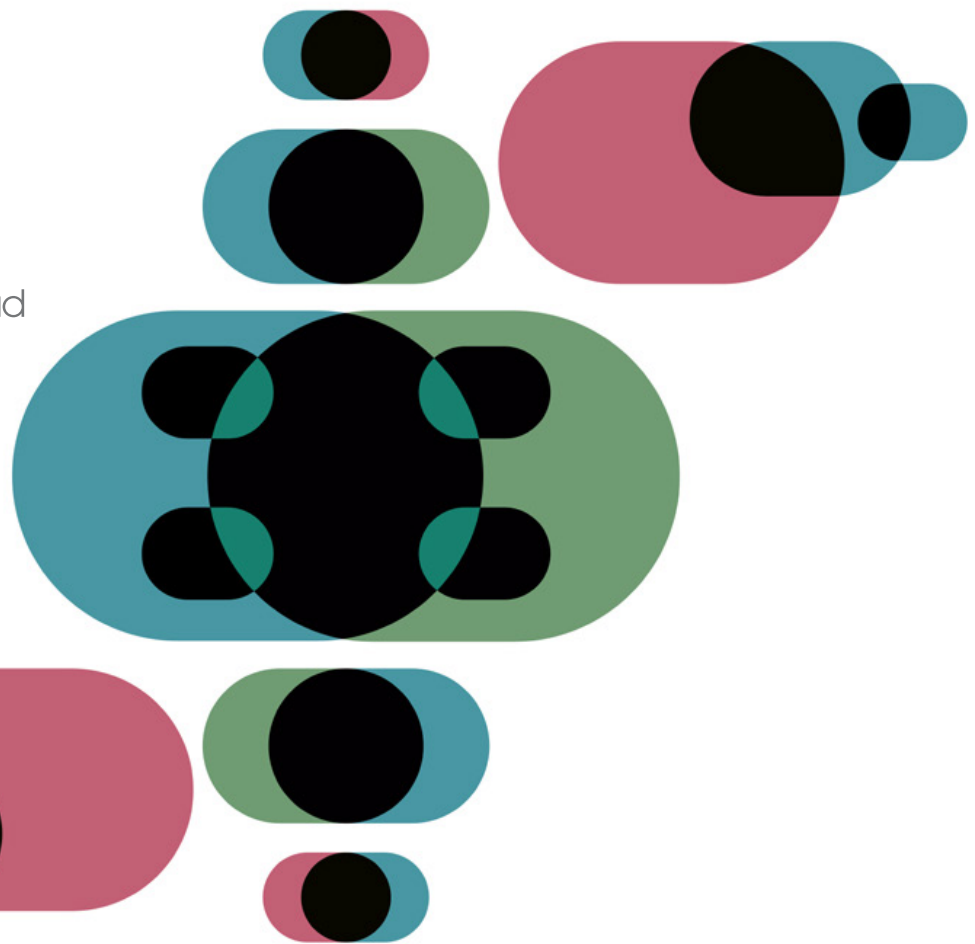




Intersection

How leaders lead



Learning from Experience

Report on the Independent
Cultural Review of Ballarat
Grammar School

JULY 2026

Disclaimer

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The findings and observations in this report reflect themes and insights identified through that information. They are not intended to represent a comprehensive account of all experiences, incidents or perspectives within Ballarat Grammar School unless otherwise stated.

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Intersection respects and honours Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together.

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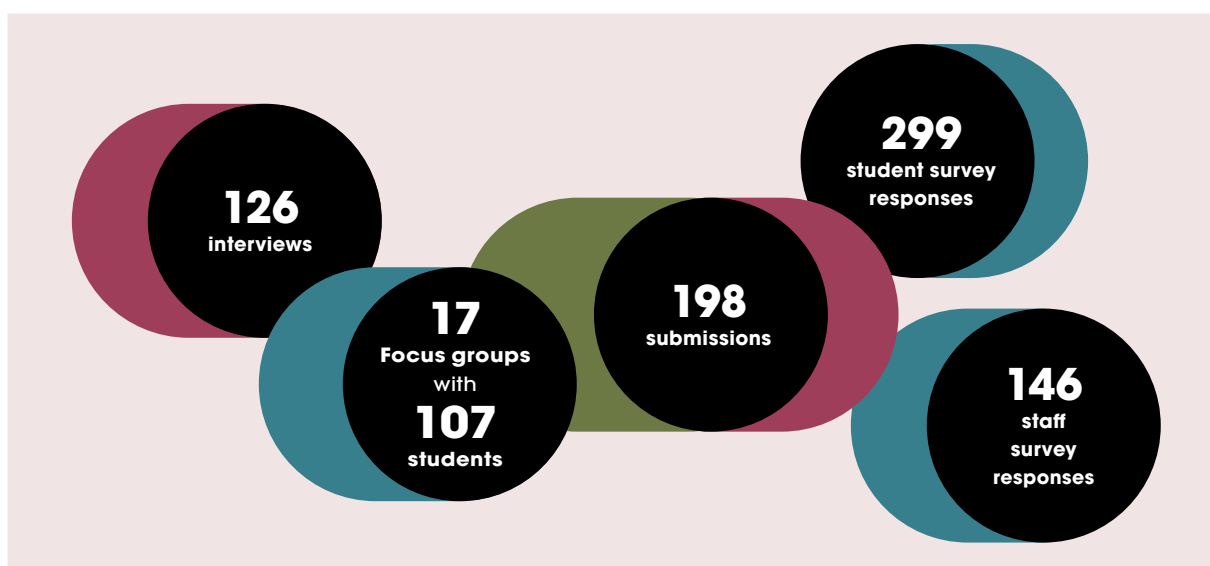
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1 Executive Summary

This Report presents the findings of the Independent Cultural Review of Ballarat and Queen's Anglican Grammar School ('Ballarat Grammar'), commissioned by the School Board in May 2025 and conducted by Intersection Pty Ltd ('Intersection'). The Review was undertaken following incidents of peer-to-peer physical violence and the practice of 'strapping' in one of the school's boarding houses, and the broader questions about school culture those incidents raised.

The Review is not an investigation, an audit or a determination of individual fault. It is a systematic examination of the culture of Ballarat Grammar as experienced by its students, parents, employees and former community members. It draws on qualitative data gathered through 126 one-on-one interviews, 17 focus groups attended by 107 students, 198 written submissions, 299 student survey responses, 146 staff survey responses and 32 follow-up meetings with school staff, coupled with a detailed analysis of the school's policies, systems and governance frameworks.



Acknowledgement of participants

Intersection wishes to sincerely thank every person who contributed to this Review. Members of the Ballarat Grammar community gave their time, their trust and their honesty to this process. Many shared experiences that were painful to recount. Current and former students described events that had shaped their understanding of themselves and their place in the school. Parents spoke about the gap between what they had hoped for their children and what their children experienced. Employees reflected on workplaces and leadership cultures that had, at times, failed to support them. Former students revisited memories they had carried for years.

The willingness of participants to speak candidly, particularly those for whom doing so came at personal cost, is the foundation on which this Report stands. Without their contribution, this Review could not have achieved the depth of understanding required to identify what needs to change or the honesty required to say so clearly. Their courage deserves to be met with action.



Key findings

Strengths of the school

Ballarat Grammar is a school with genuine strengths, and this Review was conducted on that basis. Intersection takes a strengths-based approach to cultural review work. That does not mean softening findings. It means recognising that lasting cultural change is built on what an institution already does well. The purpose of identifying strengths is not to balance out criticism; it is to understand the foundations that can be built upon. An institution that knows what it is doing well is better positioned to address gaps. This Review identifies significant challenges, but it does so in the context of a school that has real foundations to build on.

Participants across all cohorts spoke consistently about a deep sense of community at Ballarat Grammar. For many families, the school is not simply a place of education but a multi-generational institution that has shaped identities, relationships and life trajectories. Current and former students, parents and employees described a school that, at its best, fosters belonging, connection and genuine care for the individual. That sense of community was not confined to any single cohort or campus. It was present in the stories of boarders who found lifelong friendships, day students who discovered passions through co-curricular programs, parents who valued the village feel of the school, and staff who spoke about colleagues and students with evident pride and affection.

The breadth of opportunity available to students was a consistent theme. Ballarat Grammar offers an unusually wide range of co-curricular, sporting, outdoor education and creative programs relative to schools of comparable size. Participants described these programs as formative, not merely supplementary. The outdoor education program, the music program, the visual arts offerings and the breadth of sporting opportunities were all cited by students and parents as among the school's most valued features. For boarding students in particular, access to these opportunities was often the reason families chose the school.

The junior school was widely and consistently regarded as a strong, nurturing environment. Parents, staff and students who had transitioned through the junior school described it as a place where values were lived rather than stated, where relationships between staff and families were close, and where children felt known and safe. Several participants contrasted the junior school experience favourably with the middle and senior school years, suggesting that the relational culture established in the junior school does not always carry through the transition. That contrast is itself instructive: it demonstrates that Ballarat Grammar already has an environment within its own community where the culture the school aspires to is being delivered. The task is to understand what makes that environment work and to extend its principles, adapted for developmental stage, across the rest of the school.

The school's tradition of service and its connection to the broader Ballarat community were also identified as distinctive strengths. Participants described a school that values contribution, not just achievement, and that encourages students to look beyond themselves. The Indigenous Student Program, the partnerships with community organisations, the commitment to reconciliation through two successive Reconciliation Action Plans, and the school's investment in programs that connect students to Country and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities all reflect an institution that takes its community responsibilities seriously.

Staff who spoke positively about the school, and many did, described a workplace where they felt a genuine sense of purpose and where relationships with students were the most rewarding part of their professional lives. Several long-serving employees spoke about the privilege of watching students grow over the course of their school careers. Others described colleagues who went well beyond what was required to support students and families. The dedication and professionalism of the staff cohort, across both teaching and non-teaching roles, is an institutional asset that this Review acknowledges.

These strengths are not offered as a counterweight to the findings that follow. They are offered because they are true, because they were reported by the people who know the school best, and because they are the reason this Review proceeds from a position of confidence that the school can do the work ahead. A school without strengths cannot sustain cultural change. A school with strengths this deep can, provided it is willing to be honest about where those strengths have not been enough.



Challenges and tensions

At the same time, the Review identified significant and persistent cultural challenges that have developed over a number of years. The school has grown significantly over the last decade without commensurate investment in the systems, structures and leadership practices needed to manage that growth. The result is a widening gap between the school's stated values and the lived experience of parts of its community. Standards of behaviour are not applied consistently. Policies exist but are not always followed. Communication is uneven.

Trust in leadership has been eroded, particularly since the boarding incidents became public. In the boarding environment, the Review heard evidence of historical and entrenched harmful practices, including physical punishment and hazing rituals carried out by older students against younger boarders. Participants described these practices as having become normalised within a hierarchical peer culture that some perceived to be inadequately supervised. A vertical House structure that placed students from Years 7 to 12 together was the primary enabler of the power differential that underpinned these practices.

Beyond boarding, the Review identified concerns about inconsistent behaviour management across the school, social hierarchies among students, experiences of racism and discrimination that were not adequately addressed, gendered dynamics within the House system, and a disconnect between the school's espoused values and day-to-day practice. Students from diverse cultural, religious and gender-diverse backgrounds reported experiences of exclusion that the school's systems were not equipped to identify or respond to. The House system, while valued by many, continues to reinforce structural division through gendered allocation, legacy-based placement and significant variation in House size.

Employees described workload pressures, unclear reporting lines, gaps in management capability, inconsistent access to professional development (particularly for non-teaching staff), and a culture in which raising difficult issues was not always safe. The division between teaching and non-teaching staff emerged as a persistent theme, with non-teaching employees reporting that they felt less valued, less informed and less included in the life of the school. The school's growth had outpaced its investment in organisational structure, role clarity and leadership development.

Parents described frustrations with communication, transparency and the school's responsiveness to concerns. The absence of a clear, consistent complaints process was one of the most frequently raised issues. Several parents described a transactional dynamic in which the school treated parents as clients rather than partners, and in which raising concerns was discouraged or met with defensiveness.

The governance analysis found that while the Board exercises its approval authority over key safeguarding policies, its visibility within the school community is limited and its capacity to monitor whether policies are being implemented in practice is constrained by gaps in risk data and reporting.

The policy framework has been substantially rebuilt in the second half of 2025 and into 2026, and that investment is acknowledged. However, the analysis identified systemic concerns including fragmentation across a large number of documents, absent or inadequate anti-discrimination infrastructure, uncoordinated reporting pathways, and gaps in disability and First Nations inclusion.



Risks and systemic drivers

The challenges identified in this Review are not isolated. They share common drivers that have compounded over time and that, if left unaddressed, will continue to produce the outcomes this Review has documented.

The first is growth without corresponding investment in systems. Ballarat Grammar has grown significantly over the past decade, in student numbers, in the breadth of its programs and in the complexity of its operations. That growth has not been matched by equivalent investment in organisational structure, management capability uplift, reporting systems or the administrative infrastructure needed to run a school of this size. The result is a community that still operates, in many respects, as though it were smaller and simpler than it is. Informal practices that worked in a smaller school, including verbal agreements, discretionary decision-making and reliance on personal relationships as a management tool, have not been replaced by the structured systems a larger institution requires. Staff described this as the school having grown from a village to a city without building the roads.

The second is inconsistency. Across every cohort consulted, the Review heard that the experience of Ballarat Grammar depends heavily on which campus, which House, which year level and which staff member a student or parent encounters. Behavioural standards are not applied consistently. Communication quality and consistency vary between individuals. Access to support, professional development and recognition differs between staff groups. Policies exist but are applied unevenly, and in some cases are not known by the staff expected to implement them. This inconsistency is not the result of individual failure. It is a structural problem produced by the absence of standardised processes, inadequate training and a leadership culture that has historically tolerated variation rather than addressing it.

The third is a pattern of cultural avoidance. The Review heard repeated examples of issues that were known but not confronted: harmful boarding practices that persisted over years; discriminatory behaviour that was witnessed but not acted on; parent conduct that was tolerated because of the perceived consequences of challenging it; staff concerns that were raised but not followed through. This pattern reflects an institutional tendency to prioritise harmony over accountability, to manage discomfort rather than address its source. This speaks to organisational silence, where members of an institution withhold information about problems because they believe speaking up is futile or unsafe. Several participants described a culture in which raising difficult issues was met with deflection, minimisation or quiet discouragement.

The fourth is a gap between governance and operations. The Board exercises its approval authority over key policies, has established committees with relevant mandates including a dedicated Child Safety and Risk Committee, and has responded to the VRQA conditions by implementing Board reporting requirements and ensuring a dedicated role with responsibility for Child Safety. However, the Review found that the Board's capacity to assess whether its policies are being implemented in practice, whether its stated values are being lived across the school, and whether emerging risks are being identified and managed is constrained by gaps in data, reporting and operational visibility. The Board does not have systematic access to consolidated child safety risk data, as the school's mechanisms for collecting and recording child safety incidents are fragmented. Until recently, Governance oversight has been focused on compliance (does the policy exist?) rather than assurance (is it working?). This gap has contributed to a pattern in which commitments are made at the governance level that are not reliably delivered at the operational level, and in which risks that are visible at the operational level do not reach the Board until they materialise publicly.

The fifth is inadequate infrastructure for accountability. The school does not yet have a centralised system for recording, tracking and analysing incidents, complaints and behavioural concerns across reporting channels. Reports made through different pathways (Whispli, Student Support Officers, the Wellbeing Team, the Health Centre, Heads of House, classroom teachers and counsellors) are not connected. This means the school cannot reliably identify patterns, track whether responses are adequate and timely or provide the Board with an accurate picture of risk. Without this infrastructure, accountability is episodic and reactive rather than systemic and preventive.



The sixth is a lack of meaningful consultation and engagement. The Review found that decision-making at Ballarat Grammar has largely operated as a top-down process, with limited mechanisms for the voices of students, staff and parents to genuinely inform institutional direction. Students described having few avenues through which their concerns or ideas were sought, heard or acted on. The school has introduced measures over time to facilitate staff communication, such as the establishment of 'Agoras' or open forum meetings and listening circles, open to all employees. However, staff reported that changes to programs, structures and expectations were communicated rather than developed collaboratively, and that input, where it was invited, did not visibly influence outcomes. Parents described an uneven relationship with the school, in which engagement was welcomed when it aligned with institutional preferences but discouraged when it involved challenge or critique. The absence of genuine participatory mechanisms means the school has been making decisions about the people it serves without adequate input from them. This is not only a missed opportunity for better decision-making. It is itself a cultural signal: it communicates that the institution values compliance over contribution, and that the perspectives of those most affected by decisions are not essential to making them.

These six drivers are interconnected. Growth without systems produces inconsistency. Inconsistency without accountability produces cultural avoidance. Cultural avoidance without governance oversight produces risk that is invisible until it materialises publicly, as it did with the Dart House incidents. And when consultation is absent, each of these failures is compounded, because the people closest to the problems, students, staff and parents, have no effective channel through which to surface what they are seeing before it escalates. Addressing any one of these drivers in isolation will not produce lasting change. The recommendations in this Report are designed to address them as a system.

A note on reading this report

No school or workplace in Australia is immune from bullying and other inappropriate behaviours. In schools, this is not a reflection of any single institution's failings. It is a reality of educating children and adolescents whose brains, emotional awareness, and capacity for empathy are still very much in development. Young people will, at times, act impulsively, misjudge the impact of their words and actions, and cause genuine harm to their peers. The prefrontal cortex, which governs impulse control and consequential thinking, does not fully mature until the mid-twenties. Schools operate, by their nature, at the coalface of that developmental process.

What matters, then, is not whether bullying and inappropriate behaviour occur within a school or workplace. They will. What matters is how an institution recognises, responds to, and learns from those incidents when they arise. The quality of a school's culture is measured not by the absence of conflict among its students, but by the consistency and integrity of the systems it has in place to deal with that conflict, support the children affected, and hold itself accountable for the outcomes. It is through that lens that this Review has examined the circumstances at Ballarat Grammar.

The challenges identified through this Review are systemic. They reflect patterns that have developed over time through a combination of significant growth, insufficient oversight, cultural complacency and a reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths. Critically, they are challenges the school has the capacity to address. Ballarat Grammar has the community support, the institutional resources and the external impetus to do so.



This Report contains findings that reflect well on the school and findings that do not. It contains conclusions that some readers will agree with and conclusions that some will contest. Both responses are legitimate, and both are part of the picture. The school commissioned this Review because it recognised that an honest, independent examination of its culture was necessary. That decision took courage. The measure of that courage will not be found in the commissioning of the Review but in the quality, depth and sincerity of the school's response to what the Review found.

A note on evidence and methodology

Intersection drew on accounts from parents, staff, and both current and former students to develop a full picture of how the school's community experiences its culture, values, and practises. The evidence base for this Report included 126 interviews, 17 focus groups with 107 participating students, 198 written submissions, 299 student survey responses, 146 staff survey responses and 32 follow-up meetings with school staff, coupled with a thorough analysis of the school's policies, systems and governance frameworks.

This Review is a cultural review. It examines how the school is experienced by its community rather than determining individual fault, and its findings are drawn from the patterns that emerge across the evidence as a whole. Survey results are reported as indicative of the views of respondents and are not a statistically representative measure of the school population.

Through qualitative coding, evidence provided to Intersection was reviewed and organised against an inductive thematic codebook. From this detailed thematic analysis, the Recommendations were generated. Further detail of the methodology of this Report is available in section 3.

Recommendations

This Review makes 44 recommendations across seven areas: the student experience, the boarding experience, the parent experience, the employee experience, governance, policy and change management. The recommendations are grounded in the evidence gathered through this Review and are designed to address both the immediate concerns raised by participants and the systemic and structural conditions that produced them.

They are deliberately interconnected: many recommendations reinforce or depend on others across different sections, reflecting the reality that the issues identified in this Review do not sit within neat organisational boundaries. The cross-references in the table below identify the most significant of these interdependencies, and the school should treat them as a guide to sequencing and coordination during implementation.

The timing, prioritisation and sequencing of implementation is the critical work the school must now undertake to ensure the best possible outcome. That work belongs to the school, its staff and its community, and it should be undertaken through the consultative processes recommended in the change management section of this Report.



REF	RECOMMENDATION	CROSS-REFS
Student Experience (S1-S5)	Student Experience (S1-S5)	
S1	Establish authentic student voice mechanisms That Ballarat Grammar establish genuine, ongoing mechanisms for student voice on matters of culture, safety and wellbeing. This should include: • regular anonymous survey mechanisms focused on student culture and safety, distinct from teacher performance feedback; • a Student Advisory Group with direct and regular access to the Principal on cultural matters. The role of this Advisory Group should be considered in conjunction with student leadership positions and their role and articulated in a co-designed Terms of Reference; • structured consultation with students before significant decisions that directly affect their experience, including changes to boarding, House structures and co-curricular programs; and • transparent processes for selecting student leaders, with criteria communicated to the student body.	B5, P4
S2	Address the structural drivers of division within the Day House system That Ballarat Grammar should redesign its Day House system so that Houses are co-educational, with both boarding and day students as members of every House. In doing so, the school should: • remove the gendering of Houses, which reinforces gender segregation, normalises binary gender as the default organising principle and creates particular difficulties for gender-diverse students; • cease allocating students to Houses on the basis of family legacy and sibling connections, which perpetuates established sub-cultures, concentrates social capital and reduces the school's capacity to disrupt harmful norms; • ensure diversity is represented across all Houses to promote genuine inclusion; • address the significant variation in House sizes, which produces structural competitive disadvantage unrelated to student effort or ability; and • co-design the new model with students, staff and parents, ensuring the process itself models the inclusive culture the school is working to build. This redesign should be coordinated with Recommendation B2, which separates the residential function of boarding houses from the House identity and competition structure, so that boarding students are members of the same House system as day students.	B1, B2, B8



S3	Embed a sequenced wellbeing and behavioural curriculum in CREW That Ballarat Grammar develop and embed a sequenced wellbeing and behavioural curriculum within the CREW structure, building on the principles established in the Positive Behaviour @ Grammar framework and the values-based approach used effectively in the junior school. This should include: • a structured, developmental curriculum from Years 7 to 12 covering behavioural expectations, respectful relationships, bystander responsibility, consent, digital citizenship and community standards; • content that extends the PB@G approach beyond classroom behaviour into the relational, cultural and interpersonal dimensions of student life in line with the school's values; • integration of the external program content currently delivered in a piecemeal fashion (Elephant Ed, Ballarat Community Health, The Men's Project) into a single sequenced framework linked to the school values; • an upstander and bystander module embedded within the curriculum, drawing on the Men's Project 6Ds bystander framework already proposed for the school, or the Stand Up Project; • clear expectations, training and accountability for CREW Mentors in delivering wellbeing education; and • an evaluation framework that measures changes in student attitudes, behaviour and reporting confidence over time.	B4, S5
S4	Overhaul incident reporting, response and communication That Ballarat Grammar overhaul its systems for reporting and responding to incidents of bullying, harassment, discrimination and harmful behaviour, with particular attention to closing the communication gap between reporting and response. This should include: • ensuring that students directly involved in incidents always receive appropriate information about what has been done in response to their complaint, within the bounds of privacy obligations; • transparent, regular reporting at whole-of-school level about patterns of behaviour and consequences applied, without identifying individuals; • replacing or supplementing the current anonymous reporting platform with a system that has the express functionality to: ○ communicate with anonymous reporters, including acknowledging receipt, providing updates on actions taken, and requesting further information while preserving anonymity; and ○ conduct systemic and thematic analysis of behavioural incidents and reports across the school. • regular reporting to the Board on incident data, behavioural patterns and systemic risk.	B7, G4, PA3



S5	Building staff capability in diversity, respectful relationships and pastoral accountability That Ballarat Grammar establish an ongoing program of staff capability uplift in cultural diversity, respectful relationships, anti-discrimination and pastoral accountability, delivered as professional development training for all staff on a recurring basis. The program should be designed to build practical competence, not just awareness, equipping staff to recognise and respond to discrimination on the basis of race, disability, sexuality and gender identity, to understand their role as pastoral agents whose conduct directly shapes the safety and culture of the school, and to develop strategies for establishing safety in the classroom, including de-escalation, restorative practice and creating environments in which students feel confident to speak up, report concerns and be themselves. Staff must be held to the same behavioural standards and accountability frameworks as students. Where staff conduct falls short of those standards, it must be addressed through the same formal processes that apply to any other performance or conduct matter.	E6, E3, B4
Boarding Experience (B1-B8)	Boarding Experience (B1-B8)	
B1	Restructure boarding houses by age band to reduce the power differential between older and younger students That Ballarat Grammar extend the age-based restructure that commenced with the co-educational Junior Boarding model for Years 7 and 8 by establishing separate boarding arrangements for Years 9 and 10 and for Years 11 and 12. Each age band should have its own supervision model, staffing ratios and pastoral approach appropriate to the developmental stage of its students. Senior boarding houses for boys and girls should be retained.	S2, B2
B2	Redefine boarding residences and reimagine their culture with students That Ballarat Grammar redefine boarding houses as residences where students live, separate from the day school House system, and work with current boarding students to reshape the culture, traditions and identity of those residences. Boarding students should be allocated to a co-educational day school House alongside day students (see Recommendation S2). Under the age-banded residential structure in Recommendation B1, students will move through different residential settings as they progress through the school, with their cross-year connections provided through the day school House rather than the boarding residence.	S2, B1



B3	Close the boarding dining hall during school hours to reduce structural separation between boarders and day students That Ballarat Grammar close the boarding dining hall during the school day so that boarders eat lunch alongside day students, using the same facilities at the same times. The practice of boarders eating separately from day students was identified consistently as reinforcing the divide between the two groups.	S2
B4	Develop a boarding-specific behavioural and cultural curriculum, connected to the whole-of-school CREW curriculum That Ballarat Grammar develop a structured boarding-specific program that addresses the particular dynamics of residential living, including the normalisation of harmful traditions, the distinction between practices that build safety and those that cause harm, the dynamics of hierarchy and peer pressure, and the skills needed to be an active bystander in a residential setting. The program should explicitly build a safe-to-speak reporting culture in which boarders understand how to raise concerns, trust that reports will be taken seriously and acted on, and see reporting as a normal part of community life rather than a breach of loyalty. This program should run across all year levels, be embedded in the boarding calendar and connect to the whole-of-school CREW curriculum.	S3, S5, B8
B5	Establish a boarding student advisory group with genuine decision-making input That Ballarat Grammar establish a standing boarding student advisory group with a defined role in shaping boarding culture, reviewing changes and providing feedback to school leadership.	S1
B6	Implement a structured transition and induction program for new boarders That the induction process be reviewed and strengthened to include explicit education about what is and is not acceptable behaviour in the boarding houses, including the practices described in this chapter. It should also include named support contacts who are not the student's housemates or house staff, and scheduled follow-up check-ins through the first two terms. The Junior Boarding model provides the structural setting for this program for Years 7 and 8, but the content needs to be deliberate, sustained and extended to students entering boarding at any year level.	B2, B4



B7	Require quarterly reporting to the Board on boarding culture indicators That Ballarat Grammar require the school leadership to report to the Board quarterly on boarding culture indicators, including incident data disaggregated by boarding house, reporting rates through Whisppli and other channels, staffing data including turnover and vacancy rates, and student feedback on safety and wellbeing.	S4, G4
B8	Address the gender dynamics of boarding through targeted education and structural change That Ballarat Grammar address the gendered dynamics identified in this chapter through targeted education in the boys' boarding houses on respectful relationships, masculinity and the impact of misogyny, building on the Men's Project and Monash University work already commenced; structured opportunities for cross-gender interaction between the boys' and girls' boarding houses; and explicit accountability for sexist and discriminatory behaviour, including ensuring that reports from female boarders about the conduct of male boarders are investigated and responded to within the boarding context. The structural separation of boarding residences from the House identity system (Recommendations B1, B2 and S2) addresses the gender segregation of Houses at a systemic level. The measures in this recommendation address the cultural and educational dimensions that structural change alone will not resolve.	S2, B1, B2, S5
Parent Experience (P1-P4)	Parent Experience (P1-P4)	
P1	Reset the parent-school relationship as an educational partnership, not a service-provider arrangement That Ballarat Grammar, in consultation with parents, take deliberate steps to reframe its relationship with parents as a partnership in the education and development of children, not as a transactional service. This should include a clear public statement of the school's expectations of parents, referencing the Parent Code of Conduct, developed with parent input and embedded in the enrolment process. The school's values should apply to the entire school community, including parents, and the consequences of behaviour that is inconsistent with those values should be clearly articulated. This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendation E7, which addresses the same relationship from the staff perspective, including strengthening leadership support for staff when they enforce standards, implementing clear communication guidelines and protocols, ensuring the Parent Code of Conduct is visible and accessible, and establishing ongoing parent education programs.	E7

P2	Develop and publish a clear, accessible complaints and concerns process for parents and students That Ballarat Grammar develop a complaints and concerns process that is transparent, well-documented and accessible to all parents and students. The process should include clear points of contact at each level of escalation, defined timeframes for acknowledgement and response, an expectation of feedback to the person who raised the concern (subject to privacy), and an independent pathway for concerns that cannot be resolved through normal channels. The process should be published, communicated regularly and reviewed annually. The current lack of a clear, known process was one of the most frequently raised concerns in the Review.	S4, PA3, G4
P3	Develop a whole-of-school communications strategy and protocol That Ballarat Grammar develop a formal communications strategy and protocol that establishes who communicates what, to whom and when, across all areas of the school. The strategy should: • set clear expectations for communication frequency, format, channel and responsiveness, standardised across campuses, year levels and staff roles so that the quality and timeliness of communication does not depend on the individual; • ensure communication is proactive and routine, and delivered through multiple channels appropriate to the content and audience. The protocol should specifically address communication with boarding parents, for whom regular updates about daily life, wellbeing and school changes should be provided as a matter of course given the distance between families and their children. The strategy should be reviewed annually and its effectiveness measured through parent and staff feedback.	E4
P4	Establish a whole-of-school parent consultation and advisory structure That Ballarat Grammar establish a formal, whole-of-school parent advisory body with clear terms of reference, representative membership and a direct reporting line to the Board. The advisory body should have diverse membership that reflects the breadth of the parent community, including boarding and day families across all year levels. Parents who are also employed by the school should not serve as parent representatives. The body should have a transparent process for raising and tracking issues, defined timeframes for the school to provide documented responses, and a formal reporting line to the Board. Boarding parent representation should be formalised at Board level.	S1, G5, P1



Employee Experience (E1-E8)	Employee Experience (E1-E8)	
E1	Strengthen cohesion and communication across staff groups That Ballarat Grammar take deliberate steps to strengthen communication, collaboration and mutual recognition across all staff groups, particularly between teaching and non-teaching teams, to build a more cohesive, respectful and equitable workplace culture in which all staff feel recognised, valued and integral to the school's shared purpose. This should include: • ensuring regular briefings and whole-of-school updates are inclusive of all staff groups, to improve transparency, clarify priorities and expectations, and promote understanding of interdependent roles across the school; • building shared learning and understanding through collaborative professional development opportunities, with a focus on teamwork, collaboration and cultural awareness, building on the success of past joint training days for teaching and support staff; • developing a whole-of-school overview accessible to staff, students and parents that clarifies how each role contributes to the school's operations and educational mission; • implementing specific initiatives to improve the recognition and visibility of non-teaching staff, including celebrating achievements and contributions through communications, joint milestones and staff award programs, and ensuring school leaders regularly acknowledge the work of support teams in meetings and public communications; and • increasing opportunities for all staff to come together to discuss challenges and solutions, and supporting informal engagement and everyday interactions between staff groups through practical measures such as shared spaces, collaborative working groups and the co-location of administrative teams where feasible.	E4, P3



E2	Clarify organisational structure, roles, and leadership accountability That Ballarat Grammar implement measures to clarify and define roles, reporting lines and leadership responsibilities and standards. This should include: developing and distributing a clear and comprehensive organisational chart that is accessible to all staff and includes a summary of organisational responsibilities for each role, so that staff understand not only who reports to whom but what each part of the school is responsible for. Staffing policies, including recruitment, appointment and promotion, should be reviewed to ensure they reflect transparent, merit-based processes at every level, with selection criteria, assessment methods and decision-making documented and applied consistently. Leadership pathways and appointment processes should be visible and open to all staff, including non-teaching employees. Measurable standards should be defined for all leadership roles, and performance against those standards should be assessed regularly. The role of the Principal under the new leadership structure should be clearly defined. Leadership capability should be built through structured development programs that prepare staff for leadership responsibilities before they assume them.	G1, E5
E3	Consistent behavioural standards, policies, and accountability That Ballarat Grammar ensure behavioural standards and policies are applied consistently across the school, so that harmful behaviours are addressed, policies are trusted, staff feel empowered and supported to uphold standards, and both staff and leadership are held accountable. This should include: • tying the consistent application of behavioural standards to performance measures for staff and leaders at every level, so that accountability for upholding the school's expectations is embedded in how performance is assessed, not left to individual discretion; • consolidating and streamlining policy information so that staff have clear, accessible guidance on response protocols for different types of incidents and situations, supported by practical training that builds confidence in applying those protocols; and • providing trauma-informed post-incident debriefs for staff involved in enforcing standards or responding to incidents, so that staff are supported after difficult interactions and do not carry the cumulative weight of those experiences without institutional backing.	S5, E8, PA1



E4

Improve communication and transparency between leadership and staff

That Ballarat Grammar leadership demonstrate its commitment to a culture of transparency by establishing clear, inclusive and consistent communication practices that rebuild employee trust. This should include:

- proactively sharing the context, rationale and timelines for significant changes through structured updates, and documenting all significant non-confidential decisions for staff review, to reduce the perception that information and influence are confined to an inner circle;
- consulting meaningfully with employees on decisions that affect their work before those decisions are finalised, including changes to leadership structures, roles and appointments;
- providing clear and timely feedback to internal applicants, consistent with Recommendation E2 (transparent, merit-based recruitment and appointment processes), to address the perception that appointments are made informally or on the basis of personal relationships;
- regularly communicating a unified strategic vision that connects the daily work of staff to the school's priorities, and that directly addresses uncertainty during periods of growth or change;
- consolidating and streamlining the school's fragmented communication channels to ensure all staff groups, including non-teaching staff, have equitable access to information; and
- leadership modelling accountability for communication by publicly acknowledging gaps when they occur, and tracking improvements through regular staff surveys on trust, clarity and inclusion.

This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendation P2, which calls for the development of a whole-of-school communications strategy and protocol establishing who communicates what, to whom and when. That strategy should apply to internal communication with staff with the same rigour as it applies to communication with parents. Together, these recommendations recognise that the school's communication failures are not a matter of individual effort but of the absence of a coherent, institution-wide approach to how information flows across the organisation.

P3, E2



E5

Address role ambiguity, unsustainable workloads and resourcing gaps

That Ballarat Grammar address the role ambiguity, unsustainable workloads and resourcing gaps that the Review found are contributing to staff stress, burnout and decisions to leave the school. Sustainable workloads, clear expectations and adequate resourcing are essential to reducing stress, supporting retention and enabling staff to focus on delivering outcomes for students in an increasingly complex school environment. This should include:

- ensuring all staff have current position descriptions with clear responsibilities, reporting lines and key performance indicators, so that expectations are explicit and measurable rather than assumed;
- establishing a consistent and effective performance management framework that applies to all staff across teaching and non-teaching roles, with annual reviews that are meaningful and supported by leadership training in constructive feedback, and that assess workload sustainability rather than relying on subjective impressions;
- ensuring adequate support and resourcing for students with diverse needs, commensurate with the school's increased enrolments and its commitment to inclusion, recognising that the absence of specialist support has been a direct contributor to staff stress and to the inconsistent experience of students with disability and neurodivergence documented in Part A of this Report;
- progressing the implementation of the Time and Teaching Practice Project (TAPP) with leadership accountability for its application, including training for leaders in responding to flexible work requests, and establishing clear policy limits on out-of-hours demands and administrative overload to challenge the expectation that staff absorb institutional growth through personal effort; and
- addressing situations where individual employees are carrying multiple roles and responsibilities beyond their substantive position, and linking this to whole-of-school workforce planning that matches staffing to the actual scale and complexity of the school's operations.

E2, E6



E6	Targeted, inclusive professional learning and ongoing support That Ballarat Grammar ensure professional development and ongoing support is meaningful, role-specific, and accessible to all employees (teaching and non-teaching roles) to address capability gaps and improve staff motivation and career growth. A supported, skilled workforce where employees feel motivated and invested in helps to reduce burnout and support retention, leading to better student outcomes, and creates a strong professional culture. • Link professional development to personalised career development pathways and opportunities, with career mentoring and progression plans to help retain motivated staff. • Evaluate and tailor professional learning offerings for relevance to roles (rather than generic programs) and ensure equitable access to development for teaching and non-teaching staff. Measure impact on retention and staff feeling confident in their roles. • Include opportunities for joint and collaborative professional development for teaching and support staff, to clarify roles, share best practice and build mutual understanding. • Provide trauma-informed and safety-focused training to better support staff in their roles with respect to student safety, risk management processes, wellbeing and behaviour management, and trauma-informed practice. This should include training in restorative practices, equipping staff with the skills to facilitate restorative conversations, manage conflict constructively, and support students and colleagues through processes that prioritise accountability, repair and learning rather than purely punitive responses. • Provide targeted training for teachers on neurodiversity, challenging behaviours and additional learning needs.	S5, E3, E5
E7	Reset staff-parent relationships, boundaries and engagement That Ballarat Grammar reset the staff-parent relationship to reflect a partnership characterised by trust, respect and professionalism. This should include: • ensuring the Parent Code of Conduct is visible, accessible and actively enforced; • strengthening leadership support for staff when they uphold standards in interactions with parents; • implementing clear communication guidelines and protocols that set expectations for both parties; and • establishing ongoing parent communications that help parents understand the school's approach to behaviour management, child safety and wellbeing. This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendation P3, which addresses the same relationship from the parent perspective.	P1, P3



E8	Elevate staff wellbeing as a core cultural priority That Ballarat Grammar reframe staff wellbeing as a core institutional priority, equal in standing to student wellbeing, and recognise that the health, safety and psychological resilience of its workforce directly underpins student outcomes and the sustainability of cultural change. This should include: • developing a systematic, school-wide staff wellbeing strategy built on prevention, early support and continuous improvement, with clear ownership, resourcing and accountability for its delivery; • identifying and building on the pockets of positive staff culture that already exist within the school, and examining what makes those environments work so that the conditions can be extended rather than left to the efforts of individual leaders; • establishing clear policies that protect staff from harmful workplace behaviour, backed by transparent reporting and response procedures, firm leadership action, and protections against victimisation for those who raise concerns, consistent with the school's duty of care to its employees and its obligations under occupational health and safety legislation; and • introducing an anonymous reporting mechanism for staff to raise concerns about workplace bullying, harassment and safety without fear of reprisal, complementing the student-facing reporting systems already in place. This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendations E3 (behavioural standards and accountability), E5 (workload and resourcing) and E6 (professional development including trauma-informed practice).	E3, E5, E6
Governance (G1-G6)	Governance (G1-G6)	
G1	Clarify and communicate governance roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority That the Board undertake a formal clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board, the Principal and the senior leadership team, and communicate this clearly to the school community. This should include a published governance framework that describes the Board's role, the Principal's delegated authority, the function of each Board committee and the mechanisms through which parents, staff and students can access or engage with governance. The framework should establish clear boundaries between governance (strategy and oversight) and management (operations and implementation), consistent with the AICD's governance principles for not-for-profit entities. The Board should also consider the governance arrangements for the associated entities (the Ballarat Grammar Foundation and BGS Educational Services), including whether overlapping directorships create actual or perceived conflicts of interest.	E2



G2	Review Board composition and introduce term limits to ensure diversity, skills and renewal That the Board undertake a structured review of its composition, with reference to the skills, experience and diversity required to govern the school effectively in its current operating environment. This review should consider the balance between constitutional requirements (including the communicant provisions) and the need to recruit directors with specific skills in child safety, risk management, education, cultural diversity and community engagement. The Board should introduce definitive term limits for directors, prohibiting reappointment after a Director has served a set amount of terms on the Board. This is consistent with the AICD recommendation that not-for-profit boards adopt term limits of no more than nine years to support renewal and reduce the risk of groupthink. The Board should also consider mechanisms for ensuring that the interests and perspectives of current parents, including boarding parents, are represented in governance, whether through Board membership, advisory committees or structured engagement processes.	G1
G3	Develop a single, integrated regulatory compliance and implementation framework That the school develop a consolidated regulatory mapping document that aligns the recommendations of this Cultural Review, the Fenner Review implementation status, the VRQA conditions and audit requirements, the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Ministerial Order No. 1359), and the psychosocial hazard obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 into one framework. This framework should be maintained by the Principal, reported against to the Board on a quarterly basis and used to track implementation, identify gaps and demonstrate compliance. It should be a living document, updated as recommendations are implemented and new obligations arise, not a static compliance artefact.	CM2, CM3



G4	Strengthen risk management systems to provide the Board with adequate visibility of culture, behaviour and child safety risks That the school invest in data systems capable of recording, aggregating and reporting on incidents, complaints, behaviour and child safety concerns at a systemic level, not only at the individual student level. This should include the capacity to identify patterns and trends across cohorts, Houses, year levels and time periods. The Board should require structured, regular reporting on risk indicators, including incident data, reporting rates (including through anonymous reporting platforms), mandatory report tracking, staffing data (including turnover and vacancy rates across the whole school) and student and staff feedback on safety and wellbeing. Reporting should be quarterly at a minimum, benchmarked over time and disaggregated by relevant categories. The Board must also ensure that it has the capability to critically interrogate the data it receives, whether through upskilling existing directors, recruiting directors with relevant expertise, or engaging independent expertise to support the Board's oversight function.	S4, B7, PA3
G5	Increase Board visibility, accessibility and communication with the school community That the Board take deliberate steps to increase its visibility within and accessibility to the school community. This should include regular communication from the Board to the school community, including an annual report on governance, risk and culture that is accessible and substantive, not simply a compliance document. Board members should be visibly present in school life, including at key events, in boarding environments and through structured engagement with parent and staff representatives. Visibility is not a substitute for good governance, but it is a necessary condition for the trust and confidence that good governance depends on.	P4



G6	Transfer approval authority for the Whistleblower Policy from the Principal to the Board That the Board assume approval authority for the Whistleblower Policy (CGS-015), replacing the Principal as the approving body. Whistleblower protections are a governance safeguard, not an operational policy. Their credibility depends on their independence from the executive whose conduct they may need to address. ASIC's Regulatory Guide 270 recommends that whistleblower policies be owned and approved by the board, and the school should align its arrangements with this guidance as a matter of priority. The Board should also satisfy itself that the policy's provisions for feedback to whistleblowers, currently described as being at 'absolute discretion', are revised to include minimum standards for acknowledgement, communication and outcome reporting, consistent with the protections intended by Part 9.4AAA of the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth). The Board should also ensure that all whistleblower reports are directed to the Board, consistent with the school's stated intention, and that the policy and the reporting facility make clear that a report may be made about any member of staff, including the Principal, with reports concerning the Principal directed to the Board Chair.	E8, G1
Policy and Procedures (PA1-PA5)	Policy and Procedures (PA1-PA5)	
PA1	Consolidate the policy framework into an integrated, navigable structure with clear guidance for staff That the school undertake further work to consolidate its policies and procedures into a single, integrated policy framework that maps the relationships between documents, clarifies which policy applies in which circumstances, and provides staff with practical decision-making guidance. This should include a one-page visual guide or decision tree for common scenarios, including behaviour incidents, bullying, harassment, discrimination, self-harm and safety concerns, so that staff can identify the correct pathway without needing to consult multiple documents. The framework should be accompanied by structured professional learning to ensure all staff understand their obligations, know which policy to apply and can navigate the system with confidence. This consolidation should be completed within 12 months and reviewed annually thereafter.	E3, E6



PA2	Develop a standalone anti-racism and discrimination response protocol That the school develop a specific, standalone protocol for identifying, responding to, recording, escalating and tracking incidents of racism and racial, cultural and religious discrimination. This protocol should: • define what constitutes a racist or discriminatory incident, • set out the mandatory steps staff must follow when one is reported or observed, • specify the expected range of consequences, • require central recording of all incidents, and • establish mandatory reporting to the Board on a quarterly basis. The protocol should be accompanied by capability-building training for all staff on recognising and responding to racism and discrimination, including training on unconscious bias and conscious inclusion. This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the student experience chapter's recommendations on a sequenced behavioural and values curriculum (see Chapter 7).	S5, S3
PA3	Establish a centralised reporting and tracking system that connects all reporting channels That the school implement a centralised system for recording, tracking and coordinating all reports of behaviour incidents, bullying, harassment, discrimination and safety concerns, regardless of which reporting channel is used. Reports made through Student Safeguarding Officers, the Wellbeing Team, the Health Centre, school counsellors, Heads of House, classroom teachers or the anonymous reporting platform (Whispli) should all feed into a single, searchable system that allows the school to identify patterns, monitor follow-through and report to the Board. This system should replace the current fragmented approach in which each reporting pathway operates within its own policy silo. It should include mandatory recording standards, required timeframes for initial response and follow-up, and a clear escalation pathway for matters that are not resolved within the expected timeframe. This recommendation complements recommendation G4 above.	S4, G4, B7



PA4	Commission an independent implementation audit/review of the policy framework within 24 months That the school commission an independent audit of the implementation, not the content, of its policy framework within 24 months. The audit should assess whether policies are known and understood by staff, whether they are being applied consistently across the school, whether reporting and recording requirements are being met, and whether the training provided is adequate to support effective implementation. The audit should report to the Board through the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee or the Cultural Review Committee, and its findings should be made available to the school community. This recommendation complements recommendation G3 above.	CM8, G3
PA5	Bridge the gap between disability inclusion policy commitments and procedural infrastructure That the school develop the procedural infrastructure needed to give effect to its existing disability inclusion policy commitments across the full scope of the school experience. The school should develop procedures that extend the reasonable adjustments framework to co-curricular activities, boarding, sport, camps, excursions and social events, consistent with the scope already contemplated by its own policies. Policies should also be revised to include: • a documented process for determining that an adjustment is not reasonable, including the consultative and decision-making steps required under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth); • clear guidance on how disability is taken into account in behaviour management and disciplinary proceedings, including how the school distinguishes between behaviour that is a manifestation of disability and behaviour warranting a disciplinary response; and • consistent coverage across disability types, so that the level of procedural guidance available to staff does not depend on which condition a student has.	E5, E6



Change Management (CM1-CM8)	Change Management (CM1-CM8)	
CM1	Appoint a dedicated Change Coordinator with appropriate seniority, scope and resourcing That the Board fund and appoint a dedicated Change Coordinator to oversee delivery of the Review's recommendations. This role should report directly to the Cultural Review Committee rather than to the Principal alone, to preserve independence and ensure that implementation is subject to Board-level oversight from the outset. The role should be resourced at a minimum of 0.8 FTE for a period of not less than 24 months, with a brief to coordinate, sequence, track and report on implementation across all recommendation areas. This is not a role that can be absorbed into existing workloads. The Review identified unsustainable workloads and role ambiguity as existing concerns; asking current staff to absorb a 44-recommendation implementation program on top of their existing duties would compound the very issues this Review has identified.	CM2, CM3
CM2	Assign implementation oversight to the Cultural Review Committee, with structured quarterly reporting That the Cultural Review Committee assume responsibility for oversight of the implementation of all recommendations arising from this Review. The Committee is the appropriate body for this function: it was established to oversee the school's response to the cultural concerns that prompted the Review, and assigning implementation oversight to the same body ensures continuity, institutional memory and direct accountability to the Board. The Implementation Coordinator should report to the Committee quarterly against defined milestones, not activity. The distinction matters: 'training was delivered' is activity; 'staff demonstrated competency in responding to discrimination' is a milestone. The Committee should include at least one external member with relevant expertise in child safety, organisational culture or institutional reform, and its reporting to the Board should be structured, minuted and available to the school community in summary form.	G3, CM1



CM3	Develop a published implementation plan within three months, with realistic sequencing and accountable owners That the school develop and publish an implementation plan within three months of receiving the final Report. Recommendations should be sequenced into three horizons: short-term (one to 12 months), medium-term (12 to 24 months) and long-term (24 to 48 months). The sequencing should be based on risk, regulatory obligation and interdependency, not ease of delivery. Each recommendation should have a named accountable owner, defined milestones and a target completion date. Staff and the broader school community should be able to see the full plan, understand why certain matters are being prioritised and know when to expect action on matters that affect them.	CM1, CM2, G3, P3, E1, E
CM4	Resource implementation as a distinct budget line That the Board allocate a dedicated implementation budget sufficient to cover the Implementation Coordinator role, external expertise where required (including cultural advisory, organisational design and independent review), staff backfill for employees participating in implementation working groups, and professional development directly linked to recommendation delivery.	CM1
CM5	Involve staff, parents and students in implementation design, not only implementation delivery That staff, parents and students be meaningfully consulted on the design and sequencing of implementation, not merely informed of decisions after they are made. This is the most critical recommendation from a change management perspective, and it responds directly to the employee feedback.	S1, P4, E4
CM6	Develop a dedicated communication strategy for the implementation period That the school develop a communication strategy specifically for the implementation of the Review's recommendations, separate from routine school communications. The employee and parent experience data both identified communication as a systemic weakness. The implementation period will generate questions, anxiety and speculation across the community if it is not managed proactively. The strategy should include regular, scheduled updates to staff, parents and students on implementation progress; advance notice to staff before any changes that affect their roles, conditions or reporting lines; a standing commitment that staff will hear about matters affecting them internally before they hear about them externally; and a named contact point for questions about implementation.	P3, E4, E1



CM7	Monitor for change fatigue and actively manage workload impacts throughout implementation That the Change Coordinator and senior leadership actively monitor for change fatigue across the staff cohort throughout the implementation period. The school community has already absorbed the Dart House incidents, media scrutiny, the VRQA review and conditions, the Fenner Review, the organisational restructure and this Cultural Review within a compressed timeframe. Staff are not starting from a baseline of stability. Implementation planning must account for this reality. Recommendations should be sequenced to avoid overwhelming any single staff group. Where implementation requires additional work from staff, including participation in working groups, training or new reporting processes, the workload impact should be assessed and offset through backfill, time release or deprioritisation of other demands.	E5, E8
CM8	Commission an independent progress review within 36 months That the Board commission an independent review of implementation progress within 36 months. This review should assess whether recommendations have been implemented in substance rather than on paper, how the changes are being experienced by students, parents and staff, and whether the intended cultural outcomes are materialising. The review findings should be reported to the Board and made available to the school community.	PA4, G3



2 Introduction

Ballarat Grammar is an independent, co-educational Anglican school located in Ballarat, Victoria. The school serves students from Early Learning through to Year 12 and operates a boarding program that draws students from regional and rural Victoria and beyond. It occupies a prominent position in the Ballarat community, with deep historical roots and a network of families, alumni and supporters that extends across generations.

