

# Leadership practices supporting Pasifika student success:

## De La Salle College Case Study



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## Introduction

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This report is one in a series of three case study reports with a focus on school leadership practices that support Pasifika student achievement and success. The series also includes three exemplar reports<sup>1</sup>: these showcase in more detail one aspect of each case study school's approach to improving achievement outcomes for their Pasifika students<sup>2</sup>.

De La Salle College is an integrated, Catholic secondary school for years 7–13 boys that has consistently attained high levels of academic achievement over the past five or more years, particularly for Pasifika students.

This case study shows how De La Salle College understands and respects Pasifika students, families and communities and responds in an affirming manner. The college's approach supports Pasifika boys to achieve high levels of educational success, along with a positive self-identity. This in turn enables them to flourish within both Pasifika and wider communities.

A notable feature of the college is the strong sense of brotherhood that encompasses the boys and affirms their identity and place of belonging. The college's vision is to empower young men to engage and participate in an ever-changing world. To this end, the college promotes a culture of achievement and success, and high integrity.

Over the five years prior to this case study (conducted in late 2012), De La Salle students' achievement levels in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) have increased significantly. The college's results exceed average pass rates for schools of a similar type, surpass overall national averages for NCEA levels 1 and 2, and compare well at NCEA level 3.

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<sup>1</sup> All of the case study and exemplar reports in the series are listed at the end of this document (on page 47).

<sup>2</sup> The De La Salle College exemplar focuses on its teacher coach initiative.



The Education Review Office's (ERO) 2010 report for De La Salle College stated that 'student achievement is impressive and continues to improve'. The ERO report further identified (p.2) the following areas of strength within the college.

- Respectful relationships based on brotherhood and a sense of family.
- Effective and strategic leadership and a greater sense of accountability amongst the staff.
- High quality self-review focused on continual school improvement.
- Professional development that promotes high standards of teaching.
- A focus on literacy and numeracy, with improved teaching of literacy and numeracy in years 7 to 10.
- Clear expectations for improved performance and greater accountability amongst teachers.
- Curriculum development that meets student needs and a wide range of programmes and services to deal with student issues, including the needs of Pasifika.
- Pasifika students' needs are met by the school's curriculum.

The factors and initiatives that have helped De La Salle College to improve and maintain high Pasifika student achievement are explored throughout this case study.

## Research context

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The Ministry of Education has a focus on the Better Public Service target of improving participation and achievement in education at all levels, and for all students, including Pasifika. Within the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017 (Ministry of Education, 2012, p.10), for example, one of the stated targets for the schooling sector is that ‘85% of Pasifika 18 year olds ... achieve NCEA level 2 or equivalent qualifications in 2017’. For this De La Salle College case study, researchers asked the senior management team (SMT), the board of trustees, teachers, and Pasifika students and families to share their perspectives on what De La Salle College is doing to get higher-than-average Pasifika student achievement at NCEA level 2 and strong retention rates at year 13.

With a particular focus on what works to raise Pasifika student achievement, the analysis of the case study information was framed around seven key themes from the Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration commissioned by the Ministry of Education: *School leadership and student outcomes: identifying what works and why* (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009).

The seven themes are :

- setting high standards and expectations for Pasifika student achievement
- strategic resourcing to enhance Pasifika student achievement
- ensuring quality of teaching and the curriculum to enhance Pasifika student achievement
- teacher learning and development to enhance Pasifika student achievement
- ensuring an orderly and supportive environment for Pasifika students
- making powerful connections with Pasifika parents, families, and communities to support Pasifika student achievement
- engaging in constructive problem talk to enhance Pasifika student achievement.

The analysis serves, too, to highlight school practices that align with key principles and goals articulated in the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017; that is, to work to achieve Pasifika Success that is ...

‘... characterised by demanding, vibrant, dynamic, successful Pasifika learners [who are] secure and confident in their identities, languages and cultures, [and can successfully navigate] through all curriculum areas such as the arts, sciences, technology, social sciences and mathematics.’ (Pasifika Education Plan, Ministry of Education, p.3)

Under schooling, the Pasifika Education Plan advocates that the focus of efforts needs to be ‘on accelerating literacy and numeracy achievement and [students] gaining NCEA Level 2 qualifications as a stepping stone to further education and/or employment’. Related goals within the Pasifika Education Plan of particular relevance to the work in schools represented in the present series of case studies and exemplars include that:

- ‘Pasifika learners excel in literacy and numeracy and make effective study choices that



lead to worthwhile qualifications'

- 'Pasifika school leavers are academically and socially equipped to achieve their goals for further education, training and/or employment'
- 'Pasifika parents, families and communities engage with schools in supporting their children's learning'.

De La Salle College is one of three secondary schools selected by the Ministry of Education to become a case study site for this project, after a comparison of Pasifika learning in schools across the Auckland region. The Auckland region was selected as its schools have the highest proportions of Pasifika learners in New Zealand.

The three selected secondary schools were considered to be good examples of schools in which Pasifika student academic performance is higher than average, where retention rates are high, and where Pasifika identities, languages and cultures are recognised and embraced by the school leadership team and are evident on a daily basis within the school. De La Salle College also provided a different research context to other schools in the study, as a Catholic boys' school.

De La Salle College is a decile 1, integrated Catholic secondary boys' school located in South Auckland, with 1037 year 7 to year 13 students. It is a special character school — affiliated with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, also known as the De La Salle Brothers. The majority of the students within the school are representative of Pasifika cultures including: Samoan, 65%; Tongan, 17%; Cook Islands Māori, 2%; Fijian, 2%; Niuean, 2%. Other cultures or ethnicities in the school include Māori (4%), New Zealand European (3%), and Indian (2%).

In recent years, management structures across the school have supported changes within leadership positions at De La Salle College. In late 2012, when this case study was undertaken, the principal was new to the school earlier that year and was a first-time principal.

## Research method

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The case study design and methodology drew on what was learned from the development of the *Rangiātea Case Studies and Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2011)<sup>3</sup>, a series of five case studies and exemplars illustrating leadership in high-performing schools for Māori students. The present series of case studies and exemplars, like the Rangiātea series, was framed and developed on the basis of sound evidence of effective leadership practice — as presented in Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd's (2009) report, *School leadership and student outcomes: identifying what works and why*, one of the Best Evidence Syntheses commissioned by the Ministry of Education.

Cognisance of Pasifika research methodologies also formed an important part of the project design and implementation, as did orientation to the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017. As well as taking into account key principles within the Pasifika Education Plan, the researchers drew on Pasifika research methodologies and guidelines such as:

- *Teu Le Va — Relationships across research and policy in Pasifika education: A collective approach to knowledge generation & policy development for action towards Pasifika education success* (Airini, et al., 2010)
- *Talanoa research methodology: a developing position on Pacific research* (Vaiotele, 2006)
- The *Guidelines on Pasifika health research* produced by the Health Research Council of New Zealand (2004)
- The Ministry of Education's *Pasifika Education Research Guidelines* (Anae, et al., 2001).

These methodologies and guidelines embrace Pasifika values and practices and guided the research team in working with Pasifika peoples at all stages of the project.

Pacific cultural protocols for establishing respectful relations, rapport and trust between participants and researchers were followed during data collection for the case study. An information sheet was also provided for all participants and informed consent obtained prior to any interview taking place.

After a first phase in the data collection process, the researchers developed a summary of the key themes emerging from the interviews for consideration by the Pasifika Unit within the Ministry of Education, which commissioned the series of case studies. The summary helped identify priority areas of interest for further data collection. The second data collection phase focused on: (a) identifying how the school's leaders enable Pasifika student achievement; and (b) identifying a specific initiative or approach developed within the school to drive Pasifika achievement, to become the focus of a separate exemplar report for this school.

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<sup>3</sup> The Rangiātea case study and exemplar reports are available online at <http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leading-change/Maori-education-success/Rangiatea-case-studies-and-exemplars>





Researchers used a range of interview approaches to collect data, including individual, focus groups, and paired discussions. Individual interviews generally ranged from 30–60 minutes, while focus groups took approximately one hour, and were carried out with an emphasis on Pasifika etiquette and values to create a relational environment that allows honest and meaningful dialogue.

In total, 35 people were interviewed, including the senior management team (SMT), deans, teachers, students, families, pastoral staff and board of trustees members. A further 16 self-completion student surveys were filled in: these were administered in ways which sought to uphold Pasifika cultural values — by incorporating both the written and spoken word, for example — to draw out the understandings of the young Pasifika participants. In addition, a wide range of monitoring and student achievement data, including variance reporting, curriculum planners, and NCEA data and Ministry of Education SchoolSMART<sup>4</sup> data, were made available by the college.

Researcher engagement with the college mostly occurred between September 2012 and October 2012 and involved two data collection phases. Additional feedback from the school was also obtained up to 20 December 2012.

The research team would like to acknowledge that, as with any project, there were limitations experienced. Contractual arrangements and school availability both served to restrict the timeframe for data collection. This was further affected by the heavy involvement of both students and staff in NCEA preparation, and end-of-year activities. Thus, information was collected from the school in two intensive data collection visits and this meant more limited opportunities for interactions with Pasifika students' families. The research team responded to the limited timeframes involved by harnessing the respective and combined strengths of team members to ensure rigour and efficiency in the collection and analysis of information. Strong teamwork was also required to successfully achieve a balance between the need to collect accurate and sufficient historical information on the school's journey, and the need for efficiency in data collection, analysis and project write-up.

In the case of De La Salle College, the current principal joined the school in the term prior to the research being undertaken. That might have been grounds for excluding the school from the study, as the recently-appointed principal had not been involved in the development of the college's longer-term leadership strategy. However, the college's results for Pasifika students were comparatively high. Thus the Ministry was interested in exploring how the distributed leadership team, with the support of the BOT, had sustained the leadership and vision to retain these high levels of achievement during a period when acting principals were at the helm.

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<sup>4</sup> SchoolSMART gives principals, boards of trustees chairpersons and other authorised trustees access to information about their school. Schools can track their progress over time in relation to other similar schools.

