Supporting Talent Achievement and Resilience
2015 Report

Inquiry Question:
What are we doing well and how can we improve this program?
Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................. Page 4
Review of STAR ............................................. Page 7
Recommendations ........................................... Page 20

Attachment A .......................... Units of work, assessment samples
Attachment B .......................... STAR application forms
Attachment C .......................... Applicant letters
Attachment D .......................... STAR Rationale, curriculum, philosophy
Attachment E .......................... Assignments
Attachment F .......................... Sample surveys, course evaluations
Introduction

In 2015 Lyneham High School undertook a number of reviews of specialist programs. Reviews were undertaken by Professional Learning Committees (PLC). The PLC that conducted the review of the Supporting Talent Achievement and Resilience (STAR) program in semester 1 2015 consisted of six teachers, two of whom work in the program and four other teachers from across the school. Four PLC members were female and two were male.

The STAR program is specifically designed for girls in Years 9 and 10 and has been taught and coordinated by female staff since its introduction at Lyneham High School in 2010, following on from the successful implementation of a Women’s Health Day in 2009. A core aim of the program is to empower young women to think about their place in the world, tackle local and global issues and actively advocate for change. The STAR program is conducted through PE/HEALTH and SoSE (Studies of Society and its Environment) classes.

The STAR program uses Martin Seligmann’s Positive Psychology: *Ways to Wellbeing: Give, Connect, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Keep Active* as its framework. In addition to these five values, STAR added a sixth value, *Know your Strengths*. Students are required to complete the *Authentic Happiness Strengths Survey* to ascertain their top five strengths in order to build positive mindsets. Rather than focusing on what they cannot do, students are encouraged to develop their individual core strengths and appreciate the collective strengths within the program.

Students are mentored by a team of PE and SoSE teachers through positive role modelling and the development of a high-expectations culture. Students are actively encouraged to openly discuss, share ideas and co-create assessment tasks. The teachers model high expectations and build leadership skills in the students, in order for them to independently accomplish whole school events. The annual Women’s Health Day is entirely designed, organised and implemented by the Year 10 STAR class. Through Health classes, the STAR students analyse the evaluations from the preceding year and form teams to take on a key responsibility before and during the day. These responsibilities entail: seeking sponsorship from local businesses, advertising the event and delivering workshops on the day. The Year 9 STAR students also assist on the day to observe and assist in their future planning of the event.

STAR is a **two year commitment** which requires enthusiasm, active participation and a growth mindset. Below is a list of opportunities, events and responsibilities that are key components of STAR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities, Events and Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work positively with all members of the STAR team (students and staff) and be an ambassador for the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usher/volunteer at the Year 7 Welcome Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in the Mother’s Day Classic (bridge to bridge run)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend all camps and actively participate in all aspects of the itinerary (accommodation may be out of your comfort zone).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement The Year 10 Women’s Health Day (assist in Year 9 and organise when in Year 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience a wide range of classes in PE (Zumba, gym classes) and engage in the National Curriculum in SOSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a number of events and assist in the running of whole school sports carnivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete all assignments to the best of your ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer in a developing community. E.g. In Australia or South-East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in the wider community. E.g. fundraise for various charities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take on leadership opportunities around the school. E.g. Promote R U Ok Day, speak at whole school assemblies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The activities listed above are designed to help promote healthy lifestyles, build team work and form connections with the school and local community. The students are encouraged to extend themselves physically and mentally and are set a variety of demanding challenges on camps. The accommodation on camps is also specifically chosen to push the girls out of their comfort zones. Trekking and camping with very basic facilities are key components of STAR excursions. The camps are also designed to encourage and develop self-direction and regulation. Students form groups and are assigned responsibilities on the camps (transport, food, accommodation, itinerary, general assistance) and are required to seek consensus from the group, issue information and keep the team apprised of all decisions made.

There is also a strong emphasis placed on sustainability in the program. All events are planned with waste management and eco-tourism guidelines in place. To strengthen the student’s understanding of sustainable living, it is a requirement that all students attending the Year 10 Sydney excursion visit the eco-garden at Kimbriki Recycling to think of practical ways they can reduce, reuse and recycle.

**Rationale:**
The concept of a girls program was first canvassed in 2009 to address an equity imbalance at Lyneham High School. A single-gender boys program already existed and many students, staff and parents felt that a program of a similar nature would be of benefit to female students.

Research shows that there are certain factors in life that promote resilience. Some of these include:
- having positive expectations,
- a sense of self-worth
- participating and or contributing to social and community activities
- having a sense of belonging and good friendships
- building a positive relationship with an adult outside of the home (Kids Help).

