring that the scales operate in this evaluation as they should, the following tables displays the item loadings.

Table SA2.3a. Working with other teachers, item loading

Items	Component 1
Discuss how to teach a particular topic	.803
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials	.852
Share what I have learned about my experience	.822
Visit another classroom to learn more about teaching	.650
Work together to try out new ideas	.864
Work as a group on implementing the curriculum	.793
Work with teachers from other grades to ensure continuity in learning	.764

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 1 components extracted.

Table SA2.3b. Emphasis on academic success, item loading

	Components		
Items	1	2	3
Collaboration between school leadership and teachers to plan instruction	.850		
Amount of instructional support provided to teachers by school leadership	.845		
Clarity of the school's educational objectives	.817		
Parental commitment to ensure that students are ready to learn	.742		
Parental involvement in school activities	.728		
Parental pressure for the school to maintain high academic standards	.703		
Parental expectations for student achievement	.691		
School leadership's support for teachers' professional development	.661		
Teachers' degree of success in implementing the school's curriculum		.782	
Teachers' understanding of the school's curricular goals		.772	
Teachers working together to improve student achievement		.738	
Teachers' expectations for student achievement		.737	
Teachers' ability to inspire students		.698	
Students' respect for classmates who excel in school			.813
Students desire to do well in school			.808
Students' ability to reach school's academic goals			.744

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

Table SA2.3c. Emphasis on academic success, item loading

Items	Component 1
I am content with my profession as a teacher	.889
I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school	.864
I find my work full of meaning and purpose	.876
I am enthusiastic about my job	.912
My work inspires me	.897
I am proud of the work I do	.772
I am going to continue teaching for as long as I can	.795

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 1 components extracted.

2.4 Comparison of means between sites

Concern was raised early in the evaluation that the sites were very different. The below tables display a series of comparison of means across the two sites by year.

To assess the difference between the two sites an independent sample *t*-test was undertaken. An independent (two-sample) *t*-test is a statistical method for comparing two different populations (as the student questionnaire was not linked to an individual student and tracked). The formula is:

$$t = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{S_p \left(\sqrt{\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}}\right)}$$

Where M_1 is mean for group 1, M_2 is mean for group 2, n_1 is the sample size for group 1, n_2 is sample size for group 2, and S_p is pooled standard error for the two groups. A pooled standard error accounts for two sample variances and assumes that the variances from the two groups are equal. It is called a 'pooled' standard error because data from both groups are pooled into one.

In addition to the *t*-test statistics, an effect size is calculated to demonstrate the size of any differences. An effect size is a quantitative measure of the magnitude for the difference between two means. One of the most used statistics for measuring effect sizes is Cohen's *d*. The formula is:

$$d = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{SD_{pooled}}$$

Where M_1 is the mean for group 1, M_2 is the mean for group 2, and SD_{pooled} is the pooled standard deviation for the two groups.

Table SA2.4a. Teacher questionnaire comparison by site, 2018

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Working with other teachers									
Wade	55	2.691	.767	1.560	90	.122	-.761 - .589	.166	.330
Griffith	37	2.432	.801						
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	55	2.436	.601	2.596	90	.011	-.614 - -.082	.134	.546
Griffith	37	2.784	.672						
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	55	3.291	.854	3.881	90	.001	-.949 - -.307	.162	.853
Griffith	37	3.919	.595						
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	55	3.164	.811	.350	90	.728	-.262 - .374	.160	.076
Griffith	37	3.108	.658						
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	55	3.091	.752	.594	90	.554	-.426 - .230	.165	.125
Griffith	37	3.189	.811						
About being a teacher									
Wade	55	2.727	.757	.517	90	.607	-.407 - .239	.163	.110
Griffith	37	2.811	.776						

Table SA2.4b. Teacher questionnaire comparison by site, 2019

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Working with other teachers									
Wade	37	2.486	.837	2.458	79	.016	.084 - .798	.179	.546
Griffith	44	2.045	.776						
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	37	2.757	.683	4.217	79	.001	-1.027 - -.369	.166	.700
Griffith	44	3.273	.788						
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	37	3.291	.854	3.886	79	.001	-.950 - -.306	.162	.853
Griffith	44	3.919	.595						
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	37	3.432	.765	1.477	79	.144	-.641 - -.095	.185	.332
Griffith	44	3.705	.878						
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	37	3.595	.798	1.904	79	.061	-.781 - -.617	.201	.429
Griffith	44	3.977	.976						
About being a teacher									
Wade	37	2.378	.758	.313	79	.755	-.321 - .441	.191	.071
Griffith	44	2.318	.934						