In May 2025, the School Board announced the commissioning of an Independent Cultural Review, to be conducted by Intersection, specialists in organisational culture. The Review was prompted by serious allegations of student-to-student abuse within the boarding houses, reported to the school in February 2025, and by the broader questions those allegations raised about the culture, safety and oversight practices of the school.

This Report presents the findings of that Review. It is intended to provide the Board, the school leadership, the school community and relevant regulators with a clear, evidence-based account of the culture of Ballarat Grammar as it is currently experienced. It identifies the school's strengths, names the challenges and tensions that exist, explains the drivers that have contributed to those challenges, and offers recommendations for lasting change.

This Report should be read as a whole. Culture is not a collection of discrete problems to be solved in isolation. The themes explored in each chapter connect to one another, and the recommendations are designed to work together as a coherent change agenda. Where findings are difficult or confronting, they are presented with care but without softening. The school community deserves honesty, and honest reporting is the only basis for meaningful improvement.

It is important to state clearly what this Review is and what it is not. It is a cultural review, not a forensic investigation. It does not make findings of fact about specific incidents or determine individual responsibility. The value of this work lies in the systematic analysis of patterns, themes and experiences drawn from across the community. Individual accounts are treated as data points within that analysis, not as allegations to be tested or investigated further.

The Review has been conducted with a commitment to child safety, confidentiality, ethical practice and respect for the voices of all participants. The school community's willingness to engage openly with this process, often on sensitive and distressing matters, reflects a genuine desire for change. That willingness is itself a strength, and it places an obligation on the school's leadership to respond with equal seriousness.

I felt it was really important to speak up because I care about this school and I want it to be better. Not just for my kids but for all the kids.

3 Methodology

3.1 Review design and guiding principles

The Independent Cultural Review was designed as a mixed-methods, qualitative-led inquiry into the culture of Ballarat Grammar. The Review was guided by three core principles: that culture is best understood through the lived experience of those within it;¹ that a strength-based approach creates the conditions for constructive change; and that findings must be grounded in evidence.

The methodology was designed by Intersection in consultation with the School Board. It drew on established frameworks for organisational culture assessment, adapted for the school context. The Review was conducted over approximately 8 months from commencement to reporting, beginning in August 2025.

Intersection brought to this work its experience across organisational and institutional culture reviews in both the public and private sectors. The approach was informed by relevant regulatory frameworks, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards, and requirements in relation to psychosocial hazards under occupational health and safety legislation.

3.2 Relevant regulatory and legislative frameworks

The Review was conducted with reference to a number of regulatory and legislative frameworks that are directly relevant to the school's obligations and to the findings of this Report.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards establish minimum requirements for organisations providing services to children. These standards are given effect through Ministerial Order No. 1359 and require schools to embed child safety into their governance, leadership, culture, policies and practices. Compliance is monitored by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

Occupational health and safety legislation in Victoria now includes specific requirements in relation to psychosocial hazards in the workplace. The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 require employers to identify psychosocial hazards, assess the risks they pose, and implement controls to eliminate or reduce those risks so far as is reasonably practicable. Psychosocial hazards include, among other things, workplace bullying, exposure to traumatic events, poor organisational change management, and inadequate support. These requirements are directly relevant to the employee experience findings in this Report and to the school's obligations as an employer.

These frameworks are referenced throughout the Report where findings relate to specific compliance obligations. The recommendations are designed to support the school not just in meeting its minimum regulatory requirements, but in building a culture that exceeds those requirements as a matter of practice.

1 Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 4th ed, 2010).

3.3 Information sources and engagement methods

The Review drew on multiple sources of information to build a comprehensive picture of school culture.

Interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with current and former students, parents and carers, employees (teaching and non-teaching), members of the school leadership team, Board members and other stakeholders. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to speak to their own experiences while ensuring consistency across the data set.

Focus groups: Group sessions were conducted with students across all year levels to explore shared experiences and areas of divergence.

Written submissions: Community members were invited to provide written submissions to the Review. These allowed participants who preferred not to engage in an interview setting, or who wished to share sensitive material in a considered format, to contribute on their own terms.

Surveys: Online surveys were distributed to current students (middle and senior school) and employees. Survey responses are treated throughout this Report as indicative and anecdotal, representative of respondents rather than the broader population surveyed. Response rates and self-selection effects mean that survey results cannot be generalised to the school population as a whole. Survey data is used to add context and texture to qualitative findings, not as a standalone evidence base.

Activity sheets: Structured group activities were used with junior school cohorts to support age-appropriate engagement and draw out perspectives in a safe, child-friendly way.

Document review: The Review team was provided with relevant school policies and procedures, demographic data relating to employees and students, employee engagement data, information regarding governance structures and documents, and other materials to inform contextual understanding.

3.4 Cohorts consulted and participation overview

In total, the Review engaged with over 600 individuals across the school community. This included 126 one-on-one interviews with staff, parents and former students; 17 focus groups attended by 107 students; 198 written submissions received via the online submission form and by email; 299 responses to the student survey; 146 responses to the staff survey; and 32 follow-up meetings with school staff to seek further information and clarification. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

Engagement across all cohorts was strong. Student participation was substantial, with over 400 students contributing through focus groups and the student survey, noting there may be overlap in students contributing via both channels. Staff engagement was similarly high, through a combination of interviews, the staff survey and follow-up meetings. Parent and former student input came primarily through interviews and written submissions, though several parents noted that they would have welcomed more structured opportunities for input.

Survey scope and response rates

The student survey was open to middle and senior school students only and was not distributed to the junior school. It received 299 responses from a combined middle and senior school cohort of approximately 1,333 students, a response rate of around 22%. The staff survey received 146 responses from a staff body of approximately 564, a response rate of around 26%. Survey results are reported throughout this Report as counts or as proportions of those who responded to each question, with the number of respondents noted alongside the figures. Consistent with the treatment set out below, the survey is used to illustrate and add texture to the qualitative findings and is not presented as a statistically representative measure of the school population.

3.5 Analytical method

Intersection used thematic analysis to inform its Review findings. This involved collecting and analysing participant accounts through qualitative coding, using an inductive thematic codebook that allowed themes, patterns, and risks to emerge from the data. The coding process was iterative, with themes refined through ongoing review, comparison, and interpretation of participant experiences.

The thematic analysis of first-hand accounts was complemented by a detailed review of organisational data, including policies, procedures, demographics, statistical information, legislative materials, and other relevant documents. Using a combination of these methods, Intersection was able to identify recurring themes, assess the consistency between lived experiences and organisational frameworks, and develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues under review.

Evidentiary approach and the status of participant accounts

This Review is a cultural review. It is not an investigation, an audit or a determination of individual fault, and is not a legal process. Accordingly, it does not apply the standard of proof those processes require. Its purpose is to characterise the culture of Ballarat Grammar as it is experienced by the people within it, and to identify the patterns, conditions and systems that shape that experience. The methodology is designed for that purpose, and the evidentiary approach should be read in that light.

In cultural review work, participant accounts are not untested allegations standing in for contested facts. They are the primary evidence of how the institution is experienced. How students, parents and staff describe the school, what they understand its norms to be, and how they account for their own decisions to speak up or stay silent, are matters of experience that the people describing them are well placed to report. A consistent account of feeling unsafe to report a concern is evidence of the reporting culture, whether or not any individual underlying incident is independently substantiated.

The Review distinguishes between two kinds of statement. The first is a finding about culture, experience or system, which the Review makes where the evidence supports it. The second is an allegation of specific misconduct by an individual, which the Review does not adjudicate and does not present as substantiated. Where this Report describes harmful conduct, it is describing what participants reported and how those reports cluster, not determining individual fault. That distinction is maintained in the language of the Report, and accounts of specific conduct are attributed to their source.

Findings were tested through triangulation. A theme was treated as significant only where it was corroborated across multiple independent sources, for example where it recurred across interviews, focus groups, written submissions and survey responses, or where it was consistent with the documentary and organisational evidence reviewed, or external research. Isolated accounts were distinguished from established patterns and were not elevated into findings on their own. Where participant perceptions could be checked against the school's own records, policies or data, they were, and the Report notes both where those records corroborate the experience and where they sit in tension with it. The weight given to any finding reflects the strength and consistency of the evidence behind it, and the Report signals this in its language, stating where the evidence is strong and acknowledging where the picture is nuanced or contested.

Terms such as 'systemic' are used deliberately and with a defined meaning. A matter is described as systemic where the evidence shows it arises from the school's structures, systems or norms rather than from isolated individual conduct, and where it was observed across more than one part of the school or over a sustained period. Used in this way, the term describes the pattern the evidence establishes and does not reach beyond it.

This approach is standard, widely accepted social policy research practice. Qualitative evidence of lived experience is recognised across comparable regulatory and inquiry settings as a legitimate and necessary basis for understanding organisational culture. What the method requires is rigour in how that evidence is gathered, tested for consistency and interpreted, and that is the discipline applied throughout this Review. The limitations set out below apply, and the findings should be read with them in mind.

3.6 Participation bias

A participation bias is inherent in almost any cultural review of this kind. People who have had difficult, harmful or disappointing experiences are often more motivated to engage than those whose experience has been neutral or positive.² Regulators and research bodies recognise this as a form of self-selection bias: consultation and survey responses are not necessarily representative of the full population, and must therefore be interpreted with care rather than read as a simple measure of prevalence.

That risk was relevant here. As in many cultural reviews, some participants were drawn to the process because they had serious concerns or negative experiences they wanted heard. At the same time, this Review also received a substantial body of evidence from participants who described Ballarat Grammar in warm, positive and appreciative terms, including current and former students, parents and employees who spoke about belonging, care, opportunity and pride in the school. This is significant because it meant the Review was not hearing from only one end of the experience spectrum. It heard both from those who felt let down by the school and from those who felt deeply supported by it. The task, therefore, was not to choose between competing narratives, but to analyse how these different experiences co-exist within the same institution.

2 Robert M Groves et al, *Survey Methodology* (2nd ed, Wiley, 2009), Ch 6.



In this Review, that meant looking for patterns across interviews, focus groups, survey responses, submissions and documents, testing whether themes were repeated across cohorts, distinguishing between isolated accounts and broader patterns, and weighing positive and negative evidence together rather than privileging the loudest or most distressed voices.³ The result is not a claim that every view was equally common, but a considered assessment of the themes that were most credible, consistent and significant across the evidence as a whole.

3.7 Limits of the methodology and interpretation notes

As with any cultural review, there are inherent limitations to the methodology that should be kept in mind when reading this report.

First, participation was voluntary. Those who chose to engage may hold views or have had experiences that are not representative of the broader community. The Review makes no claim to statistical representativeness.

Second, the Review was conducted during a period of significant scrutiny and change for the school. The boarding incidents, subsequent media coverage, VRQA review and associated regulatory actions formed the backdrop to the engagement process. It is likely that this context influenced both who chose to participate and what they chose to share.

Third, qualitative research involves interpretation. The thematic analysis was conducted systematically using established coding frameworks,⁴ but the process of identifying patterns and drawing inferences necessarily involves professional judgement.⁵ Where the evidence supports a finding clearly, this report says so. Where the picture is more nuanced or contested, that is also stated.

Survey data has been treated throughout as indicative. Response rates in relation to the population as a whole and self-selection effects mean that survey results cannot be generalised to the school population as a whole. Survey findings are used to supplement and illustrate qualitative themes, not to establish prevalence or make statistical claims.

3.8 Approach to confidentiality, ethics and voice

All participants were assured that their contributions would be treated confidentially and that identifying details would not be included in the report. Given the close-knit nature of the Ballarat Grammar community, de-identification has been applied carefully throughout. Where direct quotes are used, they have been selected because they are representative of broader patterns, not because they are individually remarkable.

3 Michael Q Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (SAGE Publications, 4th ed, 2015).

4 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology' (2006) 3(2) *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 77, 77.

5 Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (SAGE Publications, 1985).



Participant voice is central to this report. In the writing of this report, we have prioritised lived experience and used participants' own words where appropriate to ensure the findings reflect not just what was said, but what people were trying to convey. The analysis and interpretation are Intersection's own, informed by our experience in organisational culture and the regulatory context within which the school operates.

I've never had someone actually listen before. It felt like you actually wanted to understand.

4 Context for the Review

4.1 Purpose, scope and principles

The Independent Cultural Review was announced by the Ballarat Grammar School Board in May 2025 following publicly reported incidents in the school's boarding houses and the broader cultural questions those allegations brought into view. The Review was designed as a comprehensive, whole-of-school examination of culture, safety and wellbeing, informed by consultative, child safe, trauma-informed, ethical, confidential and evidence-based principles.

The scope of the Review extends beyond boarding. The Board recognised that the cultural conditions that allowed the boarding incidents to occur were unlikely to be confined to a single part of the school. The Review was therefore framed as an opportunity to examine the health of the school's culture as a whole, through a process that sought to engage broadly across the school community, support safe participation, protect privacy and draw findings from multiple sources of evidence. The Review was open to all members of the Ballarat Grammar community, including those with current and historical connections to the school.

Consistent with this broad scope, the Review was open to hearing about historical experiences of the school as well as current ones, including both positive and negative experiences. This reflected an understanding that school culture is shaped over time and that past practices, norms and relationships can continue to influence present perceptions and experiences.

Historical accounts were considered carefully and in context. Where experiences were assessed as historical in nature, they were treated as important context for understanding the school's cultural legacy. Where themes emerging from historical accounts were also reflected in current evidence, they were treated as relevant to the Review's assessment of present-day culture, systems and practice.

The Review was conducted through a strength-based approach to cultural assessment, which treats organisational strengths as a foundation for change rather than focusing solely on deficits. Consistent with this approach, the Review was designed to hear from a wide range of participants and to understand both the positive features of Ballarat Grammar's culture and the risks, pressures and patterns that may undermine safety, inclusion and wellbeing.

Particular care was taken to ensure that the Review process was child safe and trauma-informed, recognising the sensitivity of the issues under examination and the importance of conducting the Review in a way that respected the dignity, autonomy and wellbeing of participants.

4.2 Dart House incidents and media scrutiny

In February 2025, Ballarat Grammar publicly acknowledged allegations of student-on-student abuse in Dart House, one of the boys' boarding houses. Public reporting at the time described allegations that senior boarding students had physically assaulted younger boys, including conduct referred to as 'strapping', in what was described as a form of punishment for perceived boarding house misdemeanours. The matter was reported to Victoria Police, and public reporting indicated that approximately 12 younger students across Years 7 to 11 were affected.



Subsequent reporting indicated that the alleged conduct was not confined to a single incident. Later accounts referred to a broader pattern of abusive conduct in the boys' boarding environment, including allegations of humiliating and sexualised behaviour, with police investigating incidents said to have occurred in 2023 and 2024. Public reporting also noted that two students were expelled following the school's investigation.

The seriousness of the allegations, and the period over which the conduct was alleged to have occurred, raised fundamental questions about supervision in boarding, the culture within the boys' boarding houses, and the adequacy of the school's systems for identifying, escalating and responding to harm. Those concerns were later reinforced by regulatory scrutiny, including interim conditions imposed by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority on the school's boarding registration.

4.3 The VRQA review and regulatory action

In April 2025, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) initiated a review of Ballarat Grammar's compliance with the relevant minimum standards for school registration, with a particular focus on boarding operations.

The VRQA review found the school was non-compliant with a number of boarding standards. Its assessment identified what it described as a pervasive culture of bullying and student-to-student abuse within the boarding houses, together with a lack of appropriate oversight by the Board and school leadership. The findings pointed to systemic weaknesses in supervision, incident reporting and cultural management.

In late October 2025, the VRQA placed six interim conditions on the school's registration. These included a prohibition on the enrolment of new boarding students, requirements for strengthened governance and oversight, and mandated reporting to the VRQA on the school's progress. The VRQA specifically noted that the Board and senior leaders had received information in 2023 about a student being harmed in Wigan House and the culture of strapping and had failed to take appropriate steps.

The school undertook significant remedial action. This included commissioning an independent review of boarding operations (the Fenner Review), implementing enhanced supervision and safeguarding protocols, expanded training for boarding staff, and establishing improved reporting systems. The VRQA lifted the prohibition on new boarding enrolments ahead of the 2026 school year, though interim conditions remain in place.

4.4 The Dart House incidents and the Fenner Review

Following the initial disclosures, the school commissioned the Fenner Review to examine the specific circumstances of the Dart House incidents and make recommendations for boarding operations. The Fenner Review made 32 recommendations, of which the school agreed to implement 31. Changes overseen by the Cultural Review Committee, a Committee of the School Board, include restructured supervision arrangements, introduction of whistleblower and anonymous reporting systems, revised codes of conduct, additional training, and physical modifications to boarding facilities.



The Fenner Review was focused on responding to the incidents in Dart House and boarding structures, rather than taking a systemic, whole-of-school view. This Review was designed to complement the Fenner Review by examining the broader cultural conditions across the school that enabled an environment within which the Dart incidents occurred.

The response to the Dart House incidents has been substantial, but not without tension. As detailed in the boarding chapter of this Report, some students and employees described the post-incident changes as over-corrective, creating an environment that feels punitive and over-surveilled. Managing the balance between necessary safeguarding and maintaining a positive living and learning environment remains an active challenge.

4.5 Other changes and pressures on the school

The Review has been conducted during a period of considerable change and external pressure beyond the boarding incidents and VRQA oversight. Ballarat Grammar has grown substantially across the period examined by this Review, and the pace and shape of that growth form part of the context in which the pressures described in this report developed.

They've expanded massively in the last, I'd say just not even 25 years, but it's been the last 10 years. Not even 10. Massively. If I look in our kids in year 11, when they were in prep, their classes were maybe 40 kids....
So we grew and grew and grew, but our resources didn't. Our support systems didn't grow with us.

These accounts reflect a widely held perception that the school's growth outpaced its systems and supports. The enrolment data bears out the substance of that perception. Between August 2000 and August 2025 the school's enrolment almost doubled, rising from 1,005 students to 1,996, an increase of 991 students or 99%. Much of that growth is recent: the school added 649 students in the decade to 2025, a 48% increase, equivalent to an average of 4.02% a year.

That rate sits well above the sector. Over the same decade, enrolments across the independent school sector grew by an average of 2.7% a year, and across the government and Catholic sectors by 0.7 and 0.8% a year respectively.⁶ Ballarat Grammar's average of 4.02% a year therefore outpaced the independent sector, against which it is most fairly compared, by roughly 1.3 percentage points a year, around half as fast again, and grew at around five times the rate of the government and Catholic sectors. At that pace a school doubles in size in about eighteen years.

The growth has not been even across the school. The Junior School has grown fastest, more than tripling from 213 students in 2000 to 663 in 2025, an increase of 211%, and continued to grow at an average of more than 4% a year through the most recent decade. The Middle School roughly doubled. The Senior School grew more modestly, by about 42%. The heaviest and most sustained enrolment pressure has therefore been felt at the younger end of the school, where the demands on supervision and pastoral care fall first.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools, 2025. School growth rates calculated from the school's own enrolment records, 2000 to 2025: see Ballarat Grammar Historical Student & Employee Numbers as of August 2025 (updated 21 July 2026).



Boarding numbers, by contrast, have been broadly stable. The school had 236 boarders in 2000 and 267 in 2025, an increase of 13% across 25 years, or less than 1% a year. The cultural and supervisory matters identified in the boarding chapters of this report are not, then, a function of rapid expansion in boarding numbers. They concern the culture and practice of boarding rather than growth in its scale.

The most rapid expansion has been recent. Between 2019 and 2024 the school added just over 400 students, an increase of about 26% in five years, spanning the COVID-19 period and its immediate aftermath. A school that grows quickly over a short period places its systems, staffing and supervisory arrangements under pressure to keep pace, and a recurring theme of organisational research is that structures, processes and culture tend to lag behind rapid expansion rather than adjust to it in step.

At the level of classroom teaching, staffing has broadly kept pace with this growth. The school's full-time equivalent teaching workforce rose from 69.6 in 2000 to 181.5 in 2025, and over the most recent decade it grew by around 50%, marginally ahead of the 48% growth in enrolments over the same period. The student-to-teaching-staff ratio improved across the period examined, from 14.4 students per teacher in 2000 to 11.0 in 2025. That ratio compares favourably with national benchmarks. In 2025 the average across all Australian schools was 12.8 students per teacher, and the average across the independent sector, the most relevant comparator, was 11.7. On this measure Ballarat Grammar is more generously staffed than schools of comparable type.

The pressure the Review identifies is therefore not a shortage of classroom teachers relative to enrolments. It lies in the areas a headline teaching ratio does not capture: specialist and learning support staffing for students with additional needs, supervision in the boarding houses, and the systems, structures and leadership capacity needed to run a substantially larger and more complex organisation. These pressures are examined in the chapters that follow.⁷ Leadership transitions and changes within the senior leadership team have added to the sense of instability described by some participants.

⁷ School staffing figures are full-time equivalent figures provided by Ballarat Grammar: see Ballarat Grammar Historical Student & Employee Numbers as of August 2025 (updated 21 July 2026). National and sector figures are from Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools (Catalogue No 4221.0, 5 March 2026) Table 53a <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/2025>>. Student-to-teaching-staff ratios measure staffing levels and should not be read as class sizes.



The broader education sector is also facing a number of intersecting structural pressures impacting on the operational landscape of Australian schools, intensifying demands on schools and creating capacity, performance and sustainability challenges across the sector. Workforce pressures include teacher shortages, higher rates of attrition and occupational burnout. Post-COVID pandemic shifts in student behaviour, engagement and wellbeing, alongside heightened parental expectations and involvement, have added complexity to classroom and school community dynamics. There are also concerns about the impact of the expanding regulatory and administrative burden on schools, due to increased compliance obligations and reporting requirements for school leaders and teachers diverting time and resources away from core teaching and learning functions.⁸

The cumulative effect is a school community that is, in many respects, fatigued. Understanding this context is essential to reading the findings of this report fairly. The challenges identified are not the product of a single event or a single decision. They reflect a period of sustained pressure in which the school's cultural infrastructure has not kept pace with its operational growth.

4.6 A closely connected community

Ballarat Grammar occupies a distinctive position within its local and regional community. For many families, the relationship with the school spans generations, with current students often the children or grandchildren of former students. Individuals may engage with the school across multiple roles over time, including as students, parents, staff members, volunteers or donors. The school is also a significant employer in Ballarat, and its reach extends beyond education into the social, cultural and economic life of the region.

This interconnectedness is a defining strength of the school. Participants consistently described a strong sense of community, pride and belonging associated with Ballarat Grammar. Relationships are often longstanding and deeply embedded, contributing to a shared identity and a high level of engagement in school life. The school's role as both an educational institution and a community hub reinforces these connections.

At the same time, this layered and multi-faceted relationship creates complexity. Many individuals hold overlapping or sequential connections to the school, for example as a former student who later becomes a parent, or a staff member whose children attend the school.

Professional and personal networks frequently intersect, particularly in the context of a regional city where social and employment circles are closely connected.

⁸ See: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report* (2023) <www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/atwd/national-teacher-workforce-char-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9b7fa03c_4>; Productivity Commission, *Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Final Report* (2023) <www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/school-agreement/report>; A McPherson & J Lampert, 'An Analysis of Australian Teacher Workforce Policy: Challenges and Opportunities for Teacher Recruitment and Retention' (2025) 23 *Policy Futures in Education* 446-463; Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2022* (2023) <www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia>; J Allen et al, 'Child well-being before and after the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns in three Australian states' (2023) 58(1) *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 41-69; J Gore et al, *Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 on NSW Schools: 2020 Report to the NSW Department of Education* (2020) <www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/704924/Evaluating-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-NSW-schools.pdf>; NSW Department of Education, *Audit of teachers' administrative tasks* (Final Report, 2024); Victorian Government, *Independent Review into Administrative and Compliance Activities in Victorian Government Schools* (2025).



Everybody knows everybody. That makes it really hard to raise something because you're not just raising it with the school, you're raising it with your neighbour, your friend, your kids' coach.

*I think the thing about Ballarat is it's such a small community.
Everyone knows each other. It's very hard to maintain confidentiality.*

These dynamics influenced how some participants engaged with the Review. A number of participants expressed concern about being identifiable, even when formal confidentiality processes were in place. Others described a sense of loyalty to the school, or concern about potential social or professional consequences of speaking openly. In some cases, this resulted in hesitancy to share experiences, or a preference for anonymity in submissions and interviews.

The Review also heard that these dynamics can shape how issues are raised, responded to and understood within the school community. Strong relationships and a shared history can support trust and connection, but may also contribute to reluctance to challenge behaviour, perceived conflicts of interest, or a tendency to manage issues informally rather than through formal processes.

This duality, where the same factors that underpin community strength can also create barriers to transparency and accountability, is an important contextual feature of Ballarat Grammar. Understanding this interplay is critical to interpreting the evidence gathered through the Review and to shaping responses that both preserve the school's strengths and address the risks inherent in such a closely connected community.



5 Strengths of Ballarat Grammar

Across all cohorts, the Review heard people speak about Ballarat Grammar with affection, pride and a genuine sense of belonging. These positive experiences are central to how many people understand the school and they provide an important foundation on which Ballarat Grammar can build its response to the challenges identified in this report.

The most consistently raised strength was the sense of community. Students, parents and employees described a school with a long history, strong traditions and a culture that, at its best, feels warm, connected and deeply relational. For many, Ballarat Grammar is more than a place of education. It is a community in which relationships are formed across year levels, across families and across generations.

It's a really strong sense of community when you walk in the gate.

*In year 7 part of sport and music programs and really looking up to older students.
And then mentored the younger ones when I was senior.*

Yes, we had a great time with the kids, but it was also a time of collaboration and camaraderie among the staff ... reflecting, I think that was indicative of that sort of giving culture.

Participants described these relationships as deeply meaningful and, in some cases, among the most important in their lives. This sense of belonging was often linked to a feeling of being known and cared for, particularly when students encountered challenge, transition or personal difficulty. The House system was frequently identified as part of this strength, creating smaller communities within the school and supporting connection, identity and continuity across year levels.

A closely related strength was Ballarat Grammar's whole-child educational philosophy. Across consultations, participants consistently described the school as valuing young people for more than their academic results and as seeking to support their growth as rounded individuals. Students, parents and employees referred to the school's willingness to encourage students to try new things, discover their interests and develop confidence in different settings. A recurring theme was that Ballarat Grammar is at its strongest when it identifies something a student is good at, interested in, or capable of, and then nurtures that strength. Participants valued the school's capacity to help students build confidence through recognition, encouragement and opportunity, rather than defining them narrowly by academic performance alone.

I think it was those values, that notion of wanting the kids also to be in an aspirational environment where there was a value on learning and a value on education and a value on aspiration.

The breadth and quality of co-curricular opportunity was another area consistently recognised as a strength of the school. Students spoke about the range of activities available, from sport to music, drama, debating, camps, outdoor education, service and leadership opportunities. Parents valued the school's commitment to development across academic, social, creative, physical and personal

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domains. Many described the school as offering students a wide range of pathways through which they could find belonging, build skill and develop a sense of identity. This broader educational focus was seen by many as one of the school's defining strengths and as a point of difference within the wider education landscape.

Students were also notably aware of the advantages associated with these opportunities. Across the Review, students reflected on the wealth of experiences, programs and pathways available to them and expressed appreciation for what the school offers. Many understood that these opportunities are not available to every young person and spoke with gratitude about the education and experiences they had received. This awareness is an important feature of the school's culture. It reflects both the strength of the school's offering and the extent to which many students value what they receive from it.

The school's tradition of community service was raised frequently as a defining characteristic. Service was described not simply as an additional activity, but as part of the school's ethos and of how it seeks to shape character, perspective and responsibility. Participants often linked this aspect of school life to the school's values and to a broader understanding of education as involving contribution as well as achievement. Students described service as something that connected them to a sense of purpose to the broader Ballarat community and beyond. This outward looking orientation was seen as an important cultural asset.

Many participants also spoke with deep gratitude about individual employees and about Ballarat Grammar's pastoral strengths more broadly. Teachers, wellbeing staff, boarding staff and other support staff who had gone above and beyond were remembered with warmth and respect. Participants described employees who were attentive, compassionate, perceptive and willing to act in the interests of a student's wellbeing, development or safety. For some students and families, these relationships were transformative. The Review also heard that the school's pastoral structures, including mentors, tutors, Heads of House and wellbeing supports, as well as Head of School, Head of Boarding and Head of Student Care, have at times provided important pathways for care, trust and connection. These individual relationships and pastoral structures are a significant protective factor within the school environment. They support student wellbeing, connection and safety.



They're very good at looking through things through a wellbeing lens and communicating around what their priorities are.

Former students, parents and employees also described aspects of the school's boarding culture, particularly historically and in some boarding houses, as warm, connected and supportive. Some former boarders described feeling well cared for by staff and older students, and some parents recalled boarding as a place where their child felt welcomed and safe. While these experiences were not uniform, and the Review also heard serious concerns about boarding culture and safety, it is important to recognise that some participants spoke about boarding as a source of strong pastoral care, belonging and personal growth.

The evening meetings in the boarding houses is probably the best way to try and talk about values with the kids and let them know when they've dropped the ball a little bit, to point out where things are going well..

The school's stated values of responsibility, compassion, courage, aspiration, integrity and hope were also identified as strengths, though with an important caveat. Many participants acknowledged these values as meaningful and worthwhile aspirations. Some described them as visible and embedded in the school's language, expectations and leadership opportunities. Junior School students in particular spoke positively about learning and practising values such as being safe, kind and fair. Participants did not describe the values as hollow or irrelevant. On the contrary, they carry real weight within the community. People recognise them, believe in them and want them to be lived more consistently. That belief matters. It means the school is not starting from scratch in its efforts to strengthen culture. The challenge, as explored in the following chapter, is not the absence of values but the inconsistency with which they are translated into everyday practice.

The Review also heard positive reflections on aspects of leadership, particularly where leaders were experienced as visible, accessible, compassionate and responsive. Some participants described leaders who knew families personally, were present in school life and approached issues with care and humanity. These accounts were not universal, but they point to leadership practices within the school that have contributed positively to trust and connection and that provide a foundation for future improvement.

Finally, the willingness of the school community to engage with this process is itself a significant strength. Participation in the Review was substantial, and many participants spoke not from detachment or hostility, but from care, investment and a desire for the school to succeed. Even where participants expressed serious criticism, these views were often grounded in a belief that Ballarat Grammar can and should do better. That depth of goodwill, affection and expectation is perhaps the school's most important asset. It provides a basis for reflection, accountability and change. It should be recognised, honoured and not taken for granted.

These strengths are real and important. At the same time, they have not been experienced consistently across the school community. In some parts of the school, they were described as a defining part of daily life. In others, they depended more heavily on particular staff, teams or settings. That does not lessen their value. It points to the work ahead: to protect what Ballarat Grammar does well, strengthen it, and make those positive aspects of school culture more consistent across the whole school.



6 Challenges and Tensions

The Review identified persistent cultural tensions that cut across the school community and shape how students, parents and employees experience Ballarat Grammar. These tensions are interconnected and reflect broader organisational patterns across the school.⁹

The most significant challenge is the gap between the school's stated values and the consistency with which those values are reflected in practice. Across the Review, participants described responsibility, compassion, courage, aspiration, integrity and hope as values that matter and that carry real meaning within the school community. The challenge lies in an uneven translation of the values into everyday experience. For many participants, particularly those who had raised concerns and felt unheard, minimised or not taken seriously, this gap has eroded trust and confidence in the school's systems and leadership.

A second major challenge is the impact of growth without commensurate investment in systems, structures and ways of working. The school has expanded significantly over the last decade.¹⁰ Many employees and parents described a sense that management practices, communication systems, supervision arrangements and decision-making processes had not kept pace with that growth. As the school has become larger and more complex, there was a recurring view that it has too often operated in a reactive mode, responding to issues as they arise, filling gaps as they become visible, and relying on local workarounds rather than whole-of-school consistency. This reactive style was described as affecting multiple areas of school life, including behaviour management, staff support, communication, student wellbeing and operational decision-making. The result is a perception that the school is often managing symptoms rather than addressing underlying causes in a coordinated and sustainable way.

This broader lack of consistency was reflected in the Review's findings on behaviour management. Concerns about uneven responses were raised across all cohorts. Students described a system in which consequences could vary depending on who you were, which House you were in, what relationships were in play, or which staff member was involved. Parents and employees raised similar concerns about inconsistency in the handling of complaints, incidents and disciplinary issues. This variability undermines both safety and fairness. It also reinforces a perception that formal expectations are not applied in a clear, transparent or equitable way.

The Review also heard strong concerns about fairness, influence and differential treatment more broadly. Across student, parent and employee perspectives, there were recurring perceptions that some individuals and groups had greater protection, greater access to school leadership or more favourable treatment than others. These perceptions related to social status, family influence, longstanding school connections, leadership relationships and, in some cases, employment role or school subculture. Whether or not every perception reflects the full reality, the consistency with which these concerns were raised is itself significant. It points to a school culture in which confidence in fair process has been weakened.

⁹ R Westrum, 'A Typology of Organisational Cultures' (2004) 13(suppl 2) *BMJ Quality and Safety* ii22-ii27.

¹⁰ Ballarat Grammar's enrolment grew at an average of 4.02% per annum over the decade to 2025. Over the same period, the average annual increase in enrolments across the independent school sector was 2.7%, and across the government and Catholic sectors 0.7 and 0.8% respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools, 2025). The school therefore grew roughly 1.3 percentage points a year faster than the independent sector, around 50% faster in relative terms, and at around five times the rate of the government and Catholic sectors.



For students, social hierarchies and exclusion featured prominently in the evidence. Students described a culture in which differences in wealth, family connections, boarding status, social confidence and conformity to dominant norms could shape belonging and vulnerability. The divide between boarding and day students was described as particularly entrenched.

Students also reported experiences of discrimination based on race, sexuality, disability and gender. These patterns were not described as isolated interpersonal conflicts alone, but as features of a wider social environment that can reward status, reinforce difference and make it harder for some students to feel safe, included and respected. Gendered dynamics within the school, particularly within the House system and in parts of boarding culture, were identified as a persistent challenge. These dynamics intersect with broader concerns about hierarchy, status, power and exclusion. The Review heard that some aspects of the school's structures and traditions continue to reinforce unhelpful or outdated norms, particularly where expectations of masculinity, loyalty or silence discourage help-seeking, accountability or respectful relationships.

A further challenge identified through the Review was the sense of division within the employee cohort between teaching staff and other professional, operational and support staff. A number of employees described a culture in which teaching staff were perceived to receive greater recognition, more professional development opportunities, and a stronger voice in daily decision-making. Other staff at times felt less visible, less valued and less included in the life of the school, despite their important contribution to student experience, safety and school functioning. This division affects culture, collaboration and morale. It also risks weakening the whole-of-school approach required to address complex issues of wellbeing, conduct, safety and inclusion.

Communication and transparency emerged as areas of significant frustration across all cohorts. Students, parents and employees described a lack of clarity about decisions, expectations, processes and change. For some, this was experienced as delayed communication, inconsistent communication or communication that appeared more concerned with managing risk or reputation than with building understanding and trust. In a school of Ballarat Grammar's size and complexity, communication is a core part of how confidence is built, how expectations are understood and how people perceive fairness, inclusion and accountability.

Staff wellbeing also emerged as a significant issue. Heavy workloads and occupational burnout have become widespread issues in Australian schools, contributing to workforce pressures across the sector. According to Australian Teacher Workforce Data, in 2023, full-time school classroom teachers reported working long hours during school term (median of 50 hours per week), and since 2019, workload, work-life balance and work-related stress have consistently been the top three reasons cited by teachers intending to leave the profession.¹¹

In consultations, employees described high workloads, role strain, change fatigue and the pressure of carrying responsibility in systems that were not always clear, consistent or adequately resourced. Some described feeling stretched by the pace of change, the weight of community expectations and the burden of responding to issues in the absence of strong whole-school systems. Staff wellbeing is not separate from culture. It shapes the school's capacity to respond well, to act consistently and to sustain change over time.

¹¹ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Australian Teacher Workforce Data, *National Trends: Teacher Workforce* (June 2025 ed, 2019-2023) <www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/atwd-reports/national-trends-teacher-workforce-jun2025/>.



Finally, the Review found that these issues have, over time, contributed to a culture of complacency. Staff fatigue, reactive decision-making, uneven systems, perceptions of unfairness and a lack of clarity in roles, processes and expectations have combined to create an environment in which inconsistency can become accepted and concerns are too often dealt with case by case rather than through a clear, consistent whole-school approach. The result is a widening gap between policy and practice, reduced confidence in systems and weaker accountability. In this context, the task is not simply to introduce new policies or structures, but to build the consistency, trust and organisational discipline needed to ensure expectations are lived, systems are relied on, and accountability is clear.

These challenges are systemic but also solvable. They are not evidence of a school without strengths, but of a school whose strengths have not always been matched by the consistency, structure and clarity required to sustain a safe, fair and inclusive culture at scale. The recommendations in this report are designed to address these issues directly.



Experiences of Life at School



PART A — Experiences of Life at School

The following chapters set out what the Review heard about the experiences of students, boarding students and parents at Ballarat Grammar. Together, they provide a picture of how the school's culture is lived and understood across different parts of the community, including where experiences are shared, where they differ, and where particular issues arise more sharply for some groups than others.

These chapters explain the character of experience in each area. They describe the positive features of school life that participants value and want to preserve, including connection, care, opportunity and belonging. They also examine the challenges, tensions and harms described by participants, and consider how these are shaped by the school's structures, practices, relationships and ways of responding when problems arise.

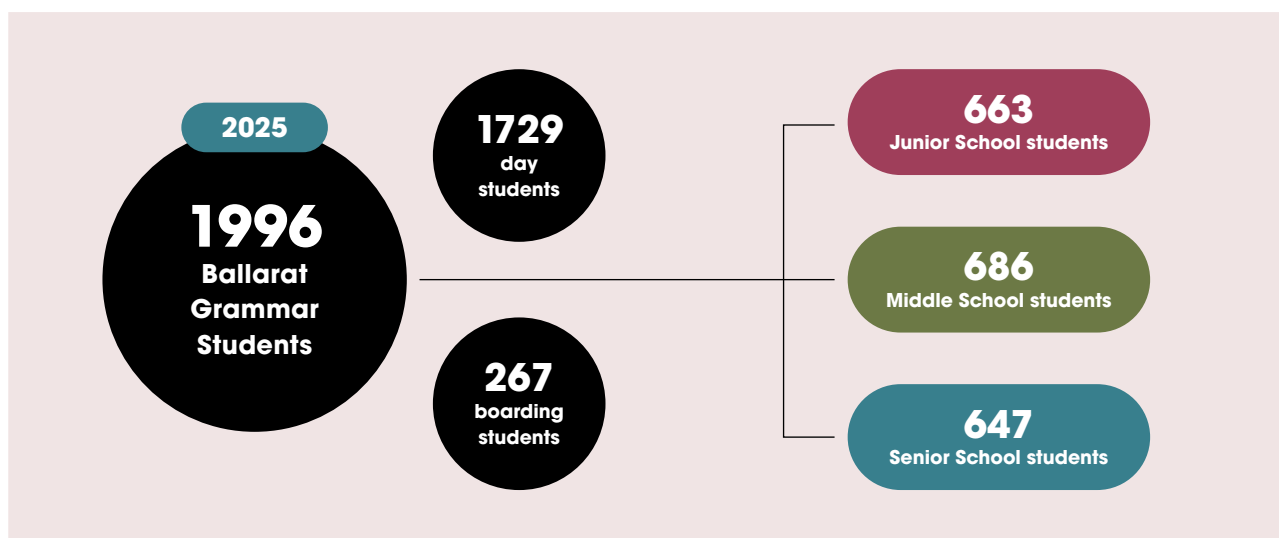
Each chapter begins with a summary of what was heard from that cohort. It then identifies strengths and protective factors, examines areas of concern, and explores the cultural and organisational drivers that help explain why those experiences occur. In doing so, these chapters move beyond individual incidents to consider broader patterns in how culture is experienced. Each chapter concludes with recommendations directed to the issues raised in that part of the Review and designed to support a safer, more consistent and more inclusive school environment.

7 Student Experience

Chapter summary

This chapter draws on interviews, focus groups, written submissions and survey responses from current and former students to examine the culture of Ballarat Grammar as students experience it. It covers five areas: sense of belonging and identity; values and behavioural culture; the student experience across year levels; the House system; and safety, reporting and institutional response. It concludes with recommendations for change.

As of August 2025, Ballarat Grammar had 1996 students, made up of 1729 day students and 267 boarding students. This included 663 Junior School students, 686 Middle School students and 647 Senior School students.¹²



Many students spoke with genuine pride about the sense of community, the breadth of co-curricular opportunity, the tradition of service, and the quality of many individual student-teacher relationships. For many, Ballarat Grammar is a place where they feel they belong and have the chance to develop as individuals.

Students described a school with genuine warmth, rich opportunities and many teachers who are deeply committed to their wellbeing. A culture of checking in on peers, pride in the school community, and a diverse range of activities were all identified as genuine strengths.

At the same time, the Review heard about significant challenges faced by some students. Social hierarchies based on perceptions of wealth, family connections, student leadership positions, gender, race, sexuality, disability and friendship groups create divisions that are difficult for students to navigate and have harmful impacts. Experiences of bullying, exclusion, discrimination and harmful behaviour were reported across all year levels. Behaviour management was described as inconsistent, and many students expressed limited confidence that reporting concerns would lead to meaningful action.

¹² Ballarat Grammar Historical Student & Employee Numbers as of August 2025 (updated 21 July 2026).

7.1 Sense of belonging and identity

7.1.1 An uneven experience of belonging and connection

A student's sense of belonging is one of the strongest predictors of their wellbeing, engagement, academic achievement and safety at school.¹³ The evidence is clear across secondary school settings, with particularly strong findings for the protective role of school connectedness against health risk behaviours, including exposure to violence and experiences of distress. The evidence gathered across the student cohort tells two stories simultaneously: genuine belonging exists at Ballarat Grammar, and it is distributed unevenly across the student population.

Current and former students stated that one of Ballarat Grammar's key strengths is the strong sense of community and welcoming culture. They report that the school is friendly and that they are able to develop positive peer relationships and friendships. The school values individuality and encourages students to pursue a wide range of interests.

Some students expressed a deep pride in being part of the Grammar community:

The overall school community is very positive and, personally, I am very proud to say I go to Grammar. There is a strong sense of resilience within the school that is really motivating both academically and when it comes to improving yourself as a person and going beyond what you believe your limits to be.

Students described the many opportunities available including camps and a wide variety of sporting, arts, music and drama activities. One former student noted that these opportunities had shaped who they had become:

[School] provided me with so many opportunities now it just feels like anything that comes, I feel like, yeah, I'll just throw my hand up. Let's just do it.

Current and former students also described positive experiences of inclusion, acceptance and feeling safe at school, including a culture of checking in on others to make sure they were ok. Respondents to the survey reflected similarly positive experiences. In the middle school, over three quarters of respondents stated that they feel that they belong at school all or most of the time,¹⁴ and almost three quarters said that they feel safe and supported all or most of the time.¹⁵ In the senior school, 67% of respondents said that they feel that they belong at the school,¹⁶ and 60% said they feel safe

¹³ H Korpershoek et al, 'The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: A meta-analytic review' (2020) 35(6) *Research Papers in Education* 641, 680; M D Resnick et al, 'Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health' (1997) 278(10) *JAMA* 823, 831.

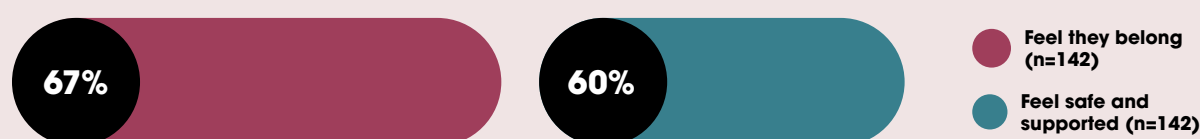
¹⁴ All of the time-24%; most of the time-53% (n=118).

¹⁵ All the time-26%; most of the time-45% (n=117).

¹⁶ All of the time-21%; most of the time-46% (n=142).

and supported all or most of the time.¹⁷ As noted in the Methodology, the survey is not a statistically representative measure of the school population, and this data reflects the proportion of respondents to each question.

Senior School respondent experiences of inclusion, acceptance and feeling safe



Senior School respondents said they feel they belong, and feel safe and supported most of the time or all of the time.

However, current and former students also noted the divisions, segregation and cliques in the school. Ballarat Grammar is a relatively homogenous culture, and this homogeneity amplifies difference: race and culture, gender and sexuality, ability and disability. Students described a judgemental atmosphere and a sense that there were certain groups they could not be part of. Cliques formed around sporting interests, subject groups or boarding status. Students described social hierarchies structured around popularity, gender, family background, wealth and sporting achievement, and the pressure these hierarchies placed on individuals to fit in.

Of course, not everyone has to be best friends, but there's a lack of acceptance and definitely some judgement between the 'cliques' that brings some toxicity into the environment.

Respondents to the survey also reflected the pressures to fit in. Almost half of respondents in middle school strongly agreed or agreed that they had felt peer pressure to change their appearance,¹⁸ and 39%¹⁹ of senior school respondents agreed with the same proposition. Some students experienced exclusion and bullying if they were perceived to be different, whether based on sexuality, appearance, disability, race, or interests considered outside the dominant norm. There was, in one student's words, 'a shame that comes with standing out'. Students who were seen as different were 'more likely to get bullied'.

¹⁷ All of the time-25%; most of the time-35% (n=142).

¹⁸ Strongly agreed-21%; agreed-24% (n=104).

¹⁹ Strongly agreed-13%; agreed-26% (n=117).

For a long time, I believed the school to be a very supportive and community-focused environment, however I have realised that while the school as an establishment aligns with these values, the cohort and sometimes even staff do not. This is particularly concerning to me because the school's social dynamics isolate many minorities. From what I perceive, LGBTQ+, neurodivergent, and people of colour are the main demographics which are looked down upon, and when discrimination is reported there seems to be little consequence or education. I believe that the way many teachers address topics of minorities in class contributes to this. The teachers' manner often reinforces the exclusive social structure built by the students

The adults in a school actively shape its culture, and that shaping role requires deliberate effort rather than passive presence. Where staff treat social division as an inevitable feature of adolescent life rather than something within the school's capacity to influence, the opportunity for constructive intervention is lost. Former students²⁰ highlighted this normalised acceptance of division directly:

A lot of staff could see what was going on and sort of went, 'well, this is something that is too big for me to fix maybe or get involved with. This is just how teenagers are, this is what the system is ... They're the boarders and the day students hate the boarders, and the boarders hate the day students, and so we're going to have tiffs with each other.' And it seemed that no one else really recognised or really felt that there was something problematic going on there.

7.1.2 Diversity and inclusion

How a school responds to reported discrimination is one of the most important cultural signals it sends. When discriminatory incidents are minimised, dismissed or addressed inconsistently, the message to students is that the school's stated commitment to inclusion does not extend to active protection.

Intersection identified a significant gap between Ballarat Grammar's stated inclusive values and the daily experience of some students from minority groups, and found evidence that this gap has been perpetuated in part by staff behaviour and institutional inaction.

According to October 2025 student data provided by the school, of 2154 students (total including Early Learning students), the vast majority (approximately 94% or 2017 students) were born in Australia, and a similarly large majority (approximately 92.5% or 1993 students) listed English as their only language spoken at home.²¹

In the senior school, 28% of survey respondents indicated that they had seen or experienced targeting based on family background and culture in the school.²² There was a common theme that staff downplayed racism and required training in cultural diversity to understand its impact and how to respond effectively. Downplaying racism led to inadequate responses including treating racist behaviours as a joke, excusing the behaviour or not responding at all.

²⁰ The former-student cohort spans several decades, with the majority of responses received from students who left the school within the past 15 years.

²¹ Ballarat Grammar Student Data, as of 13 October 2025. The total number of students included 1984 Junior, Middle and Senior School students and 170 students in the CEEEd (Centre for Early Education for children aged 6 months to 5 years)

²² 5% have been targeted; 23% have seen others targeted (n=97).

One student described the experience of racism from a teacher directly:

One time a white girl asked the teacher for a charger she said yes then I asked a few minutes later and she said no [I know] what you people do I'm going to give it to you and never get it back.

Another student described a culture of ableism, and the experience of students with disability was shaped in part by how the school's own support mechanisms were used against them:

Special provisions cards in exams are often called 'Tard cards' or 'Retard cards', and special provisions are seen by many within the school, from personal experience, as a target so many people do not use these as they need them because they do not want to be seen or treated any differently. I have experienced many teachers and students who see my special provisions as an excuse and a nuisance and many of my friends have been asked to go unscored or drop a subject because the special provisions 'get in the way' of teachers.

As one student put it:

I know it's impossible to make sure every single kid isn't homophobic, racist, etcetera etcetera, but if it could at least be easier to report said abuse that would be very [positive].

7.1.3 Support for students with disability and neurodivergence

Beyond the peer culture and stigma described above, the Review heard detailed accounts from parents about the quality and consistency of support provided to students with disability and neurodivergence. The picture was markedly uneven.

Some parents of students with additional needs spoke highly of the communication and support their child received. One parent described it as 'highly professional, highly organised, above and beyond'. These accounts demonstrate that the school is capable of delivering strong, individualised support when the right staff, systems and attention are in place.

However, other parents described a very different experience. Assessments, reports and recommendations about their child's needs were not properly or consistently implemented across the school. Internal communication between staff was a recurring concern, with parents having to provide the same information about their child's needs multiple times to different people:

They don't transition the information from one level to another, and they don't communicate that. So their internal communication is not right.

Some parents of children with disability reported feeling ‘more attacked rather than supported’, and that the onus was entirely on them to identify and address issues:

I can't keep advocating for my child every term to have the support that he should just be given as part of a child with a disability. Parents are feeling unsettled, exhausted and frustrated with all of their advocacy, which is fruitless but also daily family routines are significantly impacted by the school's inability to provide reliable communication and supports.

For neurodivergent students, the number of transitions and class changes during a school day was raised as a recurring concern. Parents noted that frequent transitions can be particularly challenging for these students and are not conducive to their learning. The matter had been raised with staff repeatedly but continued. However, following the Time and Practice Project timetable changes introduced in 2026, the school now operates on a four-period day, with no morning muster and dedicated transition times between periods, which may impact the ease of transitions for neurodivergent students.