## **Framework for analysing the case study findings and presenting this report**

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As discussed earlier under 'Research Context', the information gathered for this case study has been analysed around seven key themes<sup>5</sup> for effective school leadership, as identified in the research literature. The case study findings are presented in the following pages under these same seven key themes. The case study findings also illustrate school practices that align with the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017.

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<sup>5</sup> These themes are listed on page 6, and also form the headings for each of the main sections in the remainder of this report.



## Setting high standards and expectations for Pasifika student achievement

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This section discusses the importance of strong leadership, along with a strong values-system and clear goals, for ensuring that everyone maintains high expectations of Pasifika student success and that these expectations and goals are reflected in practice.

### School culture builds success

High standards and high expectations for student success are integral to the Lasallian philosophy on which the college is founded

The Lasallian philosophy promotes high standards and expectations for Pasifika and all students to succeed academically and in other areas of their lives, including service, community and sports.

Within the culture of the school the expectation of the principal, senior management team (SMT) and teaching staff is that each graduate of De La Salle will be a good young man:

- a man of faith — who prays and integrates the Gospel values, serves others, especially the poor, and appreciates the Lasallian and Catholic traditions
- a man of integrity — who respects himself and others, embraces social and personal responsibility, and nurtures a healthy lifestyle
- a man of scholarship — who thinks creatively, critically, independently and collaboratively; who strives for academic excellence and pursues lifelong learning<sup>6</sup>.

As well as being given prominence in the School Charter, high expectations for Pasifika success are clearly articulated by the principal and the SMT in all college media, including the school website and school newsletter. For example, a message from the principal in the school newsletter dated September 14, 2012, stated:

At school we [teach the boys] ... that if they desire to be successful, they need to work over a sustained period to achieve the certificate, [that] to be in a top sports team requires many hours of practice, and to be in a leadership role requires the gradual build of respect and trust.

In addition, the leadership team works with teachers to inform families of these expectations through home-school partnership programmes, and to reinforce high standards and expectations by means of school policy and routines.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: De La Salle School Charter, 2012.

## **Pasifika student achievement drives positive change**

**Promoting student achievement is built into in all college goals, planning and targets**

Promoting student achievement is inherent in all of the college's goals, planning and targets. School-wide goals that reflect the New Zealand Curriculum<sup>7</sup> and the five guiding principles<sup>8</sup> of De La Salle College are repeated constantly — within the school charter, in teacher appraisal performance goals, at college staff reflection meetings, and in messages on the staff bulletin board.

Recently, De La Salle College has placed even more emphasis on Pasifika academic achievement by making changes to significant college routines and events. For example, graduation events now focus on students who have graduated with qualifications, as opposed to celebrating those students who have just stayed at school until the end of year 13.

## **Values, goals and expectations upheld by the college align with those of Pasifika parents and families**

**The college's values, beliefs and expectations for student success match parents' wishes for their children**

The college's high expectations, values and goals — outlined in Table 1 below — reflect those of Pasifika parents, families and communities. The focus on student success by the principal, senior management team, and teaching staff, and the value placed on community over the individual, are among the reasons Pasifika parents choose De La Salle College for their sons.

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<sup>7</sup> The five key competencies within The New Zealand Curriculum are: thinking; using language, symbols, texts; managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing.

<sup>8</sup> The five guiding principles for De La Salle College are: God is our focus; [We are] brothers and sisters to each other; Achievement is valued; We are always honest; We respect ourselves, one another and property.



**Table 1: Summary of key expectations within De La Salle college for Pasifika success and the goals and strategies that support those expectations**

Key expectations and goals	Strategies and approaches to achieve expectations and goals
That students need to attend school and be engaged in their learning to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on student attendance</li> <li>• Internal flags through KAMAR<sup>9</sup> for lateness and absenteeism</li> <li>• Appointment of a Samoan attendance officer</li> <li>• Home visits by pastoral care team</li> <li>• Celebration of student successes</li> </ul>
That all students have the potential to succeed when they receive holistic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong belief in students — moving from deficit thinking and breaking down stereotypes</li> <li>• Personalised learning programmes for students</li> <li>• Pastoral care support</li> <li>• Providing a range of opportunities/experiences</li> </ul>
That the five Lasallian guiding principles are embedded in college culture, and in student learning and teaching practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the college's School Charter and curriculum reflect and guide key expectations</li> <li>• Regular staff meetings to reflect on practice</li> <li>• Development of student leadership and service groups</li> <li>• Routines within the college that facilitate expectations and goals</li> <li>• Having Brothers and college old boys act as mentors and role models</li> </ul>
That teachers will build effective relationships with students and improve learner outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging and supporting teachers to become lifelong learners</li> <li>• Heads of faculty providing leadership and guidance</li> <li>• Support provided by teacher coach, specialist classroom teachers and external professional development consultants</li> <li>• Staff involvement with extra-curricular activities</li> </ul>
That there are reciprocal relationships in which parents are actively involved with the college and their son's learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home-school partnership initiatives which include targeted communication with parents about student achievement</li> <li>• Regular PTFA (Parent, Teacher and Friend Association) meetings</li> <li>• Advice and guidance from parents to support the school's approach</li> <li>• Establishing a parent portal within KAMAR</li> <li>• Involvement of parents in sports and cultural coaching or mentoring</li> </ul>

The principal and senior management team (SMT) align college initiatives and developments with Pasifika family and community belief in God, brotherhood, respect and the importance of

<sup>9</sup> KAMAR is a student management system designed to support schools in New Zealand with recording and monitoring student attendance and achievement data. There are also options that allow parents and students access to relevant data.

education. Faith is reflected in school structures, and interwoven throughout all aspects of school life and the boys' learning. This is of significant importance to the college's Pasifika parents, families and communities, and reflects the inclusion of spirituality as a key value in the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017.

*[We] chose De La Salle because of the vision and goals ... [the] behaviour and learning focus.* [Parent]

*As a Lasallian, we try to incorporate the five guiding principles [of the college] outside of school.* [Student]

*[There is a] sense of brotherhood, being accepted no matter who you are, what you look like.* [Student]

All college staff, including the senior management team, teachers and support staff, share an understanding of leading by example and upholding high expectations for themselves as well as their students.

*We have an understanding to always try and give more in everything we do. So, if we get the students to give more, then we as the teachers have to give more.* [SMT member]

The school embraces Pasifika students, and negative stereotypes around Pasifika and the South Auckland community often represented in the media are eliminated within the school.

*[We are] trying to keep an academic focus, we are over deficit thinking: we believe in our students.* [SMT member]

### **Personalised programmes for Pasifika students built on strong relationships and robust assessment**

De La Salle College builds positive and longstanding relationships with its Pasifika students. The majority of students enter the school at year 7, and at this stage academic programmes are established through the use of formalised testing (such as the STAR Reading Test — New Zealand Council for Educational Research). Student targets are based on what students know and can do and students are placed in a suitable class. Teachers then begin to develop a personal academic profile for each of their students.

The school provides personalised programmes for all students. This differentiated learning approach has led to the development of a wide range of subject opportunities and classes to meet the particular needs of Pasifika students (for example, offering three different levels in English). Students are also challenged and stimulated in their learning through leadership portfolios, opportunities to develop personal responsibilities in social service, and to develop self-management skills.

*The boys are so talented. We give them opportunities to experience success, with practical experiences to make [learning] relevant.* [Teacher]

**The college builds strong positive relationships with Pasifika students and students value that commitment to them**



Personalising learning and creating successful pathways for Pasifika learners are highlighted in the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017 as being vital contributors to Pasifika achievement.

**Personalised programmes are designed to meet the needs of students**

As well as personalised learning programmes in school, the teachers go over and above their teacher class contact hours to support the students. After-school tuition in each of mathematics, English, the visual arts and arts design is set on a weekly basis. Regular time is also scheduled in the weekend for mathematics revision for NCEA levels 1 through to 3. Holiday workshops are offered in the arts, religious education, physics, and mathematics. The principal, SMT and teaching staff are also involved in extra-curricular activities, including sports coaching, and service and cultural groups.

### **Focused, distributed leadership for improved academic outcomes**

The principal is passionate about student achievement and wants to avoid any complacency, believing that a constant drive is required to improve and raise academic results. The deputy principal is aware of student and family contexts and of the need to ensure that all students, including Pasifika students, are equipped to meet these challenges.

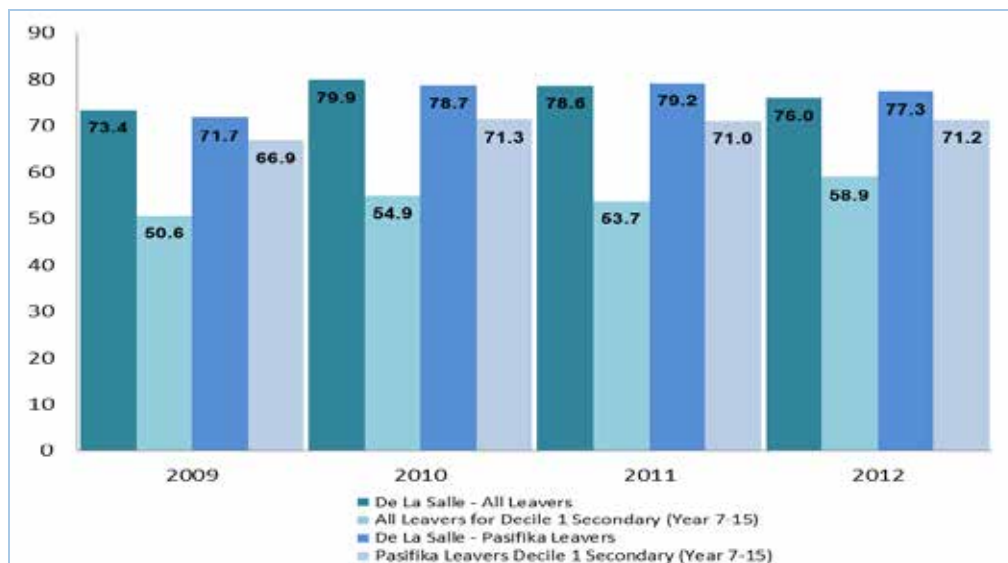
*The community has got poorer in the last five years and unemployment has risen from 8% to 14%, so it is even more important that teachers are doing their jobs. [Deputy Principal]*

Despite a number of senior management changes within the school over recent years, De La Salle College has, with consistent support from middle management, succeeded in maintaining high expectations of teaching staff; it has also maintained ongoing progress in students' learning and strong achievement results across the school. Teachers are expected to plan, set clear goals, self-reflect, evaluate teaching practice, and then feed forward their learnings to the next planning cycle.