Table SA2.4c. Teacher questionnaire comparison by site, 2020

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Working with other teachers									
Wade	27	2.815	.736	1.165	55	.250	-.179 - .674	.213	.310
Griffith	30	2.567	.858						
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	27	3.222	.641	.291	55	.772	-.323 - .433	.189	.076
Griffith	30	3.167	.791						
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	27	2.851	.770	1.106	55	.274	-.177 - .613	.197	.293
Griffith	30	2.633	.718						
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	27	2.889	.641	.259	55	.797	-.384 - .296	.170	.069
Griffith	30	2.933	.640						
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	27	2.778	.934	.312	55	.757	-.423 - .579	.250	.083
Griffith	30	2.700	.952						
About being a teacher									
Wade	27	2.741	.813	.592	55	.556	-.336 - .618	.238	.172
Griffith	30	2.600	.968						

Table SA2.4d. Teacher questionnaire comparison by site, 2021

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Working with other teachers									
Wade	37	2.486	.651	2.185	81	.032	.028 - .596	.143	.482
Griffith	46	2.174	.643						
Emphasis on academic success – teachers									
Wade	37	3.216	.630	.130	81	.897	-.287 - .327	.154	.029
Griffith	46	3.196	.749						
Emphasis on academic success – parents									
Wade	37	2.757	.435	.629	81	.531	-.180 - .346	.132	.142
Griffith	46	2.674	.701						
Emphasis on academic success – students									
Wade	37	2.838	.553	.360	81	.720	-.249 - .359	.153	.081
Griffith	46	2.783	.786						
Emphasis on academic success – leadership									
Wade	37	3.216	.584	2.159	81	.034	.029 - .707	.170	.487
Griffith	46	2.848	.894						
About being a teacher									
Wade	37	2.919	.722	1.792	81	.077	-.034 - .654	.173	.399
Griffith	46	2.609	.829						

2.5 Comparing 2018 with 2021 data

Since 2013, the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has used effect size measures (e.g., Hedges' *g*) to help interpret differences in results. The Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) have similarly adopted the practice. In comparing 2018 (benchmark) with the

final year (2021) data of the evaluation, we have adopted Hedges' *g*. As a measure, it is like Cohen's *d* (which we used in comparing the sites).

The difference between Cohen's *d* and Hedges' *g* is that *g* pools using $n - 1$ for each sample instead of *n*, which provides a better estimate, especially with smaller sample sizes (e.g., <20). Both *d* and *g* are somewhat positively biased, but this is less of an issue with moderate or large sample sizes.

Hedges' *g* for the below analysis makes it consistent with CESE and ACARA practice. The formula is:

$$g = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{SD^*_{pooled}}$$

Where M_1 is the mean of group 1 (2018, the benchmark year) and M_2 is the mean of group 2 (2021, the final year of the benchmark), and SD^*_{pooled} is the pooled and weighted standard deviation.

Common advice for interpreting effect sizes is that 0.2 is small, 0.5 is medium and 0.8 or greater is large.

To explain how we have interpreted the effect sizes, Table SA2.5a provides details on the range, meaning, and labels assigned.

Table SA2.5a. Definition of effect sizes used to summarise results

Effect size		Meaning	Descriptive label
Range	Difference as a measure of standard deviation		
0.0 – 0.5	Up to 0.5 of a SD	The value for 2021 is close to the value for 2018, meaning there has been **little** change over time.	'Close to'
0.5 – 0.8	Between 0.5 and 0.8 of a SD	The value for 2021 is above/below the value for 2018, meaning that there has been **some** change over time.	'Above/below'
>0.8	Greater than 0.8 of a SD	The value for 2021 is substantially above/below the value for 2018, meaning that there has been **substantial** change over time.	'Substantially above' / 'Substantially below'

Table SA2.5b. Comparison of benchmark (2018) v final year (2021) of teacher questionnaire data

Measure	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2018-2021
Working with other teachers	Close to (.436)	Above (.530)	Below (.510)	Close to (.387)
Emphasis on academic success – teachers	Above (.642)	Close to (.205)	Close to (.017)	Well above (.933)
Emphasis on academic success – parents	Close to (.417)	Well below (1.431)	Close to (.039)	Well below (1.149)
Emphasis on academic success – students	Above (.553)	Well below (.875)	Close to (.156)	Close to (.461)
Emphasis on academic success – leadership	Above (.795)	Well below (1.147)	Close to (.321)	Close to (.151)
About being a teacher	Below (.512)	Close to (.366)	Close to (.095)	Close to (0.18)

3.0 Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was constituted through a series of scales used in large-scale assessment exercises 'PISA' and 'TIMSS'. The scales of 'What Do you think of school', 'sense of belonging' and 'academic motivation' were taken from PISA, and 'learning culture' from TIMSS. The below tables display the descriptive data for the scales for each year of the evaluation aggregated to the school level.