Transition points between school stages also presented particular difficulties. The transition from junior to middle school was identified as a significant disruption, particularly for children with additional needs, as learning approaches shift from inquiry-based to more traditional classroom-based methods. Similarly, the transition from middle to senior school can be difficult as children are expected to fit a norm with less accommodation for different needs.

These accounts point to a systemic issue rather than isolated failures of individual staff. The inconsistency between the school's best practice and its worst is itself the problem. Where support depends on the knowledge and commitment of a particular teacher or staff member rather than on a reliable whole-of-school system, the quality of experience a student with additional needs receives becomes a matter of luck. Parents described feeling that they were the only continuity in their child's support, carrying institutional knowledge that the school itself should hold and act on.

Some parents questioned whether the school's ethos of inclusivity is consistently borne out in practice. Some said the school should be upfront if it cannot support diverse students or students with particular requirements, and not accept enrolments where adequate resources or supports are not in place. This is a matter of institutional honesty as well as educational practice.

The employee experience findings in Part B confirm that this inconsistency is not simply a matter of individual capability or willingness. Staff described feeling stretched across multiple roles without adequate time, training or specialist support to meet the needs of students with disability and neurodivergence. Several employees spoke about growing enrolments of neurodiverse learners and a learning support model they experienced as stretched, despite a substantial increase in the school's investment in this area, and about feeling ill-equipped to provide the level of individualised response these students require.

That investment has risen substantially in absolute terms. The school's spending on Inclusive Education Assistants and learning enhancement more than tripled between 2019 and 2025, from \$345,675 to \$1,164,544. The concern raised through the Review is not an absence of investment, but that it has not kept pace with the growth in the number and complexity of students requiring support. The gap parents experience is, in significant part, a resourcing and systems gap that staff are left to manage without the tools or professional development to do so.

7.1.4 Student leadership and voice

Students who feel their perspectives are genuinely considered demonstrate greater engagement, stronger trust in adults, and more willingness to report concerns. Where student leadership positions are structured without genuine access to influence, they can produce the opposite effect, reinforcing students' view that their experience does not matter to the institution. Intersection found this pattern operating at Ballarat Grammar.

Across different methods of consultation students identified a significant lack of authentic student voice. Some current boarders expressed not feeling considered in the changes being made to the boarding environment, and students who were or had been in leadership positions described not being consulted, not being listened to, and not being taken seriously. This account was provided by a former school captain reflecting on a recent period in the school's student leadership:

I mean they had elected us to be the voices of the student body, and so if they're not listening to what we're telling them about the culture of the school, then I don't know who they're going to listen to. I think that historically the captain's role was generally just a little bit performative ... I had a friend who was the school captain the year before me and I remember talking to her about her frustration with not being really taken seriously or any actual change or action being made.

Student representatives were described as not touching base with the students they represented. The few surveys available to students focused on teacher performance feedback rather than student culture and concerns. Leadership selection processes in senior school were perceived to be more of a 'popularity contest' that did not necessarily choose the best person for the role. Some students felt that leadership positions were 'not really needed. All they do is talk at assembly sometimes ... You could just rotate students through that role without having to do the whole process.' On the other hand, there have been occasions where captain advocacy has led to structural change. For example, a paper written by the school captains of 2020 eventually led to the school's implementation of CREW groups in 2026.

The overall effect, regardless of intent, is a student body that experiences decisions as made about it rather than with it.

7.2 Values and behavioural culture

7.2.1 The gap between stated values and lived experience

The alignment between what an institution says it stands for and what students experience in daily life is a fundamental indicator of cultural health. Where a significant gap exists, the values themselves lose credibility and students disengage from them. Intersection found clear evidence of this gap at Ballarat Grammar and its practical consequences.

Students observed a persistent disconnect between the school's stated values and what they experienced in practice. A specific example was given of a Head of House who had organised an event to raise awareness of domestic violence, which participants described as performative because they reported the same staff member as routinely disrespectful towards women, and 'those attitudes did then pass on to the boys, and they'd preach respect and then be disrespectful'. The performative nature of values activities, disconnected from the daily culture of classrooms and Houses, was a recurring theme.

Students suggested that values need to be discussed and made tangible with practical examples. One student captured the frustration clearly:

I think that my school needs a better focus on the present rather than promoting values and ideals which many students will actually struggle to recognise within the school's culture. There needs to be more practical discussions at assemblies and House rather than the discussions that occur currently. At the moment these discussions promote the school as a faultless institution in terms of culture and environment.

The Review heard that students are explicitly taught the school's values in the junior years and in the first year of middle school, but that by mid-secondary school 'they don't really talk about it at all as if they don't even exist'. Beyond 'posters in hallways' the school's values are not visible to some students and are not translated into practical reality, particularly as students progress through the secondary years. This fade-out of explicit engagement with values is directly connected to the behavioural patterns documented throughout this chapter.

The school's community service program was acknowledged as a strength by many students and former students, with positive long-term impact identified. The role of scholarships was also acknowledged as a meaningful contribution. However, perceptions about the alignment between the school's community service identity and attitudes modelled by some staff members at the school raises questions about the extent of the school's values commitment. Service programs that develop genuine empathy require those values to be modelled at every level. One student documented a specific example:

I think that for a school that claims to be so involved in community service, helping the underprivileged etc., there is a big sense that people at the school (both students and teachers) look down on people at schools which may not have access to the resources which we do at Ballarat Grammar... To insinuate that because a school doesn't have the same resources as Ballarat Grammar, all of their students are misbehaved, I think is an incredibly horrible thing to say.



7.2.2 Behavioural curriculum across year levels

Explicit values and behaviour education is well-established in developmental research as a protective factor across all year levels, not only in the primary years.²³ The social norms that govern how students treat one another are not fixed by the time students reach secondary school. They remain open to influence, and the school's capacity to shape them through structured curriculum and adult modelling persists throughout adolescence.

Where explicit behavioural curriculum tapers off in the middle and senior years, peer culture fills the gap, and the norms that consolidate tend to reflect the values of the most dominant social groups rather than the values of the institution. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in the Years 9 to 11 window, precisely the period at which vulnerability to peer-driven risk-taking behaviour is highest.²⁴

At Ballarat Grammar, junior school teachers described active and regular work with students around values: what respect looks like in practice, how to navigate conflict, and what it means to be part of a community. This work was described as embedded in classroom life rather than confined to discrete wellbeing sessions. Intersection heard that this explicit framing becomes less consistent through the middle school years and is largely absent by senior school, where values education tends to be delivered through one-off events, assemblies or reactive responses to incidents rather than through sustained curriculum.

The consequence is that the years in which the most harmful peer dynamics were documented, Years 9 to 11 in both the day school and boarding environments, are also the years in which students receive the least structured guidance about behavioural expectations and community standards. The school's response to harmful behaviour has been largely disciplinary rather than educational. A sustained behavioural curriculum through the middle and senior years, grounded in the same practical and reflective approach used in the junior school, would provide a more durable foundation for the cultural change the school is seeking.

7.2.3 The Positive Behaviour @ Grammar Framework (now the Teaching, Learning and Wellbeing Framework)

In 2024, the school developed and began implementing a Middle and Senior School behaviour framework known as Positive Behaviour @ Grammar (PB@G), since developed into the Teaching, Learning and Wellbeing Framework. The framework was developed in response to post-COVID changes in student behaviour, including heightened social interactions and disruptive classroom behaviours, and draws on the Queensland Government's Positive Behaviour for Learning model. It is structured around three values statements: 'We are responsible and courageous'; 'We are aspirational and hopeful'; 'We show integrity and compassion' and translates these into observable habits for learning in three domains: preparation, practice, and participation and persistence.

The framework is grounded in research-informed principles: that positive behaviour needs to be explicitly taught, that effective behaviour support requires a whole-school framework rather than isolated interventions, and that consistency across the school in applying the framework is essential.

²³ Joseph A Durlak et al, 'The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions' (2011) 82(1) *Child Development* 405, 406.

²⁴ Laurence Steinberg, 'A Social Neuroscience Perspective on Adolescent Risk-Taking' (2008) 28(1) *Developmental Review* 78, 90-2.

It identifies eight components of an integrated approach: positive relationships, classroom organisation, differentiated teaching and learning, positive reinforcement, active engagement, active supervision, consistent and fair consequences, and behavioural expectations, with social and emotional learning as a connecting thread.

Intersection recognises the PB@G framework as a constructive development that aligns with the evidence base on effective behaviour support in schools. It represents a shift from a reactive, consequence-driven approach to one that seeks to build the conditions for positive behaviour through explicit teaching, consistent expectations and reinforcement. The framework, if implemented as intended, addresses classroom behaviour and learning habits effectively.

What the PB@G framework does not yet address, however, is the broader spectrum of behavioural and cultural challenges identified in this Review. Bullying, discrimination, harassment, gender-based disrespect, bystander passivity and harmful peer norms are not primarily classroom management issues. They require a different kind of curriculum: one that deals explicitly with how students treat one another outside the structured learning environment, in Houses, in boarding, in unsupervised spaces, and online. The PB@G framework provides a sound platform for classroom behaviour. The gap identified in this Review is the absence of a sequenced curriculum that extends beyond the classroom to address the relational and cultural dimensions of student behaviour across all year levels. The CREW structure introduced through the TAPP restructure in 2026 provides the vehicle for delivering this curriculum, and the PB@G principles of explicit teaching, consistency and positive reinforcement could inform its design.

7.2.4 Current behavioural and values education programs

As part of this Review, Intersection examined the behavioural and values education programs currently delivered or in development at Ballarat Grammar. This included documentation of current curriculum offerings, external partnerships and staff training initiatives. This section sets out what is currently in place, where the gaps sit, and how the school's approach could be strengthened.

What the school currently delivers

Intersection was provided with information about a number of programs and initiatives delivered across the student body and staff. The majority of these were established or commissioned in 2025, in the period following the boarding incidents that prompted this Review.

The most structured student-facing offering is the Elephant Ed program, delivered to students in Years 10 to 12. Each year level attends two workshops: one mandatory session targeting prevention of sexual violence, and one elective chosen from topics including consent and boundaries, inclusivity, sexual relationships and privilege. In Year 12, the mandatory session addresses sexual violence directly, with content on collective responsibility and bystander intervention. The program is well-sequenced within its year levels and addresses important content, particularly around consent, media literacy and respectful relationships.

In the boarding environment, Elephant Ed has also been delivered via small group sessions in Houses, with content adapted by year level. This program was described as an interim whole boarding program, covering respectful choices and communication for Years 7 and 8, consent and coercive control for



Years 9 and 10, and allyship and upstanding for Years 11 and 12. This boarding-specific delivery represents the only documented respectful relationships and consent content for students below Year 10.

Separately, the school has delivered hazing education in boarding. These sessions were run in Term 4 2025, initially with Year 11 students preparing for Year 12 leadership, then with junior students supported by the Year 11 cohort. The program uses a spectrum-based card sort activity to help students distinguish between practices that build connection and those that cause harm. The training includes scenario-based discussions relevant to House culture, including how to respond when a student brings 'shame' to their House, how to handle inductions, and how House sporting events should be conducted. It is practical and relevant to the boarding setting, but it has not been extended to the day school.

Ballarat Community Health delivers one consent and respectful relationships session each to Year 10 and Year 11 students, presented by a panel including an educator, police officer, medical professional and legal worker. A one-off Man-Cave and Flourishing Journey session was delivered to Year 8 students, with positive student feedback reported.

On the staff side, The Men's Project, an arm of Jesuit Social Services, delivered two workshops in October 2025 to staff in the boys' boarding houses and a selection of year coordinators, junior school and wellbeing staff. The workshops focused on masculinity, the Man Box framework, boundary-setting and practical approaches to responding to harmful behaviour in boys. Post-workshop feedback from the eight respondents was strongly positive: all indicated increased knowledge of the Man Box and its impact, and all expressed interest in further workshops. Staff described the content as practical and well-founded:

All of it. Insight into the drivers, compassion for boys, practical ways to approach behaviour using strengths.

Understanding the concept of the man box and how it pigeonholes men. Understanding how to have those difficult conversations to challenge unhealthy behaviours.

One response, however, signalled an implementation concern consistent with the broader patterns identified in this Review around unclear authority structures within the House system:

Great content but worried about how this will work in my House as there are too many chefs in the kitchen... I feel I don't have a strong enough voice in this space.

The school also engaged a team from Monash University's School of Education, Culture and Society to deliver staff professional learning in December 2025 on the influence of the manosphere in school settings. The session covered the Australian landscape of gender-based violence in schools, the mechanics of algorithmic radicalisation and the impact of manosphere content on young people's attitudes and relationships. The content is current, research-informed and directly relevant to patterns identified in this Review, including the normalisation of disrespectful attitudes towards women and the reinforcement of rigid masculine norms. Intersection understands the school has indicated its intention to enter a multi-year research partnership with the Monash team, though the scope and terms had not been finalised at the time of writing.

Where the gaps are

Intersection identified a number of significant gaps in the school's current approach that limit its effectiveness as an integrated behavioural curriculum.

Limited respectful relationships and consent education before Year 10. The documented curriculum for day students in Years 7 to 9 is a general social and emotional learning program covering values, respect and upstander behaviour. The most critical gap is that targeted respectful relationships and consent education does not begin until Year 10.²⁵ Elephant Ed begins at Year 10. The Ballarat Community Health sessions are delivered at Years 10 and 11. The hazing education is confined to boarding. The Man-Cave session was a one-off for Year 8. As documented elsewhere in this chapter, the middle school years are the period in which peer culture consolidates, social hierarchies harden, and students are most susceptible to the influence of dominant group norms. Delivering the most structured program content only from Year 10 means the school is intervening after the critical window has substantially closed.

This gap is particularly stark given what the Review heard from middle school students about their experience of bullying, exclusion and discrimination during these years. Anonymous survey responses included accounts of students being encouraged by peers to self-harm, of no action being taken after anonymous reports, and of speaking up resulting in consequences for the reporter rather than the aggressor. That these students receive no consistent or evaluated structured education across year levels about behavioural expectations, bystander responsibility or respectful relationships compounds the problem.

Programs are piecemeal, not integrated. The school's current offerings involve at least five separate external providers, each delivering discrete content on their own terms and timelines. There is no documented framework that connects these programs to one another, to the school's values, or to a sequenced developmental progression from Years 7 to 12. The result is a collection of initiatives that sit alongside one another rather than building on each other. Currently, no single program addresses the full range of behavioural and cultural challenges identified in this Review, although the 4Rs curriculum roll-out through CREW Mentors and Co-Heads of Year is in progress, with the aim of integration.

Staff training has been small in scale. The Men's Project workshops were attended by boarding house staff and a selection of other staff, with eight completing the feedback survey. The Monash session was a single half-day. For staff training to shift culture rather than raise awareness, it needs to be sustained, reach all staff, and connect to changes in practice across every part of the school. At present, the training sits with a self-selecting group of already-engaged staff, predominantly in the boarding environment (training for boarding staff is discussed further in Chapter 8).

Key content is confined to boarding. The hazing education, the adapted Elephant Ed boarding sessions for Years 7 to 9, and the Men's Project staff training are all currently confined to the boarding environment. However, the cultural challenges documented in this Review are not confined to boarding. Day students described the same hierarchies, the same peer pressure, the same bystander dynamics and the same harmful behaviour. A program that addresses these matters only in boarding sends an unintended message that these are boarding problems rather than whole-of-school problems.

²⁵ The Middle School SEL overview was provided to the Review after the evidence-gathering window closed. Its delivery in practice was not assessed.



No evaluation framework. None of the programs documented have a formal evaluation mechanism beyond the Men's Project feedback survey, which received eight responses, and measured self-assessed knowledge and confidence. There is no pre- and post-assessment of student attitudes or behaviour, no longitudinal tracking, and no measurement of whether program content has translated into observable changes in peer culture or reporting behaviour. Without evaluation, the school cannot distinguish between programs that are effective and those that are merely delivered.

No connection to the school's values framework. The junior school's approach to values education, described earlier in this chapter, was identified as a strength: practical, embedded in daily life, and understood by students. None of the external programs currently delivered in the middle and senior school are documented as connecting to or building on this foundation. The school's values are not referenced in the program materials provided to the Review. The behavioural curriculum, such as it is, operates on a parallel track to the school's own values language.

Upstander and active bystander education

Across the student cohorts and year levels Intersection spoke with, the Review heard consistently that many students at Ballarat Grammar do not feel safe or confident to intervene when they witness harmful behaviour, and do not believe that reporting concerns will lead to meaningful outcomes. One submission described a peer whose intervention in a self-harm crisis likely saved another student's life. Focus group participants described attempting to intervene and being ostracised for it. Another student described the anti-upstander norm directly:

Nobody wants to be a snitch, but also nobody wants to be the person that stands up and says, 'that's not okay'.

A former student described attempting to act and finding no support:

I tried to step in, multiple times. Nothing happened. Nobody backed me up, not the students, not the staff.

The school's current programs touch on active bystander responsibility in isolated places. The Elephant Ed Year 12 session includes content on collective responsibility and bystander intervention. The Year 10 and Year 11 inclusivity elective references bystander intervention.

The Men's Project has proposed a second workshop focused on the 6Ds bystander framework, which at the time of writing has yet to be delivered. The hazing education asks student leaders to reflect on their responsibility for culture. But these elements are scattered across providers, elective, confined to specific year levels or delivered only in boarding. There is no integrated upstander program that operates across the school.

7.3 Student experience across year levels

As students progress through the school, the data gathered across junior, middle and senior school reveals a consistent developmental pattern. Social divisions deepen, the tolerance for harmful behaviour increases, and the gap between students' expectations of the school's response and their actual experience widens. In earlier year levels there is more reliance on teachers to intervene; across all year levels there is a common theme of frustration at the lack of action and consequences for inappropriate and harmful behaviours. The following sections trace this trajectory.

7.3.1 Junior School

In the junior school years, students are forming their foundational understanding of institutional norms: what rules mean, whether they apply to everyone equally, and whether speaking up about unfair treatment is safe or likely to produce any result. The consistency of the school's response to inappropriate behaviour in these years has a disproportionate influence on the attitudes and expectations students carry into middle and senior school.

Students in the junior school identified many positives about Ballarat Grammar including supportive teachers, good friendships, play spaces, fun activities, camps and the diversity of opportunities available. Junior school students stated they have a good understanding of safe, kind and fair values, and some took great pride in earning praise for demonstrating these. However, some acknowledged that these values do not always govern behaviour in the playground, and that playground rules can feel confusing, unclear or inconsistently applied:

*I think the school has bad priorities. You are more likely to get told off for going to the bathroom without asking than if you call another student a F**ing Gay piece of Sh*t.*

Students said they can become very upset by friendship conflicts, often needing adult help to repair relationships, but that sometimes issues were not noticed or addressed by teachers. A common theme was that consequences for inappropriate behaviour should be clearer, more visible and more consistently applied. Some students also noticed a perceived bias towards students whose parents worked at the school, who were seen to receive lesser punishments.

Some culturally diverse students experienced racism and stated that teachers did not consider it serious, did not take action, or dismissed the behaviour as a joke. Some older students in junior school reported incidents of bullying in unsupervised areas like bathrooms but hesitated to report due to fear of being labelled a 'dobber'. There was also a perception that reporting inappropriate behaviour would result in the reporting student also getting into trouble: 'Kids don't go to the effort to tell a teacher as it takes ages to resolve the problem, and you'll get in trouble as well'.



One student described the response to persistent bullying:

I'm very much so never going to tell a teacher, I'm never going to do anything. The teacher will just see me leave. There's been times in classes where I've just legitimately broke down and left, or kids smashed my pencils and it was just never going to be brought up with a teacher.

7.3.2 Middle school

The middle school years are a critical period for the formation of peer culture. The social norms established in Years 7 to 9 tend to consolidate and become increasingly resistant to change. Effective intervention during this period is significantly more productive than remediation at the senior school level. The evidence from Ballarat Grammar's middle school indicates that this opportunity has not been consistently taken. Some middle school students described Ballarat Grammar as welcoming and appreciated the range of opportunities on offer. However, this experience was not universal:

I've noticed that if you don't have 'normal' interests, are plus sized, a person of colour, queer, or neurodivergent, teasing/unkind behaviour is common. As a queer/neurodivergent person, it's quite unsettling ... How normalised it is by students to make jokes about things like race, sex, gender, etc.

Students spoke about numerous experiences of exclusion and bullying and perceived inconsistent responses. One student who was bullied described receiving an email apology only after a member of the public had reported the incident to an external body, 'and then two weeks after that there was just nothing. There was no other follow through at all. And the boys were back to being allowed to do everything else. And nobody checked in with me again.'

Some students described the pressure to fit in by changing their appearance. When asked what happened if they did not comply, students said: 'I would get hit' and 'I would be encouraged to commit self-harm or suicide'. Students expressed feeling unsafe and observed or experienced discrimination and assault, compounded by a culture of not speaking up. Students raised a lack of accountability and consequences for actions:

They [aggressors] get a slap on the wrist and nothing else and it honestly encourages them to escalate their behaviours. When I used the anonymous reporting service, my report was deleted and not acted upon, so it needs to totally change as I am never using it in its current state again but desperately need to.

Respondents to the survey in the middle school indicated that 24% had seen or experienced bullying in House settings,²⁶ and 15% had seen or experienced verbal abuse.²⁷ The division between boarders and day students was a common theme, reinforced by school routines such as eating separately.

²⁶ 6% have experienced; 18% have seen (n=96).

²⁷ 6% have experienced; 18% have seen (n=96).

Students also expressed the lack of visibility and confusion around the school values. The values taught in the junior years were described as fading from view, and the middle school years represented a gap in which peer culture, rather than institutional values, was setting the behavioural standard.

7.3.3 Senior school

The review found that by senior school, peer culture at Ballarat Grammar has largely consolidated. The patterns of division, hierarchy and perpetration of tolerance for harmful behaviour established in earlier years operate with both greater autonomy and social force. Senior students are also the most visible transmitters of the school's informal culture into the boarding environment, making the relationship between whole-of-school culture and boarding culture a central concern of this Review.

Some senior school students expressed feeling included and supported. Teachers were described as more supportive and respectful toward older students than in the junior years. Students appreciated the range of opportunities and how important these are to helping students form a strong and positive sense of self.

However, in the senior school there is strong evidence of the continuing divide between boarders and day students, with boarders perceived to receive preferential treatment, to look down on day students, and to have their own distinct and sometimes toxic culture. One day student described the boarding culture directly:

I find the boarding side of the school, especially boys, to be absolutely nasty and that whole community to be absolutely brainwashed by each other's egos... Naming the day students 'Scrags'... the way the girl boarders say people who snitch on child abuse are 'snitches' and 'strapping should come back, it's totally harmless', and 'people just need to harden up and not complain, take the straps, how else will there be a hierarchy in the House'... it makes me sick to my stomach.

The Review found that power dynamics in the senior school were entrenched. A social hierarchy was perceived based on children of legacy families, wealth, boarding/day student status, extracurricular activities, or whose parents worked at Ballarat Grammar. Social divisions were experienced as 'very set', and the pressure to fit in and be seen as normal was significant. Some students described fitting in at real cost to themselves:

I was pressured into excluding and ignoring two of my peers. One has been ostracised by our peers the entire time she's been at the school and bullied relentlessly, I was one of only 2 or 3 people who ever supported her, and she saw me as her best friend ... I am incredibly ashamed to say that I would ignore them both, deliberately exclude them, avoid them, and made them feel unwelcome so that I could spend time with a group of friends who would rather run away than spend time with me and have either of them there.



The Review found a recurring perception, raised by students and parents, that the school prizes sporting achievement above other pursuits. A wide range of activities is on offer, but these participants felt that involvement and success in sport drew more recognition than other achievements, leaving those whose interests lay elsewhere feeling lesser. As one student put it:

We had won debating, and the assembly was all about who had won at sport. They got to go on stage; we barely got a mention.

A parent described the same imbalance in where the school's attention and money go:

It's ... in the way they spend money, in the way the teachers will turn up to some functions and not others. Sport seems to be first.

This perception persists across a wide range of both former and current parents, students and staff despite a formal recognition structure that is, in fact, broad. Recognition is overseen by a General Award Committee and spans academic and general excellence, the arts, service and sport. Colours are awarded across eight areas of the school, only one of which is sport, and of the fourteen Senior School graduation awards, four are sport related.

Ballarat Grammar was described as providing a well-rounded education, with consistent acknowledgement of the many opportunities to thrive in areas other than academic. However, students also noted that the school is not widely seen as academically rigorous. Many linked this perception to the school's admissions policy that considers the student as a whole without an overt focus on academic achievement

I really liked it that I wasn't limited to my grades when I came here. But, like, almost everyone thinks that if you're an academic overachiever, you go to Clarendon. If your grades aren't as good, you come to Grammar.

Grammar's culture is very unique in the way that it values individuality and the pursuit of a wide range of interests, no matter how unconventional. Not just academics.

Despite a number of extension programs available at high performing students at the school, there was a perception regarding the lack of extension and support for students at both ends of the academic spectrum:

We have lots of classes for students who need extra help because they don't have very good academics, but there isn't a lot of extra help and extension for students with very good academics.



Respondents to the survey in the middle school indicated that 61% felt the school encourages them to discover and develop their strengths all or most of the time²⁸ and 74% stated that the school values all kinds of skills and talents, not just academic ones.²⁹ In senior school, 62% indicated that the school encourages them to discover and develop their strengths all or most of the time³⁰ and 69% stated that the school values all kinds of skills and talents, not just academic ones.³¹ Former students also noted that Grammar was producing well-rounded students and that teachers were shaping character and values 'not just through academics, but through a mix of formal teaching culture and role modelling.'

The Review also heard about negative gender dynamics present in the senior school. Gender segregation built into the House and mentor structures, intended to be pillars of support and bonding, reinforced separation between male and female students. Some staff were also seen to be reinforcing negative gender norms, and 'boys will be boys' attitudes excused or diminished sexual harassment, bullying and abuse, further entrenching the experience of a patriarchal system.

One student described a sexist incident with a male teacher:

He said women are often just better in the kitchen instead of the classroom as they are better at following recipes than learning complex thinking. To this I was quite upset as was the other girl. The boys laughed and thought it was hilarious but it truly hurt. I told some teachers just in passing over the next few weeks and no one followed up on it or asked anything else or looked into it further or offered support... and this is when I realised the school was so caught up in its bigger issues it had forgotten maybe about the rest of us.

Another student raised a concern about a female teacher's approach to uniform enforcement:

Saying things such as that our dresses are too short... and that this 'is unfair on male teachers at the school' and that it 'puts them in an uncomfortable situation' and that 'there's no control over what they might do' is extremely rude. I also think lining all of the girls in a year level up and walking past, crouching looking at their dress lengths is objectifying them, and when put in these situations I felt overwhelmingly uncomfortable.

28 All of the time-25%; Most of the time-36% (n=118).

29 All of the time-41%; Most of the time-33% (n=117).

30 All of the time-25%; Most of the time-37% (n=142).

31 All of the time-39%; Most of the time-30% (n=142).

7.4 The Middle and Senior School House system

A note on timing

This Review gathered evidence about the House system as it operated prior to the pastoral care restructure implemented at the start of 2026 through the Time and Practice Project (TAPP). The changes introduced through that restructure, including the separation of pastoral care into co-educational CREW groups and the repositioning of Houses as vertical connection and competition structures, are discussed at section 7.2.3.

The feedback gathered through this Review remains directly relevant to the current House system. The TAPP restructure addressed the pastoral care function but did not alter the structural features of the Houses themselves, including gendered composition, family legacy-based allocation and the dynamics documented in the sections that follow.

7.4.1 Community and belonging within houses

House systems, when designed and managed well, are a recognised mechanism for creating belonging, fostering cross-year connections, and building school identity. This potential is evident in the experiences of students at Ballarat Grammar who described their House as a source of genuine connection and support. Students described being very attached to their Houses and their traditions. Houses are an important source of support and connection, and House peers were described as becoming a family at school. For these students, the House system delivers on its purpose.

For other students, the experience within their House has been the opposite. In House settings, respondents to the survey in senior school indicated that 19% had experienced or seen hazing,³² 34% had experienced or seen bullying,³³ 25% had experienced or seen verbal abuse,³⁴ and 11% had experienced or seen cyberbullying.³⁵ In middle school, 15% had experienced or seen hazing,³⁶ 24% had seen or experienced bullying,³⁷ and 15% had seen or experienced verbal abuse³⁸ in House settings. Single-sex Houses and the associated mentor structure were perceived to reinforce the separation of genders in ways that impacted on students' social dynamics and contributed to bullying and discrimination.

32 Experienced hazing-4%; Seen hazing-15% (n=106).

33 Experienced bullying-4%; Seen bullying-30% (n=105).

34 Experienced verbal abuse-6%; Seen verbal abuse-19% (n=106).

35 Experienced cyberbullying-2%; Seen cyberbullying-9% (n=106).

36 Experienced hazing-2%; Seen hazing-13% (n=96).

37 Experienced bullying-6%; Seen bullying-18% (n=96).

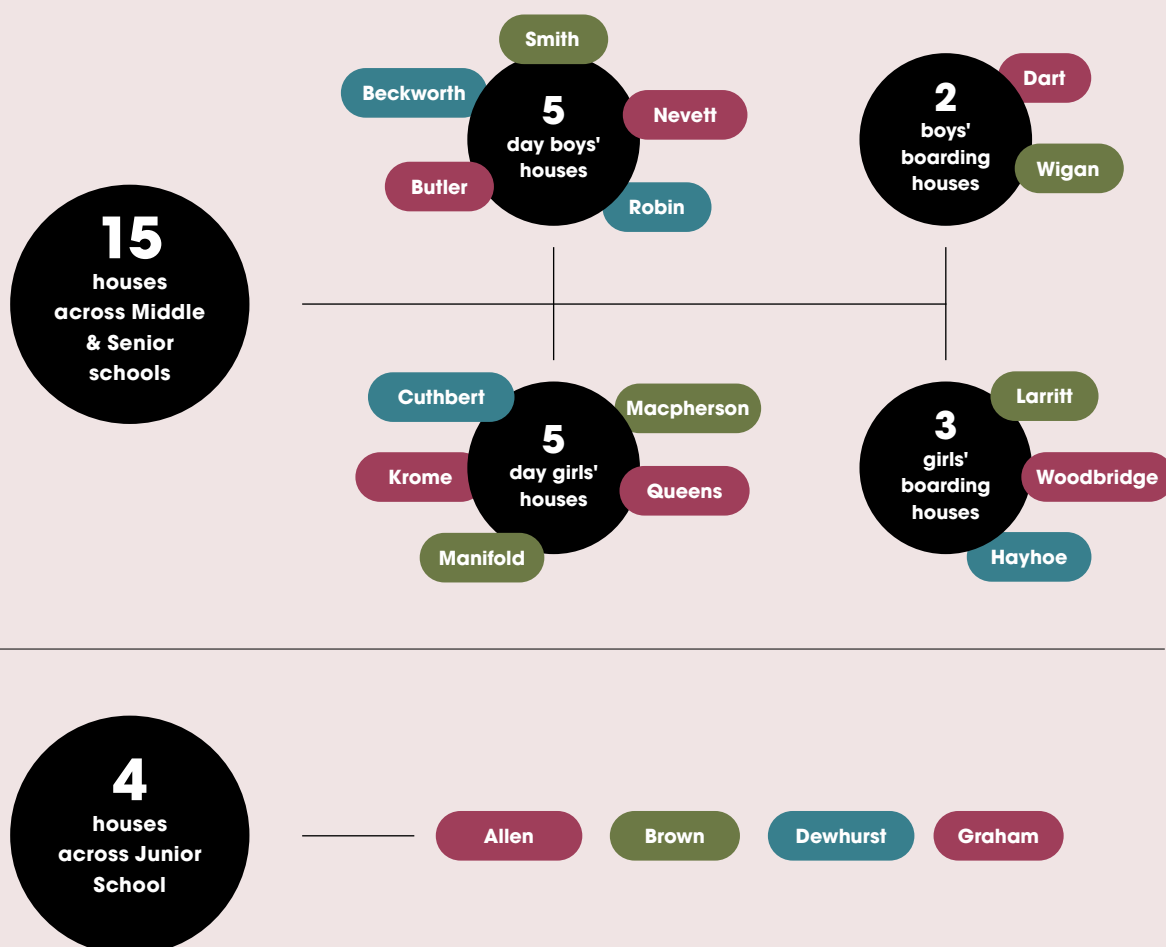
38 Experienced verbal abuse-3%; Seen verbal abuse-12% (n=93).

7.4.2 House structure, allocation and structural inequity

Middle and Senior Schools at Ballarat Grammar have 15 Houses, all single sex. There are five day boys' Houses (Beckworth, Butler, Nevett, Robin, Smith), five day girls' Houses (Cuthbert, Krome, Macpherson, Manifold, Queens), two boys' boarding Houses (Dart and Wigan) and three girls' boarding Houses (Hayhoe, Larritt and Woodbridge). The Junior School operates a separate four-House structure (Allen, Brown, Dewhurst, Graham). Each House has roughly 100 students spread across year levels. Houses are paired as 'brother-sister' combinations for events like swimming and athletics carnivals, though students described the paired Houses as operating 'pretty separate' outside those occasions.

Beckworth and Queens are the newest Houses, set up about two years before this Review. They started much smaller than established Houses because older students had to volunteer to transfer in, and numbers have been growing as new Year 7 cohorts enter.

House Structure and Allocation





How students are allocated to Houses

Students find out which House they are in on their first day of Year 7. Unless they have an older sibling already at the school, they have no say and no prior knowledge of where they will be placed. Where a sibling is already enrolled, the new student goes automatically into the corresponding brother or sister House. Family history is also factored in. Parents who attended the school can request their child be placed in the House they were in, and in some cases, this extends to grandparents. A student who does not want to follow the family legacy can avoid it by simply not declaring the connection. House transfers are rare. The school reported approximately four in the current year, all for mental health reasons.

Legacy allocation and its consequences

The way Houses are filled has structural consequences that build up over time. When House membership follows family lines, the sub-cultures, social hierarchies and behavioural norms established by previous generations of students are passed on to incoming cohorts rather than disrupted by them. Research on intergroup dynamics shows that even arbitrary group distinctions produce in-group favouritism and out-group bias.³⁹ When group membership also carries the weight of family tradition, social status and multi-generational connection, those effects are significantly stronger.

In practice, this means that the culture of each House is shaped not just by current students but by the families and traditions associated with it over many years. For students with legacy connections, this provides continuity and a sense of belonging. For students without that connection, it can mean entering a House whose identity is already well established and in which they may feel like outsiders from the start.

House size inequity

Houses vary significantly in size, and this has practical consequences. Larger Houses have a built-in advantage in competitions that depend on participation numbers, including carnivals and athletics days. Students in smaller Houses described this as unfair and said it contributes to a pecking order among Houses that has nothing to do with individual effort or ability.

House membership as social currency

House membership also works as a marker of social status in the wider school community. Houses linked to prominent or well-connected families carry prestige that follows their members through the school. A former student observed that having too many Houses traps students in small groups and that competition between Houses creates the conditions for bullying:

The lack of integration between, and competition between Houses, can create grounds for bullying.

39 Henri Tajfel et al, 'Social categorization and intergroup behaviour'(1971) 1(2) *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 149, 150.



7.4.3 Sub-cultures, social identity and intergroup division

Research on social identity has long established that even arbitrary group assignments produce in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination, driven by the need to maintain a positive sense of self through favourable comparison with other groups.⁴⁰ When group membership is reinforced by shared history, family connections, gender segregation and competition, these dynamics intensify. That is what has happened at Ballarat Grammar, both between boarding and day students and between individual Houses. It is an unintended consequence of a system designed to celebrate history and tradition, but which in practice reinforces division.

Intersection heard detailed accounts of the way House sub-cultures develop and persist. A former student described the mechanism directly:

I attributed lots of the issues that I had come across at the school to the way that the House system works ... without any other sort of culture change within the Houses, if they were to still be split by sex and if we were still treating the boys as if they've got to be men and the girls as if they're just going to be housewives, then lots of the culture around the toxicity of hyper-masculine stuff - I think it would persist.

7.4.4 The harms of gendered Houses

All 15 Houses are single-sex, and the brother-sister pairing structure reinforces a binary model of gender across the school. This has three consequences worth naming.

First, separating students by sex during adolescence works against what we know about healthy development. Research consistently shows that co-educational settings, when well managed, produce better social outcomes and reduce the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Single-sex groupings do the opposite: they amplify gendered behavioural norms, with boys' groups tending to reward dominance and risk-taking and girls' groups tending to police social conformity. At Ballarat Grammar, this plays out in how students describe their own Houses. Boys' Houses were described as promoting a narrow version of masculinity. Girls' Houses were described as producing intense social hierarchies.

Second, the brother-sister pairing structure assumes and normalises heterosexual partnering as the default. Students are grouped by binary sex and then paired across that binary for social, or sporting events. For students who are gender-diverse, non-binary or questioning, this structure is not just uncomfortable but actively exclusionary. One student put it directly:

Gendered Houses were seen to promote [traditional gender roles] and make life really hard for gender diverse people.

Third, the norms that develop within single-sex Houses are passed down through the House hierarchy, from senior to junior students. In the boarding context, this transmission is more formalised through rituals of initiation and hazing. The House structure does not just reflect gendered norms; it reproduces them year after year.

⁴⁰ William G Austin and Stephen Worchel, *The social psychology of inter-group relations* (Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1979) ch 3.



Students also described how the House system creates the conditions for targeted bullying. Inter-House competitions promote stereotyping and targeting, and the competitive dynamic means individual students become identified with their House's reputation in ways they cannot escape. Bullying based on House membership was reported across year levels.

7.5 The impact of the diversity house framing and stigmatised group membership

When a group is publicly identified or perceived as lower-status, members of that group internalise the stigma and it affects their self-concept, their sense of belonging, and their social behaviour. This dynamic is particularly pronounced when stigma is attached to institutional structures that students cannot choose to leave. Where students self-identify as members of a 'reject House', the school's structural design has produced a form of institutionalised social disadvantage.

Queens and Beckworth Houses were referred to consistently by students, including students from Queens and Beckworth themselves, as the 'House of rejects'. Its members reported being subjected to repeated bullying and discriminatory language, and some students described feeling uncomfortable telling others which House they were in. The social stigma attached to membership in this House was not incidental or temporary. It was a feature of the house's identity within the school's social hierarchy, reproduced each year through the allocation of new students into a culture that already understood itself as marginalised.

Although the school did not formally designate Queens and Beckworth as diversity Houses, and students were not allocated to them on the basis of identity or background, the Houses' founding motto being 'Unity in Diversity' reflects that diversity was an explicit part of the framing of the Houses' identity. Rather than creating the intended environment of inclusion, this produced the opposite effect. Intersection heard from parents that the Houses, socially identified as the school's diversity Houses, quickly became known among students as 'the gay House', with their members subject to sustained bullying on this basis:

Queens and Beckworth being a diversity House should never have happened. In 2025 EVERY House should be a diversity House. Beckworth kids have been bullied for being gay for 2 years. The school didn't do anything to try and create a culture where this bullying wouldn't occur - the school created a 'diversity House' which many of the kids called (and still call) 'the gay House' and then the school completely ignored reports from multiple parents that this was an issue.

Queens and Beckworth have also had aspects of positivity. Support was extended from the school to the Houses, and mentoring arrangements were established with Senior and Middle School wellbeing leaders. Additionally, students themselves were given a role to play in shaping a positive House identity.

The framing of these Houses around diversity appears to have been well-intentioned but produced significant unintended consequences. In a school culture where Houses already carried informal hierarchies and where difference attracted stigma, their social identification as diversity Houses



created identifiable targets for discrimination rather than the protected spaces that were intended. It communicated to the broader student population that diversity is a characteristic of specific sub-groups rather than a whole-of-school expectation, and it concentrated students with diverse identities in Houses that were already navigating social disadvantage within the school hierarchy.

Institutional norms around how difference is perceived and responded to at Ballarat Grammar meant that the conditions were not in place for this approach to achieve its purpose. Intersection also heard from multiple parents that reports of bullying connected to these Houses were raised with the school across multiple years according to parents who spoke to the Review. The school's response to those reports did not result in the issue being resolved.

Redesigning the House system is a structural culture change priority for Ballarat Grammar. The current design is actively reinforcing a number of the harmful dynamics this Review has been commissioned to identify and address.

7.5.1 Changes to the pastoral care and house system in 2026

Since the commencement of this Review, Ballarat Grammar has undertaken a significant restructure of its pastoral care model through implementing changes identified through a project known internally as the Time and Practice Project (TAPP). The new model, implemented at Headstart at the end of Term 4 in 2025, introduces a dual structure of CREW and House that replaces the previous system in which Houses served as both the pastoral care unit and the competitive and community structure.

Under the previous system, students were allocated a mentor within their House. Mentor groups were formed by the intersection of year level and House membership: all students of the same year in the same House constituted a mentor group.

The Review heard that the quality of pastoral support a student received depended heavily on which mentor they were allocated, and that support and group sizes have been inconsistent. On the school's own records, in 2006 some groups changed mentors several times in a single year, in some cases as many as six, while others kept a single mentor; in 2007 some girls' day House mentor groups numbered around 20 students; and multiple mentors were routinely used to accommodate part-time staff. Group sizes have continued to vary widely, from as few as six to as many as 25, depending on how many siblings happened to enter a given House in a given year. The pattern, throughout, was that some mentors were engaged, connected and genuinely available while others were not, and a student's experience of pastoral care turned largely on which mentor they happened to get. Staff described the resulting experience in direct terms: 'It's just really inconsistent'.

Consultation with students confirmed this. By the time they reached Year 12, their assessment of the pastoral care system was shaped largely by whether they had been fortunate enough to land a good mentor. Students described the frustration of knowing that other mentor groups were well-connected and supportive while theirs was not, and for those without supportive mentors there were feelings of real isolation:



My mentors however are terrible, they are meant to be our support system and people we can always go to when times get hard but mine don't say hello to me when I walk in the door, they still stuff up people's names, and we have had them since year 9. It is really disappointing as it is advertised (especially throughout this whole event to go to your mentors) and speaking on behalf of most of my tute group, none of us feel comfortable to do so.

I didn't want to talk to my mentors or anything because I didn't feel that connection with them like other people do. And even if they did, I'm not sure... I would never - I feel like going to the school's definitely the last resort because they tend to actually make it worse... because they won't listen to the problem itself, because they don't want to believe that it's happening.

Other students raised issues about lack of access to supports, and that it was 'the luck of the draw' which mentors they were assigned. Some students did not know what support services were available or how to access them.

Concerns were expressed about confidentiality and whether a teacher 'would treat them differently because of what I say in there'. Some students had been told about wellbeing services once in Year 7 and not again: 'I got told about them once in year seven to be honest and haven't heard a word about them since'. Students called for more wellbeing staff, more visible presence, and multiple access points to support:

Obviously, there's never going to be one person that everybody feels comfortable going to ... There needs to be multiple people that are different sorts of people that you can connect with through different ways.

The new model separates these functions. CREW groups are horizontal, year-level-based groups. Each year level is divided into small groups led by a CREW Mentor, who becomes the primary point of contact between home and school. CREW sessions run four times per week: a 20-minute check-in and organisational session on Monday mornings, and 20-minute sessions from Tuesday to Thursday covering wellbeing education, chapel, year level meetings and pastoral support. The CREW Mentor is responsible for academic monitoring, goal setting, subject selection and pathway mentoring. The role is explicitly defined as the first point of contact for the student, supported by Co-Heads of Year.

Houses remain, but with a different function. Under the new model, Houses are vertical groups spanning Years 7 to 12, focused on connection, belonging, student leadership, and competitive events. House meetings are held on Fridays, with additional sessions scheduled as needed for event preparation. Houses continue to be led by a Head of House supported by House staff. The 15 existing Houses are retained, including the brother-sister pairing structure and the two newer Houses, Beckworth and Queens. Houses also remain gendered while CREW groups are co-educational and mix day and boarding students together.



The weekly timetable operates on a 10-day cycle across two weeks. CREW sessions are embedded in the timetable at dedicated times, and a fortnightly Gathering session provides a whole-school or year-level assembly point. The pastoral care function has, in structural terms, been lifted out of the House system and placed into a purpose-built structure with dedicated time, clear role accountability, and consistent group composition.

Intersection recognises this restructure as a significant and positive reform. It directly addresses several of the problems identified in this Review: the inconsistency of pastoral care quality, the dependence of support on individual mentor allocation, the lack of dedicated pastoral time, and the absence of a clear first point of contact for students. By separating pastoral care from the House system, the school has created the structural conditions for more consistent, accountable support.

There are, however, aspects of the House system that the TAPP restructure does not address, and which remain relevant to the findings of this Review. Houses remain gendered and divided between day students and boarding students. The allocation of students to Houses based on family legacy and sibling connections continues. The brother-sister pairing structure, while providing some cross-gender contact for events and carnivals, was described in consultations as operating in practice as 'pretty separate'. The competitive dynamics between Houses, the sub-cultures that develop within them, and the stigma attached to particular Houses, are structural features of the House system that persist under the new model.

The TAPP restructure also does not, by itself, address the question of what is taught in CREW time. The model creates the vehicle for wellbeing and behavioural education, but the content that fills that vehicle will determine whether the pastoral care reform produces the cultural shift the school is seeking. The limited coverage of respectful relationships and consent education before Year 10, documented in section 7.2.4, is a gap that the CREW structure is well-positioned to fill, provided the school invests in developing that content rather than leaving it to the discretion of individual CREW Mentors.

7.6 Safety, reporting and institutional response

7.6.1 Inadequate or inconsistent responses to incidents

An institution's response to reported incidents is among the most powerful drivers of its culture. Students form their view of whether the school's stated values are real based on what they observe happening when rules are broken. Consistent, fair and visible responses build confidence in the institution; inconsistent or absent responses build cynicism and reduce the likelihood that students will seek help in the future. The Review found a long-standing pattern of inconsistent or inadequate institutional response at Ballarat Grammar that has functioned across year levels as a signal to students that harmful behaviour carries limited consequence.

There were numerous discussions around bullying inside and outside the classroom, with students reporting that behaviours were often dismissed as normal adolescent behaviour, or a joke. A common theme was students' frustration at the lack of action by teachers and the absence of consequences for perpetrators:



Every time they tried to go to someone, they were either pushed away, ignored, or they just didn't do it. One of the people who said those horrible things to her said, I'm homophobic and proud... I've honestly lost my thing with talking to teachers, because a lot of the time when I talk to some teachers, some of 'em go like, oh, boys will be boys.

The perception that little or no action would be taken discouraged students from making reports:

The lack of action taken against the student complaint, and overall power dynamic between student and teacher, feels so far to the point that bringing up a problem feels like a waste of time due to how little student concerns seem to matter.

Inconsistency, perceptions of favouritism and the application of different standards to different students was a common theme raised by students across all year levels: 'It's whatever mood the teacher's in ... If somebody is doing head of river rowing, they're not going to get pulled up for earrings'. Some students were perceived to get away with behaviours because they have a good reputation; others are targeted even when they have done nothing wrong.

Students also raised the misplaced focus of disciplinary attention:

Discipline on small and mostly insignificant things like uniform and minor behaviour problems. It often feels that there are greater issues in the background including bullying and general problems with school culture that are ignored and not addressed. I think that there needs to be a better process for handling these important things and reassuring students that their personal concerns will actually be addressed.

Some of the perception of inaction or inconsistency identified by students may be attributable to an individualised approach to responding to incidents, where the school has considered the specific circumstances of each student involved. Schools are rightly required to consider the individual context of a student's behaviour, including developmental factors, personal circumstances and any relevant support needs, and confidentiality and privacy obligations properly constrain what a school can communicate about the outcomes of any particular matter.

However, the Review heard that these constraints have, in practice, produced a communication gap that is actively undermining student confidence in the system. Where a student reports harmful behaviour and receives no information about what has been done in response, the conclusion often drawn is that nothing has been done. This was a consistent theme across year levels.

The constraints of Whispli, the school's anonymous reporting platform compounds this problem: the current system does not have the functionality to communicate back to an anonymous reporter about actions taken, to seek further information, or to confirm that the report has been received and is being investigated. An anonymous reporting system that operates as a one-way channel provides an outlet for disclosure but no mechanism for accountability or follow-up.

At the same time, the Review found that the school's response to incidents of inappropriate student behaviour does not identify or address the conditions that produce harmful behaviour in the first place. Repeated reports of bullying, discrimination and harassment across year levels and settings, many involving the same dynamics of hierarchy, gender, race or disability, point to systemic factors that a case-by-case approach will not resolve.

7.6.2 Help-seeking and trust in adults

Help-seeking behaviour in school environments is strongly influenced by students' prior experience of institutional response. Young people are highly attuned to whether reporting is likely to result in meaningful action, and perceived futility is one of the strongest predictors of non-disclosure. The cultural barriers to reporting identified through this Review reflect an assessment by students of what will happen if they speak up, based on accumulated experience of what has happened when others have done so.

Many students reported experiencing or witnessing harmful behaviours. The most frequent types for current students were discrimination, bullying and harassment. A major component of student feedback related to the lack of effective systems for reporting and the inadequate responses to incidents. The new QR code anonymous reporting system was seen as a positive step.

Across interviews, submissions and focus groups, students described practical and cultural barriers to reporting, including: not wanting to be seen as a snitch or weak; not trusting that something would be done; lack of action and follow-through; fearing they would get into trouble; seeing inconsistent responses and perceptions of bias; acceptance of harmful behaviours as normal; no clarity about policies; and ineffective resolution mechanisms. Some students reported being bullied by teachers, which further eroded any confidence in help-seeking:

The problem is after the teacher starts bullying you, are you going to trust anyone?

One student described the inadequacy of restorative approaches as they were applied:

I don't know how you'd fix bullying, but it's not sit the victim in a room with them unmonitored and let them work it out.

Respondents to the survey confirmed the scale of the problem. In the middle school, 37% of respondents stated that they sometimes, not often or never felt comfortable speaking up about harmful behaviour they witnessed⁴¹ and 43% stated that they sometimes, not often or never felt comfortable speaking up about harmful behaviour they experienced.⁴²

In the senior school, 24% stated that they sometimes, not often or never felt comfortable speaking up about harmful behaviour they witnessed⁴³ and 30% of respondents stated that they sometimes, not often or never felt comfortable speaking up about harmful behaviour they experienced.⁴⁴

41 Sometimes-24%; Not Often-9%; Never-4% (n=99).

42 Sometimes-22%; Not Often-18%; Never-3% (n=99).

43 Sometimes-10%; Not Often-8%; Never-6% (n=111).

44 Sometimes-14%; Not Often-6%; Never-10% (n=111).

Respondents to the survey also indicated the presence of additional risk factors. In the middle school, 12% of respondents stated that drugs and alcohol are used at school often or sometimes,⁴⁵ with a further 11% preferring not to say. Of senior school respondents, 37%⁴⁶ stated that drugs and alcohol are used at school often or sometimes. Further, 49% of senior school respondents totally or partially agree that the use of drugs and alcohol increases the likelihood of harmful behaviour.⁴⁷

7.7 Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from the evidence in this chapter. They respond to the challenges and risks identified through the Review and build on the many genuine strengths of Ballarat Grammar, including the reforms already implemented through the TAPP restructure and the Positive Behaviour @ Grammar framework.