**Consistent support from middle management is important for maintaining positive achievement results across the college**

The following Figure 1 shows that over the four-year period, 2009 to 2012, the proportion of all De La Salle students who held a NCEA level 2 qualification when they left school was well above the proportion for all students in other decile 1 secondary schools. This same trend applied when comparing NCEA results for De La Salle Pasifika students only with Pasifika students in all other decile 1 schools nationally.

**Figure 1: School leaver NCEA level 2 attainment data for De La Salle College compared with decile 1 schools nationally (2009–2012)**



Source: Indicators and Reporting, Ministry of Education, August 2013.

## Strategic resourcing to enhance Pasifika student





## achievement

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This section includes discussion of the college's allocation of teaching and pastoral care resourcing to promote Pasifika and all students' achievement. It also discusses the ways in which the college identifies, values, and uses the knowledge and skills of various groups and individuals to support students and provide them with development opportunities (eg, leadership opportunities).

### Resources for improving Pasifika student achievement and supporting excellent teacher practice

Resourcing is prioritised to support Pasifika students and build effective relationships between teachers and students

De La Salle College works to ensure that effective teaching resources are available and dedicated to improving Pasifika student achievement. The school's educational philosophy emphasises the relationship between teachers and students as paramount. John Baptist De La Salle, the Patron Saint of Teachers, advocated for an education system free of hierarchy, where students are considered equal partners in learning. The college's principal, board of trustees, and senior management team (SMT) all believe that this early philosophy on which the college was founded is just as relevant today, and advocate for and support initiatives that reflect this thinking. The importance of positive and reciprocal relationships of this nature within the educational context is also emphasised in the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017.

Resources that the school makes available for teachers include classroom teacher specialists to assist recently graduated (level 1 and 2) teachers, a teacher coach, a teacher appraisal system which supports teachers to build excellent practice through constructive, evidence-based feedback, internal professional learning groups, and external professional development from educational experts<sup>10</sup>. Heads of faculty staff provide daily support for teachers in the form of classroom walk-throughs, reviews of classroom planning, and ongoing communication around student achievement and teaching practice.

*We have very high expectations of our teachers. ... I use walk-throughs to see if students are engaged, look at the boys' work and if I'm not happy I feed back at the faculty meetings.*  
[Head of faculty]

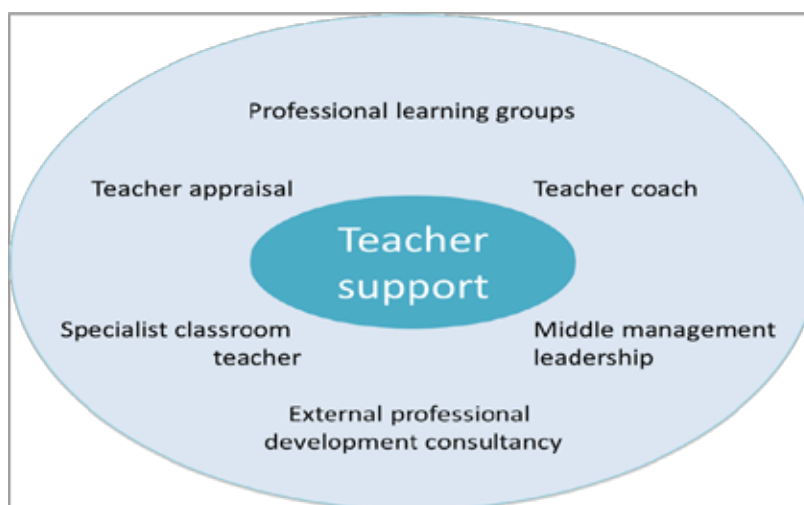
The following Figure 2 identifies the different resources and initiatives within the college that provide professional development and support for teachers.

**Figure 2: Resources and initiatives within De La Salle College to support teacher practice**

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Margaret Ross. For more information go to [www.helpbehaviour.co.nz](http://www.helpbehaviour.co.nz).

A range of initiatives provide teachers with professional support



### Supporting a holistic approach to engage Pasifika students

Pasifika students are engaged at school through a variety of learning opportunities, including classroom activities, cultural groups, sports and service options. The pastoral care team within the college provides support to students, families and teachers. Pastoral support in the school enhances the ability of students to learn appropriately. Staff are encouraged to focus on student well-being, gaining an understanding of their personal lives, and the challenges and difficulties that many families and students face.

Old boys of the college are a further valuable resource in the school's community and are actively involved as sports coaches, mentors and guest speakers. Students speak highly of the old boys and acknowledge how motivating and affirming it is to hear of Pasifika success. For example, one student talked about choosing a career in economics and accountancy, based on hearing a presentation by a De La Salle College old boy.

The college engages with a number of external organisations, such as the Ministry of Social Development, local Police, and Alcohol and Drug services. Resources are utilised in a manner that reflects the needs within the college. For example, restorative justice approaches were put in place with a group of year 9 boys found to be involved with marijuana. This approach involved random drug testing, working closely with families and students, and providing schoolwork programmes that were achievable but also challenging. Four years later, many of these boys have achieved success in both academic and sporting arenas.

The college works with a number of different agencies to provide care and support for students

### Resourcing and the role of the board of trustees

Members of the board of trustees, the majority of whom are former students of the college, are



extremely supportive, believing in the college, the vision and the principles used to guide decision-making. The BOT strongly supports the college's emphasis on academic as well as social preparedness for achieving future education and work goals. For example, the BOT is proactive and strategic in its resourcing approach and attempts to meet the needs of students and teachers, particularly in this digital world. The school is Wi-Fi networked and where possible the boys are encouraged to bring their own hardware to school. This means that the college can allocate resources to other areas of development, such as science.

Placing an emphasis on academic achievement, the BOT aligns the budget with growth areas (eg, information technology) to help the boys' pathway to tertiary education and ensures there are up-to-date resources:

*"The boys deserve the best ... to help the school punch above our weight, not just locally but right across the country".*

The majority of the BOT members are from the local area and have strong connections to Pasifika communities and students' families, particularly through church involvement. These board member connections provide a direct link to the college for many parents.

Board members have also implemented additional ways of accessing resources to support the college's goals and aspirations, for example, through a De La Salle charitable trust that enables access to funding, including grants and community funds.

### **Pasifika staff as role models and mentors**

There are a good number of Pasifika staff employed in the college, including those holding middle management positions, such as head of faculty, and dean. Of the 64 teaching staff, 20 are Pasifika, and they are involved in all areas of the school, including extra-curricular events. Pasifika staff also work as social workers or in support staff roles, including teacher aides and administrative positions. In total, Pasifika make up one third of all staff positions in the college (30 out of 90 staff).

Pasifika students often expressed particular appreciation for their Pasifika teachers and other staff, describing them as making learning culturally relevant as *"they understand our backgrounds"* and *"they are more relatable, and believable"*.

### **Initiatives and schedules to support Pasifika student achievement**

Timetable schedules reflect the college's main concern with enhancing Pasifika learner

A highly supportive board of trustees, with strong Pasifika representation, promotes Pasifika success, priorities and values

Pasifika staff members provide strong support for culturally relevant learning in the school

achievement and supporting the needs of both students and families. Within the overall timetable, times are specifically and routinely established for prayer, cultural activities, sport, and after-school homework sessions. And, for boys whose reading is at a lower level than that expected for their age, extra literacy classes are built into the schedule. Other literacy-based activities are also available, including a homework club, library literacy sessions at morning tea, and a chess club.

**Pasifika students with extra learning needs receive both academic and pastoral care support**

A further initiative introduced in response to high levels of truancy was that of support classes at each year level. Support classes, which provide a combination of pastoral and academic support, are smaller in size, and students have one teacher they work with for all core subjects, as this provides more stability. A Samoan social worker also works closely with the support classes, the students and their families, and undertakes home visits. Responses to these support classes have been positive. In 2011, nine of the 14 boys involved in the programme achieved NCEA level 2, and 14 out of 18 boys in the class achieved NCEA level 1.

### **Establishing and supporting positive Pasifika student pathways**

A number of programmes which support students to establish suitable pathways and career options have been made available to De La Salle boys through strategic resourcing. In collaboration with educational institutes such as the University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, and Manukau Institute of Technology, Pasifika students have the opportunity to become involved in the Pacific Leaders of Tomorrow programme (PILOT), Health Could Be 4 U<sup>11</sup>, and MATES (Mentoring and Tutoring Education Scheme)<sup>12</sup>.

A portfolios approach has been established for senior students to assist them to uphold the cultural construct of leadership in the Pasifika community, that is, to serve the community and earn respect. Through portfolios in health, sports, and culture, senior Pasifika students are encouraged to develop their leadership potential and become self-managing adults. Portfolios also support a mentoring approach to learning and development, where the older boys are instrumental in the lives of younger students.

**The college has a strong dual focus — successful academic pathways for Pasifika students, and students becoming respected community leaders and contributors**

*They [older students] are excellent, [we] want to be like them, they lead assemblies, stand next to the principal and shake hands [with younger students].* [Student]

There is also a service group initiative that requires that all year 12 and 13 boys complete at least 20 hours of community service. As a result, De La Salle College Pasifika students are active in the community, participating in service outside of their own church and families, and working with organisations like Habitat for Humanity, the David Lange Rest Home, and Disability Trust Onehunga.