3.1 School level

Table SA3.1a. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2018 (*n*=689)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school	7	1-4	2.970	.703	3	-.410	.093	.241	.186
Sense of belonging	6	1-4	2.502	.526	2	.142	.093	-1.327	.186
Achievement motivation	5	1-4	3.245	.664	3	-.590	.093	.431	.186
Learning culture	5	1-4	2.797	.808	3	-.260	.093	-.414	.186

Table SA3.1b. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2019 (*n*=646)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school	7	1-4	2.788	.715	3	-.276	.096	-.014	.192
Sense of belonging	6	1-4	2.494	.562	2	-.055	.096	-.731	.192
Achievement motivation	5	1-4	3.161	.714	3	-.553	.096	.120	.192
Learning culture	5	1-4	2.658	.825	3	-.072	.096	-.567	.192

Table SA3.1c. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2020 (*n*=208)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school	7	1-4	2.875	.632	3	-.242	.169	.314	.336
Sense of belonging	6	1-4	2.274	.498	2	.887	.169	.349	.336
Achievement motivation	5	1-4	3.154	.719	3	-.553	.169	.127	.336
Learning culture	5	1-4	2.673	.773	3	.070	.169	-.527	.336

Table SA3.1d. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2021 (*n*=586)

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school	7	1-4	2.901	.695	3	-.602	.101	.789	.202
Sense of belonging	6	1-4	2.582	.521	3	-.186	.101	-1.287	.202
Achievement motivation	5	1-4	3.114	.693	3	-.465	.101	.182	.202
Learning culture	5	1-4	2.787	.793	3	-.177	.101	-.466	.202

3.2 Site level

Table SA3.2a. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2018

Scale	N	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school									
Wade	393	1-4	2.804	.685	3	-.398	.123	.330	.246
Griffith	296	1-4	3.189	.667	3	-.512	.142	.372	.282
Sense of belonging									
Wade	392	1-4	2.517	.520	3	.152	.123	-1.474	.246
Griffith	296	1-4	2.483	.533	3	.135	.142	-1.160	.282
Achievement motivation									
Wade	393	1-4	3.209	.694	3	-.627	.123	.415	.246
Griffith	296	1-4	3.294	.620	3	-.466	.142	.251	.282
Learning culture									
Wade	393	1-4	2.636	.784	3	-.186	.123	-.338	.246
Griffith	296	1-4	3.010	.792	3	-.430	.142	-.326	.282

Table SA3.2b. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2019

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school									
Wade	333	1-4	2.661	.687	3	-.285	.134	.016	.266
Griffith	313	1-4	2.923	.721	3	-.349	.138	.041	.275
Sense of belonging									
Wade	333	1-4	2.505	.558	3	-.123	.134	-.778	.266
Griffith	313	1-4	2.482	.567	2	.016	.138	-.669	.275
Achievement motivation									
Wade	333	1-4	3.228	.734	3	-.708	.134	.230	.266
Griffith	313	1-4	3.089	.688	3	-.415	.138	.156	.275
Learning culture									
Wade	333	1-4	2.556	.822	3	.001	.134	-.529	.266
Griffith	313	1-4	2.767	.816	3	-.151	.138	-.555	.275

Table SA3.2c. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2020

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school									
Wade	76	1-4	2.829	.641	3	-.460	.276	.778	.545
Griffith	132	1-4	2.902	.628	3	-.112	.211	.035	.419
Sense of belonging									
Wade	76	1-4	2.276	.450	2	1.021	.276	-.985	.545
Griffith	132	1-4	2.273	.526	2	.839	.211	.699	.419
Achievement motivation									
Wade	76	1-4	3.237	.764	3	-.987	.276	1.100	.545
Griffith	132	1-4	3.106	.691	3	-.283	.211	-.372	.419
Learning culture									
Wade	76	1-4	2.737	.839	3	-.023	.276	-.708	.545
Griffith	132	1-4	2.636	.734	3	.104	.211	-.385	.419

Table SA3.2d. Student questionnaire descriptive statistics, 2021

Scale	Items	Range	Mean	StDev	Median	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat	SE	Stat	SE
Thoughts about school									
Wade	368	1-4	2.829	.727	3	-.537	.127	.406	.254
Griffith	218	1-4	3.023	.618	3	-.605	.165	1.685	.328
Sense of belonging									
Wade	368	1-4	2.560	.524	3	-.184	.127	-1.253	.254
Griffith	218	1-4	2.619	.514	2	-.185	.165	-1.264	.328
Achievement motivation									
Wade	368	1-4	3.141	.678	3	-.444	.127	.178	.254
Griffith	218	1-4	3.069	.718	3	-.479	.165	.167	.328
Learning culture									
Wade	368	1-4	2.766	.802	3	-.159	.127	-.493	.254
Griffith	218	1-4	2.821	.780	3	-.205	.165	-.399	.328

3.3 Scale loadings

Ensuring that the scales operate in this evaluation as they should, the following tables displays the item loadings.