Ref	Recommendation
Student Experience (S1-S5)	Student Experience (S1-S5)
S1	Establish authentic student voice mechanisms That Ballarat Grammar establish genuine, ongoing mechanisms for student voice on matters of culture, safety and wellbeing. This should include: • regular anonymous survey mechanisms focused on student culture and safety, distinct from teacher performance feedback; • a Student Advisory Group with direct and regular access to the Principal on cultural matters. The role of this Advisory Group should be considered in conjunction with student leadership positions and their role and articulated in a co-designed Terms of Reference; • structured consultation with students before significant decisions that directly affect their experience, including changes to boarding, House structures and co-curricular programs; and • transparent processes for selecting student leaders, with criteria communicated to the student body.

⁴⁵ Often-3%; Sometimes-9% (n=96).

⁴⁶ Often-7%; Sometimes-37% (n=109).

⁴⁷ Totally Agree-27%; Partially Agree-22% (n=41).

S2**Address the structural drivers of division within the Day House system**

That Ballarat Grammar should redesign its Day House system so that Houses are co-educational, with both boarding and day students as members of every House. In doing so, the school should:

- remove the gendering of Houses, which reinforces gender segregation, normalises binary gender as the default organising principle and creates particular difficulties for gender-diverse students;
- cease allocating students to Houses on the basis of family legacy and sibling connections, which perpetuates established sub-cultures, concentrates social capital and reduces the school's capacity to disrupt harmful norms;
- ensure diversity is represented across all Houses to promote genuine inclusion;
- address the significant variation in House sizes, which produces structural competitive disadvantage unrelated to student effort or ability; and
- co-design the new model with students, staff and parents, ensuring the process itself models the inclusive culture the school is working to build.

This redesign should be coordinated with Recommendation B2, which separates the residential function of boarding houses from the House identity and competition structure, so that boarding students are members of the same House system as day students.

S3**Embed a sequenced wellbeing and behavioural curriculum in CREW**

That Ballarat Grammar develop and embed a sequenced wellbeing and behavioural curriculum within the CREW structure, building on the principles established in the Positive Behaviour @ Grammar framework and the values-based approach used effectively in the junior school. This should include:

- a structured, developmental curriculum from Years 7 to 12 covering behavioural expectations, respectful relationships, bystander responsibility, consent, digital citizenship and community standards;
- content that extends the PB@G approach beyond classroom behaviour into the relational, cultural and interpersonal dimensions of student life in line with the school's values;
- integration of the external program content currently delivered in a piecemeal fashion (Elephant Ed, Ballarat Community Health, The Men's Project) into a single sequenced framework linked to the school values;
- an upstander and bystander module embedded within the curriculum, drawing on the Men's Project 6Ds bystander framework already proposed for the school, or the Stand Up Project;
- clear expectations, training and accountability for CREW Mentors in delivering wellbeing education; and
- an evaluation framework that measures changes in student attitudes, behaviour and reporting confidence over time.



S4	Overhaul incident reporting, response and communication That Ballarat Grammar overhaul its systems for reporting and responding to incidents of bullying, harassment, discrimination and harmful behaviour, with particular attention to closing the communication gap between reporting and response. This should include: • ensuring that students directly involved in incidents always receive appropriate information about what has been done in response to their complaint, within the bounds of privacy obligations; • transparent, regular reporting at whole-of-school level about patterns of behaviour and consequences applied, without identifying individuals; • replacing or supplementing the current anonymous reporting platform with a system that has the express functionality to: ○ communicate with anonymous reporters, including acknowledging receipt, providing updates on actions taken, and requesting further information while preserving anonymity; and ○ conduct systemic and thematic analysis of behavioural incidents and reports across the school. • regular reporting to the Board on incident data, behavioural patterns and systemic risk.
S5	Building staff capability in diversity, respectful relationships and pastoral accountability That Ballarat Grammar establish an ongoing program of staff capability uplift in cultural diversity, respectful relationships, anti-discrimination and pastoral accountability, delivered as professional development training for all staff on a recurring basis. The program should be designed to build practical competence, not just awareness, equipping staff to recognise and respond to discrimination on the basis of race, disability, sexuality and gender identity, to understand their role as pastoral agents whose conduct directly shapes the safety and culture of the school, and to develop strategies for establishing safety in the classroom, including de-escalation, restorative practice and creating environments in which students feel confident to speak up, report concerns and be themselves. Staff must be held to the same behavioural standards and accountability frameworks as students. Where staff conduct falls short of those standards, it must be addressed through the same formal processes that apply to any other performance or conduct matter.



8 Boarding Experience

Chapter summary

This chapter examines the culture of Ballarat Grammar's boarding houses as described by current and former students, parents, and current and former employees. It draws on interviews, focus groups, written submissions and survey responses to present the boarding experience across five areas: daily life and belonging; institutionalised culture and practice; gender dynamics; wellbeing and vulnerability; and the school's response to the Fenner Review and VRQA conditions. It concludes with recommendations for change.

Many boarding students spoke about deep friendships, genuine community and personal growth. Staff who were invested in the wellbeing of boarders were acknowledged with real warmth. For some, boarding was formative in the best sense: a place where independence was nurtured and lasting bonds were formed. At the same time, the Review heard evidence of historical practices within the boarding houses, including strapping and physical punishment, as well as current accounts of harmful behaviours, such as hazing, bullying, sexual harassment, and intimidation. Participants described these practices as having become normalised within a hierarchical peer culture that developed in gaps in adult supervision. A culture of silence discouraged disclosure and accountability.

8.1 Life in boarding

8.1.1 Context: The Fenner Review, VRQA conditions and this review

In response to the Dart House incidents, Ballarat Grammar commissioned a review of its boarding operations (the Fenner Review). The Fenner Review examined the school's management of, and response to, the incidents in Dart House and made recommendations to reduce the likelihood of such conduct occurring again and to improve the boarding program more broadly.

Separately, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) conducted a review of the school's boarding operations. The VRQA found the school was non-compliant with a number of boarding standards and identified what it described as a pervasive culture of bullying and student-to-student abuse within the boarding houses, together with a lack of appropriate oversight by the Board and school leadership. The VRQA imposed six interim conditions on the school's registration, requiring the school to demonstrate compliance with boarding standards, strengthen incident reporting and response processes, and address the cultural and supervisory failures identified in the review. Those conditions remain in effect and are subject to ongoing monitoring by the regulator. The VRQA findings confirmed that the problems in the boarding houses were systemic rather than isolated to a single incident or a single house.

The Fenner Review made 32 recommendations, of which the school agreed to implement 31. Changes arising from the Fenner Review are overseen by the Cultural Review Committee, which meets quarterly and is updated on implementation progress. The school's response to those recommendations, and how students have experienced the resulting changes, is discussed in detail in section 8.6.1.

It is important to note that the Fenner Review was focused on the Dart House incidents and on boarding structures specifically. It did not take a systemic, whole-of-school view of the broader culture and structures that enabled the environment within which those incidents occurred. This Review was designed to complement the Fenner Review by examining those broader cultural conditions.

8.1.2 What boarding culture looks like at its best

Boarding, when it works well, offers something that a day school cannot. It creates a shared living environment in which young people learn to manage conflict, build independence, support one another through difficulty and form relationships that often endure well beyond school. The research literature on residential education identifies that well-supervised, well-supported boarding environments can strengthen students' sense of belonging, build practical life skills and foster a maturity and self-reliance that serves young people into adulthood.⁴⁸

At Ballarat Grammar, many of these strengths were described by current and former boarding students. Students spoke about friendships and strong connections, mutual support, access to opportunities and a sense of fun. One current student spoke about increased confidence since moving into the boarding house:

When I came into [the boarding house], my confidence level was just skyrocketed. I would be half the person if I was still at home... I used to be so shy back home until I came here now and then it's just like, yeah, you just get rid of all that embarrassment and you just like everyone gets around you so much.

Students described a positive spirit in the boarding house and valued the encouragement of everyone to be involved, for instance in sports days. For some boys, fellow boarders were referred to as 'brothers' and some girls referred to their 'sisters', with the sense of being part of a family extending to a sibling-style bond between the boys' and girls' boarding houses. One student described their Head of House as 'one of my second parents'.

A former boarding student noted the quality of care provided:

They took their duty of care really seriously. So, it wasn't just about learning. It was about recognising that they live there. So like physical safety, emotional well-being, safeguarding, supervision, staff presence.

These accounts describe a boarding environment that, at its best, has given young people genuine belonging and support. They also provide the benchmark against which the harmful practices described later in this chapter should be understood. The question is not whether boarding at Ballarat Grammar has strengths. It clearly does. The question is how a culture with these strengths also came to tolerate and normalise practices that caused serious harm.

⁴⁸ Korpershoek (n 12) 641; Resnick (n 12) 831.



8.1.3 The boarder and day student divide

A defining feature of the student experience at Ballarat Grammar is the separation between boarders and day students. This divide was raised consistently across submissions, focus groups and interviews, by both boarders and day students, and was described as one of the most entrenched cultural dynamics in the school. It is also discussed in the context of the broader student experience in Chapter 7 (see section 7.3).

Boarding students drew a clear distinction between their experience and that of day students, describing the extra pressures that come with living at school. They particularly appreciated it when staff understood these pressures:

They understand that when you're a day kid and you've had a rough day, you can go home to your own bed and see your family, but when you're a boarder, you've got to go back straight to the boarding house.

However, while some students described teachers as having a 'soft spot' for boarders, others felt that teachers did not understand their situation and should 'have a little insight in to boarding life so that they can connect and strip themselves of judgment towards boarders'.

From the day student perspective, boarders were perceived to receive preferential treatment, to look down on day students and to have their own distinctive, sometimes toxic, cultures and behaviours. Day students were labelled 'Scrags' by some boarders. Boarders and day students 'rarely mix', reinforced by school routines including spending both morning tea and lunch separately.

One student captured the intensity of this divide:

Seriously as a boarder, to me it feels like it's boarders vs day kids just all the time.

Another day student described the boarding culture in stark terms:

I find the boarding side of the school, especially boys, to be absolutely nasty and that whole community to be absolutely brainwashed by each other's egos ... Naming the day students 'Scrags' ... the way the girl boarders say people who snitch on child abuse are 'snitches' and 'strapping should come back, it's totally harmless', and 'people just need to harden up and not complain, take the straps, how else will there be a hierarchy in the House' ... it makes me sick to my stomach.



One student offered a practical suggestion:

I think if boarders and day students were given more time to interact with one another, it would break down those barriers a little bit, if we could just see each other as just people and not by House or by gender.

This separation is more than a social dynamic between students. It is a structural feature of how the school operates, and it has consequences for how boarding culture develops in isolation from the broader norms of the school community. That insularity has contributed to the conditions in which harmful practices became entrenched.

8.2 Institutionalised culture and practice

8.2.1 How institutional culture is amplified in residential settings

Boarding is an intensified institutional environment. Students live, study, eat and socialise together in a closed community. The dynamics that operate in any school – peer hierarchies, group conformity pressures, the influence of tradition are amplified because students cannot leave at the end of the day. The peer group becomes the dominant social world, and the norms governing daily life extend into the evening, overnight and on weekends.⁴⁹

The UK Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse found that boarding schools can create an institutional ‘bubble’ with little normative influence from outside, and that residential schooling heightens the risk of harmful behaviour between students because of the increased opportunities for it to take place and the reduced access to external support.⁵⁰ This works both ways. Where the culture is supportive and well supervised, residential settings can foster deep belonging and personal growth. That is the experience described by many Ballarat Grammar boarders. Where harmful norms take hold, particularly where supervision is inadequate, those norms become deeply entrenched and very difficult for individual students to resist.⁵¹

In a day school, a student who experiences harm can go home, talk to family and access support outside the school. In boarding, there is no such respite. The peers causing harm are also your housemates. The staff you might report to live in or adjacent to the same space. The pressure to fit in is not just social but practical: this is your home, and if you are seen as someone who causes trouble, that home can become a great deal less comfortable.

49 Jens P Pfeiffer and Martin Pinquart, ‘Bullying in German Boarding Schools: A Pilot Study’ (2014) 35(6) *School Psychology International* 580, 582.

50 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, *The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* (HC 720, London, 2022).

51 Claire P Monks et al, ‘Bullying in Different Contexts: Commonalities, Differences and the Role of Theory’ (2009) 14(2) *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 146, 152-4.

At Ballarat Grammar, the boarding houses have developed their own distinct cultures, traditions and internal hierarchies over many years. These are passed from one cohort to the next, reinforced by the expectations of older students and, at times, by the implicit or explicit endorsement of staff. The result is an environment in which practices that would be immediately identified as harmful in a day school context have become normalised within the boarding houses, accepted as 'just how things are done' and, in some cases, actively defended as essential to House culture.

One former student described a formalised system in which Year 12 boys were expected to manage the younger ones:

There was a formalised, rules-based system of year twelves getting to tell people younger than them what to do... [the vice head of house] was the pseudo dad, but he couldn't be there all the time, he had a different job. So the year 12 took a lot of that on, the year sevens and eights fighting with each other and him having to sort it out... It's a child doing a grown-up's job.

Gaps in adult supervision were filled by the peer hierarchy described throughout this chapter.

8.2.2 What strapping means at Ballarat Grammar

The practice referred to within the Ballarat Grammar boarding community as 'strapping' needs to be clearly explained, because the term covers a broad range of behaviours and is understood very differently depending on who is describing it and what they experienced.

Strapping refers to a set of rituals, dares and directions given by older boarding students to younger ones. It sits within a broader culture of hazing and initiation that has been a feature of the boarding houses for decades, and aspects of it continue to this day. The practice is rooted in a hierarchy where seniority confers authority. Year 12 students in particular are understood to hold a leadership and enforcement role within the House. There was an expectation in many of the boarding houses that when you get to Year 12 you are the leaders of the House and you make sure 'everyone is in line'.

For many students, strapping was and is experienced positively. It was seen as a rite of passage, a mark of belonging and a way of building House spirit. At the lower end, it involved dares, errands and light-hearted challenges: getting up on a table to sing happy birthday, following someone in circles to breakfast, or performing a dance. Students described these rituals as funny, embarrassing in the moment but bonding in hindsight. Other common practices included directing younger students to do push-ups, give up their seat for an older student, carry out small tasks or take part in group activities such as doona raids and House runs. One student described them as:

Completely harmless and everyone loved when they were chosen to do one... and it would be a memory forever.

The practice has its own unwritten rules that vary between Houses. Only Year 12 students could issue a 'strap'. You earned the right through years of boarding. If you had been suspended, you lost the right. In some Houses, students could modify a strap if they felt it went too far, and other Year 12 students could override one they considered unreasonable. Current students drew a firm distinction between their experience and what they understood to have occurred in Dart House. In their view, the critical difference was what happened when someone said no. In the girls' Houses, refusal was described as accepted: 'if you said no, it's not a big deal'. In the boys' Houses, refusal was reported to trigger escalation and retaliation.

However, even in Houses where refusal was technically permitted, the social dynamics of boarding means that the option to refuse is more theoretical than real. Students described the pressure to participate not as overt coercion but as a felt obligation rooted in admiration, belonging and the desire not to let the House down. As one student put it: 'obviously if you said no, it's like oh you're fine, whatever. But you just don't because you look up to everyone so much'. Another captured the contradiction: 'Everyone's like, oh, I don't want to be strapped. But everyone loves strapping'.

This means that even the practices experienced as fun and community-building carry an element of coercion. Students participated not because they had freely chosen to, but because the social cost of refusal was too high. The same dynamic applied to doona raids and House runs: organised by older students, conducted outside normal hours, and framed in ways that made non-participation a mark of disloyalty. For a younger student new to boarding, the environment did not support a genuine choice to opt out.

Older students expressed genuine sadness that younger students no longer had the chance to experience the benefits of House spirit and the collegial atmosphere that these traditions created. This is important to acknowledge. It explains why the strapping practices are so resistant to change, and why many current and former students react strongly when traditions are removed or restricted.

At the same time, strapping exists on a spectrum. At the more harmful end, it extended to being struck with hands or objects, humiliating or degrading treatment, and the use of intimidation to ensure younger students would not report what had occurred. At times, 'strapping was used relentlessly to target and harass younger students'. Parents described its 'layered' and 'escalating' nature, noting that it might begin with relatively low-level demands but could escalate to physical punishment or assault. Trading of strapping rights between students was also described:

You were in year 12 and you had your rights, but you could only have strapping rights over someone if you'd been there longer than them. But then you could buy rights off someone else. So a year 11 kid could buy rights off a year 12 kid to go and strap that kid. It's quite layered.

Former students described strapping as part of the toxic cultures of some boarding houses, and as 'the worst kept secret amongst the Boarding staff'. With minimal supervisory staff, a hierarchy emerged where older students disciplined younger students and claimed preferential access to facilities like bathrooms and showers. One former student described their experience in the late 2010s:

The year 12 boys were forced (by staff and other year 12s) into performing a dance in front of all boarders in the dining hall, often with crude or embarrassing remarks... These early morning wake-ups occurred roughly every month and would be planned by the year 12s and authorised by a staff member who would also attend in the early morning. I was forced to attend and partake in these activities by staff, even in year 12 with SACs (year 12 assessments) the same day... On several occasions I disagreed with 'strapping' requests on myself and separate to the assault/threats, I was told it was just tradition and that I would want to do it when I was older.

8.2.3 Historical examples of strapping and their cultural legacy

Strapping and hazing at Ballarat Grammar are not recent problems. Former students provided accounts dating back to the 1940s, with detailed descriptions of rituals and punishments passed down through successive cohorts of boarders over many years. These practices were described by some as a 'way of life' that likely dated back years. Often, the rituals were mythologised, taking on a significance within boarding house culture that elevated them from acts of harm to markers of belonging and tradition.

Historical experiences shared by former students raised numerous examples of hazing involving rituals around pornography, sexualised performances, sexual abuse, harassment, assault and intimidation, and being physically hit by older students. A former student spoke about the widespread use of pornography in hazing traditions and surmised that this harmful exposure during formative years 'flows on to how girls were spoken about through things like chants at athletics or sports days'.

One submission provided an account of a dangerous ritual involving the drinking of kerosene dating to 1945. A further account, describing events in the 1980s, illustrates the severity and the degree to which these practices were embedded:

I witnessed my brother being hazed with serious consequences to his mental health. For example in [the 1980s], the seniors in [our boarding house] had been collecting faecal waste, urine, and food scraps in a big blue barrel somewhere in the basement ... On one evening they called all of [the female boarding house] girls and we all lined the quadrangle, and then the boys in [our boarding house] were brought out in front of an obstacle course, which included a wooden bed frame without a mattress. Underneath the mattress was a tarp, and all the waste was put on the tarp. The boys, including my brother, were instructed to strip. If you didn't, you were hit with a leather glove... Boys were arranged in teams and forced to run the relay in front of the girls. Anyone who showed any resistance was beaten with a glove... Anyone who made a fuss or cried was beaten by the seniors.

These historical accounts are not isolated stories of past wrongdoing. They establish the depth and longevity of cultural patterns that the Review found still operating, in modified form, in the current boarding environment. Strapping spans a spectrum. At one end it is a light, largely consensual ritual



experienced as a tradition that builds belonging. At the other it shades into coercion, humiliation and physical punishment. The milder end has persisted into the present, and a current boarder described it as follows:

In the girls' houses we had a thing called straps. It wasn't being hit like the boys ... it was when a Year 12 would ask you to do a funny, silly dare. These straps were completely harmless, and everyone loved when they were chosen to do one, and if someone really didn't want to do it they weren't forced to ... This is what gave our boarding community culture, it brought us all together ... I really hope that this culture can come back (obviously not the boys being hit).

8.2.4 The 'Family' framing and the hierarchy it conceals

Across submissions, focus groups and interviews, a tension emerged between two ways of understanding the boarding houses: as families, or as hierarchies. The family model is based on sibling-style relationships with support, guidance and supervision provided by older boarders, staff and mentors. The hierarchy model is based on authority, power and status for some, and vulnerability and powerlessness for others.

In practice, these two models coexist within the same Houses, and the language of family is sometimes used to justify the dynamics of hierarchy. Older boys disciplining or exerting authority over younger students was understood within a 'family' type context. The form the discipline took was up to the discretion of the older student. When an older student tells a younger student that they are being 'looked after' or that a particular ritual is 'just what brothers do', the family framing gives that claim an emotional weight that makes it harder for the younger student to recognise it as coercion, and harder for adults to see it as something requiring intervention.

The implicit or explicit expectation on older students to 'take care of' younger students can have a very specific meaning in the boarding context. Where the traditions of 'care' are informed by strapping and hazing rather than by genuine support and wellbeing, the 'looking after' of younger students can itself be a source of harm.

8.3 How harmful culture becomes normalised

One of the most significant findings of this Review in relation to boarding is the degree to which harmful practices have become normalised, to the point where they are experienced, described and defended as positive by many of the boarding students, boarding staff and boarding parents within the system. The normalisation of harmful behaviour is discussed as a whole-of-school issue in Chapter 7 (see section 7.6). In the boarding context, it is intensified for the reasons set out in section 8.2: students cannot leave, the peer group is the dominant social world, and the social cost of dissent is higher.

The research literature on institutional abuse shows that normalisation happens through gradual desensitisation.⁵² When harmful practices are introduced incrementally, framed as tradition, endorsed by authority figures or peer leaders, and experienced alongside genuinely positive elements of community life, people within the institution progressively lose the ability to see those practices as harmful.

This is not a failure of individual character. It is a predictable feature of closed institutional environments in which the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is set by group consensus rather than by external standards, and where the social costs of speaking up are high.⁵³

At Ballarat Grammar, this normalisation operates at multiple levels. Many current boarders genuinely experienced the lower-level rituals and bonding activities as positive, community-building and enjoyable. For them, doona raids and House runs really were fun and really did build togetherness. The difficulty is that these practices exist on a continuum with behaviours that are clearly harmful, and the normalisation of the lower end makes it progressively harder for anyone within the system to identify where acceptable behaviour ends and harmful behaviour begins.

When spirit-building rituals are normalised as core to community identity, the practices further along the spectrum of harm are shielded by the same logic. The argument that ‘it’s just tradition’ or ‘everyone goes through it’ or ‘it brings us together’ applies equally to a harmless House chant and to a humiliating physical ritual. The normalisation of the former creates the conditions in which the latter is tolerated, minimised or simply not recognised as harmful. This is how institutional cultures reproduce harmful practices over time, even when no individual within the system intends harm.⁵⁴

Adults in the boarding environment were not immune. Staff with direct supervisory responsibility for boarding houses had over time come to accept physical hazing rituals between students that they treated as ordinary boarding behaviour but that should have prompted intervention. Former employees described a culture in which the boundary of acceptable behaviour had shifted incrementally, so that practices which would have been immediately challenged in other professional settings were tolerated because they had ‘always been that way’. Current students described rituals at the lower end of the spectrum taking place in front of adults, or with the knowledge of adults, without intervention.

⁵² Albert Bandura, ‘Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities’ (1999) 3(3) *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 193, 202–03.

⁵³ Phillip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (Random House, 2007); Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 2, Nature and Cause* (Australian Government, 2017).

⁵⁴ D Palmer, *The Role of Organisational Culture in Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Contexts* (Report for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2016).



Some former students described these rituals as harmless or fun, but could, in hindsight, see how they might intimidate or hurt. This retrospective recognition was itself significant. It suggests that the normalisation process is not permanent, but that it requires distance, maturity or an external catalyst to be disrupted.

The task for the school is not to strip away all rituals and traditions from boarding life. Rituals that genuinely build connection, create shared identity and bring joy are valuable and worth preserving. The task is to create the conditions in which students and staff can tell the difference between traditions that build safety and belonging and those that cause harm, and to ensure that the environment supports people to name harm when they see it, without fear of reprisal. That is a question of safety, not of punishing culture.

8.3.1 A culture of silence: 'What happens in boarding stays in boarding'

Closely connected to the normalisation of harmful practices was a culture of silence around what occurred in the boarding houses. Students described this directly, and some reported being told not to talk about the 'Dart incidents', although it is not clear from their accounts who had told them this.

Former employees and both former and current students described a boarding environment in which the unwritten rule was clear: what happens in boarding, stays in boarding. This was not a formal policy but an understood expectation, reinforced by peer pressure, by the framing of disclosure as disloyalty and by the perceived or actual consequences of speaking up.

Students who reported harmful behaviour risked being labelled a 'snitch' and facing social exclusion or retaliation. Parents described that their child was reluctant to share experiences of strapping or other forms of bullying, abuse or assault, because it was so normalised and 'just part of life' at the boarding house. In some instances, a child would not disclose because they feared being seen as a 'snitch'.

This culture of silence served two functions. It protected the practices from scrutiny by limiting the flow of information to parents, day school staff, some boarding staff and school leadership. And it reinforced the internal cohesion of the boarding house by positioning loyalty to the group above individual wellbeing or external accountability. The consequence was that harmful practices persisted over extended periods without effective challenge, and students who experienced harm had limited safe pathways for disclosure.

This insularity is directly connected to the boarder-day student divide discussed in section 8.1.3. The physical and cultural separation of boarding from the broader school community meant that the norms governing boarding behaviour were set largely by the internal culture of the boarding houses, with insufficient external oversight to correct the drift towards normalised harm. Staff who worked primarily in the day school had limited visibility of boarding culture. The result was an enclosed world in which practices went unchecked.



8.3.2 Historical legacy, identity and the uniformity of boarding culture

The boarding houses at Ballarat Grammar carry the weight of a long institutional history. House names, traditions, songs, chants and rituals have accumulated over decades, and for many families they represent continuity and connection across generations. This legacy is valued by many within the school community and is part of what gives the boarding houses their distinct identities.

It is also a legacy shaped by the demographics and values of the institution at the time those traditions were established. Ballarat Grammar's boarding houses were built within a predominantly white, Anglo-Australian, socially conservative community. The traditions, rituals and cultural expectations that developed within them reflect that heritage. As one former student observed, you are 'surrounded by kids who all look the same as you', and this uniformity limited respect and understanding for those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

A historical account of what this meant in practice was provided by a former student:

I remember my maths teacher made me get up in the front of class and do a tap dance until I could get an answer right. My brother was made to hold a glass jug of milk above his head in the dining room until he could say 'please pass the milk' without an accent. I cannot tell you how many hundreds of stories I have like this. Do you know my brother was bullied so much that the staff gave him a key to the art room, where he would stay until 1am-3am to ensure that everyone would be asleep before he went back to the boarding house.

This is not simply a historical problem. The evidence gathered by this Review indicates that the boarding houses continue to reflect a cultural uniformity that can make it difficult for students who do not fit the dominant profile to feel that they belong. Female boarders described incidents where they had received racial, sexist and discriminatory comments from male boarders. When these were brought to the school's attention, the girls wanted to 'have a reasonable conversation' with the boys involved about the impact of those comments. The accounts of what followed differ. The school advises that senior staff facilitated a meeting between the girls and the boys involved, at which both perspectives were shared respectfully, and that the matter was addressed and followed up. The girls who raised the concern did not experience it that way: they reported that the way the matter was handled, by senior day-school staff whose understanding of boarding they saw as limited, left them feeling it was not properly addressed.

The historical legacy of the boarding houses is not something that needs to be erased. But it does need to be examined honestly. This Review recommends that the House identity and competition function be separated from the residential function of boarding (see Recommendation B2). Boarding students would belong to the same co-educational House system as day students (see Recommendation S2), while the boarding residences would retain their own community, culture and pastoral support shaped by the age-banded structure in Recommendation B1. The opportunity exists for the school to work with students to shape what that residential culture looks like, including which traditions are worth keeping and which need to change, so that the boarding environment reflects the diversity of the current and future student body rather than solely the heritage of the past.



8.4 Gender dynamics in boarding

The gender-segregated structure of the boarding houses, with two boys' houses and three girls' houses, creates conditions in which gendered norms develop and are reinforced without the moderating influence of cross-gender contact. As discussed in section 8.2.3, the hazing evidence gathered through this Review is heavily gendered. Pornography, sexualised performances, misogynistic chants and the humiliation of girls all feature prominently in historical accounts. Former students drew a direct line between the use of pornography in hazing rituals during formative years and the way girls were spoken about in school settings such as athletics or sports day chants.

The incident described earlier in 8.3.2, where female boarders raised racial, sexist and discriminatory comments from male boarders, illustrates how the handling of gendered harm in boarding can leave students feeling unheard. The school facilitated a meeting between those involved and followed the matter up; the girls did not feel the process gave them the direct voice they had sought or adequately addressed what had happened. The gender segregation of boarding houses is not incidental to these dynamics. It is structural. Single-sex boarding houses create environments in which the norms of masculinity or femininity are set by the internal culture of the house, reinforced by the expectations of older students and transmitted to incoming cohorts without cross-gender interaction.

At the same time, single-sex boarding houses offer genuine benefits that should not be dismissed. For many students, particularly during adolescence, a single-sex residential environment provides a space in which they feel more comfortable, less self-conscious and more willing to take social and emotional risks. Girls in particular described their boarding house as a place of safety and solidarity, where they could be themselves without the pressures that come with mixed-gender social dynamics. The sibling-style bonds described by female boarders, who referred to one another as 'sisters' and to their House as a family, reflect a depth of connection that a single-sex environment can foster. Research on single-sex education suggests that these settings can support identity development, reduce gendered performance anxiety and create stronger peer support networks, particularly for girls.⁵⁵ The challenge is not the single-sex residential structure itself, but the absence of deliberate strategies to counteract its risks: the echo-chamber effect on gendered norms, the lack of cross-gender accountability, and the unchecked transmission of harmful attitudes from older to younger students within a closed peer group.

Recommendations B1, B2 and S2 address this at a structural level. Where boarding residences remain single-sex for the practical and pastoral benefits they provide, a boarding student's House identity and competitive participation would no longer be confined to that single-sex group.

55 Emer Smyth, 'Single-Sex Education: What Does Research Tell Us?' (2010) 171 *Revue française de pédagogie* 47, 51–52.

8.5 Wellbeing, transition and vulnerability

8.5.1 Gaps in wellbeing support

The boarding environment at Ballarat Grammar has undergone significant change in recent years, particularly following the Fenner Review. Additional counselling has been made available on campus for boarders, and structured wellbeing programs have been introduced across year groups. For students who accessed these supports, they were valued. One student in Dart House spoke about the weekly wellbeing meetings introduced after the 2025 incidents:

It took me a fair few goes to actually open up and start talking. I just denied it a lot. Everything. And the first time she knew I was lying. But yeah, I didn't want to see everyone go.

Support through school psychologists was described as very helpful by those who used it. However, gaps remain. The evidence gathered by this Review indicates that wellbeing support in the boarding houses has historically been reactive rather than proactive, and that some gaps have not yet been fully addressed.

A former student provided a confronting account of the gaps during their time:

In multiple instances of suicide attempts or severe mental health episodes, that occurred in the boarding house during my time there, there was no support offered to the peers and students who lived with the affected individuals or evidence of significant support offered to the individuals themselves. Often students were referred to the school counsellor who at the time frequently provided unhelpful advice or dismissed student concerns. There was no after hours or crisis support available and if you did try to reach out to a staff member, they consistently lacked the appropriate training to provide support.

While this account relates to a past period and does not reflect current practice, the underlying challenge it describes remains: students in boarding do not have the option of going home when a crisis occurs. The school is their home. The investment in wellbeing programs since the Fenner Review is a positive step, but its effectiveness will depend on whether those programs are sustained, adequately resourced and genuinely accessible to all boarding students, including those who may not feel comfortable seeking help through formal channels.

8.5.2 Transition points and vulnerability

Starting at, returning to, or changing boarding houses can be a time of mixed emotion, anxiety and excitement. Students talked about important transition points, particularly entry into boarding in Year 7. The vertical boarding house structure, which until 2026 included Years 7 to 12 in the same house, meant that the specific needs of younger students could be overlooked.



The establishment of a co-educational Junior Boarding model, with Year 7 boys and girls accommodated in separate units within the existing boarding houses, commenced at the start of Term 1 2026 in response to the Fenner Review, with planned expansion to Year 8 in 2027. This model directly addresses this structural risk. The separation of the youngest boarders into a dedicated, co-educational house with its own supervision arrangements removes them from the vertical hierarchy that enabled the harmful practices described in this chapter. Early indications suggest the Junior Boarding model is providing a more age-appropriate and supported environment, though its long-term effectiveness will depend on sustained investment in supervision, staffing and pastoral support.

For students beyond Years 7 and 8, transition remains a period of heightened vulnerability. As discussed in section 8.2.4, the expectation on older students to 'take care of' younger students can mean very different things depending on the culture of the House. For new boarders, the pressure to fit in heightens vulnerability to precisely the kinds of practices described earlier in this chapter. When that pressure is framed as House spirit and the social cost of refusal is high (see section 8.2.2), new students can find themselves drawn into harmful experiences before they have the language or the standing to resist.

8.6 The school's response and how students have experienced the changes

8.6.1 Implementation of the Fenner Review

The Fenner Review's 32 recommendations covered a broad range of areas: improving investigation processes, clarifying roles and increasing time allocations for key staff, staffing levels and required qualifications, training for boarding staff, staff conditions and performance reviews. It also recommended redeveloping boarding buildings, creating a Junior Boarding House for Years 7 and 8, and introducing mixed mentor groups in senior school.

In response, the school has made a series of practical changes. Additional counselling has been made available on campus for boarders. A whole-of-boarding education and training program has been introduced, customised to year groups and covering respectful choices, consent, allyship and upstanding. Specific programs include Man-Cave and Flourishing Journey for Year 8 students (not specific to boarding students only), Elephant Ed training for Years 10 to 12, and Men's Project training by Jesuit Social Services for staff. The school has also engaged Monash University's School of Education, Culture and Society for staff training on understanding and responding to the influence of the manosphere in schools.

A student-facing values program ('Boarding @ BGS') has been introduced. Active Boarding Staff (ABS, formerly known as Master/Mistress on Duty) have been enabled to spend more time in each boarding house to build consistent relationships and provide greater continuity of care. Overnight staff have been introduced. An Activities Coordinator has been appointed to organise activities for all boarders. An online anonymous reporting facility (Whisppli) has been introduced, though uptake by students remains limited.

Staff training has been restructured, with term-based training specific to boarding staff introduced from 2026, supported by a Boarding Training Coordinator and a Boarding Cultural Coordinator. Staff are

completing the Australian Boarding Schools' Association (ABSA) Duty of Care training at levels 1 to 3 depending on their position. A new employee induction process specific to boarding has been formalised, and a student and parent induction process has also been put in place, including a handbook, code of conduct, allocated buddy, and orientation sessions covering values, reporting and support.

The limited uptake of Whispli among boarding students warrants particular attention. In the boarding context, reporting is complicated by the fact that students are being asked to report on behaviour that occurs within their home, involving people they live with. Boarders described a strong sense of protectiveness of their House and their fellow boarders. The VRQA conditions require that all incidents be reported to the regulator, and students are aware of this. For some boarders, the knowledge that a report may trigger a formal regulatory process, with consequences not just for the individual but potentially for the House and the broader boarding community, acts as a deterrent. This is not a failure of the reporting tool. It reflects a tension in the current regulatory framework: the obligation to report externally can work against the willingness to report internally, particularly in a residential setting where students feel a deep personal stake in the wellbeing and reputation of their community.

The co-educational Junior Boarding model commenced operation with Year 7 at the start of Term 1 2026, with planned expansion to Year 8 in 2027, as discussed in section 8.5.2.

8.6.2 How current students have experienced the changes

The changes introduced following the Fenner Review and the VRQA conditions have had a significant impact on the daily experience of current boarding students. The picture is mixed.

Some students raised concerns about being over-surveilled, with 'cameras in every corner', multiple daily roll calls, and a feeling that they are living 'in prison'. Rules about not having music in the dining room, the perception that Houses other than Dart were being punished unfairly, and a sense that the spirit and culture of the boarding houses was being significantly diminished were all raised.

Some students stated that they felt they were treated like 'liars' and 'questioned at the drop of a hat over nothing'. They expressed that they did not feel trusted:

For House dinner our speeches were proofread just in case we said anything wrong and for leavers night our videos were edited just in case media got a hold of them and cancelled the school again.

Some students stated that the extra surveillance made them feel 'unsafe and vulnerable'. They felt this was unfair, that even though they had not 'done anything wrong they face the consequences of others' actions'. There was a perception that the school had shut down many bonding opportunities and rituals because 'people we don't know told us to' and that there had been no explanation given as to why these changes had to take place:

I just don't understand why things need fixing when there's no problem with it.

This response from current students is itself an illustration of the normalisation described in section 8.3. Students who have grown up within the boarding culture, and for whom its rituals and practices were experienced as positive and normal, are genuinely bewildered and hurt by changes that feel arbitrary and punitive. That response is understandable. It does not mean the changes were unnecessary, but it does point to a significant gap in how those changes were communicated and implemented.

Students were clear that they wanted to be involved in the process. They described feeling excluded from decisions that directly affected their daily lives:

How they say it is 'student led' but us students don't seem to get much input into the changes being made.

We felt the recommendations, if you know what I mean. We did see changes, but we never saw the proper list of what they were.

Other students acknowledged the difficulty of the changes but valued being kept informed:

It makes us feel a lot more valued when we are kept in the loop and informed about what is happening to our school community.

One student captured the tension felt by many:

The culture needs to be protected and nurtured through this time, rather than completely rejected and destroyed. Grammar is not only where I go to school and learn, it is my home. There needs to be more respect around decisions made by those in charge and empathy towards the boarders as this is our home and not theirs. We are the ones living through these struggles and changes, not them.

The school introduced overnight staff, referred to by students as 'night crawlers'. Students described these staff as 'strangers' who were supposed to be their point of contact overnight but who were not known well enough to approach. One student observed that 'if they're only in the house for two minutes every hour, you're not going to find them'. However, some students appreciated the night staff and found them to be 'not strict, but just nice'.

Students expressed missing the sense of community in boarding and said the current changes were placing a heavy toll on them. The grief and loss expressed by boarding students is real and should not be dismissed. At the same time, it must be understood within the context of the normalisation described in this chapter. Students are mourning a culture that, for them, felt like home. The challenge for the school is to acknowledge that grief, involve students in shaping the future of boarding and help them understand why change was necessary, without retreating from the safeguards needed to keep all students safe.

8.7 Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from the evidence in this chapter. They respond to the challenges and risks identified through the Review and build on the changes already implemented through the Fenner Review and the VRQA conditions. They are designed to create the structural and cultural conditions for a safe, inclusive and connected boarding environment.

Ref	Recommendation
Boarding Experience (B1-B8)	Boarding Experience (B1-B8)
B1	Restructure boarding houses by age band to reduce the power differential between older and younger students That Ballarat Grammar extend the age-based restructure that commenced with the co-educational Junior Boarding model for Years 7 and 8 by establishing separate boarding arrangements for Years 9 and 10 and for Years 11 and 12. Each age band should have its own supervision model, staffing ratios and pastoral approach appropriate to the developmental stage of its students. Senior boarding houses for boys and girls should be retained.
B2	Redefine boarding residences and reimagine their culture with students That Ballarat Grammar redefine boarding houses as residences where students live, separate from the day school House system, and work with current boarding students to reshape the culture, traditions and identity of those residences. Boarding students should be allocated to a co-educational day school House alongside day students (see Recommendation S2). Under the age-banded residential structure in Recommendation B1, students will move through different residential settings as they progress through the school, with their cross-year connections provided through the day school House rather than the boarding residence.
B3	Close the boarding dining hall during school hours to reduce structural separation between boarders and day students That Ballarat Grammar close the boarding dining hall during the school day so that boarders eat lunch alongside day students, using the same facilities at the same times. The practice of boarders eating separately from day students was identified consistently as reinforcing the divide between the two groups.



B4	Develop a boarding-specific behavioural and cultural curriculum, connected to the whole-of-school CREW curriculum That Ballarat Grammar develop a structured boarding-specific program that addresses the particular dynamics of residential living, including the normalisation of harmful traditions, the distinction between practices that build safety and those that cause harm, the dynamics of hierarchy and peer pressure, and the skills needed to be an active bystander in a residential setting. The program should explicitly build a safe-to-speak reporting culture in which boarders understand how to raise concerns, trust that reports will be taken seriously and acted on, and see reporting as a normal part of community life rather than a breach of loyalty. This program should run across all year levels, be embedded in the boarding calendar and connect to the whole-of-school CREW curriculum.
B5	Establish a boarding student advisory group with genuine decision-making input That Ballarat Grammar establish a standing boarding student advisory group with a defined role in shaping boarding culture, reviewing changes and providing feedback to school leadership.
B6	Implement a structured transition and induction program for new boarders That the induction process be reviewed and strengthened to include explicit education about what is and is not acceptable behaviour in the boarding houses, including the practices described in this chapter. It should also include named support contacts who are not the student's housemates or house staff, and scheduled follow-up check-ins through the first two terms. The Junior Boarding model provides the structural setting for this program for Years 7 and 8, but the content needs to be deliberate, sustained and extended to students entering boarding at any year level.
B7	Require quarterly reporting to the Board on boarding culture indicators That Ballarat Grammar require the school leadership to report to the Board quarterly on boarding culture indicators, including incident data disaggregated by boarding house, reporting rates through Whispli and other channels, staffing data including turnover and vacancy rates, and student feedback on safety and wellbeing.
B8	Address the gender dynamics of boarding through targeted education and structural change That Ballarat Grammar address the gendered dynamics identified in this chapter through targeted education in the boys' boarding houses on respectful relationships, masculinity and the impact of misogyny, building on the Men's Project and Monash University work already commenced; structured opportunities for cross-gender interaction between the boys' and girls' boarding houses; and explicit accountability for sexist and discriminatory behaviour, including ensuring that reports from female boarders about the conduct of male boarders are investigated and responded to within the boarding context. The structural separation of boarding residences from the House identity system (Recommendations B1, B2 and S2) addresses the gender segregation of Houses at a systemic level. The measures in this recommendation address the cultural and educational dimensions that structural change alone will not resolve.

9 Parent Experience

Chapter summary

This chapter examines the experiences and perspectives of parents of current and former students at Ballarat Grammar. It draws on interviews, submissions and focus groups to present the parent experience across six areas: what parents value about the school; trust and confidence following the Dart incidents; communication and responsiveness; growth of the school and the loss of community; how concerns and complaints are navigated; and the parent-school relationship. It concludes with recommendations for change.

Many parents spoke positively about Ballarat Grammar. They described a school with strong opportunities, committed teachers, excellent facilities and a genuine sense of community. Some families had received deeply personal support during difficult times and were grateful for the care their children received. At the same time, many parents expressed serious concerns about communication, transparency, consistency of response and the school's willingness to acknowledge systemic problems. A recurring theme was that the school's strengths rely on particular individuals rather than on systems, and that positive experiences are uneven across families, year levels and Houses.

The Review also heard evidence of a parent culture that has, in some cases, contributed to the challenges the school faces. A smaller number of sources described influential families wielding disproportionate power, a transactional approach to the parent-school relationship and pressure on staff. These accounts, while not representing the dominant theme, are consistent with patterns identified elsewhere in this Report and warrant attention. The chapter concludes with recommendations directed at both the school and its parent community.

9.1 What parents value about Ballarat Grammar

Parents who participated in the Review spoke about many of the school's strengths. These included the breadth of opportunities available to students in sport, the arts and academics, a welcoming community, excellent teaching staff and a supportive environment. Parents described teachers who had the wellbeing of students at the heart of everything they did and were grateful for the care, friendships and skills their children had developed. One parent observed that their children were 'well-spoken and community minded'.

Some parents identified deeply personal support they had received from the school during family crises. Parents of boarders described strong, healthy relationships among boarding students and felt that their child had been well supported and cared for.

These positive experiences are real and reflect genuine strengths in the school. They also highlight the benchmark that parents hold the school to, and the reason the failures described in this chapter are felt so keenly. Parents who have experienced the school at its best know what it is capable of. Their frustration is grounded in the gap between that standard and the inconsistency they have observed.

9.2 Trust and confidence

The Dart House incidents tested the trust and confidence many parents had placed in the school. The context for these incidents, including the VRQA review and the Fenner Review, is set out in Chapter 4. This section focuses on how parents experienced the school's response and what it meant for their confidence in the institution.

The school was required to operate within significant privacy constraints regarding these incidents, as the risk of identifying students in small regional communities necessitated a measured approach to the management and communication of sensitive information. However, parents observed a lack of leadership and transparency and questioned the school's capacity to 'run a school with the right standards and the right accountability'. The lack of communication about outcomes for the students involved, or why some returned to school, left parents uncertain about whether they were making the right decisions for their child and whether their child was safe.

Communications in response to the boarding incidents were described as 'sloppy' and 'clumsy'. Some parents welcomed the transparency from leadership about the strapping incidents. Others felt that the school's response prioritised reputation management over the wellbeing of its community:

They're terrified about stuff being put in the paper, but they're choosing reputation over the needs of the community. So they're prioritising that over the people in their school, which I really struggle with. They're just not caring about their school community. They're worried about their bottom line and their enrolments, which feels horrible.

A recurring theme was the perception that incidents were treated as isolated occurrences caused by 'bad eggs' rather than acknowledged as symptoms of systemic failure. Parents stated that the school considered each incident individually rather than taking a holistic view, with no acknowledgement that incidents occurred as a result of failures in process, management and leadership. Issues of oversight, governance and accountability were not dealt with. As one submission observed:

They never kind of talked about it like it was a systemic problem. It was more like, oh, that was an isolated incident. But when these isolated things continue over and over again, it's more than just isolated.

Parents also commented on the interconnectedness between student behaviours, policies, processes and accountability.

Say were the kids taught about the values and the principles, were they set up for success around all of that. And as you work through that, it goes from student culpability up through to teachers and leadership culpability if we're missing some of those. And what I'm not seeing is evidence that the school acknowledges that.



Parents were clear about what rebuilding trust requires: openness, honesty and follow-through. As one parent put it: 'be upfront about things because if you try to brush things under the carpet, it's gonna come out anyway'.

9.3 Communication and responsiveness

The quality and consistency of communication between the school and parents was one of the most frequently raised issues in the Review. The picture that emerged was deeply uneven.

Some parents described open, respectful and uncomplicated communication. One parent described it as: 'This is what's happened, this is what we're going to do. Very comfortable with the outcome'. Classroom teachers typically formed positive relationships with parents, though this varied across year levels and between individual staff.

However, many parents described communication that was reactive, inconsistent and at times absent. Some stated that there was no communication even when their child was missing from school or there had been a serious incident, and that they found out more through the media. A common theme was that communication was only initiated when something had gone wrong:

Things were only ever communicated to me when they were bad. There was never a 'Look, we think your son is not doing so well at school. We'd like to try this' or 'He seems a bit upset lately, we're going to try and manage him.' There was none of that.

Some parents found it difficult to find relevant or timely information on the school's intranet platform (Nexus) and suggested there was an overreliance on a single channel of communication. One parent noted that 'one method of communication is not ever going to be enough'.

At times, communication was perceived as serving the school's interests rather than the child's. One parent described a pattern of receiving formal emails about their child's behaviour that felt like the school was 'trying to protect ourselves from any future issues' rather than genuinely supporting the student. Parents sometimes experienced their communications raising serious concerns as having been ignored, leaving them afraid that following up would make the situation worse for their child.

Parents also cited examples of raising concerns that received a response, but no feedback on whether anything had been done. In the absence of clear, accessible policies and procedures, they surmised this may have been for privacy or confidentiality reasons but were unsure. The effect was to leave parents feeling uninformed and excluded.

9.4 Growth and the loss of community

The growth of the school and its implications for systems, staffing and student experience are discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Parents raised growth of the school as a significant concern from their own perspective. For many, the school has grown beyond the point where it can maintain the personalised, community-oriented experience that attracted their families in the first place. As one parent observed: 'It has become difficult to maintain the personalised experience that attracts families to the school'. Another noted simply that 'kids just get lost'.

Parents observed that growth had outpaced the school's infrastructure, staffing and systems. The school was perceived to lack the workforce sophistication and systematic approach needed to support the larger student body. One parent noted that the school 'didn't have control over that growth very well. They didn't have the infrastructure. Didn't have enough decent teachers'.

In the absence of this 'infrastructure', the school's growth also created challenges for discipline and behavioural management. Some parents perceived that the school was reluctant to enforce consequences because it needed the school fees to continue functioning. Students were described as being given 'fifteenth and sixteenth chances' so as not to jeopardise income. One parent asked: 'once you get over a certain number, does it need a whole new type of supervision system?'. The growth of the school without supporting systems and structures and its implications for boarding are discussed further in Chapter 8 (see section 8.2.1).

9.5 Navigating concerns and complaints

Some parents described positive experiences of raising and resolving concerns. One parent described the school's response to an incident of bullying and physical assault as timely and effective, with the perpetrator dealt with and the victim receiving support from the wellbeing team and senior staff. They described the outcome as one they were 'happy with'.

However, many other parents described a complaints process that was unclear, inconsistent and, in some cases, harmful to the student who reported. Various barriers to reporting were identified: students telling staff but not parents for fear that incidents would be escalated; silence for fear of retribution and being ostracised, for both students and parents; students fearing they would get into trouble; and a reluctance to report children of teachers, as 'it is easier not to address it'. These barriers to reporting are discussed in the context of the broader student experience in Chapter 7 (see section 7.6).

Parents questioned what the processes actually were for dealing with concerns, so that teachers, students and parents would know their options:

Give us more information, how we report things like what's our first point of contact, what's our second point of contact, what's our third point of contact? How do we report these things? I don't know any of it.

One parent observed that without clear processes in place for staff, 'we're almost setting them up to fail'. The lack of documentation was also raised.



Consequences were described as inconsistent and unpredictable. Responses varied from very light touch to severe, 'with little or no relation to the severity of the incident or behaviour' and seemed 'dependent purely upon the judgement of the staff member involved'. In some cases, consequences were never carried out, leaving students anxiously awaiting a verdict that never came. In other cases, the onus was placed on the victim to stay away from the perpetrator rather than dealing with the person who caused harm. Restorative processes were also reported to be, in some instances, ineffective and harmful to the victim.