<sup>11</sup> Health Could Be 4 U is available in selected Counties Manukau schools for year 12 and year 13 Māori and Pasifika students. The aim is to help the students bridge the gap between health-related tertiary study and the range of health careers available. While still at secondary school the students have the opportunity to learn more about the health career options available, and what school qualifications they need to achieve to get into relevant tertiary level study.

<sup>12</sup> MATES 'provides selected school students who have the potential to achieve, but are at risk of underachievement, with a friendly university mentor/tutor, to raise levels of aspiration and achievement, and to provide the listening ear young people need'. From: <http://www.greatpotentials.org.nz>



## Parental and family involvement

De La Salle College recognises that parental involvement is important for students to achieve highly. The SMT, teachers and pastoral care team have developed a comprehensive home–school partnership programme, which is strongly supported by the BOT. The reciprocal relationships and partnerships between the college and Pasifika parents, families and communities are built in a manner that is respectful and inclusive, enabling De La Salle College to respond effectively to the needs of the students, parents, families and community.

**The comprehensive home–school partnership programme acknowledges the importance of reciprocal relationships: schools having Pasifika parents’ advice and support and , in turn, schools supporting parents**

A professional learning group focus came from surveying Pasifika parents who wanted to know how NCEA and individual student credits operated throughout the year. Following that, the KAMAR<sup>13</sup> parent portal was introduced, a system that enables parents to see up-to-date information concerning their son’s performance, including attendance, homework requirements, assignment and test results, and NCEA credits. Other initiatives being resourced to support home–school partnerships include conducting parent feedback surveys, and teaching reading strategies to parents.

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<sup>13</sup> Refer footnote 9.

## Ensuring quality of teaching and the curriculum to enhance Pasifika student achievement

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Following the Lasallian tradition, the college seeks to know and address students' learning needs and to engage every student, every day, in as many ways as possible

In 1679, John Baptist De La Salle established pedagogical training and a practical curriculum that addressed the needs of students and teachers. In Lasallian pedagogy, teachers were expected to study the individual abilities and needs of students and provide achievable options. Students were grouped by ability and were moved up levels once they had mastered tasks. Large classes would be divided into small groups, dependent on ability. The overall goal was to engage every student, every day, in as many ways as possible. The college believes that these overall principles and goals continue to be just as appropriate for Pasifika and all students today.

The foundations of De La Salle pedagogy have paved the way for Pasifika student success and achievement at De La Salle College. Lasallian principles are consistent with Pasifika values and beliefs, including belief in community responsibility, the importance of faith in the lives of people, and the need to care for and support each other for well-being and collective success.

De La Salle case study information relating to the theme for this section of the report is further discussed below in two parts: the first part discusses approaches to ensuring curriculum quality (in terms of student characteristics and needs), and the second discusses steps taken to ensure quality teaching at the college. (As would be expected, there is some overlap of content discussed in each part, just as there is overlap of content throughout the report due to the interconnected nature of the different leadership practices that support student achievement and success.)

### Part A: Ensuring curriculum quality

Systematic monitoring of student progress and engagement, and careful curriculum design and delivery provides students with meaningful learning and opportunities for success

The college works to ensure that the curriculum is culturally relevant and meaningful for Pasifika students by systematically monitoring student progress and introducing topics that engage them in their community — for example, studying flight paths across South Auckland.

The principal and SMT aim to build a culture where the student and learning is at the centre of all decisions, including curriculum design.

*The philosophy (for the staff) is 'It's not about you [it's about the students]', and there is always urgency about what we have got to fix. [Principal]*

### Responding to the abilities and interests of Pasifika students

Personalised programmes are developed whereby students are placed in appropriate classroom settings that challenge them at a level that is achievable. Additional provision (eg, support classes and streamed extension classes) has been made to cater for students who need extra support, or for gifted students who require academic extension.



For NCEA subjects, faculties within the college design approaches to ensure that Pasifika students are given the best possible chance of success. The learning is scaffolded and the students' knowledge is built over time. In the science faculty, for example, topics are unpacked and boys are taken through the lessons at a pace that suits their ability. A three-hour task will be broken down to half-hour chunks and boys will only be tested when they feel ready.

The college has responded to low levels of literacy through the development of a literacy centre for years 7 and 8, and the implementation of extra literacy classes throughout the school. An increased literacy focus has also been incorporated into a range of subjects across the school — for instance, Bible study within religious studies now has literacy goals.

**The college has a strong focus on literacy, at all levels**

Literacy programmes have also involved parents and families, and information is given to parents regarding their roles in supporting their sons' reading.

The college also incorporates the Education for Employment Programme (EEP). EEP caters for students who are typically less engaged, through developing a classroom environment that is based on caring and solidarity. The programme has an academic focus and it is expected that all students will leave with at least NCEA level 2, as this is the minimum requirement sought by many employers, and by services and tertiary providers for entry into their courses.

EEP provides the boys with the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning, and students have been able to achieve academic goals as well as undertake practical courses leading, for example, to a first aid certificate or driver's licence. All EEP students are monitored for a year after leaving school. This is proving to be an easy task, as students often return to the college to talk about their achievements. As the deputy principal stated, "*EEP is Gateway<sup>14</sup> on turbo*".

### **Building student resilience through the curriculum and pastoral care**

The principal, SMT and pastoral care team realise the need to help students build resilience. While De La Salle College genuinely cares about and believes in the boys and works to ensure a supportive school environment, the college also understands that once the boys leave college the external environment may be much harsher for them, due to the frequently negative stereotypes of South Auckland and of Pasifika peoples. Therefore, students are offered a curriculum that builds their resilience through deliberately growing their leadership and self-management skills, as well as ability to be of service to others. Students say they feel prepared for life after school because, as one of the students stated, "*teachers show us what life is about*".

**The college has a deliberate focus on building student resilience and this is reflected in curriculum content and delivery**

There is a deep understanding too that Pasifika student well-being is critical to ensuring students are able to learn and fully engage in the curriculum. Student well-being is fostered through building strong positive relationships with the students and timely and appropriate pastoral care.

*Relationships are the most important thing — know Mum and Dad, be welcoming, and*

<sup>14</sup> The Gateway programme (through the Tertiary Education Commission) strengthens pathways for students from school to further education and training or employment. Senior secondary students undertake structured workplace learning across a range of industries and businesses, while continuing to study at school.



*pronounce names correctly.* [Pastoral care team member]

*One of the most important things is to show you care about them.* [Head of faculty]

## **Pasifika identities, languages and cultures in the curriculum**

Student programmes and learning within the college support each student's interests and reflect their identity, language and culture. Personalised programmes for Pasifika students are developed in partnership with the teachers, parents and other specialist staff.

The curriculum incorporates Samoan language and cultural constructs within subjects, including English and art. In English, for example, Samoan authors and texts are celebrated and used as learning tools. The college offers Samoan language courses from year 9 through to year 11, and Tongan at year 10. Pasifika boys are also encouraged to participate in a number of culturally relevant and meaningful programmes that support them as young Pasifika males.

Pasifika students who took part in interviews for this project made special mention of the college's acknowledgement of Samoan Independence Day when the Samoan flag was raised and the school environment was adorned with Samoan ornaments. The school also acknowledged the passing of the Tongan King, King George Tupou V, and Tongan students advised that they were permitted to wear traditional dress for a week. These expressions of Samoan cultural practice (fa'aSamoa) and Tongan cultural practice (faka-Tonga) are an example of the college's responsiveness to the specific cultural identities and wider needs of students, in support of Pasifika success.

Samoan language week is celebrated with the use of imagery and text in classrooms. Non-Pasifika teachers regularly use Samoan language in everyday communications with students, and as mentioned above Samoan authors and text relevant to the lives of the Pasifika students are studied in English.

Understanding Samoan Obligations (USO) is an example of a programme that was developed in 2008 in response to behavioural issues in school among Samoan boys. 'Uso' means brother in Samoa, and so the title captures the culture of 'brotherhood' within the college as well. Students are selected for this programme based on referrals from teachers. USO provides an opportunity for a selected group of students to travel to Samoa to connect with their heritage and experience their culture first-hand. During a two-week stay, boys get the chance to take part in ceremonies and learn protocols, and are expected to carry out the tasks of untitled men, such as traditional cooking and tending to the land. The programme acknowledges the potential in the students as well as the challenge of living in two cultures. Through making activities such as this available to students, the college demonstrates its strong commitment to developing successful Pasifika learners, secure in their identities, languages and cultures.

*School has a strong connection to who you are as Samoan. They bring in the culture through Polyfest and our palagi teachers are using Samoan.* [Student]

**Pasifika identities, languages and cultures are embraced and celebrated within the curriculum and in the wider life of the school**

**The college aims to equip boys socially to thrive within their cultures**





## **Extending students' experiences through out-of-school activities**

The Lasallian culture of the school is reflected in the curriculum through religious education studies and the inclusion of language and other culturally relevant learning opportunities, and through pastoral care. The Lasallian culture is also evident in the college's provision of a range of rich out-of-school experiences for students.

**The Lasallian culture aligns well with Pasifika cultural values as well as introducing multiple world views**

For example, each year, De La Salle College participates in joint camps with the three other De La Salle schools in New Zealand. Senior boys help to run these camps. They also help to run a range of other local and international trips, to enable students to learn more and engage with other cultures. Recent trips have included visiting the marae at Hokianga (an historically important site of very early Catholicism within New Zealand), experiencing another decile 1 school and community in Murupara, and visiting a school in outback Australia.

De La Salle's sporting and cultural achievements also reflect the interests and lives of students, including a strong history in rugby and participation in Polyfest. In 2008, De La Salle's team members were the New Zealand Secondary School Rugby Champions and in 2012 the college's representatives achieved success at the ASB Polyfest as overall winners.