The STAR team tailors pedagogy and teaching programs to ensure the factors listed above are specifically addressed. Whilst our Curriculum is governed by ACARA (See appendix for units of work and assessment samples), the wide variety of opportunities and events offered to the students in the program helps to fosters a rich sense of belonging and connectedness.

Research also suggests that young boys and girls can benefit from single sex PE classes. Classes can be tailored to individual needs, interests and preferred learning styles. Professor Wright in a 1999 study titled *Changing gendered practices in physical education: working with teachers* states that many girls exhibit low levels of participation and performance in co-educational settings due to: “...ridicule, subtle put downs and harassment experienced by girls from their male peers, which unconstructively influences girls’ enjoyment of physical education, and can contribute to girls’ higher dropout rates and greater resistance to physical education” (Best, Pearson and Webb 2010)

Although the primary factor in determining academic success is the quality of the teacher (Rowe – 2003), the positive impacts of a single gender classes for and Physical Education cannot be discounted.

**Selection Process**
It is important to note is that STAR is not a “naughty girls” program. STAR is a leadership program designed to create a supportive learning environment where girls can achieve their potential. Below is an outline of the selection process.
- STAR is advertised to year 8 students at a year assembly by year 10 STAR students
- Interested students complete an application form.
- The STAR team reviews these applications forms each year in an attempt to improve the
selection process. We have had three different application forms in the program’s five year history. See Appendix.

- The STAR team collates the year 7 and 8 PE and SOSE reports for all applicants. These are distributed amongst the team with the corresponding applications
- Year Coordinators are consulted prior to the initial STAR team meeting.
- The STAR team reads approximately 10-15 applications and reports each. The team then meets to discuss our findings to produce a short list. Year coordinators are once again consulted for input on the possible dynamics of the group.
- The team selects students based on academic performance, leadership potential, sporting ability, at risk and for social inclusion. (Approximately five of each category)
- Acceptance and non-successful letters are sent to the students and their parents. Historically, the letters were distributed to students during class, but to reduce hysteria and distribution, these letters are now sent home. See Appendix for successful and non-successful applicant letters
- A parent information night is held annually to orientate new students and parents on the STAR rationale, curriculum, philosophy etc. See Appendix.
- Parents must sign a letter to allow their daughter in the program

Changes over time:
The program developers wanted to maintain a connection to the boys program, DARE (Developing Adolescent Resilience and Enterprise) and chose to include the word resilience in the title of the girls program. STAR originally stood for Sport Talent Acceptance and Resilience and was run through SOSE, Science and PE classes. After one year we decided to change the name to its current title to more accurately reflect the rationale of the program. Due to staffing and timetable complexities, the Science STAR class was removed from the program.

Prior to the full implementation of the Australian Curriculum, STAR had a strong cross-curricular approach to assessment. Joint assignments were created by SOSE and PE teachers (see Appendix for previous assignments) and launched as events to both cohorts. Students in year 10 would work on these assignments together with the hope that students in year 9 would gain knowledge from their older peers and vice versa. This approach also allowed for staff to moderate student work and deliver clear and cohesive feedback. Whilst it has become more difficult for the STAR team to design cross-curricular assessment, there is still a strong emphasis placed on moderation and classroom visits. For example, SOSE teachers make an effort to attend PE and Health classes and PE teachers attend debates and presentations where possible.

Previous Evaluations:
There is a strong culture of review in the STAR program. The STAR team evaluates every camp and event and makes changes based on student feedback. See Appendix for:

- Sample camp surveys
- 24hr Walk evaluations
- SWOT Analysis by staff 2013
- 2014 Exit Survey

The team also annually surveys all year 10 female students who attend the Women’s Health Day. All surveys are archived and the wording of the questions is reviewed each year.

In the first year of the program 30 students submitted applications for 26 places in the STAR program (2010 – 2011). By the third year of the program (2012 – 2013) there were 85 applicants for the 26 places. Despite subsequent changes to the application process, requiring a much more
rigorous effort by applicants, the STAR program still attracted 65 applicants (around half of the possible cohort) for the 26 places offered in 2015.

2015 Review of STAR

Evaluation approach over semester

STAR students, non STAR students, STAR parents, school staff and STAR staff were surveyed in May – June 2015 using an online survey tool in Google Docs. A small number of past STAR students also emailed their reflections on the program to the program co-ordinator in early June.

The survey tool provided data about respondents’ understanding of the selection process for STAR and the attributes considered for students seeking entry to STAR. The tool also recorded responses to the questions: What do you perceive are the advantages and/or disadvantages of the STAR program? and, Do you have any other suggestions or comments on how STAR could further improve?