Parents raised concerns about confidentiality. There did not appear to be an independent person or process through which to raise issues, and parents worried that their child would be treated differently as a result. In the boarding context, students had access to the Whispli app, which allows for anonymous and confidential disclosure, as well as direct reporting to staff. Students lacked confidence in these reporting avenues allowing them to raise issues without being identified 'and shamed by peers'. Parents observed that students were reluctant to report because they did not believe the school would do anything or feared the school would overreact, 'resulting in the bystander or victim being further victimised by the perpetrator'.

9.6 Diversity and inclusion

Parents noted that the school claims to be inclusive but questioned whether that claim is consistently borne out in practice. Parents provided examples of children being bullied, discriminated against and excluded because of their sexual identity, race and cultural background or religion. In some instances, they felt these incidents were 'shrugged off' by the school. Parents expected that the school would know how to deal with these issues. The school has had positive structural intervention in this area, such as the introduction of JEDI Captain roles to promote Justice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Despite this, parents noted that diverse students tended not to have access to leadership pathways.

Parents reflected on the impact of the Houses that became socially identified as diversity Houses, echoing concerns raised by students and discussed in detail in Chapter 7 (see section 7.5):

In 2025 every House should be a diversity House. Beckworth kids have been bullied for being gay for two years. The school didn't do anything to try and create a culture where this bullying wouldn't occur. The school created a 'diversity House' which many of the kids called 'the gay House' and then the school completely ignored reports from multiple parents that this was an issue.

Some parents noted exclusionary attitudes from staff, including a perception that the school wanted to produce 'Grammarians who are a certain image, and I couldn't imagine that that would be children with disabilities'. Another parent described their child's teacher making comments that were racial slurs without apparently realising it. The child did not want the parent to raise it with the teacher.

The experiences of students from diverse backgrounds, including students with disability and neurodivergence, are discussed in detail in Chapter 7 (see sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.3). It is noted here that the parent evidence on disability support was among the most emotionally charged gathered through the Review, with some parents describing years of sustained advocacy to secure supports that should have been provided as a matter of course.

9.7 The parent-school relationship

9.7.1 Parent culture and its influence on the school environment

The Review heard evidence that some parents have directly contributed to the cultural challenges the school faces. This is important to name, because the culture of a school is not shaped solely by its staff and students. Parents are part of the ecosystem, and their behaviour has consequences for the environment in which staff work and children learn.

A smaller number of sources described influential families within the Ballarat Grammar community wielding disproportionate influence over the school – feedback which was echoed by a number of employees at the school. Influential families were perceived to have the loudest voice and quick, reliable access to teachers and leadership:

Not everyone is equal. There's a lot of what I would call old money, old influence. There's some teachers that come from families. You can tell them till you're blue in the face. Nothing happens because they have the influence.

Children of these families were perceived to receive preferential treatment in selections for sporting teams and leadership positions, and children of teachers were also seen to receive more opportunities and lesser consequences. This perception of favouritism was not confined to parent accounts. It was also raised by students (see Chapter 7) and is discussed further in the context of staffing dynamics in the employee experience chapter.

Connected to this was evidence of a transactional mindset among some parents. They were paying significant fees and expected a corresponding level of service. As one parent stated: 'This is a fee-paying school. Where is the service? I'm paying for a service'. Others framed the school as a community and stressed the importance of partnership. This tension is not unique to Ballarat Grammar. It is a feature of the independent school sector more broadly. But it has particular consequences when combined with the disproportionate influence of some families, because the school's professional judgement about what is best for students can be overridden by the financial and social leverage of individual parents.

A number of teachers were described as 'frightened of dishing out consequences to kids for fear of the backlash that the parents will give'. Staff were reported to have been abused by parents over their children receiving detentions. One submission captured the breadth of this issue:

One of the invisible cultural forces of the school is its parents. Entitled, monied, arrogant parents would boast about having the power to get teachers fired, having the ear of the Head and having special deals made. Parents would boast about being a 'Grammar' family, therefore having more say, more rights and more power than 'other' families. Some parents would actively encourage their children to breach school values by lying about events, keeping 'the code', mocking school leaders, joking about school rules and values and enabling their children to run a counterculture. I think there should be less blame on teachers, and maybe parents can consider what role they played in fostering a counterculture of privilege and the rules not applying to them because they were special.

This evidence paints a picture of a parent culture that, where it operates, actively undermines the school's ability to set and enforce standards. When parents model to their children that rules do not apply to them, that staff can be intimidated into backing down and that influence and money confer immunity from consequences, the effect on the broader school culture is corrosive. The implications of this dynamic for staff wellbeing and retention are discussed further in the staff experience chapter.

It should be noted that the evidence for these dynamics, while consistent in the accounts provided, came from a relatively small number of sources. This does not diminish its significance. The pattern described, where a minority of parents exert disproportionate influence, is by its nature concentrated rather than widespread. What matters is whether the school has the systems and the institutional resolve to manage that influence, and the evidence suggests that it has not always done so.

9.7.2 Parent representation and consultation

Several parent representative structures exist across the school, but they are inconsistent in form, function and reach, and none provides a structured mechanism for whole-of-school parent consultation.

A Parent Representative Committee has operated in the boarding space for more than a decade and was viewed by some as a valued forum to include parent perspectives, raise issues and improve connections between the boarding and day communities. It operates under formal Terms of Reference. Recent reform has focused on the function the committee performs rather than its existence. Issues had been raised over time through this committee regarding inconsistent practices and standards between different boarding houses, including bedtimes, access to phones, access to leave and cleanliness of boarding houses. However, one parent noted that many of the issues raised by the VRQA review had been raised by the parent committee for four years.

Other parents perceived the Parent Representative Committees at the school as a form of gatekeeping. It was described as defending the school at all costs and not encouraging differences of opinion. Frustration was expressed that concerns raised through the committee had not been actioned. One parent observed: 'I've got a little bit of concern there around the systems and processes within the leadership team in terms of roles and responsibilities and authority and who the decision makers are and who has the authority to act on concerns that are raised from parents'.

Beyond the Parent Representative Committees, other parent structures exist but serve different and limited purposes. The Parents and Friends group operates under formal Terms of Reference (May 2025) focused on community-building, events and fundraising, but has no structured process for



communicating concerns to the school or receiving formal responses. The current practice is that the Principal meets with the Chair every term, and the Principal or a deputy attend all Parents and Friends committee meetings. The Review heard that in practice, it has become a channel through which individual issues are raised informally with school staff rather than a consultative body.

The Junior School has a parent representative group, though it meets irregularly and feedback heard through the Review indicates it is not inclusive of the broader parent community, particularly working parents. Parents expressed particular concern about the group including members who worked part-time at the school and may have had a conflict of interest. One parent stated: 'No teachers should be in parent forums'. A former representative left the role feeling that their participation was 'just a tick in the box exercise' and that their opinion did not count.

Parent-led groups also exist around specific co-curricular programs including rowing and music, with a Highland band parent group in formation. These are parent-instigated and serve program support functions rather than broader consultation purposes.

There is no formal, regular or structured process for whole-of-school parent consultation and engagement, and no consistent approach to membership, communication or escalation across any of these bodies. Parent voice is fragmented across purpose-specific groups rather than embedded as a standing feature of school governance.

9.8 Response to recent changes

Parents had mixed responses to the changes introduced following the Fenner Review and the VRQA conditions. The experience of current boarding students in response to these changes is discussed in detail in Chapter 8 (see section 8.6.2). From the parent perspective, some indicated that their child was much more settled and happier since the changes, and that the new supervision structures were rebuilding a family environment. They perceived that the school had handled the situation well and that incidents since then had been handled promptly and effectively. As one parent observed: 'change takes time and it's difficult and there will be pushback, but there's definitely been some positive'.

Some parents welcomed the separate boarding house for younger students and the mixing of day and boarding students to reduce segregation.

However, other parents were concerned about the way changes were being managed and communicated to students, with some describing the new restrictions as 'punishing'. Parents also raised a lack of consultation with both parents and students about the changes:

Those who have change thrust upon them with no consultation or explanation for the change will resent the change and struggle to adjust. Student voice and agency is not given authentic value and the kids feel disrespected.

Some parents also wanted to see the data and evidence base for the changes and a strategic plan with goals clearly aligned to delivery and action on the ground, communicated to staff and parents.

9.9 Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the evidence in this chapter. They are designed to strengthen the relationship between the school and its parent community, improve communication and accountability, and address the cultural dynamics that have contributed to the challenges identified through the Review.

REF	RECOMMENDATION
Parent Experience (P1-P4)	Parent Experience (P1-P4)
P1	Reset the parent-school relationship as an educational partnership, not a service-provider arrangement That Ballarat Grammar, in consultation with parents, take deliberate steps to reframe its relationship with parents as a partnership in the education and development of children, not as a transactional service. This should include a clear public statement of the school's expectations of parents, referencing the Parent Code of Conduct, developed with parent input and embedded in the enrolment process. The school's values should apply to the entire school community, including parents, and the consequences of behaviour that is inconsistent with those values should be clearly articulated. This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendation E7, which addresses the same relationship from the staff perspective, including strengthening leadership support for staff when they enforce standards, implementing clear communication guidelines and protocols, ensuring the Parent Code of Conduct is visible and accessible, and establishing ongoing parent education programs.
P2	Develop and publish a clear, accessible complaints and concerns process for parents and students That Ballarat Grammar develop a complaints and concerns process that is transparent, well-documented and accessible to all parents and students. The process should include clear points of contact at each level of escalation, defined timeframes for acknowledgement and response, an expectation of feedback to the person who raised the concern (subject to privacy), and an independent pathway for concerns that cannot be resolved through normal channels. The process should be published, communicated regularly and reviewed annually. The current lack of a clear, known process was one of the most frequently raised concerns in the Review.



P3	Develop a whole-of-school communications strategy and protocol That Ballarat Grammar develop a formal communications strategy and protocol that establishes who communicates what, to whom and when, across all areas of the school. The strategy should: • set clear expectations for communication frequency, format, channel and responsiveness, standardised across campuses, year levels and staff roles so that the quality and timeliness of communication does not depend on the individual; • ensure communication is proactive and routine, and delivered through multiple channels appropriate to the content and audience. The protocol should specifically address communication with boarding parents, for whom regular updates about daily life, wellbeing and school changes should be provided as a matter of course given the distance between families and their children. The strategy should be reviewed annually and its effectiveness measured through parent and staff feedback.
P4	Establish a whole-of-school parent consultation and advisory structure That Ballarat Grammar establish a formal, whole-of-school parent advisory body with clear terms of reference, representative membership and a direct reporting line to the Board. The advisory body should have diverse membership that reflects the breadth of the parent community, including boarding and day families across all year levels. Parents who are also employed by the school should not serve as parent representatives. The body should have a transparent process for raising and tracking issues, defined timeframes for the school to provide documented responses, and a formal reporting line to the Board. Boarding parent representation should be formalised at Board level.

Ballarat Grammar as a Workplace

PART B — Ballarat Grammar as a Workplace

PART B of this Report examines the experience of working at Ballarat Grammar. It draws on interviews, written submissions and survey responses from current and former employees, across both teaching and non-teaching roles, to present a picture of the school as an employer: how its workplace culture operates in practice, how leadership and management are experienced, how workload and growth have affected the people doing the work, and how the school's relationships with parents intersect with the working lives of staff.

This section of the Report does not treat employee experience as separate from the issues identified in Part A. The quality of the student and parent experience is directly shaped by the conditions in which staff work, the support they receive, and the culture in which they operate. Where students described inconsistency, staff described the structural causes of that inconsistency: unclear reporting lines, uneven management capability, workloads that have grown with the school but have not been matched by investment in resourcing or role clarity. Where parents described communication failures, staff described the absence of systems and time to communicate well. The findings in this chapter reveal the workplace conditions that sit behind the patterns described by students and families, and they carry obligations under occupational health and safety legislation, including the management of psychosocial hazards.

The information that follows presents findings across the key dimensions of the employee experience at Ballarat Grammar. It identifies both the deep commitment of staff to the school's mission and the structural and cultural pressures that are placing that commitment under significant strain. It concludes with recommendations designed to support a workplace that is fair, safe, well managed and capable of sustaining the cultural change this Review requires.



10 Employee Experience

Chapter summary

This chapter examines the experiences and perspectives of employees at Ballarat Grammar, drawing on interviews, submissions and survey responses to present their experience of the school as a workplace across six areas: workplace culture; leadership and management practices; workload, capability and support; interactions with parents and the wider community; experiences of harmful behaviour including psychosocial safety; and retention and sustainability. It concludes with recommendations for change.

As of October 2025, Ballarat Grammar had 564 employees, with just over one third employed full time, just under one third employed as casuals, and approximately one third employed part time. Women represented 70% of the school's workforce. A notable aspect of this Review was the strong interest and engagement of employees, reflecting a workforce that cares deeply about the school and its future.

Ballarat Grammar employee breakdown

564

Total number of employees

37%

Full time staff
(206 employees)

33%

Part time staff
(171 employees)

30%

Casual staff
(171 employees)

70%

Female staff
(396 employees)

30%

Male staff
(168 employees)



Many employees spoke positively about their experience of working at Ballarat Grammar. They described a warm, collegiate and values-driven workplace, grounded in a shared commitment to student wellbeing and development. Strong collegial relationships, compassionate leadership and a genuine sense of community were identified as key strengths. Almost 80% of survey respondents indicated that the school was a safe and respectful workplace most or all of the time.⁵⁶ For many, these qualities were the reason they had chosen to work at the school and to stay.

At the same time, the Review heard evidence of significant and systemic challenges that have shaped the employee experience. These include a workplace culture in which psychological safety for some staff has been undermined by low trust, a reluctance to speak up for fear of being labelled a troublemaker, and divisions between teaching and non-teaching staff. Leadership practices were praised in some areas but characterised in others by unclear structures, over-centralised decision-making, perceptions of favouritism and nepotism in appointments, and inconsistent accountability. Employees described workloads that had become unsustainable as the school had grown, without commensurate investment in resourcing, role clarity or professional development, particularly for non-teaching staff and those supporting students with additional needs.

A recurring theme was the shift in the parent-school relationship from a collaborative partnership to an increasingly transactional dynamic, in which some parents' sense of entitlement and challenging behaviour had a direct and cumulative impact on staff wellbeing and professional confidence. Employees described feeling unsupported by leadership when navigating these interactions, and that the school's response often prioritised appeasing parents over protecting staff.

The Review also heard accounts of harmful workplace behaviour, including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, as well as a historically male-dominated culture that had at times been a hostile environment for women, particularly those in leadership roles. While the school has made progress in addressing these cultural dynamics, underlying attitudes appear to persist in some areas. Confidence in reporting systems was undermined by fears of reprisal, unclear pathways and a perception that reports were not taken seriously or were handled informally, contributing to a culture of organisational silence in which issues persisted unchecked.

The cumulative effect of these factors, compounded by poor communication, inadequate change management and the significant impact of the Dart House incidents on staff morale, presents multiple psychosocial risk factors for employees. While strong pockets of positive culture and genuine care continue to exist within the school, these appear to depend on the deliberate efforts of individual leaders rather than being systematically supported by broader organisational structures. The chapter identifies eight areas for recommendation, directed at strengthening workplace culture, leadership accountability, communication, workload sustainability, professional development, the parent-school relationship, staff wellbeing and psychosocial safety.

⁵⁶ Most of the time—59%; all of the time—20% (n=125).



10.1 Workplace culture

10.1.1 Shared purpose, values and everyday behaviours

In consultations for the Review, while employees shared their views on the school's culture in terms of its impact on students, for many current and former employees the discussion also centred on their experiences of Ballarat Grammar as a workplace, as well as an educational institution.

Every workplace is experienced differently by the people working in it. Ballarat Grammar is no exception, and in this Review, employees described a wide range of experiences, positive and negative. Notably, some employees spoke with pride about the school and its culture, highlighting the strength of professional relationships among colleagues, the high quality of many staff and a supportive working environment:

Dedicated staff, supportive leadership, and a community that genuinely cares about both students and colleagues.

Several employees described feeling welcomed into a warm, inclusive and family-oriented community from when they first started working at the school. Employees who had built strong bonds with their team or colleagues over the years spoke of the importance of these relationships in helping them get through more challenging periods, such as during the aftermath of the Dart House incidents, when the school was subject to intense public and media scrutiny.

The staff are all very collegiate. We all work extremely well together. We look after each other and that's an amazing thing.

The employee survey showed similarly positive responses to questions about the overall workplace culture and professionalism of staff at the school, with almost 80% of respondents indicating that Ballarat Grammar was a safe and respectful workplace most of the time or all of the time.⁵⁷ A similar majority felt that staff treated each other with respect most of the time or all of the time.⁵⁸ There was also confidence among respondents that harmful behaviour by adults was not tolerated, with more than three quarters of respondents reporting that harmful behaviour was not tolerated all or most of the time.⁵⁹

Employees also talked about the school's values-based culture and student-focused approach, supported by staff who were genuinely committed to student wellbeing and development. They described the school's culture as one grounded in a strong community ethos, respect and service, and that this shared sense of values and purpose within the school community provided the foundation for a workplace and staff culture built on 'goodwill, professionalism, and a shared desire to do what's best for students'.

⁵⁷ All of the time—20%; Most of the time—59% (n=125)

⁵⁸ All of the time—17%; Most of the time—64% (n=125).

⁵⁹ All of the time—39%; Most of the time—37% (n=123).

Perceptions of workplace culture



Almost 80% of staff respondents indicated that Ballarat Grammar is a safe and respectful workplace most of the time or all of the time



Similarly, 76% of staff respondents also indicated that harmful behaviour by adults was not tolerated at the school most of the time or all of the time

We've got a lot of staff who are on board with the fact that [they're] playing a role in growing whole and successful individuals - by successful I mean that can go out in the world and do good, can actively contribute to their community in a positive way. That's their passion. And I think that underneath that gets us through a lot of problems is because a lot of our staff will come back to this is what we fundamentally, this is what we want to do. And so they'll go a long way for that. I think compared to other places I've worked, it's a very caring place to be.

10.1.2 Psychological safety, trust and respect

For some employees, however, their experience of the workplace culture at Ballarat Grammar was not always a positive one. In consultations, some talked about a 'toxic' culture in some parts of the school, pointing to 'cliques' among certain groups of staff, perceptions of nepotism or favouritism, or that some staff were protected from consequences of their bullying behaviour:

There have been occasions in the last [few] years maybe where I just notice like just a bit of a toxic environment there in terms of friendships and then a certain degree of favouritism.



Several employees described a workplace culture marked by low trust and in which open dialogue about issues was discouraged. This was compounded by the high proportion of staff with children enrolled at the school at a significant fee discount, or with partners or family members working at the school, which some felt could lead to conflicts of interest and a reluctance to raise issues or hold people to account:

They've been here forever. They're teachers, their kids go here - it's all so ingrained. They've got no reason to rock the boat..

Others reflected on their experiences of a workplace culture at the school in which psychological safety for staff was lacking, where colleagues did not support each other, or were made to feel like a 'troublemaker' for speaking up. As Edmondson's foundational research on psychological safety in work teams demonstrates, environments where individuals fear negative consequences for speaking up are less likely to learn from mistakes, innovate, or address emerging risks.⁶⁰

There was a saying 'record it don't report it' for a long time in JS [Junior School] because staff [felt] that if they reported behaviour nothing was done about it anyway so why waste your time. You were also made to feel you were a troublemaker if you did report something.

10.1.3 Divisions between teaching and non-teaching staff

The Review also heard from employees who talked about a culture of lack of respect and divisions among staff. A common theme raised in consultations by employees in administrative, operational or professional services roles, was a perceived divide between teaching and non-teaching staff within the school.

The Review heard about what one employee described as a 'distinct lack of connection between the two sides of the teaching staff and the professional services staff', characterised by siloed work practices, limited communication and even a physical separation, in which 'staff often seem stuck in their section and don't see the whole picture and the opportunities to collaborate more'.

A clear disconnect and lack of mutual respect exist between teaching and non-teaching staff. This often hampers collaborative efforts and timely completion of tasks, which can result in reputational and financial repercussions.

Another employee similarly observed that while overall their interactions with staff across different departments were courteous and respectful, a 'silo mentality' caused miscommunication and staff feeling excluded from decision-making; this could impact on communication to students and parents creating a feeling of disconnect. Some felt that teaching staff did not always appreciate or respect the contributions and expertise of non-teaching staff:

60 AC Edmondson, 'Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams' (1999) 44(2) *Administrative Science Quarterly* 350, 355.



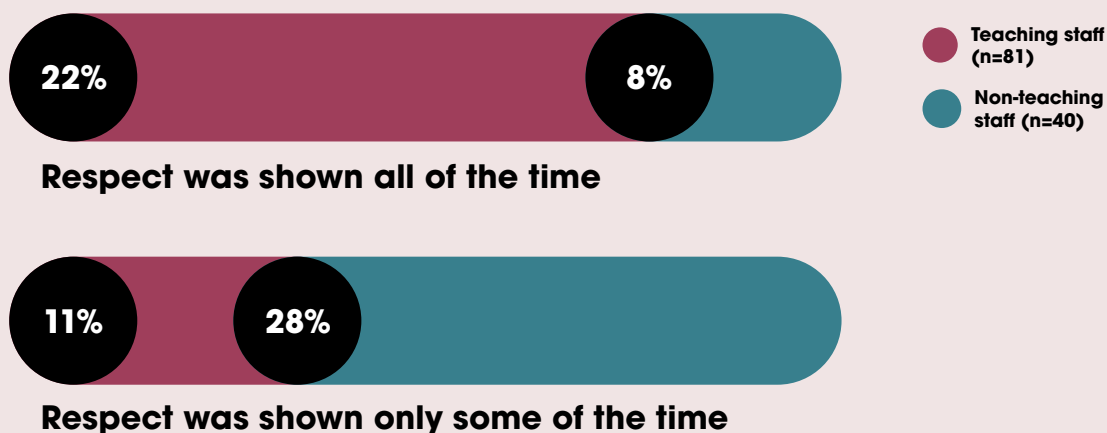
Professional respect of people's roles is lacking especially when advice is given that does not align with 'how it's always been'. Obvious divide between professional staff and teaching staff, by management.

Employees in non-teaching roles also described feeling that their work was not always acknowledged by school leadership. They also described a sense of exclusion reinforced by a perception that the school's priorities and professional development opportunities centred around teaching, ignoring other critical roles that supported the running of the school:

It wasn't until a couple of years ago that they started including professional staff [on staff honours boards]. This is people who've been here for 10 years, 15 years, 20 years ... no support staff was ever put up there. ... I don't give a toss whether my name's up there or not, but it's just that attitude of holding the academics high up when in fact there's professional staff doing a great job in school to support the students as well.

Similar perceptions of a divide between teaching and non-teaching staff were evident in survey responses. When asked whether staff treated each other with respect, 22% of teaching staff respondents indicated that respectful interactions occurred all the time, compared to 8% of other staff respondents, such as professional or support staff. Conversely, 28% of non-teaching staff (other staff respondents) felt that respect was shown only some of the time, compared to 11% of teaching staff respondents.⁶¹

Whether staff treated each other with respect



⁶¹ Teaching staff (n=81); other staff (n=40).



When asked whether professional, support, and teaching staff were valued equally, nearly half (45%) of respondents to this question felt staff were valued equally.⁶² However, an almost similar proportion (42%) did not feel these roles were equally valued.⁶³

One submission referred to a difference in culture between teaching and non-teaching staff and inequalities created by more limited opportunities being available for non-teaching staff, such as professional development days, and disparities in pay and leave benefits compared to teachers. Other employees reflected on how these divisions could have a negative impact on morale and the sense of collegiality within the school. As one person observed:

I find with a big school and a big staff, there are times when you walk past teaching staff in the yard and they don't even make eye contact, there needs to be that sense of 'we're in it together' and just acknowledge each other professionally.

The Review heard there was a need to improve collaboration and shared understanding across teaching and non-teaching departments to reduce these cultural barriers and create a more cohesive and equitable workplace.

Communication and cohesion between different staff groups—particularly between teaching and professional/support staff—could be strengthened to enhance overall unity and workplace satisfaction.

10.1.4 How expansion outpaced culture

Organisational culture research suggests that rapid growth without deliberate attention to cultural maintenance can erode shared assumptions and values, particularly where legacy norms are not adapted to new organisational realities.⁶⁴ Some described it as a sense of cultural drift as the school had expanded, and a sense that the culture had not grown with the school:

Decades behind what was expected. The culture and systems are inflexible and established to support a much smaller school. The culture has not grown with the school.

Employees who had been at the school for many years felt that as the school had grown, there was less connectedness or shared purpose among staff:

62 21% (23 respondents) strongly agreed; 24% (26 respondents) somewhat agreed (n=110).

63 24% (26 respondents) somewhat disagreed; 18% (20 respondents) strongly disagreed (n=110).

64 Schein (n 1): framework identifies how rapid organisational growth can destabilise embedded cultural assumptions where leadership does not actively manage cultural adaptation.



I think as we've grown, we've lost some of the connectedness that we had within the staff body, and I feel for new staff as they try to navigate the school and the school community.

Some employees referred to a sense of cultural stagnation in some parts of the school, with a workplace culture 'influenced by tradition, not always seeking improvement', a culture of not questioning and maintaining the status quo:

The greatest strengths and weaknesses that the school has is that staff have been here for aeons. ... a lot of people say, 'Well, we've always done it this way. We're very comfortable. We're just going to roll with what's comfortable.' And that was really obvious when I first came and it was just like, we have it all signed up here, this is a great job. We're not going to slack off on the job, but we are not going to change anything because everybody's really comfortable and there's some good things in that. But also when things need to change, it's very, very difficult to change it.

The culture of the school has not kept pace with the growth of the school in recent years. Old norms of fellowship and looking out for each other have not kept pace with the need for formal, contemporary workplace policy and procedure that is clearly and fairly communicated to all.

Another employee expressed concerns that 'legacy staff', values and systems could potentially impede the school's progress in implementing change, improvements and cultural renewal:

But I think here we've got an embedding of a culture that has existed for well 150 years and hasn't significantly shifted over those years. We have legacy staff and that comes with positivity and wisdom, but it also can come with complacency, lack of progress and refusal to move with the time.

Some saw this as extending to active resistance or backlash to cultural change initiatives, particularly on the part of staff who had been part of the system for a long time. One employee gave the example of some staff being reluctant to enforce the school's new behaviour management framework, resulting in inconsistent application of these policies for students:

So you've got all this cultural change which they kind of don't agree with. Then they're actually being called to account. But again, and this is someone who's been here for a really long time, their children go here. ... a lot of people have more than one connection to the school and it's a long connection. So I do feel that most of the dissatisfaction is people who've been here 10 plus years.



The Review also heard that the school has a culture of moulding new staff to 'become Grammar', rather than valuing diverse contributions. One employee was told when they started working at the school they had to learn 'how to speak our language', implying conforming to the way things were done. Another gave the example of another young staff member,

who was quite forward thinking at the time and progressive, bringing new educational ideas ... and the school was not ready for that, didn't want to know about, didn't want pushing the boundaries.

10.2 Leadership and management practices

Leaders at all levels of the school play a fundamental role in driving a safe, respectful and inclusive culture. Effective leaders model their organisation's values and standards for behaviour and hold individuals to account, irrespective of their seniority or status, for harmful behaviours.

In the context of Ballarat Grammar, leadership encompasses those with influential and powerful decision-making roles, such as Board members, the Principal and senior leadership team, as well as numerous staff in middle management roles who report to them.

In consultations, the role of senior leaders at Ballarat Grammar in influencing the culture of the school was often raised by employees, with some praising examples of positive and proactive leadership they had seen and experienced. Many spoke highly of the Principal's accessible, supportive and genuinely caring leadership style:

He will always acknowledge you. How's things, how's your weekend? How's the family? How's the kids? And you really feel like there's a respect from the school about that and that I've never been questioned if I've had to duck off and one of the kids is sick or anything. Always you've got support that your family comes first. And I think that's one thing that's amazing here.

[The Principal] has relentlessly supported female leaders. He has relentlessly supported teachers getting higher degrees, getting their masters, getting further credentialed, he has relentlessly supported finding ways to accommodate people's needs and interests ... that's what good leaders do, and he's role modelling to other people. You know, you want to build your teams so that they function without you.

Other leaders also received praise for their individual contributions, such as the recent change in leadership at Dart House, which was seen as positive. Overall employees felt that the warm and respectful tone set by the Principal and senior leadership was a key driver of the safe and supportive workplace culture they experienced among staff at the school more broadly:



It's hard to put your finger on sometimes the culture, but it is probably the relationships that you have with certain staff members that go out of their way to try and create an environment that you feel comfortable and safe in ... that's been probably carried on from some of the senior staff that I've had interactions with as well. If there's been moments of my life where there's been issues personally ... There's been immediate support from the school and from senior staff reaching out, offering what they could do to help So those kind of examples ... when it's been tough times, I've felt like support has been there.

The leader over here is quiet, is a very nice person. He is very talented and genuine. He shares information. He's not always the greatest communicator but generally speaking he's authentic.

Staff members are valued, and people in leadership acknowledge the hard work and effort that people make.

Survey respondents had mostly positive views on how effective school leaders were in promoting and encouraging a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace culture with nearly two thirds of respondents feeling that people in leadership roles did this all or most of the time.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, just under one third found leaders' efforts in fostering a positive workplace culture less effective in practice, with 29%⁶⁶ indicating they found this effective only some of the time.

Employees also spoke about the school leadership adopting a 'compassion-first approach', with the Principal having 'a reputation as being Mr. Nice guy'. However, some noted that this could be both a strength and a potential weakness, where an overly compassionate approach could result in poor performance or behaviour being inadequately addressed, which could impact negatively on other staff:

Sometimes leadership are too kind and compassionate and tolerates incompetence, which puts pressure on other hard-working staff.

10.2.1 Line management capability and accountability

However, the Review also heard that individual strengths in leadership were constrained by a number of structural factors within the school. In consultations, a recurring theme for employees was a lack of a clear organisational structure or clarity around leadership roles, and multiple and unclear reporting lines. Some employees observed they had never seen the school's organisational chart:

65 All of the time—30% (38 respondents); most of the time—34% (42 respondents) (n=125).

66 36 respondents (n=125).



One of the things that I don't have, or I haven't seen since I've been here for [several] years is [an] organisational flow chart... I do wonder whether those processes or those structures maybe weren't there or maybe weren't robust or maybe weren't defined enough.

Others said that a lack of a clear hierarchical structure and unclear procedures left staff not knowing who to speak to about different issues:

I find the staff reporting structure and Committee/Management Structure to be confusing and difficult to follow. It feels like often the same people sit in the various groups and actions/decisions move between these groups. At times you are unsure where requests or recommendations should go for endorsement.

Others spoke about what they perceived as a decline in standards over time, characterised by a lack of accountability. One employee expressed frustration with school leaders who accepted ongoing poor performance, and appeared unwilling to address issues with the quality of staff or the way people did their work:

The major shift in culture or in practices is like the school has had such strong sense of community... But I feel like still we are people, we are an organisation, trust needs to be paired up with accountability, with consequences, with quality control. ... I think the drop in standards, not only in what we do as staff but also in students, once again, there's no accountability ... There's no genuine interest of doing the best thing for the kids. They just want their job to be done and easily done. That's their interest, that's their focus. That's not like 'it hasn't been working. Let's see, let's go upskill, let's go and look at other schools. Maybe we can do it differently'.

Other employees observed that the confusion about who staff should report concerns to created a risk of things being missed or falling through the gaps where there were unclear or overlapping accountabilities:

In part we have addressed this with a renewed organisational chart, but there was genuinely so much confusion about ... who do I tell? And one of the biggest risk factors is sometimes in a person's lack of knowledge of who to tell or who to report something to. They would send an e-mail and literally they would address it to seven people. And what do you reckon happened? Cause all of those seven people are going 'Well. So it's not, it's not really me'.

The Review also heard concerns that the school's middle management structures were not sufficient for its size and complexity, with some leaders at this level becoming overburdened and feeling overwhelmed. Employees also perceived that people had been put in roles created around the individual, rather than with a view to the overall organisational structure or needs:



It became ... seemingly apparent to me that lots of people had gone into positions that had been created around the person rather than the structure and the need of the school.

Another structural issue frequently identified was that existing reporting structures over-emphasised the role of the Principal, highlighting 'far too many direct reports' without adequate intermediate management structures. Research on distributed leadership in schools has shown that where middle management capability is not developed alongside organisational growth, accountability gaps emerge and decision-making becomes over-centralised.⁶⁷ Some saw this over-centralisation of decision-making and authority as a potential risk, placing too many demands on the Principal, and creating opportunities for staff to bypass more appropriate channels:

Literally everyone's PD [position description] says ultimately all roles report to the headmaster ... And I think it was only maybe three years ago that [the Principal] stopped doing everyone's annual reviews ... I mean, he's a smart man, but that's not possible. And so things are going to get missed ... And going back to the structure, if everyone's reporting into [the Principal] and he then puts that large amount of trust on those people to be making those decisions, nobody's checking because there's only so much that he can do. We've got a system of siloing where people, if they screw up, they can conceal it rather than go through the right channels.

Some observed that the accessibility and availability of the Principal and senior staff blurred reporting lines and undermined the authority of leaders at other levels. The Review heard from both employees and parents who felt that the school's senior staff were 'way too available', with parents having their direct mobile numbers. The Review heard that some parents would go directly to the Principal to raise concerns, bypassing the usual reporting lines.

For some employees the direct involvement of the Principal in matters which should have been dealt with at a lower level signalled a lack of trust. In some cases, employees who were the subject of complaints from parents felt that they lacked the support of the school. In other cases, parents who did not receive the response they wanted from the Principal, were left with nowhere to escalate their concerns and a sense that their issue remained unresolved.

There's too many meetings where everyone has to be involved and it's almost like they have to have a consensus to make a decision. [We had a relatively minor decision] that went all the way to [the Principal] the other day. Seriously, I'm sure he's got bigger things to do than that. ... We need processes in place that aren't there. We need to know, okay, this is what we do.

The Fenner Review made recommendations in relation to Ballarat Grammar's wellbeing structures and reporting lines, and raised concerns about the overall management structure of the school. This included the number of direct reports to the Principal and lack of a single senior leadership team with oversight of all aspects of the school's operations.

⁶⁷ Alma Harris, 'Leading or Misleading? Distributed Leadership and School Improvement' (2004) 32(1) *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 11, 259-63.



The Fenner Review also referred to staff concerns that structures and processes had not kept up with the growth of the school, with changes made or positions added to meet a specific need, without adequately considering how they fit into the overall structure. The Fenner Review suggested that the Board consider a management review, with a view to simplifying and rationalising leadership structures, to ensure more effective oversight.

As noted in Chapter 7, the school has recently reviewed its organisational structure, introducing new leadership roles and reporting lines. The Review was told that the restructure is intended to address the historical lack of clarity in relation to reporting lines throughout the school, including some that were overlapping or duplicative, and respond to issues raised by the Fenner Review, VRQA and the Time And Teaching Practice Project (TAPP).

The new structure reduces the number of roles directly reporting to the Principal. Instead, the Heads of School, Boarding, and the new Teaching and Learning, Student Wellbeing and Care, and Co-curricular and Student Experience, all report to the new Deputy Principal role. The Review was told that the new leadership positions are intended to enable clearer escalation points by simplifying and clarifying reporting structures, while providing for time for coaching and mentoring by those in positions of responsibility.

In addition to unclear reporting lines, employees in consultations also spoke about leadership roles within the school lacking clear job descriptions, tenure or accountability. Employees felt that it was not always clear what roles people were doing and what fell within their 'basket' of responsibilities, and that there were 'no regular professional reviews for those in leadership.'

Several employees felt that leadership opportunities were tied to 'doing your time' at Grammar, particularly in boarding. Others voiced concern that internal appointments of people to roles without the right skills and capability had undermined trust in leadership at the school, although some expressed hope that the new leadership positions would be filled externally by people who were outside of the 'inner circle.'

Appointments of internal staff to leadership positions are made despite limited experience across the wider school context and a lack of relevant professional studies or formal leadership training. This has contributed to perceptions of unpreparedness and, in some cases, undermined staff confidence in leadership decisions. These perceptions are seen as contributing to declining morale and a reduced sense of trust in leadership.

Some suggested there should be more clarity and transparency in relation to appointment processes, procedures and roles, so people understood where each role fit into the broader structure, with greater visibility around the role descriptions, tenure and performance review processes for people in leadership roles—particularly senior leaders. This needed to be accompanied by clear performance indicators or measures for leadership roles, and standards to which leaders are held accountable, particularly given the leadership failures which had been found to occur in boarding.



10.2.2 Consistency, accountability and perceptions of favouritism

In consultations, employees highlighted inconsistencies in leadership approaches and decision-making, often linked to the emphasis on 'relational culture' at the expense of accountability and clear standards. Some described leadership at the school as 'reactive rather than proactive', with staff left feeling unsettled by inconsistent decision-making.

As noted above, the Review heard that the school has historically prioritised relationships as part of its compassionate and community-oriented approach, but that this has sometimes prevented difficult conversations, with issues being 'smoothed over' rather than communicated transparently.

Some felt leaders were reluctant to address poor performance or disrespectful behaviour, choosing compassion or 'niceness' over making tough decisions. This could create uncertainty and frustration for staff, students and families.

We've probably wrapped up incompetence in a ribbon of compassion or kindness, in that we treat people too kindly in some situations and it covers up for some incompetence.

Over several years I have experienced the same staff members consistently not meeting professional teaching and learning standards and nothing has changed and conversations to these staff members have not occurred. This causes divisions within faculties. Some staff do all the work in professional learning and planning and assessment whilst others cannot update their pages and don't follow curriculum. No accountability because they are a 'good guy'.

Employees also highlighted the inconsistent application of policies and standards, particularly around student behaviour and interactions with parents, noting that consequences were not always proportionate to the incidents:

Some of the students with behavioural issues ... we've taken that relationship building, giving them more chances than they probably deserved, tolerated more than we probably should have done. And we built that culture of, I suppose, blurring boundaries between ... what is acceptable, what is not acceptable."

Discipline and consequences do not necessarily equate to the severity of the actions by the students, and this is not a transparent process, especially between day and boarding students.

Others similarly observed that while policies may appear clear on paper, they were not always clear in practice, and their enforcement could vary depending on the interpretation of individual teachers, and whether there was fear of pushback from parents:



Policies are not implemented consistently. If parents aren't happy then the school will redact the consequence. Behaviour is ignored even after multiple offences.

These inconsistent approaches left employees uncertain about appropriate responses and feeling that they may not be supported for upholding standards, undermining confidence in school-wide systems and processes. As discussed in Chapter 7, Ballarat Grammar has taken positive steps to improve its behavioural standards framework for students and develop policies which are more transparent, consistent and equitable and which set clear expectations. This needs to be paired with consistent accountability from every level of leadership.

Employee perceptions revealed a consistent theme of favouritism and lack of consistent standards which have shaped their experiences of the culture at Ballarat Grammar. For some this has resulted in a loss of trust and diminished respect for leadership, and disillusionment with the prospect of a fair and equitable workplace.

The Review heard from current and former employees who spoke about their perceptions of favouritism, nepotism and preferential treatment in relation to appointments and promotions, workplace processes and addressing disrespectful or harmful behaviour, and in interactions with parents and students. Preferential treatment was often attributed to legacy ties or longstanding relationships or connections to the school, donations and family wealth, or the 'relational culture' of the school's leadership.

Several employees spoke about a 'trusted circle' or 'clique' within the school's leadership, preserved through relationships. For many this shaped access to career advancement and opportunities:

That circle of trust has been created over a long period of time and through people that are 'Grammar' is the way I would describe it, and have proved themselves to be 'Grammar', kind of on the same team.

A formal merit-based selection process, criteria, interview process and application or external recruiting process applies for appointments to more senior positions. However, some employees perceived that merit-based selection processes for appointments, promotions, or leadership opportunities were not always applied or visible. Leadership positions were seen to be given to individuals who had been part of the school for a long time and had 'proven' they were part of the Grammar team, rather than based on capability or performance.

Recently there's been some roles ... and it's clear that there's certain people that a role is being designed for who are going to get the role. And so even though there might be a process around interviewing, [it] feels like it's kind of a foregone conclusion ... It's communicated that there's a process and this consultation and we need this role ... but then all of a sudden a role will just pop out of nowhere. And we saw that with our two co-heads of the school ... It was just announced one day, 'Oh, a person's also doing this role now', or 'We've created this new layer of leadership under the headmaster' that wasn't really justified in any sense. And it felt like the jobs were just created for those people [for] their progression.

Acting roles tend to transition directly into permanent positions, with leadership commonly stating that 'we have searched the world, and the best person for the role is already here.' While internal appointments can offer continuity, the lack of external recruitment has led to a shortage of fresh ideas and perspectives.

Employees felt that staff who had shown their loyalty and commitment by doing the 'hard yards in boarding' were tapped on the shoulder for leadership positions, rather than these appointments being advertised and based on talent or the right skillsets for the role. One employee observed that this could risk perpetuating elements of the 'toxic' culture in boarding:

Unfortunately, the culture of boarding is so incredibly toxic, a lot of these staff end up in middle management, they don't have the right skillset and then their behaviours and their culture really continues into the day school.

The Review received Ballarat Grammar's Recruitment & Selection Policy, which aims to provide a 'consistent recruitment and selection process' applying principles of 'merit-based selection, equity, diversity and procedural fairness'. It sets out a process covering procedures for position descriptions, advertising vacancies, interviews, assessments and screening, although the status of this policy is unclear.⁶⁸ Ballarat Grammar advised that over the past four years almost all roles have been advertised with formal recruitment practices in place. Despite this, employees frequently spoke of their perceptions of an 'ingrained' culture of nepotism in hiring decisions, as well as intertwined personal and professional networks and informal hierarchies that operated at the school, in which some employees were seen as more valued than others:

Nepotistic on the whole. Employing 'mates' to director positions that should have been advertised externally. ... Spouses having jobs created for them or employed without advertising. Jobs given to people (internal) who have no experience in that role. Preference given to people of the 'Grammar family': Ex-students, family members of current staff, parents.

⁶⁸ The version reviewed by the Review is dated August 2025, but the document code field is incomplete, and no original approval date is recorded.



Survey responses were similarly mixed. When asked whether all staff were treated with equal respect, regardless of their role, just over half of respondents responded positively, with about 23%⁶⁹ strongly agreeing that staff were treated with equal respect, and 33%⁷⁰ somewhat agreeing. However, 21%⁷¹ somewhat disagreed and 16%⁷² strongly disagreed, suggesting that nearly two in five respondents felt there was unequal respect across roles.

Survey results also showed a range of views on whether policies and expectations were applied consistently to all staff. About two in five respondents felt there was consistency, with 15%⁷³ of respondents strongly agreeing that policies were consistently applied and 24%⁷⁴ somewhat agreeing. In contrast, half of respondents somewhat disagreed⁷⁵ or strongly disagreed,⁷⁶ indicating notable concern about unequal or inconsistent application of workplace policies and expectations.

Some employees felt there were no clear standards or processes for holding people to account for their behaviour, referring to examples of some staff who felt they were able to act with impunity, including engaging in unprofessional, bullying or other harmful behaviour. As one employee described, 'they are the golden ones, who are protected and can't be held accountable'.

I have seen people that have been kept at positions because they're friends with someone else. And that they feel protected and that doesn't help their behaviour.

Another employee described this ingrained favouritism as 'very much a culture of who you knew, what you're willing to gloss over, what you know', which made them feel unsafe about speaking up.

Survey results also indicated mixed perceptions regarding the fairness and consistency of actions taken against harmful behaviour, regardless of seniority or status: 18%⁷⁷ of respondents felt that fair and reasonable action was taken all of the time, and 25%⁷⁸ believed this occurred most of the time. However, another 28%⁷⁹ felt this only happened some of the time, while 17%⁸⁰ said fair action was taken only rarely. This suggests nearly half of respondents viewed accountability as inconsistent when addressing harmful behaviours within the workplace.

Employees also described similar patterns in their interactions with parents and students, where some families appeared to receive preferential treatment based on donations, family connections, or legacy status, which could influence decision-making or accountability.

69 25 respondents (n=110).

70 36 respondents (n=110).

71 23 respondents (n=110).

72 18 respondents (n=110).

73 17 respondents (n=109).

74 26 respondents (n=109).

75 32% (35 respondents) (n=109).

76 18% (20 respondents) (n=109).

77 22 respondents (n=125).

78 31 respondents (n=125).

79 35 respondents (n=125).

80 21 respondents (n=125).



Families that have social status within our community ... their ride is made easier, decisions are reversed to maybe make their child's experience here easier so people have some more sway maybe than others based on their status within our community or their associations with the school.

Others emphasised the need for fairness, accountability, and collective support:

I still think the culture is good, it just needs to be more about supporting each other and being accountable for mistakes, rather than patching over errors and protecting people.

Research has shown that favouritism shown by school leaders can reduce staff motivation, job satisfaction, performance and organisational commitment, while increasing their stress.⁸¹ The Review heard from some employees who described their frustration at the lack of fairness inherent in this approach, with some describing feeling unmotivated to pursue leadership ambitions, and that it had eroded confidence in leadership at the school.

As an educator with leadership ambitions, I have never been formally reviewed or even asked about my career goals. I personally stopped applying for leadership positions when it became clear that an inner network largely controlled appointments.

Cumulatively, these factors have consequences for employee morale, professional relationships and workplace cohesion and staff wellbeing, as well as the school's ability to attract and retain capable, motivated staff. This highlights the need for more transparent, merit-based processes, along with clearly communicated behavioural standards to rebuild trust and reinforce accountability.

10.2.3 Change management and communication

Throughout the Review the issue of communication between Ballarat Grammar's leadership and its staff was a strong focus in consultations with employees, and played a key role in influencing their experience of the workplace culture and perceptions of trust.

The survey findings suggested that while most staff felt informed and supported, there were issues around consistency of internal communications. While some employees felt communication from school leadership was 'generally open and informative', with 'visible effort to consult and engage staff in key decisions', this view did not appear to be widely shared. In particular, a perceived lack of transparency around organisational restructuring and role changes created uncertainty and stress for some. Employees repeatedly raised concerns about a lack of transparency from school leadership, inconsistent messaging, and a lack of consultation with staff during periods of change within the school.

⁸¹ Abidin Dağlı and Zuhal Akyol, 'The Relationship between Favouritism Behaviours of Secondary School Administrators and Organizational Commitment of the Teachers' (2019) 7(7) *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 35, 45.



A number of employees described a culture of ‘withholding information’, and that information was selectively shared within an ‘inner circle’ of senior leaders, which created a sense of exclusivity and division between leadership and the broader workforce:

Over the years a culture of silencing, ostracism and favouritism was apparent. This led to feelings of being excluded, undervalued and marginalised ... Staff were not invited to discuss any issues and if they did - this was done ‘behind doors’ and with several senior staff members in place, A distinct culture of mistrust and lack of respect had developed.

The school has introduced measures over time to facilitate staff communication. In 2019, it established ‘Agoras’, open forum meetings enabling staff to discuss thoughts and concerns across a range of issues. Since 2023, it has held Agoras and listening circles at least twice a year, open to all employees, to support open communication between staff and the school. In the context of the TAPP changes which commenced in 2026, consultation with staff during the course of the previous year took the form of meetings, workshops, briefings, presentations, professional learning sessions and a survey to capture early feedback.⁸²

Despite this, employees described instances where they felt that important information was kept from staff or poorly communicated, resulting in confusion and a lack of trust. This was particularly the case following the Dart House incidents, where employees felt they were ‘left in the dark’ about the outcomes of decision-making processes and the school’s response. The school’s capacity to manage and share information regarding these incidents was constrained by the Child Safe Standards framework and the limited notice it received from media outlets. Employee comments highlighted that this lack of information created an atmosphere of speculation and gossip, and a sense that such sensitive matters were shared publicly rather than communicated internally first.

During the past year’s events, a significant amount of information shared with staff was on a need-to-know basis. This led to gossip and staff finding out information from the press rather than from the school. The leadership team are very cliquey and keeps information to themselves.

The school has published a 5-year Strategic Plan, and updates on its progress are provided at staff days. However, some employees felt there was no clear communication about the school’s strategic direction and a lack of a clear and shared vision, which compounded the uncertainty felt by some employees during periods of organisational change.

The school does not have a strategic plan, so everything is disconnected and ad hoc and without a vision of where the school is headed - or one they would share with the general staff.

Employees said they felt there was no meaningful consultation with staff around the recent changes to the leadership structure, or that consultation did not go far enough. Some also saw a need for better communication across leadership teams, as well as between administrative and teaching teams within the school.

⁸² Timeline of TAPP Communication and Consultation sessions provided to Intersection by the School.



I feel that things are being decided that are not being consulted on anymore. I feel that there's a lot of ... 'we're doing this. This is what's happening', and there's not a lot of consultation, which gets people's backs up ...

In their survey responses, employees raised wider concerns about internal communications within the school often being 'late and vague', and that communication gaps, inconsistent and last minute messaging, and 'too much and too many different avenues' for delivering communications, created unnecessary stress for staff, disrupted planning and in some cases undermined their authority and meant they felt unable to do their job properly:

There are staff in senior leadership positions that use a machine-gun approach to messaging. Spraying a rapid fire of conscious thoughts that change or contradict over a short period of time. It sometimes seems like we don't get the whole picture with honesty and transparency. This may be related to privacy or other reasons for non-disclosure however it means that we never feel that we fully understand why decisions are made/not made.

Similar patterns appeared in responses about whether important updates were communicated in a timely manner, with a majority of respondents indicating they felt that communication was timely.⁸³ However, 20%⁸⁴ somewhat disagreed and 11%⁸⁵ strongly disagreed, comprising a sizeable minority experiencing communication that was delayed or lacking.

When asked whether communication reached all relevant staff, not just select groups, just over half of respondents felt communication was broadly inclusive (19%⁸⁶ strongly agreed; and 35%⁸⁷ somewhat agreed). However, 25%⁸⁸ somewhat disagreed and 13%⁸⁹ strongly disagreed, indicating that more than one-third of respondents perceived gaps in fairness or coverage.

Some employees saw a need to simplify and modernise ways of working given the challenges with structures and the pace of change at the school:

I'd like to see communication channels made more streamlined and consistent, and policy information easier to find and interpret. Continued focus on digital tools, workflows, and clear accountability would help reduce duplication.

83 25% (28 respondents) strongly agreed; and 35% (39 respondents) somewhat agreed (n=110).

84 22 respondents (n=110).

85 12 respondents (n=110).