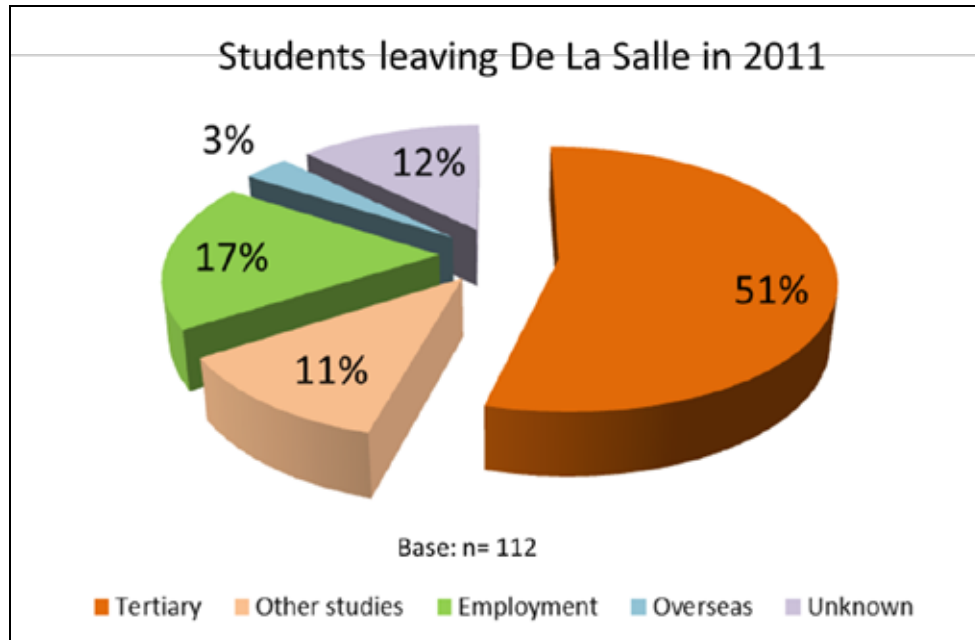
## **Tracking students' destinations after leaving school to better understand the delivered curriculum**

For three years, a current head of faculty held the role of Achievement Coordinator and was involved in tracking achievement across the whole school. Part of this role included interviewing every student and then feeding back particular strengths of each student to his teachers. The role also included monitoring student pathways throughout the boys' years at the college, to when they transition from school and go on to other pursuits.

**Data on students' destinations after they leave school give helpful insights into how well prepared they are to achieve life goals post secondary school**

As shown in Figure 3, of the 112 students who left the college in 2011, 51% were in tertiary education, 17% were employed, and 11% had taken up other studies. Although the SMT would like a more detailed break-down of what courses and professions boys end up in, these rudimentary data have been useful in giving a general overview of what boys do after leaving the college, at the same time providing insights about the delivered curriculum within the college and student preparedness for life beyond secondary school.

**Figure 3: Destinations of De La Salle students once they leave the college**



## Part B – Ensuring quality of teaching

**Lasallian philosophy recognises the importance of quality teaching for engaging students and building effective relationships**

The Lasallian philosophy recognises the importance of quality teaching in engaging students and building effective relationships where students are willing participants in their own learning. Brotherhood between all staff, students, the board of trustees, and families is critical, and is seen as providing a solid foundation for effective teaching practice. In job advertisements for the college it is made clear that any applicants should support the special character of the school and its values.

In its 2010 *Managing National Assessment* report for De La Salle College, NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) commended the college for its robust quality assurance practices through which teachers maintain their understanding of the national standards, and students are treated equitably and fairly in a quality assessment environment.

The college engages many processes to support teachers to monitor their own teaching and learning, helping them to set goals for classroom and individual student achievement. Heads of faculty provide frequent guidance, and support teachers with a solid planning foundation.



## Support for teachers

The college's teacher coach initiative supports teachers to undertake a process of self-reflection to improve teaching practice

Targeted support for teachers is provided by the teacher coach, who works alongside the teachers as they identify the improvements they would like to see in their own teaching practice, and identify the learning outcomes they would like to see in their students. The teacher coach provides timely support and advice, offers teaching strategies, and undertakes observations that engage the teacher in a process of self-reflection and evaluation.<sup>15</sup>

The pastoral care team plays an essential role in supporting teachers with disengaged students. They provide one-to-one support to both the student and the teacher. Their focus is to provide teachers with strategies for managing difficult behaviour and building open and trustful relationships with the students, as a sound basis for quality teaching and learning to then take place. Pastoral staff, as well as SMT staff, will also visit homes in an attempt to bridge the gap between school and families.

Pastoral care team support for teachers is vital to help them build trustful relationships with students

Staff with particular expertise in Pasifika identities, languages and cultures help other teachers in the school to develop their knowledge and skills, particularly in Samoan, to build positive relationships. Teachers are involved in leading professional learning groups that, in the past, have included lessons on correct pronunciation. Among all staff there appears to be a commitment to establishing home-school relationships, and learning everyday language (such as greetings, basic instructions) that reflect their students' backgrounds. Students are led in singing and prayer in their own languages and comment that the Pasifika teachers are good role models as they provide them with a relevant and relatable way of being.

*Pasifika teachers are like aunties, uncles, they understand your background, [and are] believable because they want us to achieve. [Student]*

External expertise is also accessed on an annual basis through programmes such as HELP!, where a consultant offers customised professional development regarding behavioural issues<sup>16</sup>. This includes one-to-one support and mentoring for teachers, as well as school-wide workshops where needed.

Staff with particular expertise in Pasifika identities, languages and cultures support others

Parent expertise is also a key resource when the college has issues with students, and parents' advice is sought if teachers need support.

*We have been called in to school to talk with kids because of [their] behaviour. ... Kids listen to us. [Parent]*

<sup>15</sup> The teacher coach initiative at De La Salle College is discussed in more depth in the separate exemplar report: *Teacher coaching to upskill teachers and support Pasifika student achievement* (see listing on p.47 of this report).

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 10, regarding the consultant and website information.

## Robust staff appraisal process

De La Salle College understands the need for robust processes in the staff appraisal process to ensure quality teaching. Teacher goals are assessed in teacher appraisals where the teacher is expected to bring evidence of progress towards goals. Discussions of Pasifika student assessment data focus on the relationship between what was taught and what the students learned.

An inquiry and feed-forward approach is used in the school where teachers are expected to not only mark whether work is correct, but to provide information for the student on how to improve.

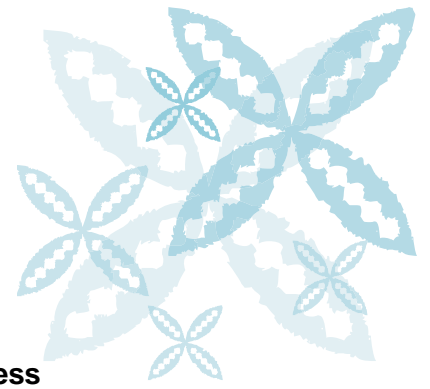
*I will look through books for teacher feedback. ... [The feedback provided] can't be a dead end. I want to see, 'Good work, Johnny, and next time you could do this' — [ie, providing] some direction [for how the student could do better].* [Head of faculty]

A robust staff appraisal process supports continuous improvement in teaching

Teachers are expected to be able to relate stories of student achievement successes and show evidence of how and what was achieved. In the teacher appraisal, time is allocated for setting new goals based on what has been achieved, and to discuss with their head of faculty any concerns or support required.

Students are involved in the teacher appraisal process as well, by giving their feedback in surveys. When goals are not met, extra support is provided for the teacher by their head of faculty, and the teacher coach or specialist classroom teacher, and the cycle continues. There is regular monitoring of teaching practice and how it is affecting the learners, and students at risk of failure and needing extra support are discovered in a timely manner.

Assessment information and procedures are also reviewed annually, and published for students and their families in the *De La Salle College Assessment Procedures Guidelines for Students*. Guidelines cover topics relating to National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA), certificate endorsement, internal and external assessment, scholarship, qualifications fees and financial assistance.



### Student feedback to teachers on teaching effectiveness

As noted above, Pasifika students are provided with opportunities to provide feedback for teachers on the effectiveness of their teaching. When the teacher coach is working alongside teachers in the classroom, she will approach the students and ask questions that relate to their understanding of what the teacher is trying to convey, and how they feel about the teacher's approach.

Also, all teachers can gain feedback about their teaching through a standard student learning survey, developed within the college. Students are asked to:

- Name three ways that your teacher helps you learn in this class
- Name three other ways that your teacher can help you learn in this class
- [Describe] three things [you can] do to improve your learning in this class by the end of next term.

Teachers are encouraged to carry out this survey at the end of each term with their classes and incorporate the information obtained into their teaching appraisals and ongoing practice.

Students commented that their feedback has made a difference in their classes and they feel listened to and validated.

*What they do, is that the teachers and seniors are always offering help and also ask us how they can be more help to us. [Student]*

Feedback from Pasifika students helps teachers better meet the students' needs, and the students feel listened to and valued

## Teacher learning and development to enhance Pasifika student achievement

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Discussion relating to the leadership theme in the previous section focused on systems and approaches in the school for ensuring teaching quality. The discussion for the present theme is more about how school leadership consults with and includes teachers in decisions about the way forward. It is also about the ways in which teachers take ownership of their professional learning, and contribute to helping the college develop and maintain a whole-school approach to learning how best to meet the needs of the students and ensure their success.

### Teacher-driven professional development

De La Salle College espouses and understands the need for teachers to take ownership of their learning and development, and to model desirable behaviour for the students' benefit.

'Since it is your responsibility to teach your students about God you must first become aware of the action of God in your life. Teach by example. Put into practice what you want your students to believe.' [From: *Meditations by John Baptist De La Salle*]

The principal, SMT and teachers work towards being life-long learners and seek to model the expectations they have of and for the students. Just as the boys' learning is targeted and personalised, so is teacher professional development.