In total there were 114 responses to the Google Docs surveys. There was a strong response rate from school staff and a good response from STAR students. Only a small percentage of non STAR year nine and ten students responded to the survey and around one quarter of all possible STAR parents/caregivers. Most of the data collected by this process was qualitative in nature – providing rich detail for the reviewing team and the opportunity for respondents to cover a wide range of issues in their responses.

All written responses to the two questions in each category of respondents were analysed by STAR staff and the two external partners and common themes were identified and agreed upon. A frequency count was then conducted of all responses against the agreed themes. The frequency of responses was then presented graphically in Excel graphs. By using this rigorous process of analysis it has been possible to identify significant trends in the qualitative data.

By its very nature this review of STAR is only concerned with levels of stakeholder satisfaction with the program in its current form. This review has not examined the effectiveness of the program in terms of student engagement and attainment measures, although an analysis of the qualitative data does, in effect, provide some rich information about many students’ engagement with the program and some evidence of their attainments.

Student results

Summary

Twenty - seven out of a possible fifty students enrolled in the STAR program completed the online survey. Seventeen students in years 9/10 who were not enrolled in the STAR program also completed surveys seeking their views of the program. Another four students who were past students of the STAR program emailed their written reflections on their experience of the program while attending Lyneham High School (LHS).
While the responses from the 27/50 STAR students are likely to provide a reliable guide to the views of most students in the program, the low response rate from non STAR and past STAR students will mean they may be an unreliable guide to the views of students they represent in the sample.

In the survey responses students enrolled in the STAR program demonstrate that their understanding of the attributes required by applicants is clearly aligned with those outlined in the program’s selection criteria, especially in the area of leadership. i.e.: The team selects students based on academic performance, leadership potential, sporting ability, at risk and for social inclusion. (Approximately five of each category).

**What attributes are considered in STAR students?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk potential</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership potential</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting ability</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, student responses indicate that they value the STAR program highly and are able to identify key intended outcomes of the program as areas of strength in the way it is actually implemented at LHS. The school should be commended for the high degree of alignment between student experiences and perceptions of STAR and the intended outcomes as outlined in the introduction to this document.

A relatively small number of negatives were identified by students mostly to do with the negative perceptions of others and issues caused by limited access to the program.

**Benefits of the program**

When asked to comment on the advantages of the program, 27 STAR students’ responses clustered most strongly around their recognition of its rich curriculum and high expectations, its safe, supportive environment and the strong sense of belonging it provides to girls in the program.

The graph below maps the pattern of their responses according to theme areas.
Girls in the STAR program provided some rich and often heartfelt detail in their comments about the advantages of the program, including:

*Personally, being in the STAR program changed my life. Without the community it has given me, and the family of girls who I am surrounded by daily, I would be behind on schoolwork, I would have missed amazing opportunities like the Dawn to Dusk walk which raise awareness for important problems that are prevalent in our community.*

*Not worrying about boys judging you in class. Constant support from teachers and students in STAR. Form close relationships. Classwork is challenging but support is available and we are required to push ourselves.*

*Advantages are just being able to become so close to such a genuine group of girls and amazing teachers who support you to reach your potential and raise the bar every single day. The teachers are dedicated to what they do with us girls, and we are honestly so lucky! Every day we are given more and more opportunities and sometimes it feels as though we’re treated as though we’re above the other girls even though they could easily be in STAR instead of any of us.*

*The unique group of girls that have been put together for my year group have made me see many different ways to think through exciting discussions revolving mainly around women but also about human rights and different historical events that have led to this day…….*

A very small percentage of possible non STAR students completed surveys and, of that small number, only 10 students commented on their perceptions of the advantages/disadvantages of the STAR program. Almost half of the comments about the advantages of STAR were related to its capacity for providing a sense of belonging for participants.

Interestingly, non STAR students also clearly identified the attributes required by applicants, reflecting a similar level of alignment with the stated selection criteria as their STAR program peers.

The four past students who sent their email comments about STAR all had very positive things to say about their experience of the program. With time to reflect on and weigh up their experience of STAR the comments of these past students add another perspective to this review, even though (because of the small number of responses) they may not be a representative sample.

*STAR was one of my favourite parts of high school, it gave me so many opportunities and helped me make so many new friends. The program helped me to become more confident in trying new things and how to be a leader as well as how to follow someone else’s lead. STAR for me and all the other girls in my year was a space that we felt safe and confident to learn and express our opinions. One student in my year even said when she*
entered the classroom it felt like coming home, and I think that pretty much sums up how all of us felt and will always feel about the program.