86 21 respondents (n=110).

87 39 respondents (n=110).

88 28 respondents (n=110).

89 14 respondents (n=110).



There were also concerns about lack of transparency and communication around decision-making processes for internal appointments and recruitment processes. Some employees said they received insufficient feedback after applying for roles, suggesting that positions were filled by people who were tapped on the shoulder informally.

One thing that I have found is a massive difference from previous employment to here is that there's not a lot of feedback when you don't get a role. ... You walk away going, well, what do I need to do?

Just over one-third of respondents (33%⁹⁰) either strongly or somewhat agreed that decisions affecting staff were made transparently and fairly. However, more respondents expressed concern about this issue, with 35%⁹¹ somewhat disagreeing and 17%⁹² strongly disagreeing.

Overwhelmingly employee perceptions point to a need for more transparent communication by school leadership with the workforce. This will be particularly significant in implementing cultural reforms to ensure buy-in from the school community as a whole. Building trust needs a consistent effort from leadership to involve staff meaningfully in decisions that affect their work, and ensuring information flows openly across all levels and roles within the school.

10.3 Workload, capability and support

10.3.1 Role clarity, resourcing and sustainability

While some employees felt that the school's policies and established processes provided 'structure and clarity', others in consultations spoke about challenges they faced due to a lack of clarity around both processes and procedures, and the parameters of their roles, and the impact this had on the sustainability of their workload.

One employee described the school's systems as 'disorganised', with newer staff particularly feeling unclear about their own responsibilities as well as reporting lines. Another employee observed:

I feel that the school really suffers from a lack of process in the work that we do on a day-to-day basis and procedures. And I feel that that unintentionally puts a lot of pressure on people within the organisation.

90 36 respondents (n=110).

91 39 respondents (n=110).

92 19 respondents (n=110).



Some spoke of staff wearing ‘too many hats’, with too many responsibilities spread too thin:

They've got too many different positions. We've got some assistant heads here that are part-time. ... All these people do a great job, but I'm sorry, when you are part-time working three days a week and you are [carrying multiple leadership and teaching responsibilities at the same time]? Doesn't work.

The school's Annual Review Guidelines provide for a review cycle of continuous feedback over 12 months with a year end review, however some employees said they had never had a formal review, or felt that performance management was done in an ad hoc way. Some employees suggested there was a need for clear KPIs for employees across all roles, ‘so that if you don't “meet your expectations” there is a benchmark for why’ rather than it being based on a personal opinion. It was felt there needed to be professional development ‘for all staff which is not selecting the same people for significant growth, transparent recruitment processes (not nepotism based) and clear job descriptions so people understand and can be proud of their roles’.

The Review also heard from employees across a range of teaching and non-teaching roles about the increasing demands being placed on them or others without sufficient support or resourcing. One employee felt the school was overextending by offering too many programs:

I see a risk in that we probably take on too much ... We have such a wide range of subject offerings. We have such a wide range of sports offerings, music offerings ... and we probably are doing a lot of things in a really mediocre way, in an under-resourced way because we're doing too much. ... You can't afford to do it, but you try to do what you can with what you can and therefore you might be overloading staff, because they're pushed and pulled in all directions and then trying to meet all these needs.

Teaching staff spoke about being severely under-resourced supporting students with diverse needs. One referred to having a single teacher's assistant for over 100 students, while another observed:

We talk so much about inclusion, but as our numbers increase, the needs of students and demands of parents increase, and we have seen minimal growth in IEA support hours, intervention and extension programs. Placing enormous stress and angst on homeroom teachers.

Contrary to perceptions, the school's investment in these roles has risen sharply in absolute terms. Total salary spending on inclusive education and wellbeing staff, including on-costs, increased by over 180%. That increase and the experience staff describe are not contradictory. The data records expenditure, not the ratio of support staff to students or the support hours available in the classroom, which is what teaching staff spoke to. Rising salary costs can reflect award wage increases as much as



additional hours, and the growth in the number and complexity of students requiring support may have outpaced even this level of investment. The finding concerns whether resourcing kept pace with need, and the staff working directly with these students reported that it had not.

The Review also heard about a lack of clarity for education support roles. The availability of position descriptions, which the school provides, does not necessarily translate into a lived experience of role clarity for staff. Employees spoke about occasions where staff with 'no job descriptions' took on large workloads supporting students, often with high needs. A recurring concern was that these roles were undervalued, with one employee observing that 'education support staff are all working way below the pay below state level'.

The Review heard that a combination of unclear roles and inadequate resourcing has increased stress and created workload expectations and responsibilities for some employees that have become unsustainable. Research has established a direct link between role ambiguity, excessive workload demands and teacher burnout, with these factors among the strongest predictors of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation in educational settings.⁹³

Recent national studies also show that teacher burnout in Australian schools is widespread, with rates of depression, anxiety and stress higher than the general population. A nationally representative survey by the Black Dog Institute, UNSW Sydney, in 2023 of more than 4000 teachers revealed that around three quarters (75.6%) reported feeling 'burned out from my work' often or all the time, and nearly half (46.8%) were considering leaving the profession within 12 months (an increase from 14% in 2021).⁹⁴

High workloads appeared to be a key driver, with approximately 70% of teachers surveyed describing their workload as largely or completely unmanageable. The majority reported a teacher shortage in their school (76.9%). The same survey also found that 60% of teacher absences in the previous month were due to mental health or emotional problems.⁹⁵

A 2025 study of nearly 5,000 primary and secondary teachers found that 90% reported moderate to extremely severe stress levels, while more than two-thirds experienced moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression and anxiety at rates three times the national norm.⁹⁶

Consistently, a smaller 2021 study of 749 Australian teachers showed that over half of the sample reported being very or extremely stressed and were considering leaving the profession, with early career teachers, primary teachers, and teachers working in rural and remote areas reporting the highest stress and burnout levels.⁹⁷

Other employees also felt the lack of clarity and resourcing signalled a lack of coordination and inefficiency across the school's operations more broadly, and that these factors undermined the school's ability to function cohesively.

93 Einar M Skaalvik and Sidsel Skaalvik, 'Dimensions of Teacher Burnout: Relations with Potential Stressors at School' (2017) 20(4) *Social Psychology of Education* 775, 788.

94 Black Dog Institute, National Teacher Survey – Summary (Preliminary Data) (February 2023) <www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/National-Teacher-Survey_Summary_FEB_2023_final.pdf>; 'Teacher mental health and burnout could halve workforce, new data by Black Dog Institute' (media release, 26 February 2023) <www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/media-releases/teacher-mental-health-and-burnout-could-halve-workforce-new-data-by-black-do>.

95 Black Dog Institute, National Teacher Survey – Summary (Preliminary Data) (February 2023) <www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/National-Teacher-Survey_Summary_FEB_2023_final.pdf>.

96 Helena Granziera et al, 'Teachers' Workload, Turnover Intentions, and Mental Health: Perspectives of Australian Teachers' (2025) 28 *Social Psychology of Education* 149, 157.

97 A Carroll, et al, 'Teacher stress and burnout in Australia: examining the role of intrapersonal and environmental factors' (2022) 25(2-3) *Social Psychology of Education* 441-469.



10.3.2 Impact of growth and complexity on workload

The Review heard from many employees about the impact of the growth of the school, and the corresponding increase in the volume and complexity on what was demanded of them in their roles.

One employee observed that the school has grown from 'a village to a city' but was still 'being managed like a village', with this growth not been matched by appropriate modern policies, procedures and systems. As one employee observed, the 'size of school has grown too rapidly and staffing and resourcing has not kept pace'.

Others felt this growth had impacted on the quality of the school's offerings: 'Trying to do too many things at once as a school, leaving the students last on the priority list'.

They've grown so fast that they are still stuck in being a school of 800 students and now we've got over 2000 and nothing has evolved with it. Ways of working procedures, processes, nothing has evolved with it and the culture has stayed where it was.

The Review heard that the additional administrative burdens of compliance requirements across the multiple areas of operation within the school (boarding school, kindergarten, VET programs, various businesses) created 'overwhelming' demands on some staff, without adequate support or training to manage this range of matters. As one employee observed, 'the absence of clear and consistent organisational systems and processes often leaves staff without adequate professional support in their teaching practice'.

We try and tick a lot of boxes, but unfortunately that's because of big organisations mandating things on schools. There is limited time left to concentrate on the things that matter - The workplace, the people in the environment, but most importantly, the students! I feel like they are last on the list of priority, which shouldn't be the case.

Teachers spoke about the challenges of keeping up with pastoral and administrative duties while maintaining their focus on teaching:

You're meant to be teaching at the same time, so you're trying to teach a lesson, but you're trying to get kids to fill out an incident report and then you find out from the incident report that there's four other students involved... and you're conscious because the bell's about to go at 3:20 and you want to find out what's happening before the kids go home to their parents. So yeah, you just find that it is just so stressful.

Employees felt that the increasing complexity and volume of workloads was increasingly having a negative impact on work-life balance. Workload stress is a significant issue in the education sector and has been identified as a key source of stress for teachers and associated with poorer mental health.⁹⁸

98 H Granziera et al, 'Teachers' Workload, Turnover Intentions, and Mental Health: Perspectives of Australian Teachers' (2025) 28 *Social Psychology of Education* 149.



According to Australian Teacher Workforce Data in 2023, full-time school classroom teachers reported working long hours during school term (median of 50 hours per week). From 2019-2023, workload, work-life balance and work-related stress were consistently the top three reasons cited by teachers intending to leave the profession.⁹⁹ While research has highlighted that teachers are generally satisfied with their 'core' teaching workload (e.g., delivering lessons and interacting with students), the proportion of working hours dedicated to 'non-core' tasks (e.g., paperwork and administrative tasks, compliance requirements, excessive data collection or non-essential professional development) has increased significantly in recent years, contributing to a sense of feeling overburdened.¹⁰⁰

The Review heard that the high daily workload of teachers often left little downtime for personal wellbeing, planning or collaboration between colleagues, limiting opportunities for professional growth, peer-led problem-solving or teamwork approaches.

It can feel that almost on a weekly basis more is being asked but nothing is being taken away. There is very little work/life balance.

There is little to no downtime during an average day for a teacher. This leads to essentially no time for collaboration with colleagues as everyone is also so busy.

While some employees praised the 'family-oriented' culture of the school, not everyone shared this view, with some staff experiencing limited flexibility in seeking part-time work arrangements, which particularly affected parents. Employees also highlighted a culture of 'expectation that staff put the school first as a priority in their lives', which contributed to work/life imbalance and an unsustainable environment.

10.3.3 Professional learning, development and support

The Review heard mixed views about the level of professional development and support for employees. Some felt strongly that staff professional learning was valued at the school, there were good options for external development opportunities, and that the 'PL [professional learning] program is delivered well'.

Staff are supported to build capability across a wide range of areas. As the school continues to grow, the focus on consistency and shared understanding across departments remains a key strength.

However, others felt that professional learning and career development opportunities were lacking, particularly for employees in non-teaching roles:

⁹⁹ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Australian Teacher Workforce Data, National Trends: Teacher Workforce (June 2025 ed, 2019-2023) <www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/atwd-reports/national-trends-teacher-workforce-jun2025/>.

¹⁰⁰ See commentary and research cited in H Granziera et al, 'Teachers' Workload, Turnover Intentions, and Mental Health: Perspectives of Australian Teachers' (2025) 28 *Social Psychology of Education* 149.



There appears to be a noticeable gap between the opportunities and training provided to teaching staff compared to non-teaching staff. Non-teaching and administrative employees receive fewer professional development opportunities, which can be discouraging for those wanting to grow within the school.

Survey results similarly revealed a range of views about whether opportunities for professional development and career advancement were allocated fairly and based on merit. Broadly, just over 40% of respondents expressed some level of agreement that opportunities were distributed equitably.¹⁰¹ In contrast, 21%¹⁰² somewhat disagreed and 16%¹⁰³ strongly disagreed, indicating that about one-third of respondents perceived unfairness or bias in how opportunities for professional growth opportunities were assigned.

Employees described how these limited opportunities to develop and grow their career resulted in staff losing motivation and feeling held back in their careers or driving them to seek jobs elsewhere.

In recent years opportunities to engage in external professional development seem to have become rarer, in favour of 'in house' PD. I see little incentive to aspire to leadership roles.

Teaching staff also expressed concerns about what they perceived as training and support gaps for critical student safety and wellbeing aspects of their work. Under the Victorian Child Safe Standards, organisations are required to embed child safety into governance, leadership and culture, and ensure a child safety culture that is understood and implemented by all staff.¹⁰⁴

The Review heard from former employees in interviews and submissions who felt there had been insufficient child safety training during their time at the school, and that historically staff had not been across mandatory reporting requirements.

Accounts from current employees were mixed. Some employees described improvements, with regular compliance training for all staff, while others described gaps which remained in training or support for staff in managing student safety or knowing where to report. Several employees described a perception of 'lack of professional development and training in child safe standards'.

There's very clear protocols, procedures and processes that we must follow and are mandated to follow. Teachers are as well, but ... I don't think they're privy to the right information ... I'm not sure they recognise when they're supposed to when they're not supposed to.

The school has introduced a new Student Safety Framework in the past year, which requires induction training for all new staff covering student safety policies and codes of conduct, mandatory reporting

101 17% (19 respondents) strongly agreed; 25% (27 respondents) somewhat agreed (n=110).

102 23 respondents (n=110).

103 18 respondents (n=110).

104 Victorian Child Safe Standards, Ministerial Order No. 1359. Standard 2 requires organisations to embed child safety into governance, leadership and culture. Standard 7 requires a child safety culture that is understood and implemented by all staff.



obligations, professional boundaries and recognising abuse or neglect. This is reinforced through annual refresher training that includes updates on relevant legislation, reportable conduct, risk identification, and responding to disclosures or safety concerns, as well as regular engagement of staff on student safety and safeguarding issues through staff meetings, briefings and access to resources.¹⁰⁵

Survey results demonstrated strong awareness among respondents of the school's policies and protocols for ensuring student safety, and broadly positive views on induction and refresher training on student safety. However, perceptions of core student safety training were more varied.

Nearly all respondents (91%) strongly agreed or agreed that they were aware of student safety policies.¹⁰⁶ While more than half (around 57%) of respondents thought related training was effective,¹⁰⁷ a notable portion remained neutral or sceptical about training—just under one third (28%)¹⁰⁸ neither agreed nor disagreed, while 14%¹⁰⁹ disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Almost 80% responded that they received frequent and updated refresher training.¹¹⁰ The survey also asked if staff were made aware of relevant safety protocols on employment at Ballarat Grammar (i.e., induction), with 28%¹¹¹ strongly agreeing and 39%¹¹² agreeing, pointing to a generally positive view of induction processes for safety onboarding.

The Review also heard from some employees that they felt unsupported in their roles without adequate risk management training, or that risk assessments or safety procedures were lacking or difficult to locate for certain student-related activities:

And at any stage in any of my leadership positions, no one has ever sat me down and said ... 'This is what you are responsible for. These are the risks that you have to manage and this is what you have to do and this is how often you have to do it. And here's some training.' It was all a bit like, 'oh, you'll just learn it on the job'.

Survey respondents were also asked whether they received the information and support required to do their job well: 21%¹¹³ strongly agreed and 42%¹¹⁴ somewhat agreed, indicating about two-thirds of respondents felt adequately informed and supported. In contrast, nearly one-third of respondents perceived gaps in communication or job-related support.¹¹⁵

The Review heard that Ballarat Grammar had undertaken significant work as part of the VRQA Review to review and update its child safety systems, policies and processes. However, there appeared to be

¹⁰⁵ Student Safety Framework (SSS-054) (December 2025).

¹⁰⁶ 38% (37 respondents) strongly agreed; 53% (51 respondents) agreed (n=97).

¹⁰⁷ 43% (42 respondents) agreed; 14% (14 respondents) strongly agreed (n=97).

¹⁰⁸ 27 respondents (n=97).

¹⁰⁹ 14 respondents (n=97).

¹¹⁰ 29% (28 respondents) strongly agreed they received refresher training; 49% (48 respondents) agreed (n=97).

¹¹¹ 27 respondents (n=97).

¹¹² 38 respondents (n=97).

¹¹³ 23 respondents (n=110).

¹¹⁴ 46 respondents (n=110).

¹¹⁵ 23% (25 respondents) somewhat disagreed; 8% (9 respondents) strongly disagreed (n=110).



significant gaps remaining in their implementation and employees' understanding of what they required, with one employee observing, 'Processes and policies can be difficult to find.' Another commented:

Administration has reprimanded staff for not following policy and when access to the policy has been requested so that it can be communicated to staff, it has been discovered that the aforementioned policy is folk-law and does not actually exist.

Teaching staff also spoke about gaps in understanding how to appropriately address harmful behaviour by students. The Review heard that Ballarat Grammar has introduced a new Middle and Senior School behaviour management framework with clear expectations and consequences, including a system where three behaviour reminders for a student result in a 'reset'. However, employees said that implementation of the framework has been inconsistent, with some teachers reluctant to issue behaviour reminders due to fear of being 'the bad guy' or concerns about backlash from parents.

Teachers were like, just tell me how to punish them. ... Well, it's actually not about that. It's actually setting really clear behaviour expectations for everybody first and teaching that to them and then going through with a behaviour through that if we need to ... And so it is really clear for everybody, but it's just whether people are choosing to engage with that or not.

Findings from the survey reflected a degree of confidence in policies and processes around student behaviour management, together with concerns about their fairness, effectiveness of consequences, as well as staff support in implementing them.

Regarding whether the school's policies, systems, and processes for managing student behaviour were fit-for-purpose and effective, half of respondents viewed these systems positively.¹¹⁶ However, almost the same proportion expressed doubt or were neutral about them.¹¹⁷

In terms of views on repercussions for students engaging in harmful behaviour, only one quarter of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that repercussions were fair and consistent.¹¹⁸ However, 37%¹¹⁹ disagreed and 14%¹²⁰ strongly disagreed, highlighting relatively widespread perceptions of inconsistency in disciplinary responses.

Similarly, regarding consequences for students engaging in serious misconduct, less than one quarter felt they were appropriate and effective in stopping the behaviour,¹²¹ while closer to half of respondents felt they were not.¹²² Respondents also had mixed views on whether staff were adequately supported in managing harmful behaviour. Only around one third felt support was adequate,¹²³ and around the same proportion felt it was not.¹²⁴

116 12% (12 respondents) strongly agreed; 38% (37 respondents) agreed (n=96).

117 21% (20 respondents) disagreed; 2% (2 respondents) strongly disagreed; 22% (21 respondents) neither agreed nor disagreed (n=96).

118 4% (or 4 respondents) strongly agreed; 21% (or 20 respondents) agreed (n=97).

119 36 respondents (n=97).

120 14 respondents (n=97).

121 7% (7 respondents) strongly agreed; 15% (15 respondents) agreed (n=97).

122 30% (29 respondents) disagreed; 15% (15 respondents) strongly disagreed (n=97).

123 5% (5 respondents) strongly agreed; 27% (26 respondents) agreed (n=97).

124 28% (27 respondents) disagreed; 5% (5 respondents) strongly disagreed (n=97).



While some felt that that recent system and policy changes had a positive impact on providing clarity for those in teaching roles, others highlighted the importance of effective implementation and continuous review to ensure new policies did not remain ‘a useless piece of paper’:

There are a list of policies that the school ticks the boxes, but I feel like compliance at the school stops there. They'll build the policy and think that they've done their job, but it's a useless piece of paper unless it is used and used and then tested and then edited and refined. Use the policy and if you think there's something that doesn't work in it, then go back to the drawing board and make a new addition of it that should be driving the behavioural stuff in my opinion.

As noted above, the Review heard that a significant impact of the growth of Ballarat Grammar in recent years¹²⁵ has been an increase in students with additional learning and/or support needs, particularly in the Junior School. Teaching staff in consultations said they felt ill-equipped, unsupported and under-resourced to provide adequate support for students who had additional needs, including students with neurodiversity, diverse learning needs or challenging behaviours:

We are taking on more and more challenging kids, which is occupying a lot of time for staff [particularly in the middle school] ... it's a culture of 'well we'll do what we can for you'. And that's sort of been in the school for a long time and rarely do they understand then the pressure they're putting on the classroom teacher because they've taken on too many of those sorts of kids or high needs kids. And then you've got to try and get IEAs to support them and you're limited.

The enrolments of neurodiverse or children with additional needs has just gone up and up and up massive. So the need for [Inclusive Education Support] seems to be increasing if nothing else...

¹²⁵ Ballarat Grammar's enrolment grew at an average of 4.02% per annum over the decade to 2025. Over the same period, the average annual increase in enrolments across the independent school sector was 2.7%, and across the government and Catholic sectors 0.7 and 0.8% respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools, 2025). The school therefore grew roughly 1.3 percentage points a year faster than the independent sector, around 50% faster in relative terms, and at around five times the rate of the government and Catholic sectors.



10.4 Interactions with parents and the wider community

A common theme for employees in consultations was the way in which their interactions with families of students and the wider community shaped their experience of the school's workplace culture. Many spoke about a shift in this dynamic in recent years, particularly following the COVID lockdowns, when parents had become more involved in their children's schooling through online learning.

Current and former employees who had experienced more collaborative relationships with parents and carers in the past, felt these relationships were now characterised by more 'transactional' interactions, accompanied by a greater sense of entitlement on the part of some parents. Research on barriers to constructive parental involvement in education has identified that where trust between parents and educators breaks down, or where interactions become adversarial rather than collaborative, both staff wellbeing and student outcomes are negatively affected.¹²⁶ Employees also spoke about the way in which this shift had impacted on their individual job satisfaction and wellbeing, as well as implications for trust across the school community more broadly.

10.4.1 Nature and impact of changing parent expectations

The Review heard from employees who had worked at Ballarat Grammar for many years about a perceived increase in challenging student behaviour and parent expectations, post-COVID. Employees felt that attitudes of parents were becoming more demanding and less collaborative, and they experienced more challenges in maintaining positive engagement and relationships with parents:

I feel like the shift has been one of ... when I first began, really supportive parents on the whole, but probably now more of almost like a user pays type scenario with the parents. They're a bit more demanding, ... they push back a fair bit more ... I feel less likely that they're going to support me as a staff member ... I feel like there's more pushback on that, I need to do things as the teacher and that's not my son or daughter's fault that they've misbehaved here and [I as the teacher] need to change my approach.

Several employees referred to a perception that certain families received preferential treatment from the school, with one commenting, 'Sometimes it's a belief that because of family connections to the school, some parents believe have more "right" to complain'. Employees observed that this had led to inconsistent responses from leadership when issues arose, and a reluctance of teachers to take action in response to poor behaviour by students because of fear of parental backlash:

¹²⁶ Garry Hornby and Rayleen Lafaele, 'Barriers to Parental Involvement in Education: An Explanatory Model' (2011) 63(1) *Educational Review* 37, 42-7



Our staff members at the moment they are increasingly scared to send home a behaviour notice for stuff that's happened in class, because if they do, the number of times that the parents will flick it back to a staff member and say, well, my kids said that that didn't happen and that you are targeting her unfairly ... And so staff just go, 'You know what? I don't need that level of accusation'. So they don't send the behaviour notices home.

I feel the exceedingly increasing demands of parents is creating an unsafe environment for Teaching staff. Parents have a higher than normal sense of entitlement and interfere with the daily operations of the School. Parents are extremely critical of all aspects of the School, from communication to disciplinary processes for students, and some want to put the onus on the School for their child's poor behaviour.

Employee survey feedback reinforced these observations, noting that parents sometimes held unrealistic expectations and showed limited understanding of broader classroom responsibilities of teachers. Survey respondents had varying perceptions of whether parents treated staff with respect. Most staff appeared to feel parents generally behaved respectfully, with a majority of respondents (62%)¹²⁷ reporting that this occurred most of the time. However, a further 32%¹²⁸ indicated this was less consistent, occurring only some of the time.

Some noted that despite 'email curfew' rules, 'teachers get emails from parents at all hours and this can feel overwhelming'. One respondent felt that post-COVID some parents were more belligerent to authority and rules, describing a 'common tactic' of parents sending a staff member 'haranguing emails', copying in the student, multiple other staff and leadership.

They do want what is best for their child but this means that they can become unreasonable in their expectations of how staff can act (often not realizing what might be needed for other students in their care).

Employees spoke about the increasingly transactional nature of the parent-school relationship, in which interactions with staff were shaped by the role of parents as fee-payers. One teacher reflected:

What's changed over time is entitlement really. Entitlement and a transactional based approach. We are paying school fees so we expect this delivered, rather than bringing up a child also involves what happens outside of school, not what happens necessarily happens in school.

¹²⁷ 77 respondents (n=124).

¹²⁸ 40 respondents (n=124).



Others explained that the school's growth and resulting loss of a sense of community has prompted parents to see education more as a product than a partnership, creating a power imbalance in favour of those from wealthy families who were perceived as having more influence:

The school as a consequence has fallen into a transactional model of 'we are a product that somebody buys'.

The school seems to over-value the families with deep pockets which only reinforces their sense of entitlement.

10.4.2 Impact on staff wellbeing and the parent-school relationship

The Review heard from current employees that while they found most parents to be grateful and supportive, a growing number of parents would push back on any feedback about their children, and in some cases had become 'aggressive' and 'vicious' in their communications. This appears to be consistent with broader patterns across Australian educational settings, in which teachers have been found to be at significant risk of violence and aggression in their workplace. A 2022 survey of teachers' perceptions of their work found that 24.5% of teachers felt unsafe at work (up from 18.9% in 2019), and that poor parent behaviour, including verbal abuse, hostility, and aggression, was a significant contributing factor.¹²⁹

The Review heard that for Ballarat Grammar employees, these disrespectful interactions with parents had a direct impact on their mental health, wellbeing and professional confidence. Some referred to cumulative stress from the anxiety about daily interactions with families leading to a fear of honesty in addressing student behaviour.

My experience, and that of colleagues, with leadership (higher than chair of faculty) is that parents' and students' views/complaints will be supported over the teacher. As one teacher put it 'the tail (parents) is telling the dog (school) where to go'. It promotes a fear/anxiety of honesty (marks, behaviour management) with students from 'challenging' families.

To be honest I have thought about leaving the profession many times due to abusive parents.

Some employees also noted that attitudes of entitlement from parents sometimes filtered down to students who did not take disciplinary measures seriously, where there was no accountability for their poor behaviour, leaving teachers feeling 'powerless and disrespected'.

¹²⁹ Fiona Longmuir et al, 'Australian Teachers' Perceptions of their Work in 2022' (Monash University, October 2022) 35.



Others shared their frustration that leadership responses often prioritised appeasing parents, and trying ‘to be friends to everybody’, over the protection of employees. They felt that the school allowed ‘too much inappropriate communication and behaviour and even access from parents’, instead of setting clear boundaries.

I do think we sometimes put challenging and difficult and threatening and coercive families over the well-being and safety of our staff, and therefore our students.

The cumulative effect of these interactions and the school’s response has undermined authority and fairness for employees, with several staff believing that leadership prioritises relationships with influential families over consistent and equitable enforcement of policies and behavioural standards.

Unfortunately, not all parents are equal and therefore what one student gets as a consequence of misbehaviour is different to the next and this can drive dissent towards to the school from the parents.

At the same time, recent steps taken by the school show that this dynamic has shifted. While parent relationships are maintained wherever possible, the school has taken action with respect to some parents’ behaviour, including issuing formal warnings and proactively asking families to leave the school. The Review observed from employee comments that when parents treat their child’s schooling as a transaction, it undermines the sense of trust and shared responsibility between families and schools.

There has to be trust because this is a relationship... the number of times that parents will reduce the partnership of school to parent as a transaction, I pay you and I’ll tell you what my kid will do.

Rebuilding parent-teacher relationships will require resetting boundaries and reaffirming the school’s role as a partner in students’ growth—not merely a service provider. The Review heard from multiple employees that there was a need for more transparent communication and better education for parents about expectations.

Some suggested the establishment of clearer guidelines that define boundaries and respectful communication, such as a code of conduct or process to ‘build, change, modify or reset’ relationships with parents:

We need a much more explicit guidelines framework about how the school and parents work there. There has to be trust because this is a relationship... We need a Community guideline that says we are in partnerships but they have to be grounded in respect. And that if you breach that respect, if you intimidate staff, if you send aggressive emails, if you make accusations ... you’re forfeiting your right to communicate with the school like that.



The Conditions of Enrolment form, signed by parents when a student first enrolls, includes a clause about Parent/Guardian Conduct requiring them to agree to:

- ✓ comply with school rules, procedures and policies and the 'School's Expectations'
- ✓ treat staff, students, and others in the school community with fairness, courtesy and respect
- ✗ not act in a way that would cause others to feel offended, humiliated or intimidated
- ✗ not to bring the School into disrepute.

The 'School's Expectations' are set out in a Community Guidelines document which talk about parents and carers working in partnership with the school. It sets out expectations of parents, carers and visitors regarding respectful behaviour and communication, including in interactions with staff. Breaches can result in actions including warnings, limiting communication with teachers or restricting access to school grounds.

It is noted that these behaviour expectations form part of a much larger document which also sets out general information about a range of school policies, rules and processes. There was little knowledge in consultations about the existence or status of these behaviour guidelines for parents, and those employees who did know about them felt they were not clear enough, had been watered down and needed to be 'more visible and enforceable'.

I think someone did put together a code of conduct type thing for parents, but about parent behaviours. But I forget what that's called now or where that is. It's not necessarily something that gets brought up a lot.

The Review also observes that the language throughout the guidelines is inconsistent in its tone and prescriptiveness, which dilutes a clear message around behavioural standards.



10.5 Experiences of harmful behaviour

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the impact of psychosocial hazards in the workplace on employee mental health. Australian research on psychosocial safety climate has demonstrated that organisational-level factors, including management commitment and priority given to psychological health, are critical precursors to conducive work environments and strong predictors of employee psychological wellbeing.¹³⁰

Psychosocial hazards refer to factors within the workplace that have the potential to cause psychological harm to employees. Hazards do not exist in isolation, and the cumulative impact of multiple hazards can have a significant impact on employee mental health and wellbeing, contributing to stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and other psychological injuries.

In the school context, a recent Australian study found that that 90% of teachers reported moderate to extremely severe levels of stress, while more than two-thirds experienced moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, at rates far above the general population. The research found that these symptoms were closely linked to their workload and intentions to leave the profession.¹³¹

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 (Vic), employers are required to identify psychosocial hazards, assess the risks they pose, and implement controls to eliminate or reduce those risks so far as is reasonably practicable.¹³² In consultations, employees described multiple psychosocial risk factors arising in their work. These included specific experiences of harmful behaviour set out below, such as bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and the hostile environment experienced by some women, alongside common themes of excessive workloads, work pace and job demands without adequate organisational support, role conflict and ambiguity, challenging interactions with parents and students, high emotional demands associated with teaching and student wellbeing and potential exposure to distressing or traumatic events, and concerns about poorly managed organisational change and a sense of organisational injustice.

Concerningly, for some employees the cumulative strain of multiple psychosocial hazards appears to have compounded their stress, manifesting in impacts to their wellbeing, physical and psychological health, jobs and career. While not everyone shared these experiences, for some the impacts were profound. The Review heard from employees who described suffering anxiety attacks, requiring medication, and ultimately leaving their position because of the toxic environment they felt they experienced working at the school.

130 Maureen F Dollard and Arnold B Bakker, 'Psychosocial Safety Climate as a Precursor to Conducive Work Environments, Psychological Health Problems, and Employee Engagement' (2010) 83(3) *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 579, 581.

131 Helena Granziera et al, 'Teachers' Workload, Turnover Intentions, and Mental Health: Perspectives of Australian Teachers' (2025) 28 *Social Psychology of Education* 149, 157.

132 *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022* (Vic) requires employers to identify psychosocial hazards, assess the risks they pose, and implement controls to eliminate or reduce those risks so far as is reasonably practicable ('*Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Regulations*').



10.5.1 Nature and impact of negative workplace behaviours

Australian research has highlighted that concerns about harmful behaviour and safety of the school workforce are growing. A 2025 survey of over 8,000 Australian teachers, found that up to 25% of participants felt unsafe at school. Sources of safety concerns included student and parent behaviours.¹³³

While an earlier 2012 Australian study of more than 2,500 school staff found over 95% had experienced at least one form of workplace bullying,¹³⁴ research in 2019 found that 80% of Australian teachers had experienced bullying or harassment from a student or parent within a 12-month period.¹³⁵ Similarly, the 2025 National Anti-Bullying Rapid Review reported that school workers are increasingly experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviours from students and parents/carers, highlighting the impact of misogynistic content and harmful behaviour online on female teachers in particular.¹³⁶

The Australian Human Rights Commission's fifth national workplace sexual harassment survey found that the incidence of workplace sexual harassment in the education and training industry was 30% (workers in the industry experiencing sexual harassment in the previous five years) – just under the rate of 33% across all industries.¹³⁷

More recently, a smaller survey of more than 1,000 Australian teachers reported even higher sexual harassment rates, with close to 47% of respondents experiencing sexual harassment in a school environment, and the majority of this harassment by students (81%). Almost 60% reported feeling unsafe in the classroom/school grounds afterwards. A further 80% reported an increase in sexualised behaviours in schools, which the report found might be attributed to early exposure to pornography, social media, the influence of social media influencers, and broader societal sexist attitudes.¹³⁸

While this Review was initiated in light of incidents of harmful behaviour and safety concerns involving students in boarding, in consultations, current and former employees also recounted their own experiences of harmful or disrespectful behaviour while working at the school.

These incidents of negative workplace behaviour ranged from discriminatory or sexist attitudes, comments or emails to persistent bullying and harassment, including targeted hostility and intimidation, and sexual harassment. While in many cases, the person engaging in the behaviour was another staff member, The Review also heard about examples where the behaviour was by a student or a parent.

¹³³ F Longmuir, et al, 'Australian teachers' perceptions of safety, violence and limited support in their workplaces' (2025) 24(1) *Journal of School Violence* 1-20.

¹³⁴ D Riley et al, *Bullying of Staff in Schools* (Acer Press, 2012).

¹³⁵ R Fogelgarn et al, 'Teacher-targeted bullying and harassment in Australian schools: A challenge to teacher professionalism', in *Professionalism and Teacher Education* (2019) 175–198 cited in F Longmuir, et al, 'Australian teachers' perceptions of safety, violence and limited support in their workplaces' (2025) 24(1) *Journal of School Violence* 1-20, 4.

¹³⁶ Australian Government, *Final Report from the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review* (Report, 2025) 76.

¹³⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Time for Respect: Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* (Report, 2022).

¹³⁸ M Dent, *Sexual Harassment of Teachers – Final Report* (Collective Shout, 2024).

In interviews and submissions, bullying was often cited as an example of harmful behaviour that employees had experienced, although this took a wide variety of forms, including being humiliated in front of others, employees' work being deliberately sabotaged, and intimidation tactics. Another recounted:

I've experienced being torn down a few shreds and picked on and minimised and students guided away from my classes.

Survey respondents reported bullying by other employees—in some cases leaders and people in positions of responsibility—that made them feel uncomfortable, humiliated, embarrassed or put down. They described being undermined or excluded from decision-making, access to facilities or resources, and withholding of information which affected their ability to perform their work. One employee said false information was spread about them to turn colleagues against them, while another recalled intimidating behaviour by leaders, including being yelled at or told off in front of other staff.

An employee in an interview said they were regularly harassed by a colleague who 'would just yell at me because she wasn't happy with something', and 'would be bad mouthing me at the top of her voice'. They described the psychological impact of being subjected to this behaviour daily: 'By the time I got to work ... I'd broken out in a sweat... I began having just horrible anxiety attacks'.

Some faced bullying by staff and also by parents, including one who recounted receiving 'vitriolic' emails who had 'cc'd in half the world'. Others referred to harassing and threatening behaviour by parents which included verbal threats, swearing and accusations made by phone or in person, unfounded complaints being made against them and being 'slandered on the internet'.

In the survey, 44% of respondents reported that they had experienced harmful behaviours demonstrated by other staff members,¹³⁹ and just under half (47%) reported experiencing harmful behaviours by parents.¹⁴⁰ Bullying by other staff was the most common behaviour experienced by respondents (46%),¹⁴¹ followed by discrimination by other staff (26%),¹⁴² and harassment by other staff (26%).¹⁴³ Bullying was also the most commonly experienced harmful behaviour demonstrated by parents that respondents reported (23%).¹⁴⁴

Respondents also identified the harmful behaviours by other staff or by parents they had seen or been made aware of (for example, through a report or disclosure). The three most commonly witnessed staff behaviours were directed towards other staff, in the form of bullying (36%),¹⁴⁵ harassment (22%),¹⁴⁶ and discrimination (21%).¹⁴⁷

¹³⁹ 46 respondents (n=104).

¹⁴⁰ 49 respondents (n=104).

¹⁴¹ 28 respondents (n=61).

¹⁴² 16 respondents (n=61).

¹⁴³ 16 respondents (n=61).

¹⁴⁴ 14 respondents (n=61).

¹⁴⁵ 24 respondents (n=67).

¹⁴⁶ 15 respondents (n=67).

¹⁴⁷ 14 respondents (n=67).



The most common parent behaviours which respondents witnessed generally involved aggression or negative behaviour directed towards staff, in the form of bullying (24%),¹⁴⁸ violence/abuse (18%),¹⁴⁹ and harassment (18%).¹⁵⁰

The survey also asked staff if they had experienced, witnessed or been made aware of (for example, through a report or disclosure by another student or staff member) harmful behaviours by students. A substantial proportion of respondents said they had seen or were made aware of harmful behaviour by students (68%),¹⁵¹ while almost a quarter (23%)¹⁵² said they had personally experienced such behaviours. Respondents most commonly reported witnessing peer-to-peer harm, including bullying of other students (85%),¹⁵³ followed by violence or abuse directed at other students (76%)¹⁵⁴ and discrimination against other students (61%).¹⁵⁵

Where respondents witnessed harmful behaviour by a student or staff in the form of discrimination, this was most commonly based on race, followed by sex/gender or sexual orientation.¹⁵⁶

In interviews and submissions, the Review also heard that historically employees had experienced a hierarchical and male-dominated culture at the school that could be a hostile environment for women.¹⁵⁷

There's a gender issue at the school and it has been at times a hostile place as a female leader to be.

Others noted that under current the leadership structure of 22 women and 3 men this culture had been largely dismantled, with more women in leadership roles, more support and more avenues for women to 'skill up in and to step into roles'. However, underlying attitudes and a perceived 'boys club' culture appears to have persisted in some pockets, with staff suggesting this resistance stemmed from dissatisfaction with changing power dynamics:

There is a resentful and a vocal group of male staff members who think that we don't belong or we aren't doing a good job, or that the way to get ahead in this school is to be a female.

¹⁴⁸ 16 respondents (n=67).

¹⁴⁹ 12 respondents (n=67).

¹⁵⁰ 12 respondents (n=67).

¹⁵¹ 68 respondents (n=100).

¹⁵² 23 respondents (n=100).

¹⁵³ 53 respondents (n=62).

¹⁵⁴ 47 respondents (n=62).

¹⁵⁵ 38 respondents (n=62).

¹⁵⁶ Race—61% (35 respondents); sex/gender—51% (29 respondents); sexual orientation—37% (21 respondents).

¹⁵⁷ The Review heard accounts dating back 10–15 years, and earlier, which described this hostile school environment.



In interviews and submissions, some female employees disclosed experiences of gender-based and sexual harassment including instances of intimidating or offensive behaviour which made them feel unsafe. While some of these incidents were historical, relating to behaviour by male employees who had since left the school, current employees shared some concerning experiences which had occurred in the past five years.

One employee gave the example of a school leader who 'speaks to women like dirt'. Employees reported experiencing disrespect from students, including female teachers being 'ignored when addressing inappropriate behaviour, called derogatory names -including being called a 'c*nt' -and had instructions openly defied'.

The Review heard other examples from employees of their experiences as young women working in boys boarding houses. Behaviour of male boarders included examples of 'fifty boys singing and chanting to a female staff member, like quite derogatory', and male boarders taking Snapchats of female staff without their consent. As one employee explained:

I was dealing with not only young boys, but men, 18 year old men... and they stand over you. So I really had to assert my power of this is not going to be acceptable or I'm not tolerating that or that's not appropriate.

Another employee observed that these types of behaviours and attitudes were not confined to boarding but were evident in the broader student body: 'there's a rise in misogynistic comments from students, the way students speak to female teachers, female staff in general.' One teacher described a male student performing an explicit gesture ... a sexual act' toward her while a young male supervisor 'didn't really stand up for me'.

Some felt that these attitudes and behaviours were a reflection of sexist and toxic behaviour, particularly in boys' Houses, being tolerated by male staff, and that male school staff needed have 'a better understanding of the unintentional ways that they encourage sexism (or at least tolerate unhelpful versions of masculinity) among male students, particularly in House settings'. Another employee felt there was an important gap to be addressed by having more positive male role models in pastoral care and middle leadership roles.

10.5.2 Confidence in reporting and response

Employees also shared their views and personal experiences of the school's systems for staff to report harmful behaviour. In some cases, employees reflected on reporting incidents of harmful behaviour they themselves or other staff members had experienced, while in other cases their views related to reporting incidents involving students.

Effective reporting systems provide clear, safe and accessible pathways for employees to raise concerns about behaviour, safety and unfair treatment without retaliation. Equally, they help school leadership to identify patterns, address problems early and support a culture of transparency and accountability.



For school reporting systems to be effective, they need to be accompanied by a genuine ‘speak up’ culture, in which employees (as well as students) trust that honesty, integrity and student and staff safety are valued over silence or complacency. Research on organisational silence has shown that when employees perceive that speaking up will not lead to meaningful change, or may result in negative consequences, a collective pattern of withholding concerns becomes embedded in organisational culture, creating systemic blind spots that prevent organisations from identifying and addressing problems.¹⁵⁸ A speak up culture encourages open dialogue and reinforces that reporting upholds the school values, rather than painting someone as ‘disloyal’ or a ‘troublemaker’.

Transparent and respectful responses from school leadership to reports, complaints and feedback signal to their staff that psychological safety is a priority and strengthens trust within the whole school community.

The Review heard from some employees that reporting processes for workplace issues were well communicated in the school, noting they could find policies and procedures for bullying, harassment and formal complaints ‘pretty quickly and easily’. Another employee noted that reporting processes were explained clearly in staff briefings and staff meetings.

More than one third of survey respondents (34%)¹⁵⁹ said they felt safe and supported speaking up about staff safety or harmful behaviour all of the time, with approximately one quarter reporting this most of the time (26%),¹⁶⁰ or some of the time (25%)¹⁶¹

The large majority of respondents said that they would report harmful behaviour they experienced or witnessed in line with school policy.¹⁶² Most said they would do so because it was the right thing to do, and because it was important for management to have oversight.¹⁶³ A majority also said they had used the school’s formal reporting processes to report harmful student behaviour they witnessed (64%).¹⁶⁴

However, in consultations, comments from employees highlighted several barriers to reporting workplace issues in the school, reflecting concerns about personal risks, unclear processes, practical barriers and cultural dynamics within the school that have created a lack of trust in the effectiveness of systems for reporting and response.

One of the most common barriers to speaking up related to the interconnectedness of the school community, with a large proportion of employees having children enrolled at the school and receiving a substantial fee reduction. Many felt this created inherent conflicts of interest, making staff hesitant to report for fear that challenging colleagues or leaders, or holding people accountable, could result in unfair treatment or other repercussions for their family or child.

¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth W Morrison and Frances J Milliken, ‘Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Change and Development in a Pluralistic World’ (2000) 25(4) *Academy of Management Review* 706.

¹⁵⁹ 43 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶⁰ 33 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶¹ 31 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶² If experiencing behaviour—80% (83 respondents); if witnessing/being made aware of behaviour—78% (81 respondents) (n=104).

¹⁶³ For experienced behaviour: right thing to do—75% (62 respondents); management oversight—48% (40 respondents) (n=83). For witnessed behaviour: right thing to do—78% (63 respondents); management oversight—56% (45 respondents) (n=81).

¹⁶⁴ 39 respondents (n=61).



I don't feel comfortable raising issues at the school, because working here is the only way I can afford to send my child to this school. I am not part of the teaching staff, and I don't feel I have the job security or the backing to raise any concerns formally, so I don't. I think about the bigger picture.

I am a teacher myself, and know many teachers who have left the school shortly after their children graduated, and know many others who are counting down the years before they can leave. The reduced fees are a wonderful benefit, and I know many are very grateful for the opportunity to have their child at this school, but it does mean people also stay for that reason alone.

Others described a 'culture of secrecy' or 'close ranks' mentality, in which the image of community harmony was valued over accountability, and employees felt reluctant to 'dob in' other staff, discouraging speaking out.

When I talked about the community that it is this kind of warm, inviting, very community centred place with lovely people to hang out. It's provided you don't challenge or call out or upstand.

Employees also expressed concerns about impacts to their career or position, if they were seen as complaining, labelled a 'troublemaker' or as non-compliant and not conforming to the 'Grammar way', which further discouraged reporting and made employees feel 'you've got to pick and choose what you're going to raise'.

I don't want to because I feel that it will impact my chances of getting a higher job or that I'm a troublemaker... you can't raise things without being seen as someone that's negative or someone that doesn't support the school.



The fear of reprisal and career impacts was particularly acute when the person engaging in the behaviour was in a position of power or influence at the school. One employee recalled:

The person who behaved in an intimidating manner towards me, causing considerable stress, was in a position of authority and is a 'favourite child' of the school. I felt pressure not to report because if I did, I would be judged by the rest of the management clique, and my career would be damaged.

Some employees also identified structural and practical barriers to reporting. These included time pressures on teachers from back-to-back classes which created obstacles for them to properly document, communicate or follow up on incidents, and unclear pathways with staff being unsure where to go to report, particularly where leaders held multiple roles and responsibilities. Gaps in training and staff understanding of how to identify harmful behaviour and when and how to report it were also identified as a further barrier.

I remember going to HR at the time to ask where do I find that information? How do I get in contact with that teacher? How do I know? And I remember them saying to us, I don't know, just go and find your head of faculty.

When employees did report, their experiences were uneven. In the survey, around one quarter of respondents felt that complaints about harmful behaviour were taken seriously all of the time (26%),¹⁶⁵ with similar proportions reporting this most of the time (26%)¹⁶⁶ and some of the time (26%).¹⁶⁷ However, around one in ten said that this was rarely the case (11%).¹⁶⁸

Just over two in five survey respondents (43%) felt that fair and reasonable action was taken against anyone engaging in harmful behaviour, regardless of their seniority or status, all or most of the time.¹⁶⁹ However, almost half of respondents felt this happened only some of the time (28%)¹⁷⁰ or rarely (17%).¹⁷¹

In interviews and submissions, a number of employees expressed frustration and lack of confidence in the school's response, where reports were not addressed adequately. One employee said that after reporting workplace bullying, 'the only thing that was done about it was they were spoken to very gently... And then everything was fine for about a week and then it just went back to the way it was'.

Another said they had experienced bullying for years and raised it each time with their supervisor, yet 'nothing was ever done. Comments such as: She gets results, she is well respected etc. The only reason the bullying stopped was the staff in question retired.'

¹⁶⁵ 33 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶⁶ 32 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶⁷ 33 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶⁸ 14 respondents (n=125).

¹⁶⁹ All of the time—18% (22 respondents); most of the time—25% (31 respondents) (n=125).

¹⁷⁰ 35 respondents (n=125).

¹⁷¹ 21 respondents (n=125).



Some described reports being managed informally and the matter being left unresolved, while others described experiences where responses and outcomes seemed to depend on the individuals involved, rather than consistent processes.

The approach to managing any issues... we had a person who would go like leave it with me. I'll have a cuppa. We don't report... We'll just have a chat with them and it'll be fine. It'll sort it out. Of course, it never sorted them out and we didn't have a record of anything that had ever happened.

It's also the way the bullying was handled from the upper echelon... the perpetrators were given the better assistance and they were looked after better than the victims.

Others gave examples where employees who had reported harmful behaviour experienced victimisation as a result. In one example, an employee that had reported being bullied was sacked 'under the auspices of retrenchment', while the perpetrators remained. Another employee who called out sexually harassing comments said, 'I was the one that was reprimanded' and made to feel 'like I was the troublemaker all the time'. Other employees said that after calling out bullying or harassing behaviour they were later told by other senior staff to drop the matter, because the perpetrator was a highly regarded staff member.

Overall, the perspectives from employees indicate that the cumulative effect of these experiences has diminished staff trust in school's leadership and response systems. One employee's comments reflected these systemic weaknesses:

I spoke to HR and they didn't say anything ... I've not seen any change of anything... I was just like, I have no more avenues. I don't know what to do. I feel like I've spoken to everybody and I don't quite know who to trust.

Where employees are reluctant to engage, it can create a culture where issues of unresolved bullying and other harmful behaviour erode psychological safety and issues persist unchecked with impacts on staff wellbeing, including heightened stress, anxiety and risk of turnover.



10.6 Staff wellbeing, morale and retention

Employee wellbeing in educational settings is shaped by a range of interconnected factors, including supportive leadership, collegial relationships, manageable workload, professional autonomy, and a shared sense of purpose and belonging. Research suggests that these conditions are associated with stronger staff retention and better student outcomes, as well as more positive school culture overall.¹⁷²

Conversely, workplace risk factors such as role ambiguity, poor change management, excessive workloads, a sense of unfair treatment, lack of support and workplace conflict and division, contribute to staff being more likely to experience burnout and consider leaving their jobs, or in some cases, their profession.¹⁷³

In consultations, the Review heard about strong pockets of collegiality, community and care from employees at Ballarat Grammar, particularly among colleagues and peers, which provided strong protective factors for staff wellbeing and a reason why people were attracted to or chose to stay at the school. However, the Review heard that despite these strengths, a number of structural and systemic factors have negatively impacted on staff wellbeing, morale, and created risks of burnout, lack of psychological safety and contributing to some people's decision to leave the school.

The Review heard from employees that historically, Ballarat Grammar provided a supportive and collegial workplace culture, characterised by strong interpersonal relationships, compassionate leadership and a shared sense of purpose. These factors are strong drivers of staff wellbeing and retention.

The school's continued emphasis on holistic education and community-oriented values has created a sense of shared purpose, allowing many current employees to find a meaningful alignment between the school's mission and their own values, which can support commitment and job satisfaction.

However, the Review also heard that the significant expansion¹⁷⁴ of the school has undermined this positive culture through experiences of inadequate systems, unclear structures and increasing pressure on staff, with consequent impacts on employee morale and overall wellbeing.

Some employees reflected with sadness on this perceived loss of culture, with one describing how the school had transformed from a close-knit community where 'we all felt part of a family' to an environment that was 'very closed and cold'.