The principal and senior management team maintain that teacher learning and development occurs through a contextualised and integrated professional development plan, which is focused on the teacher becoming well equipped to respond to and support Pasifika boys to experience success. A combination of external consultancy expertise and internal professional learning groups is used to ensure that professional development is relevant and meaningful to staff. The principal, SMT, heads of faculty, and teachers regularly discuss student achievement and the professional learning required to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Every fortnight internal professional learning groups are held. Teachers choose the learning areas that they think they need and then opt into groups of interest. Topics have included strategies to teach thinking skills, and numeracy and literacy. Occasionally, management staff may suggest, on the basis of prior observations or conversations with the teacher, that a teacher join a particular learning group.

Professional learning groups have also developed from parent feedback. An example of this is the development of a parent portal in KAMAR to provide parents with up-to-date information about their sons' attendance and academic results, followed by the whole school learning about KAMAR<sup>17</sup>. Another example is that many of the faculty heads, deans and teachers have participated in the Teaching English in Schools to Speakers of Other Languages (TESSOL) course to improve learner outcomes.

De La Salle College leadership understands and promotes the need for teachers to take ownership of their learning and development

Professional learning groups within the college help teachers reflect on their practice and develop knowledge and skills in areas of need

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<sup>17</sup> Refer footnote 9 earlier in this report.



*TESSOL was the best PD ever. ... I have become so much more explicit in my teaching: I make sure the purpose [of what they are learning] is clear and that the boys know exactly what it is I want them to get out of my lessons. [Head of faculty]*

### **School-wide professional learning focus and strategies**

In De La Salle College, formal strategic planning with staff occurs at the beginning of each term, during which a school-wide learning focus is planned. The agreed learning focus is later reviewed at the end of each term and the review results provided to staff so they can incorporate learnings into their teaching practice. In-class support occurs in a variety of ways, including through feedback and assistance as a result of regular classroom observations and walk-throughs.

Teachers have opportunities to discuss why they might need to change their practice to enhance Pasifika learner achievement. Heads of faculty roles are integral to teachers' planning and reflection. Through regular faculty meetings, teacher appraisals, and more informal conversations, faculty staff help each other to develop more effective teaching strategies. The teacher coach and specialist classroom teacher provide timely support through random observation, goal setting and one-to-one planning and mentoring sessions with teachers.

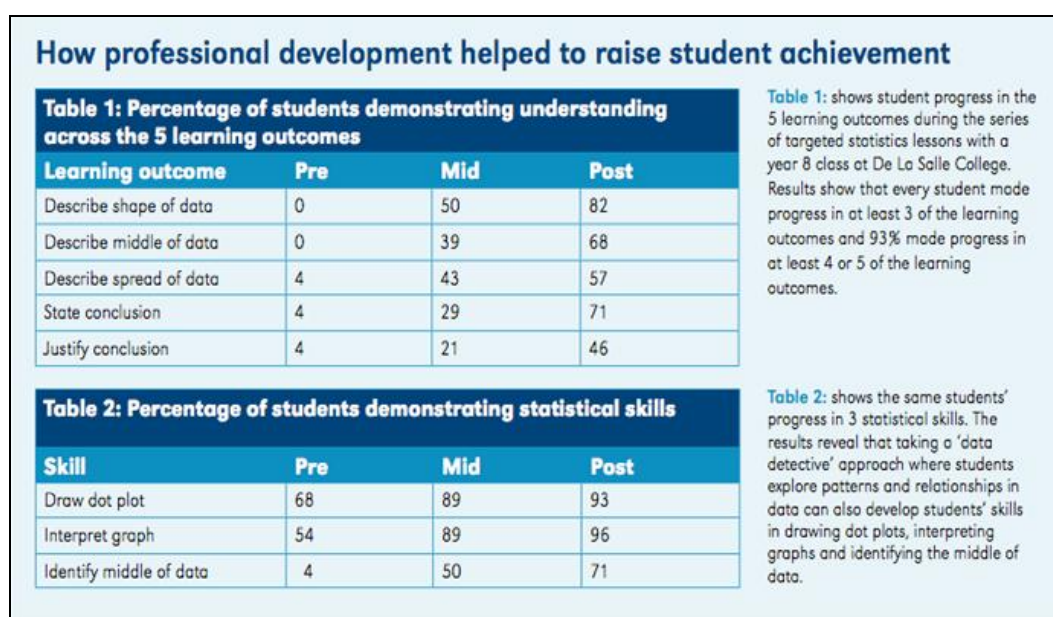
Following on from external provision, and based on their data, the college has developed internal professional development directly relevant to their teachers' and students' needs

De La Salle College has participated in a number of professional development initiatives over the years, such as the Secondary Numeracy Project (SNP) and the Assessment to Learn programme. The Assessment to Learn programme, operated by Evaluation Associates, provided teachers with development in a number of areas, including differentiated learning, leadership, analysis of data, and planning. From 2008 to 2010, Team Solutions (University of Auckland) facilitators worked with a college staff member to focus teacher practice on raising student achievement.

Subsequent school-wide professional development has been facilitated internally, to ensure that learning is directly relevant for teachers in the college and can be applied in their particular classroom settings.

The data presented in Figure 4 provide an example of a positive shift in students' levels of understanding and achievement in statistics, following their teacher's participation in professional development designed within the college to help teachers raise student achievement.

**Figure 4: De La Salle students' understanding and achievement in five learning outcome areas in statistics, before and after their teacher participated in professional development to improve student outcomes**



Source: Extracted from *Effective Practice in Education 2010: Quick Smart (Team Solutions, University of Auckland)*

Lasallian philosophy and principles provide a strong foundation for the college and are important to the boys as well as their families. To maintain the integrity of the Lasallian philosophy and principles throughout the college community, senior management staff undertake professional development relevant to the Lasallian philosophy, ensuring depth of knowledge and ongoing commitment to the overarching values and strategies. The principal and a middle management staff member are also involved in a three-year programme that focuses on Lasallian pedagogy, history and spirituality.

*I have an emotional connection, so work hard — always improving. I drive [the Lasallian] part of the school hard. ... I have a strong connection with the Brothers; they are like father-figures [to me]. [Head of faculty]*





## Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment for Pasifika students

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Lasallian beliefs and vision for the school help create an environment where the boys feel safe, supported and comfortable with who they are

As emphasised throughout this report, the Lasallian philosophy underpins everything the college does. The Lasallian principles therefore guide the leadership team's approach and beliefs about the nature of the environment they and other staff seek to provide for their students, and for the school community as a whole.

### A college culture based on genuine care

The sense of brotherhood between the senior management team (SMT), teachers and other staff, and students is critical in engaging the boys. The Lasallian beliefs and vision for the school help create an environment where the boys are safe, supported and feel comfortable with who they are. A sense of the Pasifika core values of family, belonging, and inclusion is evident in the way students describe the college environment.

*Brotherhood sets the school apart; De La Salle is like a home away from home.* [Student]

*This school is like family; not really a school.* [Student]

*I feel at home; it's a natural environment for you.* [Student]

College initiatives seek to address the physical, social, spiritual and cultural needs of all students. There is a clear focus on the pastoral care and well-being of the students, and the SMT and pastoral care staff build strong relationships with Pasifika students and families through regular communication. College routines and regulations help to provide a structured, no-surprises environment where all expectations are clearly stated and constantly reiterated.

Students feel their ideas, skills and characteristics are recognised by the principal, SMT and teachers. Students talk with pride about their school and the respectful relationships between students and teachers.

### Positive staff relationships and committed middle management for a supportive, stable environment

Despite changes in key senior leadership personnel over the past few years, the staff have continued to work in an orderly and supportive environment. The BOT reports that college management, particularly as a result of the strong work ethic and commitment of the heads of faculty staff, has provided stability and maintained the school's focus on student achievement and success. In addition, the Brothers who reside at the college and provide support with the day-to-day operations (such as caretaker responsibilities) are a positive resource for staff and students, role modelling the Lasallian way of life.

Distributed leadership through middle management enables the college to maintain its focus

## Positive relationships between teachers and students and between younger and older students

Students and teachers have strong, positive relationships, and students are grateful for the time and effort teachers take to help them achieve.

*I appreciate all the hard work and devotion the staff apply towards our learning.* [Student]

All staff are actively involved in extra-curricular activities. Despite the principal being recently appointed at the time information for this case study was being collected, he had made a positive impact through his presence at activities and events that the boys participate in and that their families attend. He had attended all rugby games held since his appointment and was coaching softball. A number of SMT members were also coaching, including the deputy and assistant principals as basketball coaches, and the head of faculty of religious education as rugby manager.

There is also a brotherhood between older and younger students in the college, based on the strong Pasifika values of caring and support for one another. An enduring sense of brotherhood is also evident in the time that the college old boys give to the school as motivational guest speakers, coaches and mentors.

## College routines based on sound knowledge of students' learning and other needs

College routines are firmly grounded in the special character of the school. They are culturally affirming as they support the Pasifika students' personal knowledge and understanding and reflect what they know of home and church life.

The principal, BOT, SMT and teachers understand the educational needs of boys, and school routines are organised to create structure that supports the boys' learning. The boys respond well to college routines, rules and regulations, saying that they create a safe and comfortable learning environment.

*We help others who are struggling at homework centres, our little brothers. ... This school is a family, not really a school.* [Student]

Pasifika students and parents reinforce the notion of De La Salle 'being a home away from home'.

College routines are designed to provide a supportive structure for Pasifika students' learning



Parents, families, and communities play an important part in ensuring an orderly and supportive learning environment

## Welcoming and encouraging parental and family involvement and support

In ensuring an orderly and supportive environment for Pasifika students, De La Salle leadership recognises the importance of the role that parents, families and communities play.

Parents who took part in interviews also recognised the importance of the part that families can play in their young people's learning progress and achievement, and expressed their strong support for the college and the students, and the high expectations and goals that they are working towards. The participating parents said that they were actively working on getting other families involved in the school, to help build a community in which schools and families work together to support students' learning and achievement.