Table SA3.3a. What you think about school, item loading

Items	Component 1
I like being at school	.755
I feel safe when I am at school	.724
I feel like I belong at this school	.763
I like to see my classmates at school	.490
Teachers at my school are fair to me	.687
I am proud to go to this school	.793
I learn a lot at school	.742

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 1 components extracted.

Table SA3.3b. Sense of belonging scale, item loading

	Component	
Items	1	2
I feel awkward and out of place in my school	.824	
I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school	.824	
I feel lonely at schools	.750	
Other students seem to like me		.822
I make friends easily at school		.797
I feel like I belong at school		.700

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Table SA3.3c. Achievement motivation, item loading

Item	Component 1
I want to be one of the best students in my class	.821
I want to be the best, whatever I do	.801
I want top grades in most or all of my classes	.797
I want to be able to select from among the best opportunities available when I graduate	.795
I see myself as an ambitious person	.729

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 1 components extracted.

Table SA3.3d. Learning culture, item loading

Items	Component 1
The teacher gives extra help when students need it	.862
The teacher helps students with their learning	.857
The teacher continues teaching until students understand the material	.828
The teacher gives students an opportunity to express their opinions	.819
The teacher shows an interest in every student's learning	.818

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 1 components extracted.

3.4 Comparison of means across sites

Concern was raised early in the evaluation that the sites were very different. The below tables display a series of comparison of means across the two sites by year.

Table SA3.4a. Comparison of means between sites, 2018

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Thoughts about school									
Wade	393	2.804	.685	7.386	687	.001	-.487 - -.283	.052	.057
Griffith	296	3.189	.667						
Sense of belonging									
Wade	393	2.517	.520	.841	687	.401	-.045 - .113	.040	.065
Griffith	296	2.483	.533						
Achievement motivation									
Wade	393	3.209	.694	1.665	687	.096	-.185 - .015	.051	.129
Griffith	296	3.294	.620						
Learning culture									
Wade	393	2.636	.784	6.171	687	.001	-.493 - -.255	.061	.475
Griffith	296	3.010	.792						

Table SA3.4b. Comparison of means between sites, 2019

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Thoughts about school									
Wade	333	2.661	.687	4.279	644	.001	-.371 - -.153	.055	.372
Griffith	313	2.923	.721						
Sense of belonging									
Wade	333	2.505	.558	.520	644	.604	-.064 - .110	.044	.041
Griffith	313	2.482	.567						
Achievement motivation									
Wade	333	3.228	.734	2.480	644	.013	.029 - .249	.056	.195
Griffith	313	3.089	.688						
Learning culture									
Wade	333	2.556	.822	3.272	644	.001	-.338 - -.084	.064	.258
Griffith	313	2.767	.816						

Table SA3.4c. Comparison of means between sites, 2020

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Thoughts about school									
Wade	76	2.829	.641	.801	206	.424	-.253 - .106	.091	.115
Griffith	132	2.902	.628						
Sense of belonging									
Wade	76	2.276	.450	.042	206	.967	-.139 - .145	.072	.006
Griffith	132	2.273	.526						
Achievement motivation									
Wade	76	3.141	.678	.711	206	.478	-.128 - .272	.101	.103
Griffith	132	3.069	.718						
Learning culture									
Wade	76	2.737	.839	.906	206	.366	-.199 - .321	.111	.128
Griffith	132	2.636	.734						

Table SA3.4d. Comparison of means between sites, 2021

Scale	*N*	Mean	StDev	*t*	df	*p*	95% CI	SE	*d*
Thoughts about school									
Wade	368	2.829	.727	3.297	584	.001	-.310 - -.078	.059	.287
Griffith	218	3.023	.618						
Sense of belonging									
Wade	368	2.560	.524	1.327	584	.185	-.146 - .028	.044	.114
Griffith	218	2.619	.514						
Achievement motivation									
Wade	368	3.141	.678	1.215	584	.225	-.044 - .188	.059	.103
Griffith	218	3.069	.718						
Learning culture									
Wade	368	2.766	.802	.811	584	.418	-.188 - .078	.068	.070
Griffith	218	2.821	.780						

3.5 Comparison between 2018 and 2021

As with the teacher questionnaire (Table SA2.5b), the below table displays the comparison between the benchmark year (2018) and final year (2021), including the years in-between using effect size (see Table SA2.5a).

Table SA3.5a. Comparison of benchmark (2018) v final year (2021) of student questionnaire data

Measure	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2018-2021
Thoughts about school	Close to (.257)	Close to (.125)	Close to (.038)	Close to (.098)
Sense of belonging	Close to (.015)	Close to (.403)	Below (.597)	Close to (.153)
Achievement motivation	Close to (.122)	Close to (.010)	Close to (.057)	Close to (.193)
Learning culture	Close to (.170)	Close to (.018)	Close to (.145)	Close to (.012)