I've watched the staff that I've worked with in the last 10 years go from being happy, vibrant, have time to talk to you. No one's got time to talk to you, nobody. They're too busy.

172 Joy C Nwoko, et al, 'A Systematic Review of the Factors That Influence Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing' (2023) 20(12) *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 1, 11; Rachel F Cann, et al, 'The Power of School Conditions: Individual, Relational, and Organizational Influences on Educator Wellbeing' (2022) 13 *Frontiers in Psychology* 1, 7; Benjamin Dreer, 'On the Outcomes of Teacher Wellbeing: A Systematic Review of Research' (2023) 14 *Frontiers in Psychology* 1, 6.

173 Jari J Hakanen, Arnold B Bakker and Wilmar B Schaufeli 'Burnout and Work Engagement among Teachers' (2006) 43(6) *Journal of School Psychology* 495, 496.

174 Ballarat Grammar's enrolment grew at an average of 4.02% per annum over the decade to 2025. Over the same period, the average annual increase in enrolments across the independent school sector was 2.7%, and across all Australian schools 0.7% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools, 2025). The school therefore grew roughly 1.3 percentage points a year faster than the independent sector against which the school can most fairly be compared, around 50% faster in relative terms, and at around five times the rate of the government and Catholic sectors..



Employees also spoke about feeling valued and their work recognised. However, others felt that this too had diminished over time, 'with staff members feeling undervalued and like our voices aren't respected.' The Review heard that the school's expansion without commensurate support structures has created unsustainable workloads, with some employees feeling stretched across multiple roles without adequate time or resources. Teaching staff have also reported a lack of specialist and support resourcing to meet the increasingly complex needs of students, which can be linked directly to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Confusion and lack of clarity around roles, responsibilities and reporting lines have compounded organisational stress and inefficiencies.

Perceived favouritism and protection of certain groups of staff have contributed to a sense of unfairness and disengagement for others. This is consistent with research identifying how perceptions of organisational injustice can be particularly damaging to employee wellbeing.¹⁷⁵

Employees also spoke about the impact of poorly managed organisational change, which some feel has been imposed without proper consultation or transparency around restructuring and role reshaping, as contributing to stress and uncertainty.

Another factor consistently identified as impacting on employee morale was a lack of effective communication across the school, with staff across teaching and non-teaching roles describing feeling uninformed, excluded from decision-making and unable to access information needed to perform their roles effectively. Communication silos between departments have added to a sense of frustration and division among staff.

The communication gaps around the Dart House incidents, in particular, have had a significant impact on staff morale, with some employees learning details through media reports rather than internal briefings. This was impacted by the school's restricted capacity to manage and share information, driven by the legitimate requirements of Child Safe Standards 6 and 8 and the limited notice it sometimes received from media outlets, including occasions where only 10–20 minutes' notice was provided before publication. Staff described how they experienced this lack of communication and its effects on morale:

It felt like there was more emphasis on getting information to parents first than staff. ... Or you'd read media reports and for some reason that seemed to have a heck of a lot more information in it than actually having briefing from senior leadership. And that kind of hurt.

Some said they felt 'ashamed' to tell people they worked at the school, while the lack of information left others feeling unable to support students effectively. While apologies from the Principal and support through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) were offered to staff, an employee observed that despite the personal and professional impact the Dart House events had on staff, leadership only shared information on a 'need-to-know' basis and did not extend the same level of acknowledgement or apology to staff that was given to parents and students.

¹⁷⁵ Jerald Greenberg, 'Stress Fairness to Fare No Stress: Managing Workplace Stress by Promoting Organizational Justice' (2004) 33(4) *Organizational Dynamics* 352, 356; Jerald Greenberg, 'Organizational Injustice as an Occupational Health Risk' (2010) 4(1) *Academy of Management Annals* 205.



I do feel like there hasn't been a lot of acknowledgement of the impact that the whole incident, the media storm, everything has had more broadly on staff.

The cumulative effect of these factors on staff wellbeing has been profound, with employees describing depleted morale and psychological distress. As one employee stated plainly: 'Grammar has a terrible staff morale at the moment. I can't lie about that'. The stress for some was reported by participants as manifesting in increased absenteeism and taken an emotional toll, with 'teachers that are on edge all the time' and 'taking a lot of days off'.

Colleagues described relying on their own informal support networks, noting, 'we often will ring each other after school and vent or, you know, shed a tear together'. However, there was a sense from employees that the school did not prioritise staff mental health, and that the availability of wellbeing support for staff was not clear:

So I feel like the culture has been one of looking after the staff and the kids, but lately it's sort of been more looking after the school and even last year when there was a fair few staff needing assistance from the school, ... it wasn't listened to. It was stop causing issues, stop causing trouble sort of thing when... they needed support. So I feel like the culture changed in the last 18 months of more looking after the school rather than the staff.

The school provides staff lunches most staff days, a weekly staff morning tea with the Principal and regular catering for meetings. It also provides yearly funding to the staff association for events. While staff have access to an EAP through Mindlife Clinic, employees noted that other staff wellness initiatives, such as quality staff lunches, had diminished over time, leaving staff feeling 'undervalued': 'We feel unworthy. We don't feel like we're appreciated'.

Despite these systemic issues, the Review did hear about pockets of the school which have maintained positive cultures characterised by strong leadership and team cohesion. The performing arts department, for example, was seen to have created its own supportive environment for staff and students:

We've created our own set of standards, which is community, our professionalism, and our heart. So that's kind of like what underpins what we do every day for people, and we're open to feedback to make it better for people next time.

Similarly, the Review also heard about teams that had maintained strong, collaborative relationships and functional ways of working. These pockets of positive culture demonstrate that constructive, supportive workplace environments continue to exist within the school. However, they appear to depend on deliberate efforts from individual leaders rather than being systematically supported by broader organisational structures.



While the school's foundational values and cultural strengths continue to resonate for many current employees, the impact of significant growth¹⁷⁶ without corresponding systems and supports, combined with poorly managed change, unclear roles, excessive workloads, perceived inequities and dysfunctional communication systems, appear to have significantly undermined wellbeing, morale and commitment. These themes are consistent with research on psychosocial risks in education settings, where the interaction of high demands and insufficient support is strongly associated with stress, burnout and turnover.

When describing what attracted staff to Ballarat Grammar, employees commonly spoke about factors such as the school's high-quality facilities, its holistic educational philosophy and its positive and welcoming community, as notable strengths.

Strong collegial relationships appear to be a key reason employees stay, and the sense of community within the school is powerful, with staff feeling 'embedded in the school', particularly if their children are students.

The substantial reduction in school fees for their children has clearly been a strong factor in attracting and retaining staff, although it was also described as 'the golden handcuffs', making employees feel 'they can't leave when it gets too hard'. Others highlighted the potential for conflicts of interest, for example where staff feel unable to speak up for fear of jeopardising their child's enrolment.

As set out above, the Review has identified multiple factors impacting on employee wellbeing, which have been drivers of burnout and in some cases strongly influenced decisions to leave the school. Most directly, heavy workloads and inadequate resources have resulted in staff feeling overworked and 'buckling' under excessive demands, particularly with insufficient learning support for students with additional needs. A lack of support for dealing with the increasing complexity of staff workloads in the form of training, HR or compliance support has also contributed to a sense of staff burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Leadership culture concerns, including perceptions of favouritism, an 'old boys club' culture and appointments not being merit-based, together with challenges relating to transparent communication within the school, have eroded employee trust. On the other hand, limited career progression opportunities, limited performance development and review for some staff and experiences of inflexible working arrangements - especially for parents - together with concerns about the school's response to incidents of bullying, harassment and employee as well as student safety, have in some cases served to discourage retention.

I don't think the leadership actually realise the level of dissatisfaction experienced by some of the staff. I think they think it's confined to a few disgruntled individuals, but in my role I speak to a lot of staff across the school, and many of them share the same concerns and issues.

¹⁷⁶ Ballarat Grammar's enrolment grew at an average of 4.02% per annum over the decade to 2025. Over the same period, the average annual increase in enrolments across the independent school sector was 2.7%, and across the government and Catholic sectors 0.7 and 0.8% respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools, 2025). The school therefore grew roughly 1.3 percentage points a year faster than the independent sector, around 50% faster in relative terms, and at around five times the rate of the government and Catholic sectors.



The school's TAPP project, which examined staff workloads across the school, was intended to provide staff 'with a fairer workload and remuneration for all aspects of their work', with anticipated downstream effects on retention and recruitment. The Review heard mixed feedback on TAPP, and while some staff welcomed its intent, not everyone was positive about how implementation of changes affected their workload on the ground.

Psychosocial Safety Framework and Risk Register

In line with the new Victorian OHS regulations around psychological health and safety, the school is developing a Psychosocial Safety Framework and accompanying Psychosocial Risk Register. The Review received draft versions of these documents, which were subject to consultation at the time of writing this report.

The stated purpose of the Framework is to affirm the school's 'commitment to providing a supportive and mentally healthy environment for all staff', and 'prevent stress, burnout, bullying, and other psychosocial hazards by promoting respectful communication, equitable workloads, and strong support systems among educators, administrators, and students'. However, the scope of the Framework applies to 'all members of the Ballarat Grammar community', with the potential to dilute the employer's duty under OHS laws which primarily covers employees and contractors. Similarly, while holding leadership 'accountable for modelling and promoting psychological safety' this is combined with an expectation on 'all members of the school community' to contribute, which appears to frame obligations as collective or shared, rather than squarely focusing on the employer's primary, proactive duty to manage psychosocial risks so far as reasonably practicable.

While the Framework and Risk Register identify many of the psychosocial safety risks highlighted through this Review, existing controls to address these appear limited – for example, the existence of a complaints policy and reporting pathways to address workplace hazards such as harmful behaviour and organisational injustice, do not address core issues relating to the culture of silence, or staff feeling unsafe to report and lacking trust in reporting systems, which were strong themes in consultations for this Review. Likewise, the existence of policies around behaviour management or codes of conduct is not sufficient as a control without consideration of their effective implementation. Training strategies to address hazards such as poor workplace relationships and sexual harassment appear generic, such as through provision of annual Respectful Workplaces training, without consideration of specific strategies for different cohorts.

Some promising initiatives are identified in the documents, such as the establishment of a staff wellbeing committee, and 'a newly established staff complaint register to analyse conduct and complaint data each term', in the Risk Register under 'Actions Planned', although it is noted that most of this column remains empty.



It is also noted that the Risk Register identifies the Director of People and Culture as responsible for ownership against every risk.¹⁷⁷ Concentrating accountability in one operational role is particularly problematic when some of the risks identified, such as organisational change and poor organisational justice, are issues of leadership and governance. Schools are recognised as being dynamic and often challenging work environments. While it may not be possible to ensure that the environment will be completely free of psychosocial hazards, schools are required to take steps to mitigate and, manage such hazards effectively and minimise harm. This requires more than viewing this as an OHS or HR function. Building a psychosocial safety culture requires leadership ownership, commitment and capability.

10.7 Recommendations

The following recommendations respond to the findings of this chapter and are designed to be read as an interconnected set. They address the structural, cultural and systemic factors that shape the employee experience at Ballarat Grammar, from communication and cohesion through to workload, leadership accountability, professional development, the parent-school dynamic and staff wellbeing.

Several of these recommendations connect directly to findings and recommendations in other parts of this Report: Recommendation E6 builds on Recommendation S5 (staff capability in diversity and respectful relationships), Recommendation E7 should be read alongside Recommendation P3 (resetting the parent-school relationship), and the themes of consistency, accountability and communication that run through these recommendations reflect the systemic drivers identified in the introduction to this Report.

Together, these recommendations are directed at creating a workplace that is fair, safe, clearly structured and sustainably resourced, one in which staff are equipped, supported and held to account, and in which the conditions that underpin good outcomes for students are deliberately maintained rather than left to the efforts of individuals.

¹⁷⁷ The 'Risk Owner' with respect to BGPSY-10 'Poor environmental conditions' is the Director of People and Culture (or Property and Services Manager).

REF	RECOMMENDATION
Employee Experience (E1-E8)	Employee Experience (E1-E8)
E1	Strengthen cohesion and communication across staff groups That Ballarat Grammar take deliberate steps to strengthen communication, collaboration and mutual recognition across all staff groups, particularly between teaching and non-teaching teams, to build a more cohesive, respectful and equitable workplace culture in which all staff feel recognised, valued and integral to the school's shared purpose. This should include: • ensuring regular briefings and whole-of-school updates are inclusive of all staff groups, to improve transparency, clarify priorities and expectations, and promote understanding of interdependent roles across the school; • building shared learning and understanding through collaborative professional development opportunities, with a focus on teamwork, collaboration and cultural awareness, building on the success of past joint training days for teaching and support staff; • developing a whole-of-school overview accessible to staff, students and parents that clarifies how each role contributes to the school's operations and educational mission; • implementing specific initiatives to improve the recognition and visibility of non-teaching staff, including celebrating achievements and contributions through communications, joint milestones and staff award programs, and ensuring school leaders regularly acknowledge the work of support teams in meetings and public communications; and • increasing opportunities for all staff to come together to discuss challenges and solutions, and supporting informal engagement and everyday interactions between staff groups through practical measures such as shared spaces, collaborative working groups and the co-location of administrative teams where feasible.
E2	Clarify organisational structure, roles, and leadership accountability That Ballarat Grammar implement measures to clarify and define roles, reporting lines and leadership responsibilities and standards. This should include: developing and distributing a clear and comprehensive organisational chart that is accessible to all staff and includes a summary of organisational responsibilities for each role, so that staff understand not only who reports to whom but what each part of the school is responsible for. Staffing policies, including recruitment, appointment and promotion, should be reviewed to ensure they reflect transparent, merit-based processes at every level, with selection criteria, assessment methods and decision-making documented and applied consistently. Leadership pathways and appointment processes should be visible and open to all staff, including non-teaching employees. Measurable standards should be defined for all leadership roles, and performance against those standards should be assessed regularly. The role of the Principal under the new leadership structure should be clearly defined. Leadership capability should be built through structured development programs that prepare staff for leadership responsibilities before they assume them.

**E3****Consistent behavioural standards, policies, and accountability**

That Ballarat Grammar ensure behavioural standards and policies are applied consistently across the school, so that harmful behaviours are addressed, policies are trusted, staff feel empowered and supported to uphold standards, and both staff and leadership are held accountable. This should include:

- tying the consistent application of behavioural standards to performance measures for staff and leaders at every level, so that accountability for upholding the school's expectations is embedded in how performance is assessed, not left to individual discretion;
- consolidating and streamlining policy information so that staff have clear, accessible guidance on response protocols for different types of incidents and situations, supported by practical training that builds confidence in applying those protocols; and
- providing trauma-informed post-incident debriefs for staff involved in enforcing standards or responding to incidents, so that staff are supported after difficult interactions and do not carry the cumulative weight of those experiences without institutional backing.

E4**Improve communication and transparency between leadership and staff**

That Ballarat Grammar leadership demonstrate its commitment to a culture of transparency by establishing clear, inclusive and consistent communication practices that rebuild employee trust. This should include:

- proactively sharing the context, rationale and timelines for significant changes through structured updates, and documenting all significant non-confidential decisions for staff review, to reduce the perception that information and influence are confined to an inner circle;
- consulting meaningfully with employees on decisions that affect their work before those decisions are finalised, including changes to leadership structures, roles and appointments;
- providing clear and timely feedback to internal applicants, consistent with Recommendation E2 (transparent, merit-based recruitment and appointment processes), to address the perception that appointments are made informally or on the basis of personal relationships;
- regularly communicating a unified strategic vision that connects the daily work of staff to the school's priorities, and that directly addresses uncertainty during periods of growth or change;
- consolidating and streamlining the school's fragmented communication channels to ensure all staff groups, including non-teaching staff, have equitable access to information; and
- leadership modelling accountability for communication by publicly acknowledging gaps when they occur, and tracking improvements through regular staff surveys on trust, clarity and inclusion.

This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendation P2, which calls for the development of a whole-of-school communications strategy and protocol establishing who communicates what, to whom and when. That strategy should apply to internal communication with staff with the same rigour as it applies to communication with parents. Together, these recommendations recognise that the school's communication failures are not a matter of individual effort but of the absence of a coherent, institution-wide approach to how information flows across the organisation.

**E5****Address role ambiguity, unsustainable workloads and resourcing gaps**

That Ballarat Grammar address the role ambiguity, unsustainable workloads and resourcing gaps that the Review found are contributing to staff stress, burnout and decisions to leave the school. Sustainable workloads, clear expectations and adequate resourcing are essential to reducing stress, supporting retention and enabling staff to focus on delivering outcomes for students in an increasingly complex school environment. This should include:

- ensuring all staff have current position descriptions with clear responsibilities, reporting lines and key performance indicators, so that expectations are explicit and measurable rather than assumed;
- establishing a consistent and effective performance management framework that applies to all staff across teaching and non-teaching roles, with annual reviews that are meaningful and supported by leadership training in constructive feedback, and that assess workload sustainability rather than relying on subjective impressions;
- ensuring adequate support and resourcing for students with diverse needs, commensurate with the school's increased enrolments and its commitment to inclusion, recognising that the absence of specialist support has been a direct contributor to staff stress and to the inconsistent experience of students with disability and neurodivergence documented in Part A of this Report;
- progressing the implementation of the Time and Teaching Practice Project (TAPP) with leadership accountability for its application, including training for leaders in responding to flexible work requests, and establishing clear policy limits on out-of-hours demands and administrative overload to challenge the expectation that staff absorb institutional growth through personal effort; and
- addressing situations where individual employees are carrying multiple roles and responsibilities beyond their substantive position, and linking this to whole-of-school workforce planning that matches staffing to the actual scale and complexity of the school's operations.

**E6**

Targeted, inclusive professional learning and ongoing support

That Ballarat Grammar ensure professional development and ongoing support is meaningful, role-specific, and accessible to all employees (teaching and non-teaching roles) to address capability gaps and improve staff motivation and career growth. A supported, skilled workforce where employees feel motivated and invested in helps to reduce burnout and support retention, leading to better student outcomes, and creates a strong professional culture.

- Link professional development to personalised career development pathways and opportunities, with career mentoring and progression plans to help retain motivated staff.
- Evaluate and tailor professional learning offerings for relevance to roles (rather than generic programs) and ensure equitable access to development for teaching and non-teaching staff. Measure impact on retention and staff feeling confident in their roles.
- Include opportunities for joint and collaborative professional development for teaching and support staff, to clarify roles, share best practice and build mutual understanding.
- Provide trauma-informed and safety-focused training to better support staff in their roles with respect to student safety, risk management processes, wellbeing and behaviour management, and trauma-informed practice. This should include training in restorative practices, equipping staff with the skills to facilitate restorative conversations, manage conflict constructively, and support students and colleagues through processes that prioritise accountability, repair and learning rather than purely punitive responses.
- Provide targeted training for teachers on neurodiversity, challenging behaviours and additional learning needs.

E7

Reset staff-parent relationships, boundaries and engagement

That Ballarat Grammar reset the staff-parent relationship to reflect a partnership characterised by trust, respect and professionalism. This should include:

- ensuring the Parent Code of Conduct is visible, accessible and actively enforced;
- strengthening leadership support for staff when they uphold standards in interactions with parents;
- implementing clear communication guidelines and protocols that set expectations for both parties; and
- establishing ongoing parent communications that help parents understand the school's approach to behaviour management, child safety and wellbeing.

This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendation P3, which addresses the same relationship from the parent perspective.

**E8****Elevate staff wellbeing as a core cultural priority**

That Ballarat Grammar reframe staff wellbeing as a core institutional priority, equal in standing to student wellbeing, and recognise that the health, safety and psychological resilience of its workforce directly underpins student outcomes and the sustainability of cultural change. This should include:

- developing a systematic, school-wide staff wellbeing strategy built on prevention, early support and continuous improvement, with clear ownership, resourcing and accountability for its delivery;
- identifying and building on the pockets of positive staff culture that already exist within the school, and examining what makes those environments work so that the conditions can be extended rather than left to the efforts of individual leaders;
- establishing clear policies that protect staff from harmful workplace behaviour, backed by transparent reporting and response procedures, firm leadership action, and protections against victimisation for those who raise concerns, consistent with the school's duty of care to its employees and its obligations under occupational health and safety legislation; and
- introducing an anonymous reporting mechanism for staff to raise concerns about workplace bullying, harassment and safety without fear of reprisal, complementing the student-facing reporting systems already in place.

This recommendation should be read alongside Recommendations E3 (behavioural standards and accountability), E5 (workload and resourcing) and E6 (professional development including trauma-informed practice).

Governance, Leadership and Institutional Accountability

PART C — Governance, Leadership and Institutional Accountability

PART C of this Report examines how Ballarat Grammar is governed, led and held to account. It moves from the experiences described in Parts A and B to the institutional structures, decision-making practices and oversight mechanisms that shape those experiences. The chapters in this part consider whether the school's governance and leadership arrangements are adequate to identify risk, drive consistent practice and deliver the cultural change this Review has found is needed.

The chapters below examine how existing structures have functioned in practice, where they have supported good outcomes and where gaps between intent and implementation have allowed problems to persist. They consider the role of the Board, the clarity of decision-making authority, the effectiveness of risk management and child safety oversight, and the adequacy of the school's policy framework. In doing so, they draw on the regulatory and legislative frameworks referenced in the introduction to this Report, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards, occupational health and safety obligations relating to psychosocial hazards, and the conditions placed on the school's registration by the VRQA.

The governance chapter examines Board and leadership structures, regulatory context, role clarity, Board composition, visibility and accountability, risk management and oversight of child safety, the school's policy framework, and the Board's role in governing culture. The change management chapter considers the school's capacity to implement and sustain reform at the scale this Review's recommendations require. Both chapters conclude with recommendations designed to strengthen the school's governance and leadership architecture so that it can support, monitor and sustain lasting cultural change.

11 Governance, Oversight and Accountability

Chapter summary

This chapter examines the governance of Ballarat Grammar: whether the Board has had the structures, composition, skills and information needed to oversee the school's culture, safety and risk management effectively. It draws on interviews, submissions and document review to assess how governance has operated in practice, where it has fallen short, and what governing for a positive, safe and accountable culture requires going forward.

Effective governance in an educational institution is not confined to financial oversight and strategic planning. In a child safe environment, the governing body carries a direct responsibility for ensuring that systems of safety, accountability and culture are functioning as intended. The Victorian Child Safe Standards, given effect through Ministerial Order No. 1359, place governance at the centre of child safety. Standard 2 requires that organisations establish a culturally safe environment through leadership, governance and culture. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that failures of governance were a common feature of institutions where abuse occurred, and that boards which lacked diversity, independent oversight and the willingness to ask difficult questions were more likely to fail in their duty of care.¹⁷⁸

The Review found that the governance of Ballarat Grammar has not kept pace with the growth and complexity of the school. Perceived lines of authority between the Board and the Principal have been unclear. The Board's composition has not reflected the diversity of the school community or the skills required to oversee risk, culture and child safety. The Board's visibility within the school community has been limited or inconsistent, and its responsiveness to concerns, particularly in the period leading up to and following the Dart House incidents, has eroded trust. Systems for recording, tracking and monitoring incidents and risks related to behaviour and culture have been inadequate, limiting the Board's capacity to identify patterns and exercise informed oversight.

Intersection acknowledges that Ballarat Grammar has already implemented a number of important governance changes, including the establishment of a Cultural Review Committee as a standing committee of the Board, the engagement of a governance consultant to provide governance advice and committee structure review (with director training delivered through the AICD and similar bodies), a comprehensive review of child safety policies, and the development of a new risk management framework with a specific focus on psychosocial safety. These are positive steps. This chapter identifies further opportunities to build on that work and embed lasting change.

¹⁷⁸ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Final Report, December 2017) vols 2; 6 ('Institutional Responses').

11.1 Governance and leadership structure

11.1.1 Board and committee structure

The Constitution for Ballarat and Queen's Anglican Grammar School provides for the establishment of the school, its governing body and its core functions. The school is governed by a Board of 10 directors, incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, with 25 members.

The school's Anglican affiliations are embedded in its constitution and governance structure. The Board is responsible for oversight and direction of the school in meeting its objectives of providing 'a liberal, scientific and general education, including religious education in conformity with the principles of the Anglican Church'. The Anglican Bishop of Ballarat serves as the school's President, providing ceremonial and spiritual leadership and pastoral oversight.

Board directors include company members and Bishop-in-Council appointees. The constitution specifies that the Board must include the Archdeacon of Ballarat (or clergy appointed by the Bishop), four directors appointed by the Bishop-in-Council and four by the Board, one past student (in consultation with a past student body), and at least one director who is also a current parent. Principles for board appointments provide that directors should include five who are 'communicant' members of the church, 'a balance of both male and female', and a broad range of interests, qualifications, skills and experience to assist the Board in its role. Directors' terms are three years, after which they can be reappointed.

The Board operates six standing committees: the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee; Finance Committee; Planning Committee; Nominations Committee; Projects Committee; and Cultural Review Committee. The Cultural Review Committee was established to assist the Board with oversight of the school's cultural review processes. Its Charter describes 'a central role in ensuring that the School maintains a positive, inclusive, and forward-thinking culture that aligns with its values and vision'. This includes providing strategic guidance on cultural review efforts, reviewing senior leadership reports to identify trends, engaging with external partners and reporting to the Board.

The Board has recently approved changes to the committee structure so that student safety will become a specific focus of a renamed Student Safety, Risk and Governance Committee (with the audit function shifting to the renamed Audit and Finance Committee).

There are two other entities associated with the school's financial structure which operate as registered charities: the Ballarat Grammar Foundation and BGS Educational Services. While each has its own board, there has at times been overlapping membership between the three entities, a matter discussed further in section 10.4 below.

11.1.2 The Leadership structure

The school's day-to-day operations are led by the Principal (until recently known as the Headmaster), supported by a senior leadership team. Under the constitution, the Principal, who is also the company CEO, is appointed by the Board with the Bishop's agreement and must be a communicant unless the Bishop otherwise decides. A Board-appointed Business Manager serves as company secretary and is responsible to the Board for the school's financial and business administration. The Principal appoints and is responsible for oversight of all other school staff.

The senior leadership team includes leaders with an educational and academic focus, such as the Heads of School and Boarding, and operational and corporate leaders including the Business Manager and Director of People and Culture. A recent leadership restructure has introduced a number of new roles, including a Deputy Principal to whom the Heads of School and Boarding report, and new Heads of Teaching and Learning, Student Wellbeing and Safety, and Co-Curricular and Student Experience. Issues relating to leadership and management practices, including staff experience of the leadership structure, are discussed in the staff experience chapter.

11.2 Regulatory context and the VRQA review

The Board has oversight of the school's five-year Strategic Plan and the Principal is accountable to the Board for performance against its objectives. The Board must also ensure that Ballarat Grammar complies with a range of legal and regulatory standards applicable to independent schools in Victoria, including maintaining registration with the VRQA and ensuring compliance with the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic) and relevant Ministerial Orders.

The school's boarding facilities must comply with VRQA Minimum Standards for School Boarding Premises Registration, including implementing the Victorian Child Safe Standards under Ministerial Order No. 1359. This requires the Board to ensure that the school and its boarding premises develop and implement child safety strategies, policies, procedures and practices to create a child safe culture and environment. Additional regulatory standards apply in relation to international students, early childhood programs and student exchange programs.

The regulatory context for this Review is set out in Chapter 4. In summary, the VRQA commenced a review of boarding at Ballarat Grammar in April 2025, following the Dart House incidents. The VRQA identified that the school's boarding premises were non-compliant with minimum standards relating to governance and the care, safety and welfare of students. In late October 2025, the VRQA imposed six interim conditions on the school's boarding registration, including prohibiting the enrolment of new boarding students. Other conditions increased transparency through monthly progress reporting, provision of Board and committee minutes to the VRQA within seven days of approval, and notification to the VRQA of any child safety incident or complaint within 24 hours.

In setting out its reasons, the VRQA highlighted failures of governance and oversight directly:

Given the nature, frequency and extent of the incidents – which indicate a pervasive culture of bullying and student-to-student abuse – the VRQA considers there was a lack of appropriate oversight by the Board and leadership of Ballarat Grammar's school boarding premises.

The VRQA formed the view that the Board and senior leaders had received information in 2023 about a student being harmed in Wigan House and the culture of strapping, and had failed to take appropriate steps to address the incidents, mitigate risks to students and ensure a culture of child safety. The VRQA also found that the Board had failed to review policies and procedures required by the Child Safe Standards within the requisite timeframes, annually review the risk register, or ensure all staff completed mandatory training.

The VRQA acknowledged that ‘significant work’ had been done to address non-compliance, though this was ongoing. The prohibition on new boarding enrolments was lifted on 22 December 2025. The school continues to provide the VRQA with Board minutes, incident report and monthly progress reports.

Intersection also understands that the Board has taken steps to increase its visibility and engagement in boarding by meeting with parents and parent representatives, visiting the boarding houses and dining hall, and attending boarding activities.

11.3 Clarity of roles and decision-making authority

Through interviews and submissions, Intersection heard a range of perspectives about the Board, governance and leadership at Ballarat Grammar. While a small number of participants had direct contact with the Board, for most their engagement with governance was limited. Those who shared their views raised consistent concerns about the clarity of roles, decision-making authority and the separation of governance from operational management.

Consultations revealed confusion among parents and employees regarding the school’s governance structures, decision-making authority and the respective roles of the Board, the Principal and the associated entities. This lack of clarity has negatively influenced perceptions of accountability and contributed to undermining community confidence in the school’s oversight and direction.

There was limited understanding within the school community of the respective roles and responsibilities of each of the three boards, their membership and terms of appointment, or the involvement of the diocese. Parents and employees described uncertainty about who holds decision-making power:

The communication and how the boards even work, what is their role and who makes the decisions? Is it the Board or is it the leadership team? Is it the headmaster? None of that is documented anywhere at all. So it’s like this secret system of decision making, and they make big decisions.

So there’s no watch and oversight for the school, and if the diocese controls the board, how do you ever change that and make sure that you have people that are putting the protection of children first.

Some parents questioned Board decisions that appeared to prioritise financial considerations over the interests of students. The lack of management of the school’s significant growth was a particularly common concern. Parents and staff perceived that the Board had endorsed significant expansion without proper planning, consultation or assessment of risk:

I don't feel like the Board actually understood their role properly. And I don't think that they've had enough oversight of actually what they were meant to do and an understanding of the actual risk that schools have. And I think that they've focused on growth and I think they've focused on facilities and I think they're focused on all the things that are kind of fun to talk about. And they've not had lots of uncomfortable conversations.

The implications of the school's growth for systems, staffing and student experience are discussed in Chapter 6. The specific consequences for boarding supervision are discussed in Chapter 8 (see section 8.2.1). For parents, the growth concern is discussed in Chapter 9 (see section 9.4). What is relevant here is the governance dimension: whether the Board assessed the risks associated with growth, whether it ensured the school had the systems, workforce and infrastructure to manage a larger and more complex organisation, and whether it maintained adequate oversight of the cultural and operational consequences.

The Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) emphasises that the Board of a not-for-profit organisation must ensure that it understands the organisation's operating environment and the risks it faces, and that it has systems in place to manage those risks effectively.¹⁷⁹ The evidence gathered by this Review suggests that the Board's focus on growth and capital investment was not matched by equivalent attention to the systems, workforce and cultural infrastructure needed to sustain a safe and effective school at the expanded scale.

Intersection also heard about a perceived blurring of roles between the Board and the Principal. In some cases, employees spoke about Board overreach, where the Board appeared to have too much influence on day-to-day management and operational decisions. Others felt that the Principal's leadership style had contributed to a lack of clear separation between the Board's strategic and oversight functions and the operational responsibilities of the Principal and senior leadership:

I feel like he's done above and beyond all the things that one man is capable of ... it's actually their oversight. They're the boss and it feels like he's the boss. He's the 2IC, but kind of telling them what to do and it shouldn't be like that. I would like to see the Board take more accountability and be more aware of their responsibilities.

A good CEO knows how to convince a Board of why their decisions are good and why their leadership is the right style without controlling the Board. I think there's a level here of [the Principal] has controlled the Board for a period of time to his detriment as well, because when the crisis has occurred, they have not known what to do.

Good governance practice requires a clear delineation between the role of the board, which is responsible for strategy, oversight and accountability, and the role of the executive, which is responsible for operations and implementation. The AICD's Not-for-Profit Governance Principles

¹⁷⁹ Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), *Not-for-Profit Governance Principles* (2nd ed, 2019) ('Not-for-Profit Governance Principles').

identify the separation of governance and management as a foundational principle, noting that boards must 'oversee and monitor organisational performance and the achievement of the entity's strategic goals' without descending into operational management.¹⁸⁰ Where these boundaries become blurred, the risk is that neither function is performed effectively. The Board loses its capacity for independent oversight, and the executive loses the space to lead.

11.4 Board composition, diversity and skills

Some school leaders who had direct experience of engaging with the Board described a positive and constructive relationship, marked by directors who were professional and compassionate:

And we have a great Board in terms of they're all professional people, but they're all courteous, they're all kind, compassionate. They'll challenge you however they are kind and compassionate about how they go about it.

However, Intersection heard from a number of employees and parents that there were concerns about a lack of diversity, stagnant membership and questions about whether the Board has the right skills for the oversight challenges it now faces.

Intersection was provided with a skills matrix for the Ballarat Grammar Board for 2026. Six directors have served on the Board for 12 or more years. Seven directors are communicants. Two directors are identified as current or future parents, and two with boarding experience (as a parent or student). The Board is relatively gender-balanced, with women representing 40% (four out of ten) of directors. However, other diversity characteristics are not identified in the matrix.

In consultations, participants felt that the lack of diversity in the Board and school leadership was out of step with the increasing demographic diversity of the broader school community:

So as the school demographics changes, I'm concerned that the diversity is not seen anywhere in leadership. It's not anywhere in the board. I'm not hearing it, I'm not seeing it. I'm not speaking it.

The long tenures of some Board members were raised as a risk factor. Participants suggested that stagnant leadership could reduce willingness to challenge decisions, foster complacency and limit innovation in addressing emerging issues such as child safety and psychosocial risk:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.



The people can be on the Board for seemingly forever and that's lovely in terms of having cultural knowledge and historical knowledge of the school. But it also means that you don't have robust governance if you don't have new people coming in and changing and challenging.

There's three boards in the school and the people on those boards, some of them have been there for over 30 years. How can you have best practice governance, people running a school when I don't know how you can be relevant for that length of time. They get recycled from Board to Board. They don't recruit outside, they just keep it all inside.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that boards which lacked diversity, particularly in relation to gender and professional background, were less likely to identify and respond to child safety risks.¹⁸¹ The Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry (the Hayne Royal Commission) similarly identified that boards with homogeneous membership and long-serving directors are susceptible to groupthink, a dynamic in which the desire for consensus overrides the willingness to ask difficult questions or challenge prevailing assumptions.¹⁸²

The AICD's governance guidance for not-for-profit entities is direct on this point: 'Boards should comprise directors with an appropriate mix of skills, experience and personal attributes that allows the Board to cover its key functions and bring a diversity of perspective to its decision-making'.¹⁸³ The AICD also recommends that boards adopt formal tenure limits for directors and establish nomination processes that actively seek diversity of background and capability, not simply replicate existing membership profiles.¹⁸⁴

Participants raised concerns that the response to the Dart House incidents had exposed gaps in the Board's skills, particularly in relation to risk management, crisis governance and child safety:

I don't think anyone can argue with the fact that critical errors were made. And I don't know that the capacity of the board, I think they're all probably capable people. But I don't think that they actually had enough understanding of what a Board actually does and also how they respond in a crisis.

181 *Institutional Responses* (n 177) vol 6 ch 2.

182 *Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry* (Final Report, February 2019) vol 1 see discussion of board culture and governance at 401-12 ('Hayne Royal Commission').

183 *Not-for-Profit Governance Principles* (n 178) principle 3.

184 *Ibid.*



I don't think there's the right skill set, no point having a whole group of lawyers on a Board that's an educational institute that needs to understand the student lens and perspective, diversity of the population that the school serves and really progressive educational input not from a teacher of the school.

Parents of boarders perceived that significant changes were being made to boarding with no current boarding parent representative involved in decision-making at Board level. One parent observed:

It would be lovely to see a boarding parent rep be part of it, so those questions could be asked to say, 'okay, from a practical point of view, we're going to change this in boarding. How do you think the parents are going to react to that?' People who sit on the Board should be directly involved with the school.

In contrast, Intersection heard from parents of former boarders that in the past, when there had been significant changes to boarding such as the amalgamation or creation of boarding houses, this had been handled effectively and 'respectfully' by the school, with boarding parents actively engaged throughout and able to advocate for the boarders' interests. The current experience represents a departure from that standard.

The constitutional requirement that five of the ten directors be communicants of the Anglican Church warrants consideration in this context. While the school's Anglican affiliation is a defining feature of its identity and governance, this requirement necessarily constrains the pool of individuals who are willing and able to take on a voluntary governance role with significant responsibility, and may limit the Board's ability to recruit directors with the specific skills, diversity and independence that the current challenges demand.

A number of independent schools with denominational affiliations have in recent years reviewed and amended their constitutional arrangements to balance heritage governance with the need for contemporary skills and diverse representation. This is not a matter of diminishing the school's Anglican character, but of ensuring that the governance framework supports rather than constrains the Board's capacity to govern effectively.

11.5 Visibility, transparency and accountability

In consultations, parents expressed concern about what they saw as a lack of visibility and engagement by the Board. Most parents would be unfamiliar with the directors, apart from possibly the Chair. This lack of visibility creates oversight gaps if parents and other members of the school community do not understand the Board's role or how to engage with it:

I think the Board needs to step up and be visible in this process and I haven't seen them be visible at all. Having come from reporting to a Board as an executive, the Board was very visible when things got tough and you need that solidarity. And I can't see it.

They're untouchable. They come to events sometimes, but they don't actively engage really. They're just there as a token.

Employees reflected similar concerns. They spoke about the impact of the Board's absence on staff morale following the media coverage of the Dart House incidents. Staff felt unsupported and left to deal directly with families and public scrutiny without visible governance leadership:

All of us, I've had parents screaming at me saying, you knew about this and you did nothing about it. They haven't had that. They don't call the parents. They're not even present in everyday life. They don't come to the junior school production. Why weren't they all sitting at graduation? They weren't showing their support for all of us by being present.

[Intersection notes that the Board Chair attended the Junior School production, and Chair and Board members attended the Year 12 graduation, with the Chair giving a speech.]

Parents and employees expressed criticism of the Board's response to the Dart House incidents. Some parents felt that serious safety concerns escalated through formal channels were not adequately addressed. One family felt the Board's response was 'downplaying' their concerns, and that the school's leadership 'were being scripted by lawyers or they just don't get it. There's no trust, there's no accountability. Response has been zero'.

Multiple participants described a lack of transparency and an 'opaque' culture of withholding information. One employee described it as 'there's a fair bit of we need to share the bare minimum unless we're forced into a corner'. Staff doubted whether they would see the Fenner Review report, and access to it was delayed. Others felt this opacity was linked to a historical pattern of issues being 'swept under the carpet':

When there's radio silence for a long time, that's the feeling that comes across that it's a bit of, 'oh, maybe if we don't bring it up, they'll forget about this and we can get away with it.'



Others felt that the response prioritised the school's reputation over student welfare and safety, and that issues in boarding had been known about but not acted on until they were in the public domain:

That includes the Board of the school as well as the leadership. So again, it wasn't until some families decided to go public with this that they decided to act, but they were well aware of this, you know, two years prior. That again leads into the accountability and being timely and responsibility for your actions.

There was also a perception, discussed in the parent chapter (see section 9.7), that students from wealthy, well-known families or with 'Old Grammarian' connections received preferential treatment or were protected from consequences. Both employees and parents questioned why Board members and senior leaders had not been held accountable for what they viewed as a governance failure in relation to student safety:

It wasn't until they were absolutely backed into a corner that they've actually started to act. So I would've been happier if VRQA spilled them and said, let's actually get some really experienced people. And now they're suddenly like, we're going to get a consultant in about governance. It just seems like only when their positions were threatened.

The AICD emphasises that visibility and communication are not peripheral to good governance; they are part of it. For a not-for-profit board, maintaining the confidence of stakeholders requires that the Board is 'visible and accessible to its members and stakeholders, and that it communicates its decisions and the reasons for them in a timely way'.¹⁸⁵ Where a Board operates at arm's length from the community it serves, the risk is not only reputational. It is functional: the Board loses access to the information, insight and early warning signals that an engaged community provides.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid principle 8.

11.6 Risk management and oversight of child safety

11.6.1 What risk management requires in a child safe environment

Risk management in a school environment extends well beyond financial risk and regulatory compliance. In a child safe environment, the governing body must ensure that systems are in place to identify, assess, control and monitor risks to the safety, wellbeing and development of children.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards, implemented through Ministerial Order No. 1359, require that child safety be embedded in governance, leadership and culture (Standard 2), that policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe (Standard 11). These standards require that the Board and leadership actively monitor compliance, review the effectiveness of child safety strategies and respond to identified risks.

The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 introduced specific requirements in relation to psychosocial hazards in the workplace. These require employers to identify psychosocial hazards, assess the risks they pose and implement controls to eliminate or reduce those risks so far as is reasonably practicable. Psychosocial hazards include for example workplace bullying, exposure to traumatic events, poor organisational change management and inadequate support. These requirements are directly relevant to the staff experience findings of this Review, including the evidence of workload pressures, change fatigue and the burden of managing parental behaviour discussed in the parent chapter (see section 9.7) and the staff experience chapter (see section 10.4).

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse articulated a clear framework for what effective governance oversight of child safety looks like. It requires that boards take an active role in risk management, not merely receive assurance from management. Boards must have direct access to information about incidents, complaints and patterns of concern. They must have the skills to interrogate that information critically. And they must have the institutional resolve to act on what they find, even when doing so is uncomfortable or disruptive to existing relationships and structures.¹⁸⁶

The Australian Standard for Risk Management (AS/NZS ISO 31000) provides the general framework within which these specific obligations sit. It requires that risk management be systematic, structured and integrated into governance and decision-making at all levels. In the school context, this means that the Board must have visibility not only of individual incidents but of patterns and trends that may indicate systemic risk. It requires that risk registers are living documents, regularly reviewed and updated, not compliance artefacts produced annually and filed.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ *Institutional Responses* (n 177) vol 6 recommendations 6.4-6.6.

¹⁸⁷ *Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand*, AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management – Guidelines (2018).

11.6.2 Gaps in risk data and oversight at ballarat grammar

The Review identified that the school has lacked adequate systems for recording, tracking and monitoring incidents and risks related to behaviour, culture and child safety in a way that allows this data to be considered systemically. This is a significant gap. Without reliable, aggregated data, the Board has limited visibility of emerging patterns, cannot effectively hold management to account, and cannot discharge its governance obligations under the Child Safe Standards.

Concerningly, some employees referred to a lack of systematic recording of mandatory reports in relation to student safety concerns. One employee observed:

What's been exposed is there's actually a lack of systems across the whole school. And as we've grown as we've changed, things change all the time. The systems haven't been built. So there wasn't even a centralised way of just keeping an oversight of how many kids have been mandatory reported.

The school's learning management system and communication platform (Nexus) allows staff to record behaviour-related incidents and pastoral interactions. While it also has the capability to identify patterns, trends or risks across a cohort, a House, a year level or over time, employees noted that this broader pattern-level analysis was not occurring in practice. This limitation is directly relevant to the findings of this Review. Many of the concerns identified, including inconsistent behaviour management (Chapter 7, section 7.6), harmful practices in boarding (Chapter 8, sections 8.2 and 8.3) and communication failures (Chapter 9, section 9.3), are systemic in character. They can only be identified and addressed when data is analysed at a systemic level.

Intersection notes that the school has significantly revised and updated its student safety and related policies, procedures and risk management documentation. A new Student Safety Framework provides an overarching structure. This has included the development of a new Risk Management Framework accompanied by three risk registers, including a child safety specific risk register. School leaders have also initiated an ad hoc register for recording incidents related to racism at the school, though the ongoing status and governance of this register is unclear.

These developments are positive. But their effectiveness will depend on three things: whether the systems are implemented consistently across the school and supported by adequate staff training; whether reporting to the Board is structured, regular and mandatory rather than discretionary; and whether the Board has the capability to critically interrogate the information it receives. A risk register that exists on paper but is not actively maintained, regularly reviewed or used to inform governance decision-making is a compliance document, not a risk management tool.

11.6.3 Board policy approval authority

Intersection notes that the school's policy framework includes formal approval authority designations. Approximately half of the policies reviewed are designated as requiring Board of Directors approval, including the Student Safety and Support Policy (SSS-001), the Behaviour Management Policy (SSS-026), the Student Harassment Procedure (SSS-023), the Professional Boundaries Policy (SSS-008),

the Complaints and Compliments Handling Policy (CGS-005), the Recruitment and Selection Policy and the Conditions of Enrolment. The remaining policies are approved by the Principal, with one approved by the Deputy Head of Operations.

Intersection acknowledges that the Board's role as approval authority for key safeguarding and governance policies is appropriate and consistent with good governance practice. It means the Board has formal oversight of the content of the school's most significant policy documents.

However, policy approval is the starting point of governance, not the endpoint. Approving a document means the Board has reviewed its content and authorised its adoption. It does not mean the Board automatically has visibility of whether the policy is being implemented, whether staff understand it, whether it is being applied consistently, or whether it is producing the outcomes it describes. The distinction between procedural governance and substantive governance is critical here. A Board that approves a child safety policy but has no independent mechanism to assess whether that policy is functioning in practice is performing a compliance function, not an oversight function. The evidence gathered through this Review, and the findings of the VRQA, suggest that this distinction is directly relevant to how governance has operated at Ballarat Grammar.

The analysis also identified a structural concern with the approval arrangements for the Whistleblower Policy (CGS-015). That policy is approved by the Principal, not the Board. This is a governance issue. Whistleblower protections exist to enable reporting of serious wrongdoing that may implicate senior management. A policy designed to protect people who raise concerns about leadership should not have its terms set by the person whose conduct those protections may need to address. ASIC's Regulatory Guide 270 recommends that whistleblower policies be approved by the Board of Directors, not by management, to preserve the independence and credibility of the protections.¹⁸⁸ The school should transfer approval authority for the Whistleblower Policy to the Board as a matter of priority. The school advised that its external whistleblower provider directs reports to the Principal, except where a report concerns the Principal, in which case it is directed to the Board Chair. While this provides a route for concerns about the Principal, the arrangement is not clearly communicated, and all other reports default to the executive. The school has advised it will direct all whistleblower reports to the Board in future. That change, together with the transfer of approval authority, would align the facility with its protective purpose, and should be reflected in a revised policy that states plainly that a report may be made about any member of staff, including the Principal.

11.6.4 Mapping regulatory obligations to review findings

The findings and recommendations of this Review, the implementation of the Fenner Review recommendations, and the VRQA conditions and audit requirements all operate within the same regulatory landscape. It is critical that the school and its Board do not treat these as separate, parallel workstreams. They must be mapped to a single, integrated compliance and implementation framework that connects each initiative to the underlying regulatory obligation it is designed to address.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards provide the overarching framework against which all child safety

¹⁸⁸ *Not-for-Profit Governance Principles* (n 178) principles 1; 2.



related initiatives should be assessed. The recommendations in this Report that relate to student safety, reporting, behaviour management, boarding culture and oversight (Chapters 7, 8 and 9) should be mapped against the eleven Child Safe Standards to identify where they reinforce existing compliance and where further action is required.

The Fenner Review made 32 recommendations, of which 31 were accepted by the school. These are focused on boarding operations and are overseen by the Cultural Review Committee. Implementation of these recommendations should be tracked against the VRQA conditions, particularly those relating to governance oversight, incident reporting and student safety. Where Fenner Review recommendations overlap with or complement the recommendations of this Review, they should be consolidated into a single implementation plan to avoid duplication and ensure accountability.

Recommendations in this Review that relate to the employee experience, including psychosocial safety, workload, management capability and the management of parental behaviour towards staff, should be mapped to the psychosocial hazard risk framework established under the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022. These recommendations are being developed in the staff experience chapter and will require the school to identify psychosocial hazards, assess the associated risks and implement controls. The Board will need to ensure that its oversight of these obligations is as structured and rigorous as its oversight of child safety.

Intersection recommends that the school develop a single regulatory mapping document that aligns the recommendations of this Review, the Fenner Review implementation status, the VRQA conditions and audit requirements, the Child Safe Standards and the psychosocial hazard obligations into one consolidated framework. This document should be maintained by the Principal and reported against to the Board on a quarterly basis through the Cultural Review Committee or the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee. Without this integration, there is a risk that the school's response remains fragmented, with different initiatives operating in silos and the Board unable to see the full picture of its compliance and implementation position.

11.7 Governing for culture

The preceding sections of this chapter have identified concerns in governance oversight, Board composition, transparency, risk management and the school's policy framework. This section sets out what governing for a positive, safe and accountable culture requires, drawing on established governance frameworks and the lessons of comparable institutional reviews. It is intended to provide the Board with a clear picture of what good practice looks like as a practical standard against which its own performance can be assessed.

11.7.1 Culture as a governance responsibility

Culture is a governance matter, not solely a management matter. The AICD's guidance on governing organisational culture, developed in the wake of the Hayne Royal Commission, is explicit on this point: the Board is responsible for setting the expected culture, satisfying itself that the culture is consistent with the organisation's purpose and values, and holding management to account when it is not.¹⁸⁹ This does not mean that the Board manages culture day-to-day. It means that the Board must have its own independent sources of insight into organisational culture and cannot rely solely on management assurance.

The Hayne Royal Commission found that boards had consistently failed to look beyond financial metrics to understand the culture operating within their organisations. In the banking sector, this meant that boards received reporting on profit, compliance and risk in financial terms, but had little or no visibility of the conduct, values and behavioural norms that were driving outcomes on the ground.¹⁹⁰ The parallel with Ballarat Grammar is direct. The Board did not appear to have adequate visibility of the culture and safety of the school's boarding environment and the behaviour and wellbeing of its students and staff.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that the single most important governance factor in whether an institution was child safe was the degree to which the governing body actively demonstrated, not just stated, its commitment to child safety.¹⁹¹ That commitment must be visible, sustained and embedded in how the Board operates, what it prioritises, what it measures and what it is willing to act on even when doing so is uncomfortable. A Board that delegates its cultural responsibilities entirely to a committee or to the Principal, and then does not critically examine what it is told, has not adequately discharged its governance obligation.