Parent expertise and skills have been used to help support the school in developing home–school partnerships, as well as in building positive relationships between teachers and students. Key parents within the school (ie, those who regularly visit, participate and contribute) play a critical role in relaying information from the college to the wider community of families. This is extremely valuable as they are able to explain college messages in their Pasifika language(s) and this improves parental buy-in and understanding of school processes.

*Families having some leadership in schools is important — it [helps] in breaking down some barriers between school and parents. [Parent]*

*They [parents who have a leadership role] can have meetings with their parents and students in Tongan [or another Pacific language, depending on the community]. [Parent]*

## Celebrating student success

Student success and achievement is regularly celebrated at assembly, in newsletters and at certificate presentations. Excellence is given particular recognition in a number of subjects, including Samoan, music, drama and the visual arts. Levels Up certificates are presented for excellent behaviour and attitude in class.

*They award achievement at school assemblies on Tuesday. ... Teachers and the principal also show support in sports and cultural programmes. [Student]*

The college supports the boys to become leaders through service in the community, running school assemblies, and peer mediation.

## Monitoring and support for regular school attendance

**Student attendance is vital for student success and the college actively works to engage students at school**

Students need to attend school and be engaged in learning to achieve academic success. To help ensure this, the principal and SMT are highly visible around the school and actively engage with the students — for example, welcoming them each morning as they walk into the school grounds, checking presentation, and late arrivals. Sweeps are done in the nearby shops just as school is about to start to hurry late students along, and a Samoan Attendance Officer follows up with students who are regular truants.

Effective use of the school-wide KAMAR system also quickly flags absentees and late arrivals to the pastoral care team who follow up with each student and family. With the development of the KAMAR parent portal, families are also sent text messages asking them to explain any student's absence from school.

## Proactive behaviour management and fair disciplinary processes

**The college seeks to effectively manage student behaviour for a positive learning environment**

There is an expectation in the school that staff will manage day-to-day student behaviour issues appropriately, and support is available through the SMT, faculty leaders, and the pastoral care team to help teachers deal with any ongoing behavioural issues. A key role of the pastoral care team is to support staff to effectively manage student behaviour so that there is a positive and enabling learning environment. The pastoral care team work individually with teachers, providing them with strategies to engage in a positive way with students and helping them to modify problematic student behaviour when required.

*We all need to be self-motivated as a staff [to do this well] — before teachers can teach and before they [students] can learn we need to deal with their behaviour. [Pastoral care team member]*

**The college strongly believes that Involving and engaging parents is an essential foundation for student academic success**

The college also accesses all available resources to ensure that problems between Pasifika students, families and teachers are managed and positively resolved. Parents are contacted immediately if there are any concerns, reiterating the college's expectations for regular attendance and behaviour that reflects the values of the school. For example, in the case of students who are absent for more than two to three days, parents will be asked to provide a medical certificate. The college strongly believes that involving and engaging parents is an essential foundation for student academic success.



For students identified as being at risk of leaving school early or without experiencing success, the SMT, deans and pastoral care team co-construct an intervention programme and mobilise internal and external resources to support a student and his family to address the problems.

Particularly serious and substantive problems with students are dealt with on an individual basis in a fair and timely way, using restorative processes based on the Restorative Justice Model (Margaret Thorsborne & Associates, 2013)<sup>18</sup>. The college has a second-chance philosophy for all students, as both the principal and SMT are aware of the challenges and difficulties that many families are faced with and the need to remove as many barriers as possible in order to support learner achievement.

Restorative processes and a 'second-chance' philosophy are adopted with boys whose behaviour is challenging: the college aims to keep all boys learning and succeeding at school

*If the boys are settled and feel safe then they will learn better.* [Pastoral care team member]

*What I like to tell the boys is, 'Leave your baggage at the gate. When you walk in here it is a safe and happy place. ... If you've still got problems, come and see me.'* [Pastoral care team member]

The BOT expects that college management will deal with student disciplinary matters, and has the view that stand-downs and suspensions should only be used as a last resort. The BOT members also consider themselves the guardians of the De La Salle spirit, and although not what they would wish and a decision not made lightly, they will expel a student if necessary to protect the safety of the other boys and the staff.

The data in Table 2 show that while there were more student stand-downs in the college between 2009–2011 compared to the previous two years (although returning to earlier levels again in 2012), suspensions over the 2007–2012 period were lower than for all other decile 1 schools nationally.

<sup>18</sup> The website for this work states: 'Restorative justice (also known as transformative justice), views wrong-doing as a violation of people and relationships. Problem-solving becomes centred around an exploration of the harm that has been done and how to repair it. This philosophical approach, with its focus on procedural, substantive and emotional satisfaction has enormous benefits, for victims or those harmed, wrongdoers and their families, for agencies and institutions and the wider community, as it shifts thinking away from retribution toward repair. It is this recognition that *relationships matter* which drives the work of Margaret Thorsborne & Associates.' For more information go to: <http://www.thorsborne.com.au>

**Table 2: Stand-down and suspension data for De La Salle College compared with all other decile 1 schools (2007–2012)**

Year	De la Salle College Age-Standardised rate (per 1000 students)				Decile 1 schools Age-Standardised rate (per 1000 students)			
	Stand-downs		Suspensions		Stand-downs		Suspensions	
	Pasifika	Total	Pasifika	Total	Pasifika	Total	Pasifika	Total
2007	12	11	0	0	33	26	8	6
2008	19	20	5	4	26	26	7	6
2009	34	32	3	3	26	24	6	6
2010	31	32	7	8	32	24	8	5
2011	32	30	3	3	27	24	5	5
2012	19	20	3	3	24	20	6	5

*Source: Indicators and Reporting, Ministry of Education, August 2013*



## **Making powerful connections with Pasifika parents, families and communities to support Pasifika student achievement**

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**De La Salle College has positive relationships with families, churches and wider community organisations and services**

To improve outcomes for boys and raise academic expectations, the college believes it is essential that there is a close home–school partnership. The school works hard to have a connected, supportive parent body which works together with the staff to raise outstanding young men who are high achievers in academic, sporting, cultural and faith dimensions.

Despite the principal being new to the position, he has established genuine relationships with students and parents. Regular messages from the principal in the college newsletter advocate for home–school partnerships and the importance of parent and family involvement in students' educational journeys.

Through the home–school relationships, the college provides up-to-date and relevant information to parents, and they in turn provide the college with information about their needs. As an example of both the college's and Pasifika parents' desire to hear each other's voices, over 100 parents of year 9 and 10 boys attended a meeting at the beginning of the year, after being actively encouraged to do so through personal invitations, newsletters and flyers.

### **Clear goals for home–school partnerships set out in School Charter**

The De La Salle College Charter sets out the home–school partnership goals including:

Goal 4.5 — 'to ensure that parents, caregivers and families are involved in all aspects of their sons' education and with issues affecting the college community'.

Activities that support this goal include school–home partnership meetings across all year levels in each term. These meetings include a focus on: delivering a curriculum that is relevant to the students and reflects their Pasifika identities, languages and cultures; pastoral support; gaining feedback from parents; and providing strategies for parents to help their young people with their learning.

**College activities are designed to meet the goals for home–school partnerships stated in the School Charter**

The partnership meetings enable targeted conversations based on student academic achievement and are an example of a school putting into practice the Pasifika Education Plan goal of fostering active Pasifika parent, family and community engagement with the school in order to support Pasifika learning.

**There is a shared belief that education is about improving Pasifika communities as a whole**

## **A clear understanding that partnership and collaboration is critical to Pasifika success**

The academic and social learning of the boys is embraced as the responsibility of all — from governance through to management, teaching staff, support staff, parents and families, and members of the extended community, such as college old boys. Amongst the people interviewed for this case study, it was evident that they had a clear understanding that partnership and collaboration through sharing of information and communication is critical to Pasifika success.

The De La Salle College community believes that student education is not about the individual, rather it is about improving Pasifika communities as a whole. The brotherhood philosophy provides a strong foundation for sharing, love and support amongst staff, the boys, their families and the South Auckland community. There is evidence that Pasifika parents and families involved in the college, including those serving on the board of trustees, are encouraged to set high expectations, and 'demand better outcomes' for their young people.

*We want to resource those subjects that have a clear pathway to university. We want our boys to have the most up-to-date resources that they can get. We demand that [because] the boys deserve the best. If there is something that we need, we want to get it. For a decile 1 school we want to be punching above our weight. Not just amongst decile 1 to 3 schools but [for all schools] nationally. We want to be nationally recognised. The only way we are going to do that is to resource it well. ... We want to be remembered for being there for the boys, families and staff. I make no apologies for putting the boys first because that's why we are here. [BOT member]*

## **Valuing support from Pasifika parents and families**

**The college values the positive impact that families have on the smooth running of the school**

Pasifika families visit the college to support academic, social and cultural initiatives. Families receive personalised letters inviting and encouraging their support, and asking them to come into the school. The principal and SMT acknowledge the positive impact that families have on the smooth running of the college as well as on student academic achievement. A core group of parents support the college and provide a link with the wider community. The principal and a teacher representative attend monthly Parent, Teacher and Friend Association (PTFA) meetings. Parents who regularly attend these meetings relay information to the wider communities through church and other connections.





School leaders place a high priority on strengthening community links, and families and the wider community talk with pride about the college.

*[The college] leaders understand our people. ... They promote what we are gifted in. They care about our students. [Students are] not judged by the colour of their skin. [They] feel they are loved; they belong. [Parent]*

**Family and community input supports the school to celebrate Pasifika identities, languages and cultures**

Strong cultural performing groups give many Pasifika students a sense of pride through experiences of success. The school enjoys a good relationship with the media and with past pupils of the school (who include some elite sportspeople), many of whom act as mentors to current students. Parents have opportunities to attend dedicated meetings for ethnic and social groups, and to discuss student achievement information. Parents are invited to courses to learn strategies (eg, reading strategies) that can support their sons' learning.

## Engaging in constructive problem talk to enhance Pasifika student achievement

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This final theme in the framework for analysing the case study information, as outlined on page 6 of this report, emphasises the importance of strong leadership and a collective willingness and responsibility within the school to: identify and to discuss what is not working well; plan for and implement strategies and approaches for successful outcomes for Pasifika students.

### Effective, proactive, and distributed leadership

Effective distributed leadership draws on the Lasallian philosophy and five guiding principles

Within the college there is effective distributed leadership, which has ensured that despite changes in those holding senior leadership positions, academic results have remained at a consistently good level over several years. Although the person filling the principal role had changed several times in the two years preceding data gathering for this case study (in late 2012) and the current principal was new, it is clear that within the overall leadership team are members who hold strong institutional knowledge, have strong relationships with students, and have the ability and will to maintain a strong focus on improving teaching and learning.

The principal and SMT make important school decisions based on the values and five guiding principles of Lasallian pedagogy<sup>19</sup>, as well as ensuring that developments reflect the special character of the college. All staff are expected to share, promote and model the values of the school, to provide a strong foundation for all planning and actions.

The principal and SMT engage with staff, parents and students about teaching and learning concerns, interests and ideas. All SMT members, including the principal, lead conversations focused on learning and achievement. Reflection meetings occur at the beginning of each day and all staff are required to take turns to lead the meetings at some point.

The principal and SMT actively engage with staff, parents and students about their concerns, interests, and ideas to do with teaching and learning

College leaders provide honest judgements and feedback and are open to discussion of issues. Planned developments within the college are well informed, so that they can be realistic and in the best interests of students. The SMT works alongside teachers to improve outcomes for Pasifika, including supporting the initiation of programmes that teachers consider will help raise student achievement.

The principal and SMT are aware of the college's standing and progress in relation to other schools both locally and nationally. This provides motivation and a constructive sense of competitiveness to strive for excellence. To inform school decisions the expertise of external consultants, guest speakers, provider organisations, old boys, and parents and families is called upon. There are many different levels of leaders in this school and all are clear about school values and beliefs, and have a strong focus on the boys and supporting them to be the very best they can be.

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<sup>19</sup> The five guiding principles are listed in the earlier footnote 8.



School leadership has the respect of its Pasifika students, parents, families and communities

### Mutually respectful relationships

The principal, SMT, heads of faculty, deans and all teaching staff appear to have the respect of the Pasifika students and parents, families and communities. There is a deep understanding of the importance of building good relationships between home and school, and that it requires a consistent commitment. The principal and SMT believe in the students, their potential and their ability to achieve the highest success possible. Pasifika students, parents, family and community members are placed at the centre of all of the college's decision-making and planning.

Members of the SMT collectively act to ensure conflict is resolved quickly and fairly, and faculty heads, deans and the pastoral care team play an important role in working with students and families. The special character of the school has provided stability in times of change and also provides the foundation for how conflict is resolved within the college.

The special character of the school has provided stability in times of change

### A responsive board of trustees

The BOT is actively engaged with the college and governs with passion and dedication. Pasifika representation on the BOT ensures a Pasifika lens informs policy and provides an appropriate mandate for the college. All reports from the principal, SMT and teachers are thoroughly read prior to board meetings, and staff that attend the meetings are expected to respond to questions relating to academic reports and resource requests. Board members are cognisant of their responsibilities to ask the hard questions to ensure that the students and community are getting good provision.

The BOT actively engages with the college and provides a strong Pasifika lens to inform school policy

*We like to ask the hard questions. I've been an elected member to represent parents. We challenge the running of the school. The majority of our board are Pacific, educated, trained. We wanted us as a board to be looked at as a body who know what they are doing. There are about three or four of us [BOT members] who live in and amongst Mangere. I've been here all my life. I'm a son of Mangere. We go to the churches. We are amongst the church and they are going, 'What is going on?' These are parents that have long gone. They have no more kids there but they still have a strong connection to the school. [They ask us] 'What's happening?' [and we say] 'Don't worry, trust us.' [When they say] 'Okay we'll trust your judgement on this', that means a lot to me, when they can trust our judgement. They did and we came through it [the hard times in recent years]. [Board of trustees member]*

**The principal ensures students and parents feel safe to share any concerns**

### **Strong, clear management to provide stability and engagement**

SMT members acknowledge that the past few years have been difficult, but have worked hard to maintain a sense of stability among staff and within the student body, and to continue to communicate with families in a consistent and positive way. The principal in his short time at the school has sent very clear messages to the SMT and parents about the goals of the school for students' learning, progress and well-being. Senior management team members, parents and students feel safe to share concerns, ideas and interests, because everyone shares common goals and values through the special character of the college and have the well-being of the students at heart. The SMT appears to make tough decisions where necessary. For example, the current principal is the first appointed lay principal in the college's history. Initially this met with some resistance; however it was important for the college to establish permanent leadership, rather than continuing in a pattern of short-term measures and uncertainty.

Despite initial reservations about the appointment, feelings about the principal are now overwhelmingly positive. He is recognised as *"approachable"*, and *"the right fit and at the right time"*, and as explained by a board member, *"He makes things happen and he gets things done."*



## Concluding comments

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This case study report shows how De La Salle College understands and respects Pasifika students, families and communities. The college's strongly values-based approach supports Pasifika boys to achieve high levels of educational success, along with a positive self-identity. This in turn enables them to flourish both within Pasifika and wider communities. A notable feature of the college is the strong sense of brotherhood that encompasses the boys and affirms their identity and place of belonging.

The college is a place where both teachers and students are considered equal partners in improving teaching and learning outcomes, and where positive relationships between teachers and all students, and between the college and parents and families, are paramount. Teachers are supported and empowered by college management and leaders to direct their own professional growth, with a clear focus on student achievement.

The exemplar report which supports this case study<sup>20</sup> describes how De La Salle College utilised its recently introduced teacher coach position to support teachers to effectively engage more successfully with Pasifika students, in order to address their learning needs.

While the college acknowledged a range of ongoing challenges, one of the key messages for improving Pasifika student achievement from the De La Salle experience is the importance of teacher support structures that are strongly promoted and resourced by the board of trustees and college leadership team, and that place an emphasis on teachers being accountable for their practice and for student outcomes.

This De La Salle College case study, like the other case studies in the series, provides evidence of effective leadership practice in each of the seven key areas<sup>21</sup> identified by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) in their report *School leadership and student outcomes: identifying what works and why*, a Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration undertaken for the Ministry of Education. The De La Salle College case study also serves to illustrate principles of the Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017 at work in a school context, supporting and championing Pasifika student achievement and success.

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<sup>20</sup> All of the case study and exemplar reports in this series of reports with a focus on school leadership practices that support Pasifika student achievement and success are listed on page 47.

<sup>21</sup> As indicated early in this report (p.6), these themes are to do with school leaders working to ensure: high standards and expectations for Pasifika student achievement; strategic resource management and allocation; quality teaching and a quality curriculum; opportunities for teachers to learn and develop; an orderly and supportive school environment; strong connections with Pasifika families and communities for student support; constructive ongoing talk to solve problems and reach the goals for successful student outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

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This case study has developed from the knowledge and expertise of many people both now and from the past. The research team would like to acknowledge all those who have been involved in various stages of writing and production.

The first acknowledgement is to De La Salle College and its community of staff members, board of trustees members, families and students who participated enthusiastically and candidly in the research. Throughout the process, the principal of De La Salle College and the senior management team worked alongside the research team to share their journey of raising Pasifika achievement. Without their support and willingness to work with the researchers it would not have been possible to develop this case study.

The research team is grateful for the time and contribution of both students and families who spoke with them and trusted that their experiences within the school would be represented accurately. Students engaged in the research process with maturity and expressed their hopes that their own successful experiences would improve education for Pasifika throughout New Zealand.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of the team from the Ministry of Education — in particular Dr Lesieli Tongati'o (then Pule Ma'ata Pasifika), Fatulatetele Tolo, Gabrielle-Sisifo Makisi, Jo MacDonald, and Shelley Kennedy.

## Research Team

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Based on the success of the *Rangiātea Case Studies and Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2011), Judy Oakden was selected by the Ministry to lead the project with the support of Kellie Spee. Pasifika cultural and research competence was then built into the project through the selection of experienced Pasifika team members — Pale Sauni, Dr Ruth Toumu'a, and Clark Tuagalu — whose input, involvement and presence in all key stages throughout the project provided the Pasifika lens required to ensure the project planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting were framed appropriately for Pasifika.

Kellie Spee was the lead researcher for this case study, with support from Judy Oakden, Dr Ruth Toumu'a, Pale Sauni, and Clark Tuagalu.



## **List of case study and exemplar reports in the series**

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### **Case Studies**

- *Leadership practices supporting Pasifika student success: De La Salle College Case Study* (Spee, K., Oakden, J., Toumu'a, R., Sauni, P., & Tuagalu, C.: 2014)
- *Leadership practices supporting Pasifika student success: McAuley High School Case Study* (Toumu'a, R., Oakden, J. & Sauni, P.: 2014)
- *Leadership practices supporting Pasifika student success: Otahuhu College Case Study* (Spee, K., Toumu'a, R., Oakden, J., Sauni, P., & Tuagalu, C.: 2014)

### **Exemplars**

- *Teacher coaching to upskill teachers and support Pasifika student achievement: An exemplar* [De la Salle College] (Spee, K., Oakden, J., Toumu'a, R., Sauni, P., & Tuagalu, C.: 2014)
- *Evidence-based decision making for Pasifika success in mathematics: An exemplar* [McAuley High school] (Oakden, J., Toumu'a, R., Sauni, P., & Spee, K.: 2014)
- *A model of academic mentoring to support Pasifika achievement: An exemplar* [Otahuhu College] (Spee, K., Oakden, J., Toumu'a, R. & Tuagalu, C.: 2014)

All six reports are published by the Ministry of Education, Wellington, and are available from the Education Counts website at: [www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications) (under Pasifika).

Some hard copies may also be available: to request copies, please email [research.info@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:research.info@minedu.govt.nz)

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