11.7.2 Leading and lagging indicators

Effective culture governance requires the Board to monitor both leading and lagging indicators of cultural health. Lagging indicators, such as incident reports, complaints and regulatory actions, tell the Board what has already gone wrong. Leading indicators, such as staff engagement and turnover data, reporting rates through formal channels, training completion rates, student voice and survey data, exit interview themes and the results of structured culture assessments, tell the Board about the conditions that may give rise to future harm.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ *Governing Organisational Culture* (July 2019) which argues that 'boards must take ownership of the culture of their organisations, set clear expectations, and ensure they have the information they need to assess whether those expectations are being met'.

¹⁹⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* (2017) principle 6.

¹⁹¹ *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Regulations* (n 131).

¹⁹² Australian Institute of Company Directors, *Governing Organisational Culture* (Director Tool, 2019); Chartered Institute of Internal



Ballarat Grammar has historically had visibility only of lagging indicators, and even those appear to have been inadequate. The absence of systematic data on behaviour incidents, mandatory reports, and staff wellbeing has meant that the Board has been governing culture without the information needed to do so. The development of a culture dashboard that includes both leading and lagging indicators, reported to the Board on a regular cycle, is essential to closing this gap.

The AICD recommends that boards establish key metrics for culture and conduct, review them regularly and benchmark them over time.¹⁹³ For Ballarat Grammar, this should include, at a minimum: incident data disaggregated by type, House and year level; reporting rates through all channels including anonymous reporting; staff engagement, turnover and vacancy rates (including in boarding); student wellbeing survey data; training completion rates for child safety and psychosocial hazard obligations; and the status of implementation of the recommendations of this Review and the Fenner Review.

11.7.3 The Role of the cultural review committee

The establishment of the Cultural Review Committee is a positive governance response. Its charter describes a central role in ensuring the school maintains a positive and inclusive culture. For this Committee to fulfil its purpose, it will need defined authority, structured reporting and access to independent information.

The Committee should have a defined reporting cycle to the Board, with standing agenda items that include a 'culture health check' at every meeting. It should have access to data and information beyond what the Principal and senior leadership provide, including the ability to receive reports directly from key functions such as wellbeing and student safety, and hear directly from staff and student representatives. Its terms of reference should specify that it reports to the Board on a quarterly basis with a standing report on culture indicators, implementation progress and emerging risks.

The Committee should also have a role in overseeing the implementation of the recommendations of this Review, the Fenner Review and any further actions arising from the VRQA audit. This oversight role should be structured and documented, with clear accountability for implementation resting with the Principal and regular reporting to the committee on progress, barriers and outcomes.

11.7.4 Visibility and presence

Literature on good governance, including the AICD's governance principles and the frameworks that emerged from the Hayne Royal Commission, emphasises that boards cannot govern culture from the boardroom alone.¹⁹⁴ Directors need structured, regular exposure to the operational environment: visiting boarding houses, attending staff forums, sitting in on parent meetings. This is about building

Auditors, *Culture and the Role of Internal Audit: Looking Below the Surface* (2014). The distinction between leading and lagging indicators of culture is well established in governance literature and was emphasised in the post-Hayne regulatory guidance issued by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority: *Transforming Governance, Culture, Remuneration and Accountability: APRA's Approach* (Information Paper, 2019).

¹⁹³ *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth) ss 3.4, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2 ('Disability Standards for Education'). The Standards apply to all aspects of education including enrolment, participation, curriculum development, student support services and the elimination of harassment and victimisation; *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) s 22.

¹⁹⁴ *Not-for-Profit Governance Principles* (n 178) principle 8; *Hayne Royal Commission* (n 181) on the importance of boards obtaining 'first-hand and unfiltered information about the entity's culture and conduct'.

the Board's own understanding of what the culture actually feels like at ground level, and ensuring that the information the Board receives through formal reporting is consistent with the reality of the school's operations.

Intersection acknowledges that the Board has taken steps in this direction, including visiting boarding houses and attending boarding activities. This is a practice that should be embedded permanently as part of the Board's governance calendar, not treated as a temporary response to the current crisis. Each director should have at least one structured visit to the school's operational environment per term, with a focus on different areas of the school over the course of the year. The insights from these visits should be discussed at Board or committee meetings as a standing item.

Visibility also extends to communication. The Board must be accessible to the school community, not through informal channels or personal relationships, but through structured, transparent mechanisms. Regular communication from the Board on governance matters, and an annual governance and culture report to the school community would all contribute to rebuilding the trust that has been eroded.

11.8 Analysis of school policies

Section summary

As part of the Review, Intersection examined policies and procedures provided by Ballarat Grammar covering student safety, wellbeing, behaviour management, inclusion, governance, complaints handling, staff recruitment and induction, and operational matters. The majority of these documents were revised or newly created in mid to late 2025, in the period following the Dart House incidents and the commencement of the VRQA review. This section sets out the findings of that analysis.

Intersection acknowledges at the outset that Ballarat Grammar has undertaken a substantial body of policy work. The school now has a comprehensive suite of documents that addresses, on paper, a wide range of student safety and wellbeing matters. The Student Safety and Support Policy (SSS-001) provides an overarching framework. Supporting policies address specific domains including safeguarding officers, professional boundaries, pastoral care, counselling, behaviour management, bullying prevention, harassment, assault, self-harm, inclusive education, and the welfare of international students. Corporate governance policies address complaints handling, whistleblower protections, inclusion and equity, and equal opportunity.

The question, however, is not whether the policies exist. It is whether they are adequate in design, coherent as a system, and capable of being implemented in a way that delivers the outcomes they describe. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that the presence of policies, even well-drafted ones, is not itself evidence of a child safe culture. Many institutions that failed children had policies that were adequate on paper but had never been effectively implemented, communicated to staff or monitored for compliance.¹⁹⁵ The analysis that follows applies that lens.

¹⁹⁵ *Institutional Responses* (n 177) vol 6. The Commission found that many institutions had policies that were adequate on paper but had never been effectively implemented, communicated to staff, or monitored for compliance.

Approach and assessment framework

The policy analysis was conducted as a desktop review of policies and procedures provided by Ballarat Grammar. Each document was assessed against the regulatory obligations and best practice governance and policy principles applicable to the operation of an independent school in Victoria, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Ministerial Order No. 1359), the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (2018), the AICD's *Not-for-Profit Governance Principles* (2nd edition, 2019), the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse *Final Report Volume 6: Making Institutions Child Safe* (2017), ASIC *Regulatory Guide 270: Whistleblower Policies* (2019), the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth), and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 (Vic).

The assessment examined five dimensions: whether each policy addresses the matters it needs to address given the school's regulatory environment; whether the policy framework is internally consistent and coherent as a system; whether the language and structure of individual policies support consistent implementation by staff; whether adequate accountability, monitoring and reporting mechanisms are built into the framework; and whether the policies meet the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards and the Disability Standards for Education. The review did not assess whether individual policies are being implemented in practice. That question is addressed through the qualitative evidence in other chapters of this report and through the governance analysis elsewhere in this chapter.

11.8.1 Timing and context of the policy overhaul

Almost all of the policies reviewed were created or substantially revised between August and September 2025, a period that coincides with the VRQA review, the Fenner Review and the commencement of this Cultural Review. A smaller number of documents were updated in September 2025. The volume and timing of the revision suggest a reactive response to external pressure rather than an embedded, ongoing process of policy development and review.

This observation is not a criticism of the decision to revise the policies. Given the regulatory action and the findings of the Fenner Review, a comprehensive policy overhaul was appropriate and necessary. But the timing does raise questions about the maturity of the school's policy framework prior to 2025. Several policies are marked as 'new documents' rather than revisions of existing documents, suggesting that in some areas, such as student safety risk management (SSS-007) and professional boundaries (SSS-008), formal policy had not previously existed. A school of Ballarat Grammar's size, complexity and regulatory exposure should have had these frameworks in place well before 2025.

The risk with a reactive, compressed policy development cycle is that documents are produced to satisfy regulatory requirements without the organisational embedding needed to make them effective. Policies need to be known, understood and applied by the staff who are expected to implement them. The gap between policy creation and consistent implementation is one of the central themes of this Review's broader findings and is discussed throughout this Report.

11.8.2 Strengths of the policy framework

The policy framework has a number of genuine strengths that should be acknowledged.

The **Student Safety and Support Policy** (SSS-001) provides a clear overarching structure and articulates a zero tolerance stance on child abuse. It names specific roles and accountabilities from the Board through to individual staff members, and references the school's mandatory reporting obligations.

The **LGBTIQA+ Students Policy** (SSS-019) is a well-considered document that centres the student in all decision-making, recognises mature minor status, provides practical guidance on support plans and facility access, and includes comprehensive definitions of gender and sexual identity. It represents the kind of specificity and student-centred approach that is needed across other areas of the policy framework.

The **Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy** (SSS-024) includes useful distinctions between bullying, conflict and one-off incidents. It addresses cyberbullying with contemporary examples including deepfakes and AI-generated imagery, and it acknowledges the specific dynamics of boarding culture.

The **Self-Harming Behaviour Policy** (SSS-044) includes a well-structured response procedure with clear escalation steps, a detailed flowchart and a useful appendix that walks staff through different scenarios from initial identification through to documentation. The direction that staff must not confront students directly about suspected self-harm but must report promptly and compassionately reflects a sensitive and informed approach.

The **Professional Boundaries Policy** (SSS-008) addresses the particular challenges of the boarding environment, where the boundary between professional and personal relationships is less defined. It includes guidance on cultural sensitivities, disclosure requirements and after-hours contact.

Staff recruitment and induction policies include appropriate screening and child safety checks. The Recruitment and Selection Policy requires interview panels to include mixed gender representation and mandates explicit questions to referees about suitability to work with children. The Staff Induction and Onboarding Policy requires mandatory annual child safety training and completion of the PROTECT online training module. These are sound foundations.

11.9 Systemic gaps and concerns

11.9.1 Fragmentation and lack of integration

The most significant structural concern is the fragmentation of the policy framework. Multiple documents covering overlapping domains, each with its own definitions, roles, reporting pathways and review cycles, create a system that is difficult for staff to navigate and risks inconsistency in application. There is no single, integrated framework document that maps the relationships between policies, clarifies which document takes precedence when they overlap, or provides staff with a practical guide to which policy applies in a given situation.

This fragmentation is directly relevant to the review's findings on inconsistent behaviour management. For example: a staff member who witnesses a student making a racist remark to another student in the playground could reasonably consult any of six different policies. Each would point the staff member in a different direction.

The **Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (SSS-024)** would apply if the conduct formed part of a pattern. It directs the staff member to use the 'Method of Shared Concern' or a 'No Blame' approach for initial stages, with escalation to the Head of School or Principal for severe incidents. It does not define what constitutes a severe incident or specify when the restorative approach should be abandoned in favour of formal consequences.

The **Student Harassment Procedure (SSS-023)** defines racial harassment and adopts a restorative approach, but does not contain its own investigation pathway - instead deferring to the Bullying Prevention procedure and associated documents, adding a further navigation layer for the staff member.

The **Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026)** states that 'discrimination, racism, harassment and victimisation of any type is identified, confronted and not tolerated'. It references an Anti-Racism Framework led by an Anti-Racism Working Group, but provides no detail on what that framework involves or how a specific incident should be managed under it. It directs the staff member to use the school's complaints procedures, including conciliation.

The **Behaviour Management Policy (SSS-026)** classifies *repeated* harassment or bullying of others as a 'major infringement' to be dealt with by the Principal. The policy does list a range of disciplinary measures - from restorative conversations through to expulsion - but doesn't specify which measure applies to which type of incident.

The **Equal Opportunity and Valuing Diversity Policy** defines racial discrimination and vilification, states that complaints will be investigated 'in a confidential and procedurally fair manner', and references external complaint bodies including the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. It treats the matter as a workplace and school conduct issue, with investigation and potential disciplinary action. The Review notes that the policy only defines workplace discrimination under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth), rather than using the definition of discrimination included in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) which would cover discrimination against both students and staff.

At the time of writing, the status of this policy was unclear. The version provided to the Review was not numbered and did not have an approval date.

The **Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004)** provides the overarching child safety framework and states that racism will be addressed with 'appropriate consequences'. It names Student Safeguarding Officers as the first point of contact for safety concerns and references mandatory reporting obligations, but does not specifically direct how a racist incident should be classified or responded to within its framework.

A staff member standing in a playground having just heard a racist remark has no time to consult six documents, reconcile their different approaches and work out which pathway to follow. In practice, the staff member will do one of three things: follow whichever process they are most familiar with, make a judgement call on the spot, or do nothing because the system is too unclear. The Review's evidence suggests all three responses are occurring. The result is a system in which the nature of the response to racism depends not on the character or severity of the conduct but on the individual staff member's

familiarity with the policy framework, their confidence, and their personal judgement about whether the matter is serious enough to escalate. This is the structural foundation for the inconsistency the review documented.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards require not only that policies and procedures exist but that they are understood and implemented by all staff.¹⁹⁶ A policy framework that requires staff to navigate potentially dozens of separate documents to understand their obligations is a barrier to that standard being met.

11.9.2 Flexibility and discretion in decision-making

Throughout the policy suite, critical decision points are expressed in language that provides significant discretion to individual staff members and school leaders. Terms such as ‘appropriate consequences’, ‘as required’, ‘where appropriate’, ‘at absolute discretion’ and ‘on a case-by-case basis’ appear repeatedly across behaviour management, complaints handling, harassment and discrimination policies.

Some flexibility in decision-making is appropriate and necessary. Every student’s circumstances are different, and a rigid, mechanistic approach to behaviour management and complaints handling would not serve students well. Staff need the professional space to exercise judgement, take into account the individual circumstances of each student, and calibrate their response to the particular situation.

The concern is not that decision-makers have discretion. It is that there are no published guidelines that set out the factors to be considered, the range of available responses, or the standards that have been applied. Where decisions are made without transparency about the criteria used, the school community has no basis on which to assess whether the response was fair, consistent or proportionate. In the context of this review’s findings, where students, parents and staff described a system in which consequences varied depending on who was involved, which staff member responded and what relationships were in play, the absence of clear guidelines and transparent decision-making standards is a contributing factor. Flexibility with guardrails produces good outcomes. Discretion without transparency produces inconsistency.

11.9.3 The gap in anti-discrimination and anti-racism infrastructure

Across the policies reviewed, racism and racial discrimination are mentioned in several documents. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004) states that racism will be addressed with ‘appropriate consequences’. The Behaviour Management Policy (SSS-026) lists racist harassment as a major infringement. The Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026) states that ‘discrimination, racism, harassment and victimisation of any type is identified, confronted and not tolerated’. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004) references the Diversity and Anti-Racism Framework as a supporting document.

The Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Framework (draft dated October 2025) addresses racism response at a strategic level, including commitments to reporting mechanisms, investigation,

¹⁹⁶ See Standard 11: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people. In complying with Child Safe Standard 11 an organisation must, at a minimum, ensure: ‘11.5 Staff and volunteers understand and implement policies and procedures.’

restorative practices, support for affected students, and data collection. However, the framework does not constitute an operational protocol. It does not define what constitutes a racist incident for the purpose of the school's response, does not set out the specific mandatory steps staff must follow when one is reported or observed, does not establish recording and escalation requirements with specified timeframes, does not specify the expected range of consequences, and does not require the school to report on patterns of racist behaviour to the Board. The status of the document is itself unclear: the version reviewed by the Review is dated October 2025, but the document code field is incomplete and no original approval date is recorded.

This remains a significant gap. The Review heard consistent evidence from students across all year levels that racist comments and conduct were dismissed by staff, treated as jokes or responded to with no meaningful consequence. The policy framework, including the Anti-Racism Framework, does not provide staff with the operational direction they need to respond consistently and effectively to specific incidents. In the absence of a clear protocol – one that tells a staff member standing in a playground exactly what to do when they hear a racist remark – staff are left to exercise their own judgement, and the evidence of this Review is that that judgement has produced inconsistent outcomes.

By contrast, the LGBTIQ+ Students Policy (SSS-019) demonstrates that the school is capable of producing a detailed, student-centred policy for a specific area of diversity and identity. A comparable document for racial and cultural discrimination does not exist. The school's Student Safety Definitions and Additional Resources document (SSS-003) however, does include a definition of racial, cultural and religious abuse or discrimination. The Student Safety Code of Conduct (SSS-005) includes a specific section on cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children but does not extend equivalent specificity to students from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The cumulative effect is a policy framework that acknowledges racism as a problem in general terms but does not equip staff to respond to it, does not hold anyone accountable for responding inadequately, and does not provide the school with the data it needs to identify patterns and exercise governance oversight.

11.9.4 Reporting pathways: multiple channels, unclear coordination

The policy framework establishes multiple reporting channels for student safety concerns: Student Safeguarding Officers (SSS-010), the Wellbeing Team and Deputy Head for Student Care and Wellbeing (SSS-017), the Health Centre (SSS-039), school counsellors (SSS-018), Heads of House, classroom teachers, and the Principal. Students may also use the anonymous reporting platform Whispli.

The existence of multiple pathways is not itself a problem. In fact it reflects a 'no wrong door' approach and ensures students and staff have choice and control over how they raise concerns. The problem is the absence of a clear system for ensuring that reports made through any channel are recorded in a consistent format, tracked centrally, escalated where necessary and followed up. Each pathway operates within its own policy silo. There is no documented process for how a concern raised with a Head of House is coordinated with a concern raised through the counselling service about the same student, or how a pattern identified through Whispli reports is connected to incident data recorded in Nexus.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards reinforce this requirement directly. Standard 7 of Ministerial Order No. 1359 requires that processes for complaints and concerns are child focused. A complaints and reporting

framework that is fragmented across multiple policy silos, that provides no clear information to students or families about how their report will be managed, and that lacks the back-end systems to track whether reports are followed through, does not meet this standard. The school's compliance position on Standard 7 will depend not on the number of reporting channels available but on whether those channels deliver consistent, coordinated and accountable outcomes for the students who use them.

11.9.5 Behaviour management: restorative approaches without clear escalation

Several policies reference restorative practices as the preferred approach to behaviour management. The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (SSS-024) uses the Method of Shared Concern and a 'No Blame' approach for initial stages. The Behaviour Management Policy (SSS-026) and the Student Harassment Procedure (SSS-023) both reference restorative approaches.

Restorative practice, when implemented well, is an evidence-based approach to building accountability and repairing relationships. The concern identified through this analysis is not with the principle of restorative practice but with the absence of clear criteria for when a restorative approach is insufficient and more formal intervention is required. None of the policies reviewed specify what happens when a restorative process fails to produce behaviour change, when an incident is too serious for a restorative approach to be appropriate, or when a pattern of repeated conduct should trigger escalation beyond the initial response.

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy states that the Method of Shared Concern and No Blame approach are appropriate for 'initial stages' but does not define what triggers progression to a more formal process. The Behaviour Management Policy categorises misbehaviour as minor, moderate or major, but the criteria for each category are broad and the expected responses are discretionary. The result is a system in which the nature of the response depends more on the judgement of the individual staff member than on the character or severity of the conduct.

This is directly relevant to the review's central finding on inconsistent behaviour management. Students described a system in which consequences varied depending on 'who you were, which House you were in, what relationships were in play, or which staff member was involved'. The policy framework, as currently designed, enables that inconsistency rather than constraining it.

11.9.6 Governance oversight within the policy framework

As discussed in section 11.6.3, approximately half of the policies reviewed designate the Board of Directors as the approval authority for key safeguarding and governance policies. That role is appropriate and is acknowledged. However, beyond the approval function, governance oversight is inconsistent the operational policy framework. There is no consistent requirement for the Board to receive regular, structured reporting on behaviour incidents, discrimination complaints, bullying data, reporting channel usage, or the outcomes of formal investigations across all relevant policies, noting that the Student Safety and Support Policy and Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy both do contain explicit reference to this. At the time of writing, there is no mechanism for the Board to assess whether policies are being implemented consistently across the school. There is no provision for independent audit or external review of the policy framework's effectiveness.

The AICD's governance principles for not-for-profit organisations emphasise that the Board must ensure it has the information it needs to assess whether the organisation's risk management systems are functioning effectively.¹⁹⁷ The Board could approve every policy in this framework and still have no visibility of whether they are being applied consistently, whether discrimination is being addressed, or whether students have confidence in the school's reporting systems. The structural concern regarding the Whistleblower Policy's approval arrangements is discussed in section 11.6.3.

11.9.7 Staff training and cultural competency

The Staff Induction and Onboarding Policy requires mandatory child safety training, PROTECT online training and annual VIT and WWCC compliance. These are necessary and appropriate requirements.

However, there is no requirement in any policy reviewed for staff to receive training in cultural competency, anti-racism, unconscious bias, or responding to discrimination. The Student Safeguarding Officers Policy (SSS-010) states that officers receive 'additional training' but does not specify the content. The Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026) references 'staff training' and 'culture development' as implementation strategies but provides no detail on what this training involves or how its effectiveness is assessed.

The Review heard consistent evidence that staff responses to racism ranged from dismissal to minimisation to inaction. A policy framework that prohibits racism but does not adequately upskill staff to recognise it or respond to it beyond standard compliance training and be held accountable for their response will produce exactly the outcomes the Review documented.¹⁹⁸

11.9.8 Disability inclusion and reasonable adjustments

The school has policy coverage in this area. The Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026) commits to reasonable adjustments to ensure students with additional needs are able to participate in all activities available to students, including in both day and boarding environments. It articulates the 'same basis' concept from the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth), the unjustifiable hardship threshold, and a number of the factors relevant to determining whether an adjustment is reasonable. The Equal Opportunity and Valuing Diversity Policy extends this commitment explicitly to the boarding environment and other school activities, including school sports, concerts and other events, and lists specific adjustments such as modified boarding house routines and staff support structures. The Inclusive Education Procedure (SSS-027) sets out a detailed procedural framework for referrals, Individual Learning Plans, Student Support Groups, NCCD levels of adjustment and VCAA examination provisions.¹⁹⁹ The Behaviour Management Policy (SSS-026) includes a provision for disciplinary matters

¹⁹⁷ Australian Institute of Company Directors, *Not-for-Profit Governance Principles* (2nd ed, 2019) Principle 5 ('Risk Management'). Principle 5 provides that board decision making is informed by an understanding of risk and how it is managed, and that the board should satisfy itself that it receives sufficient information to oversee the effectiveness of the organisation's risk management framework.

¹⁹⁸ *Ministerial Order No 1359* (Vic) Standard 8. Standard 8 requires that staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training. See also Standard 1 (organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse identities and experiences of children are respected).

¹⁹⁹ The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability is a Commonwealth requirement under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth). Every Australian school, government and non-government, is required to collect data annually on students who are receiving adjustments because of disability. The data feeds into Commonwealth funding calculations under the schooling resource standard.

involving students with disabilities to be reviewed with pastoral care and learning support input. The Conditions of Enrolment (CGS-010, clauses 35 and 36) require parents to disclose disability and medical information and reference reasonable adjustments. These are appropriate foundations.

The gap in the disability inclusion policy framework is structural. At the policy level, the commitments are appropriately broad: CGS-026 refers to participation in 'all activities' and SSS-027 includes 'adjustment to buildings/facilities' in its list of available supports. However, the only procedure that operationalises reasonable adjustments is the Inclusive Education Procedure (SSS-027), which is an education-focused document. It addresses Individual Learning Plans, literacy and numeracy programs, classroom adjustments, assessment provisions and VCAA exam arrangements. There is no equivalent procedural document that directs how reasonable adjustments are identified, planned, implemented and reviewed in co-curricular activities, boarding, sport, camps, excursions, social events, or the broader school experience, or for existing and potential staff. The Equal Opportunity and Valuing Diversity Policy includes a single reference to modified boarding routines and staff support structures, but this is a bullet point in a policy, not a procedure. For a school as operationally complex as Ballarat Grammar, with boarding, outdoor education, international programs and a significant co-curricular offering, the gap between the policy commitment and the procedural infrastructure is a real one. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) apply to education in all its forms, not just classroom delivery.²⁰⁰

There is also no documented process for what happens when the school forms the view that an adjustment is not reasonable or that unjustifiable hardship applies. The Inclusion and Equity Policy identifies a number of the factors to be weighed, including costs associated with additional staffing, the provision of special resources or modifications, and health and safety and duty of care requirements. What it does not provide is a documented process: who makes the determination, what the consultation process with the student and family involves, how the decision is communicated and documented, and what review or recourse mechanism exists. A decision that an adjustment is not reasonable is, in effect, a decision to limit a student's participation. Under the Disability Standards, that requires a genuine consultative process and proper documentation.

The interaction between disability adjustments and the behaviour management framework is thin. The Behaviour Management Policy states that disciplinary matters for students with disabilities will be 'reviewed with input from pastoral care staff and learning support teams'. This is procedurally vague. Although the policy does provide for reasonable adjustments for students in disciplinary matters, it does not address how the school distinguishes between behaviour that is a manifestation of disability and behaviour that warrants a disciplinary response, what adjustments to disciplinary processes are required, or how the school avoids indirectly discriminating against students with disability through its behaviour management practices. This is a well-established area of legal risk under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic), and there is High Court authority on it.²⁰¹

The school has a condition-specific policy for ADHD (SSS-032) but no equivalent for other common conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, specific learning disabilities, anxiety disorders, or physical

200 *Disability Standards for Education* (n 192) ss 3.4, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. The Standards apply to all aspects of education including enrolment, participation, curriculum development, student support services and the elimination of harassment and victimisation. See also *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) s 22.S

201 *Purvis v New South Wales* (Department of Education and Training) (2003) 217 CLR 92. The High Court held that the comparison for the purpose of assessing less favourable treatment under the Disability Discrimination Act must be with a person without disability who engages in the same behaviour, not a person without disability who does not engage in that behaviour. The decision remains the leading authority on the intersection of disability and school discipline in Australia.

disability. The ADHD policy is detailed and thoughtful, but its existence as a standalone document raises the question of why other conditions have not received the same treatment. This creates inconsistency in the framework and a risk that staff knowledge and practice varies depending on which condition a student has.

The Review also notes that both the Equal Opportunity and Valuing Diversity Policy and the Conditions of Enrolment have incomplete document codes ('XXX-XXX' and 'SSS-XXX' respectively) and no recorded original approval dates. The Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026) similarly has no original approval date. This pattern of incomplete document control metadata across several key disability-related documents raises a question about governance oversight of the policy framework in this area.

11.9.9 Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Ballarat Grammar has made detailed, public commitments to reconciliation and cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, most prominently through its Reconciliation Action Plan 2024–2027. The school's overarching student safety documents reflect these commitments. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004) contains a dedicated section on establishing a culturally safe environment, setting out specific strategies including engagement with local Aboriginal communities, staff training on cultural safety, and programs to support the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families. The Student Safety and Support Policy (SSS-001) defines cultural safety with specific reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and commits to specialist supports for Aboriginal students in its Equity and Inclusion provisions. Both the Student Safety Code of Conduct (SSS-005) and the Volunteer Code of Conduct (SSS-000) contain dedicated sections on cultural safety and inclusion of Aboriginal children and young people. The Complaints and Compliments Handling Policy (CGS-005) provides for access to a cultural support person for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, and the Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026) includes relevant provisions through its Appendix A-CEEd Responsibilities Table.

However, this coverage is uneven. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004) contains substantive operational content on Aboriginal cultural safety, including specific strategies, programs and staff training requirements. But when the policy framework moves into subject-specific procedures, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content drops away. The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (SSS-024), for example, references racism as a form of bullying but contains no culturally specific response protocols, no provision for cultural support during bullying investigations involving Aboriginal children, and no translation of Child Safe Standard 1 into its operational procedures. The gap is that the subject-specific policies which would most directly shape day-to-day practice have not yet been adapted to reflect the school's stated commitments to Aboriginal cultural safety. Actioning the school's RAP commitments - particularly the Action 17 undertaking to review and update all policies for cultural inclusiveness with Aboriginal community input - would address this unevenness and further strengthen the school's alignment with Standard 1 of the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

11.9.10 Review cycles and currency

Review cycles across the policy suite vary from annual (for some medical policies) to triennial (for the assault and inclusive education policies). Several policies are due for review in 2027 or 2028.

While review cycles are specified, there is no overarching governance requirement for the Board to be satisfied that the full suite of policies is current, internally consistent and aligned to the school's regulatory obligations.

Given the volume of policy revision undertaken in 2025, there is a particular risk that the initial revision satisfied the immediate regulatory requirement but that the policies are not maintained, updated or reviewed with the rigour needed to ensure ongoing compliance and effectiveness. A scheduled review cycle is a necessary but not sufficient condition. What matters is whether the review is substantive, whether it draws on implementation data and feedback, and whether it results in genuine improvement rather than administrative renewal.

11.9.11 Alignment with the Victorian Child Safe Standards

The Victorian Child Safe Standards require that organisations establish a child safe culture through governance, leadership and culture (Standard 2); that policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe (Standard 11); and that staff are equipped with knowledge and awareness to keep children and young people safe (Standard 8). Standard 1 requires that organisations establish a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal children and young people.

On paper, the policy framework addresses Standards 2, 11 and 8. The Student Safety and Support Policy (SSS-001) names the Board's role (Standard 2). The suite of policies documents how the school intends to be child safe (Standard 11). Training and induction requirements are specified (Standard 8). However, the Royal Commission's finding that policies alone are insufficient is directly relevant. Standards 2, 8 and 11 require not only that policies exist but that they are implemented, monitored, understood by staff and experienced by children as real. The gaps identified in this analysis, including fragmentation, vague accountability, inadequate anti-discrimination infrastructure, fragmented reporting and absent governance oversight, represent risks to the school's ability to demonstrate compliance with these standards in practice.

11.10 Summary of policy analysis

Ballarat Grammar has invested significant effort in developing a comprehensive policy framework, and the Review acknowledges that effort. The school now has policies covering a wide range of student safety, wellbeing, behaviour and governance matters.

The analysis identified the following systemic concerns.

First, the framework is fragmented. A large number of separate documents with overlapping scope, different definitions and multiple reporting pathways create a system that is difficult for staff to navigate and prone to inconsistency in application.

Second, while flexibility in decision-making is appropriate and necessary to account for individual student circumstances, critical decision points across the policy suite lack the guardrails needed to ensure consistency and transparency. The absence of published guidelines and clear standards for decision-making contributes to the inconsistency in behaviour management that the Review documented.

Third, the school has developed a Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Framework (October 2025), which establishes a four-pillar strategic approach to acknowledging, understanding, preventing and responding to racism. This is a positive step. However, the framework is a strategic document, not an operational protocol. It does not contain the step-by-step procedural detail that staff need to respond to incidents of racism and racial discrimination consistently, and it does not establish clear accountability for failures to respond. The document's status within the governance framework is also unclear - the version reviewed carries a document code of XXX-XXX and no recorded approval date. There remains a gap between the strategic intent of the framework and the operational infrastructure needed to give it effect.

Fourth, reporting pathways are multiple but uncoordinated. There is no system for ensuring that reports made through different channels are recorded consistently, tracked centrally and followed up.

Fifth, while the Board exercises its approval authority over key safeguarding policies, governance oversight beyond that approval function is largely absent from the operational policy framework. The Board has no mechanism within the current framework to assess whether policies are being implemented consistently. Additionally, the Whistleblower Policy (CGS-015) is approved by the Principal rather than the Board, a structural arrangement that undermines the independence of the protections it is designed to provide (see section 11.6.3).

Sixth, staff training requirements in cultural competency and anti-racism are present in some parts of the policy framework but not embedded consistently across it. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004) includes cultural safety in its staff training and induction requirements, and the Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Framework contemplates training as part of its strategic approach. However, these requirements have not been translated into subject-specific operational policies or supported by a structured, whole-of-school training program. This is inconsistent with the school's RAP commitments, which include annual Cultural Awareness training for all staff (RAP Actions 4 and 9) and a whole-of-school anti-racism strategy (RAP Action 15). Actioning those commitments would be the most direct path to closing this gap.

Seventh, the school's policy-level commitments to disability inclusion and reasonable adjustments are broadly drawn. The Inclusion and Equity Policy (CGS-026) and the Equal Opportunity and Valuing Diversity Policy both commit to reasonable adjustments across education, boarding, co-curricular

activities and the broader school experience. However, the only procedural document that operationalises these commitments - the Inclusive Education Procedure (SSS-027) - is narrowly focused on classroom-based learning and assessment. It does not extend coherently to co-curricular activities, boarding, camps or the broader school experience. There is no documented process for determining that an adjustment is not reasonable, no clear framework for distinguishing between behaviour that is a manifestation of disability and behaviour warranting disciplinary action, and inconsistent coverage across different disability types. The gap is not in what the school has committed to - it is in the procedural infrastructure available to deliver on those commitments.

Eighth, the school's overarching student safety documents contain meaningful content on Aboriginal cultural safety. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy (SSS-004) includes a dedicated section on establishing a culturally safe environment, with specific strategies, programs and staff training requirements. The Student Safety and Support Policy (SSS-001) defines cultural safety with explicit reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Both the Student Safety Code of Conduct (SSS-005) and the Volunteer Code of Conduct (SSS-000) contain dedicated sections on cultural safety and inclusion of Aboriginal children. However, this coverage is uneven. When the framework moves into subject-specific operational procedures - bullying prevention, behaviour management, pastoral care - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content drops away. The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (SSS-024), for example, references racism as a form of bullying but contains no culturally specific response protocols and no translation of Child Safe Standard 1 into its operational procedures. Actioning the school's RAP commitments - particularly the Action 17 undertaking to review and update all policies for cultural inclusiveness with Aboriginal community input - would address this unevenness and further strengthen the school's alignment with Standard 1 of the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

These concerns do not diminish the value of the work that has been done. They identify the next stage of that work: moving from policy creation to policy implementation, integration and accountability.

Intersection acknowledges that the school's policy framework is new. Most of the documents reviewed were created or substantially revised in the second half of 2025, and some in early 2026. This means the school is at the beginning of the implementation journey for these policies. The challenge ahead is to ensure that the policies that exist are understood by staff, applied consistently in practice, supported by structured training, monitored for effectiveness and backed by genuine accountability when they are not followed. A policy that exists on a document management system but is not known, understood and lived by the people who are expected to apply it is a liability, because it creates the appearance of a system without delivering the protection that system is supposed to provide.

The school's willingness to invest in this body of work is a strength. The critical success factor now is whether the same level of investment is directed to the harder work of embedding, training, monitoring and accountability. Policies without implementation are compliance documents. Policies with implementation are cultural infrastructure.

11.11 Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the evidence in this chapter. They are designed to strengthen governance, rebuild trust and ensure that the Board has the structures, skills and information it needs to exercise effective oversight of culture, risk and child safety.

Governance recommendations

REF	RECOMMENDATION
Governance (G1-G6)	Governance (G1-G6)
G1	Clarify and communicate governance roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority That the Board undertake a formal clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board, the Principal and the senior leadership team, and communicate this clearly to the school community. This should include a published governance framework that describes the Board's role, the Principal's delegated authority, the function of each Board committee and the mechanisms through which parents, staff and students can access or engage with governance. The framework should establish clear boundaries between governance (strategy and oversight) and management (operations and implementation), consistent with the AICD's governance principles for not-for-profit entities. The Board should also consider the governance arrangements for the associated entities (the Ballarat Grammar Foundation and BGS Educational Services), including whether overlapping directorships create actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
G2	Review Board composition and introduce term limits to ensure diversity, skills and renewal That the Board undertake a structured review of its composition, with reference to the skills, experience and diversity required to govern the school effectively in its current operating environment. This review should consider the balance between constitutional requirements (including the communicant provisions) and the need to recruit directors with specific skills in child safety, risk management, education, cultural diversity and community engagement. The Board should introduce definitive term limits for directors, prohibiting reappointment after a Director has served a set amount of terms on the Board. This is consistent with the AICD recommendation that not-for-profit boards adopt term limits of no more than nine years to support renewal and reduce the risk of groupthink. The Board should also consider mechanisms for ensuring that the interests and perspectives of current parents, including boarding parents, are represented in governance, whether through Board membership, advisory committees or structured engagement processes.



G3	Develop a single, integrated regulatory compliance and implementation framework That the school develop a consolidated regulatory mapping document that aligns the recommendations of this Cultural Review, the Fenner Review implementation status, the VRQA conditions and audit requirements, the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Ministerial Order No. 1359), and the psychosocial hazard obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 into one framework. This framework should be maintained by the Principal, reported against to the Board on a quarterly basis and used to track implementation, identify gaps and demonstrate compliance. It should be a living document, updated as recommendations are implemented and new obligations arise, not a static compliance artefact.
G4	Strengthen risk management systems to provide the Board with adequate visibility of culture, behaviour and child safety risks That the school invest in data systems capable of recording, aggregating and reporting on incidents, complaints, behaviour and child safety concerns at a systemic level, not only at the individual student level. This should include the capacity to identify patterns and trends across cohorts, Houses, year levels and time periods. The Board should require structured, regular reporting on risk indicators, including incident data, reporting rates (including through anonymous reporting platforms), mandatory report tracking, staffing data (including turnover and vacancy rates across the whole school) and student and staff feedback on safety and wellbeing. Reporting should be quarterly at a minimum, benchmarked over time and disaggregated by relevant categories. The Board must also ensure that it has the capability to critically interrogate the data it receives, whether through upskilling existing directors, recruiting directors with relevant expertise, or engaging independent expertise to support the Board's oversight function.
G5	Increase Board visibility, accessibility and communication with the school community That the Board take deliberate steps to increase its visibility within and accessibility to the school community. This should include regular communication from the Board to the school community, including an annual report on governance, risk and culture that is accessible and substantive, not simply a compliance document. Board members should be visibly present in school life, including at key events, in boarding environments and through structured engagement with parent and staff representatives. Visibility is not a substitute for good governance, but it is a necessary condition for the trust and confidence that good governance depends on.

**G6****Transfer approval authority for the Whistleblower Policy from the Principal to the Board**

That the Board assume approval authority for the Whistleblower Policy (CGS-015), replacing the Principal as the approving body. Whistleblower protections are a governance safeguard, not an operational policy. Their credibility depends on their independence from the executive whose conduct they may need to address. ASIC's Regulatory Guide 270 recommends that whistleblower policies be owned and approved by the board, and the school should align its arrangements with this guidance as a matter of priority.

The Board should also satisfy itself that the policy's provisions for feedback to whistleblowers, currently described as being at 'absolute discretion', are revised to include minimum standards for acknowledgement, communication and outcome reporting, consistent with the protections intended by Part 9.4AAA of the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth). The Board should also ensure that all whistleblower reports are directed to the Board, consistent with the school's stated intention, and that the policy and the reporting facility make clear that a report may be made about any member of staff, including the Principal, with reports concerning the Principal directed to the Board Chair.

Policy recommendations

The governance recommendations above address the structures, composition and oversight mechanisms the Board needs to govern effectively. The policy recommendations below address a different question: whether the school's policy framework, as a system, is designed and implemented in a way that delivers the outcomes it describes. These are operational rather than structural concerns. They arise from the detailed policy analysis in sections 11.8 and 11.9 and relate to the design, coherence and practical usability of the policy suite. They are separated from the governance recommendations because they require action by school leadership and staff, not only by the Board, though the Board retains oversight responsibility for ensuring they are implemented. They are designed to complement the governance recommendations above and the behavioural and values curriculum recommendations in Chapter 7.

REF	RECOMMENDATION
Policy and Procedures (PA1-PA5)	Policy and Procedures (PA1-PA5)
PA1	Consolidate the policy framework into an integrated, navigable structure with clear guidance for staff That the school undertake further work to consolidate its policies and procedures into a single, integrated policy framework that maps the relationships between documents, clarifies which policy applies in which circumstances, and provides staff with practical decision-making guidance. This should include a one-page visual guide or decision tree for common scenarios, including behaviour incidents, bullying, harassment, discrimination, self-harm and safety concerns, so that staff can identify the correct pathway without needing to consult multiple documents. The framework should be accompanied by structured professional learning to ensure all staff understand their obligations, know which policy to apply and can navigate the system with confidence. This consolidation should be completed within 12 months and reviewed annually thereafter.

PA2	Develop a standalone anti-racism and discrimination response protocol That the school develop a specific, standalone protocol for identifying, responding to, recording, escalating and tracking incidents of racism and racial, cultural and religious discrimination. This protocol should: • define what constitutes a racist or discriminatory incident, • set out the mandatory steps staff must follow when one is reported or observed, • specify the expected range of consequences, • require central recording of all incidents, and • establish mandatory reporting to the Board on a quarterly basis. The protocol should be accompanied by capability-building training for all staff on recognising and responding to racism and discrimination, including training on unconscious bias and conscious inclusion. This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the student experience chapter's recommendations on a sequenced behavioural and values curriculum (see Chapter 7).
PA3	Establish a centralised reporting and tracking system that connects all reporting channels That the school implement a centralised system for recording, tracking and coordinating all reports of behaviour incidents, bullying, harassment, discrimination and safety concerns, regardless of which reporting channel is used. Reports made through Student Safeguarding Officers, the Wellbeing Team, the Health Centre, school counsellors, Heads of House, classroom teachers or the anonymous reporting platform (Whispli) should all feed into a single, searchable system that allows the school to identify patterns, monitor follow-through and report to the Board. This system should replace the current fragmented approach in which each reporting pathway operates within its own policy silo. It should include mandatory recording standards, required timeframes for initial response and follow-up, and a clear escalation pathway for matters that are not resolved within the expected timeframe. This recommendation complements recommendation G4 above.
PA4	Commission an independent implementation audit/review of the policy framework within 24 months That the school commission an independent audit of the implementation, not the content, of its policy framework within 24 months. The audit should assess whether policies are known and understood by staff, whether they are being applied consistently across the school, whether reporting and recording requirements are being met, and whether the training provided is adequate to support effective implementation. The audit should report to the Board through the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee or the Cultural Review Committee, and its findings should be made available to the school community. This recommendation complements recommendation G3 above.

**PA5****Bridge the gap between disability inclusion policy commitments and procedural infrastructure**

That the school develop the procedural infrastructure needed to give effect to its existing disability inclusion policy commitments across the full scope of the school experience.

The school should develop procedures that extend the reasonable adjustments framework to co-curricular activities, boarding, sport, camps, excursions and social events, consistent with the scope already contemplated by its own policies. Policies should also be revised to include:

- a documented process for determining that an adjustment is not reasonable, including the consultative and decision-making steps required under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth);
- clear guidance on how disability is taken into account in behaviour management and disciplinary proceedings, including how the school distinguishes between behaviour that is a manifestation of disability and behaviour warranting a disciplinary response; and
- consistent coverage across disability types, so that the level of procedural guidance available to staff does not depend on which condition a student has.

12 Managing Change: Implementation of Review Recommendations

Cultural reviews create their value at the point of implementation. The findings and recommendations in this Report provide a detailed picture of what needs to change. The work that follows, translating those findings into sustained, visible change across a complex school community, is where the real impact is made. This section addresses how that work should be managed.

Ballarat Grammar has an opportunity to approach this implementation differently from previous change processes, and there are good reasons to do so. The employee experience data gathered through this Review shows that staff have direct experience of organisational change that did not go well. The response to the Fenner Review, the organisational restructure and the handling of the Dart House incidents were each described by staff as top-down, poorly communicated and inadequately resourced. The fact that the school was impacted by the limited notice it sometimes received from media outlets, including occasions where only 20 minutes' notice was provided before publication, meant that staff learned about critical incidents through media reporting before they received internal briefings. Consultation on structural changes was limited or absent. The cumulative effect is a school community that approaches institutional change with scepticism rather than confidence, not because they are resistant to change, but because their experience of how change has been managed at this school has given them reason to be cautious.

This matters practically as well as culturally. Poor organisational change management is identified as a specific psychosocial hazard under the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations 2022 (Vic), and the evidence gathered through this Review indicates it is present at Ballarat Grammar. The way the school implements the recommendations of this Review is therefore not just a measure of commitment to the findings. It is itself a test of whether the culture is changing. Implementation will require trade-offs and a deliberate resourcing plan. Staff, students and parents will judge the school's response not only by what is implemented but by how it is implemented: whether communication is open, whether consultation and co-design is genuine, whether resources match the scale of the task, and whether commitments made are commitments kept.

The school has the structures to do this well. The Cultural Review Committee is already in place, the CREW model provides a pastoral care framework that can support cultural change at the student level, and the Board has demonstrated its willingness to commission and receive independent scrutiny. The recommendations that follow are designed to build on those foundations and ensure that the implementation process itself reflects the values this Review is asking the school to embed.

REF	RECOMMENDATION
Change Management (CM1–CM8)	
CM1	Appoint a dedicated Change Coordinator with appropriate seniority, scope and resourcing That the Board fund and appoint a dedicated Change Coordinator to oversee delivery of the Review's recommendations. This role should report directly to the Cultural Review Committee rather than to the Principal alone, to preserve independence and ensure that implementation is subject to Board-level oversight from the outset. The role should be resourced at a minimum of 0.8 FTE for a period of not less than 24 months, with a brief to coordinate, sequence, track and report on implementation across all recommendation areas. This is not a role that can be absorbed into existing workloads. The Review identified unsustainable workloads and role ambiguity as existing concerns; asking current staff to absorb a 44-recommendation implementation program on top of their existing duties would compound the very issues this Review has identified.
CM2	Assign implementation oversight to the Cultural Review Committee, with structured quarterly reporting That the Cultural Review Committee assume responsibility for oversight of the implementation of all recommendations arising from this Review. The Committee is the appropriate body for this function: it was established to oversee the school's response to the cultural concerns that prompted the Review, and assigning implementation oversight to the same body ensures continuity, institutional memory and direct accountability to the Board. The Implementation Coordinator should report to the Committee quarterly against defined milestones, not activity. The distinction matters: 'training was delivered' is activity; 'staff demonstrated competency in responding to discrimination' is a milestone. The Committee should include at least one external member with relevant expertise in child safety, organisational culture or institutional reform, and its reporting to the Board should be structured, minuted and available to the school community in summary form.
CM3	Develop a published implementation plan within three months, with realistic sequencing and accountable owners That the school develop and publish an implementation plan within three months of receiving the final Report. Recommendations should be sequenced into three horizons: short-term (one to 12 months), medium-term (12 to 24 months) and long-term (24 to 48 months). The sequencing should be based on risk, regulatory obligation and interdependency, not ease of delivery. Each recommendation should have a named accountable owner, defined milestones and a target completion date. Staff and the broader school community should be able to see the full plan, understand why certain matters are being prioritised and know when to expect action on matters that affect them.
CM4	Resource implementation as a distinct budget line That the Board allocate a dedicated implementation budget sufficient to cover the Implementation Coordinator role, external expertise where required (including cultural advisory, organisational design and independent review), staff backfill for employees participating in implementation working groups, and professional development directly linked to recommendation delivery.

CM5	Involve staff, parents and students in implementation design, not only implementation delivery That staff, parents and students be meaningfully consulted on the design and sequencing of implementation, not merely informed of decisions after they are made. This is the most critical recommendation from a change management perspective, and it responds directly to the employee feedback. Staff reported that previous change processes were experienced as imposed rather than collaborative. The psychosocial hazard data identifies poor organisational change management, low job control and poor support as specific hazards already present in this workplace. At minimum, meaningful consultation should include staff working groups for each major recommendation area with representation from both teaching and non-teaching staff, genuine consultation periods before decisions are finalised, and transparent feedback loops showing how staff input has been considered and what has or has not changed as a result.
CM6	Develop a dedicated communication strategy for the implementation period That the school develop a communication strategy specifically for the implementation of the Review's recommendations, separate from routine school communications. The employee and parent experience data both identified communication as a systemic weakness. The implementation period will generate questions, anxiety and speculation across the community if it is not managed proactively. The strategy should include regular, scheduled updates to staff, parents and students on implementation progress; advance notice to staff before any changes that affect their roles, conditions or reporting lines; a standing commitment that staff will hear about matters affecting them internally before they hear about them externally; and a named contact point for questions about implementation.
CM7	Monitor for change fatigue and actively manage workload impacts throughout implementation That the Change Coordinator and senior leadership actively monitor for change fatigue across the staff cohort throughout the implementation period. The school community has already absorbed the Dart House incidents, media scrutiny, the VRQA review and conditions, the Fenner Review, the organisational restructure and this Cultural Review within a compressed timeframe. Staff are not starting from a baseline of stability. Implementation planning must account for this reality. Recommendations should be sequenced to avoid overwhelming any single staff group. Where implementation requires additional work from staff, including participation in working groups, training or new reporting processes, the workload impact should be assessed and offset through backfill, time release or deprioritisation of other demands.
CM8	Commission an independent progress review within 36 months That the Board commission an independent review of implementation progress within 36 months. This review should assess whether recommendations have been implemented in substance rather than on paper, how the changes are being experienced by students, parents and staff, and whether the intended cultural outcomes are materialising. The review findings should be reported to the Board and made available to the school community.



Intersection
How leaders lead

About Intersection

Intersection Pty Ltd is a boutique consulting firm that supports Boards, leaders and organisations to build safe, respectful and inclusive cultures. Our team of social policy, legal and governance professionals have deep expertise in workplace culture reform, child safety and safeguarding, psychosocial safety, gender equality, discrimination and human rights. We work across sectors where the duty of care is high and the consequences of getting culture wrong are serious, including schools and other organisations that work with children and young people.

The team at Intersection led and authored the ground-breaking Respect@Work National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, which:

- recommended the introduction of the positive duty to prevent sexual harassment and other related behaviours, and
- developed the prevention framework that underpins the seven positive duty standards all employers must comply with, and which aligns with work health and safety obligations to eliminate risks to psychosocial safety.

That work connects directly to the issues examined in this Review. The framework that governs sexual harassment now sits within a broader regulatory shift towards psychosocial safety, child safety and active prevention, where the expectation on Boards and executives has moved from assuming oversight to demonstrating it.

We bring this expertise to the governance level. Through our education arm, we design and deliver governance education for Boards and C-suite executives, including online learning that helps directors understand their obligations for child safety, psychosocial safety and workplace conduct, and the oversight those obligations require.

Intersection offers a range of services to support Boards, leaders and organisations to create safe, respectful and inclusive cultures, including:

- independent workplace and organisational culture reviews
- child safety and safeguarding advisory, including alignment with the Child Safe Standards
- advisory on the systems, structures and risk assessments that support psychosocial safety and a positive culture
- governance education for Boards and executives, delivered online and face to face
- Respect@Work Masterclasses
- targeted training, both face-to-face and online.

Our training draws on leading practice in adult learning. Programs are available on a range of topics, including how to:

- build leadership capability to prevent and respond to harmful workplace behaviour
- meet child safety and psychosocial safety obligations at the Board and executive level
- conduct trauma-informed and person-centred reviews and investigations
- equip individuals to be active bystanders.