STAR and the STAR teachers gave me a supportive network, which encouraged me to be myself and supported me to get through my high school years. In year nine and ten a lot of girls are finding out who they are and a lot of girls may experience confidence issues, mental health illnesses and social issues. STAR can help to give girls a supportive and accepting network and a place to belong to help manage those difficulties. STAR encouraged us to accept ourselves and build confidence through exercises like the strengths and weaknesses questionnaire which helped identify our strengths and give us confidence.

In my personal experience I was experiencing some mental health issues and STAR helped me to manage those feelings and thoughts. Although I was not very open about these issues I felt that I belonged and I was valued in the STAR group. It also gave me a reason to come to school each day as I knew that I would be accepted. As well as this STAR taught me life skills, which helped me through each day and still helps me today. STAR allowed me to be myself and gave me a supportive network. STAR also has encouraged me to keep physically and mentally healthy.

**Negatives of STAR**

Compared to the large number of comments relating to the advantages of the program, STAR students’ comments about the disadvantages of STAR were relatively much smaller in number. Of the total number of comments about the disadvantages almost half were related to the “negative perceptions of others” while around 40% were related to the program only providing limited access to the total number of students seeking a place.

**Indicative comments included:**

*Disadvantages would be that people that don’t get in can start say bad things about the program, out of jealousy.*

*Just on a side note being part of the STAR program has also brought about unnecessary sexist comments and stereotypes of the STAR girls that are hurtful, untrue and unwelcome.*

*...but as a whole STAR isn’t really a big part of the school and we are mostly hated by our peers for just being in STAR.*

Only 6 comments relating to perceived disadvantages of the program were completed by the 17 non STAR students who responded to the online survey. Half of those comments referred to the
limitations in access to the program, with one of the respondents including a very heartfelt comment….. “the way they pick the girls is also humiliating for people who don’t get in”.

**Improvements suggested**

Only a relatively small number of specific suggestions for improvement were recorded by STAR students. Of the total number about a quarter related to expanding the PE and SoSE options. A close analysis of some of the comments suggests that perceived victimisation may correlate with a loss of motivation, engagement and a sense of purpose at times for some girls.

![Suggestions for STAR (key themes - STAR students responses)](chart)

*I think that STAR is there for all the right reasons but it sometimes doesn’t reach its goal and creates issues surrounding friendship groups, rude comments etc.*

*Possibly to solve the issue that STAR is too exclusive, other programs such as DARE, LEAP, SEAL could become more involved in our experiences and opportunities, but also they could invite us to be a part of theirs.*

Of the 8 comments recorded by the 17 non STAR students in this section of the online survey, only three recorded a specific suggested improvement. Two of the three comments related to making the program more accessible for students.

**Recommendations**

It would appear that the current situation where large numbers of students who would like to be in the STAR program, are unable to be, is contributing to a perception that the program is “exclusive”. It is possible that this is what makes students in the program more prone to negative comments from students who may be unhappy about missing out.

Unlike other special programs at LHS, entry to the STAR program is based on a diverse range of attributes (*academic performance, leadership potential, sporting ability, at risk and for social inclusion*). Entry to other special programs involves demonstrating a special talent – aspects of which are measurable (e.g entry to LEAP, BAND and SEAL). It is understandable therefore that students seeking entry to STAR may find the selection process more difficult to understand than entry processes for the other special program (especially in cases where they have been unsuccessful).

Any recommendations resulting from student feedback about STAR need to be placed within the context of the basic issue that there is a high level of continuing demand for a relatively small number of available places in the STAR program.
1. That staff (STAR staff and other staff) investigate the extent and nature of “negative perceptions” held by students and staff with a view to developing whole school practical measures to counter it.

2. That communication about the purpose of the STAR program, and the student need it is meeting continues to be an ongoing priority in the school. The involvement of the leadership team and non STAR staff in this process is essential to the effectiveness of this recommendation.

**Staff results**

**Summary**

A relatively high percentage of teaching staff (58 of a possible 70) completed the online survey, although this number could also have included current and past STAR teachers. Responses from staff about the benefits of STAR were overwhelmingly positive, comprehensive and detailed. The school is to be commended for the high level of alignment between the intended outcomes of the program and the benefits of the program, as perceived by staff, as it is currently implemented at LHS.

A much smaller number of program negatives were listed by staff. Issues around the program’s perceived exclusivity (and tendency for “cliques” to form) and the related issue of limited access were most frequently mentioned in these types of responses.

Eight past and present STAR teachers were also separately surveyed as a component of this review. Their responses were related to different survey questions so direct comparisons with general staff responses are not possible. An analysis of STAR teachers’ responses is provided separately from the general staff results. STAR teachers’ responses reveal the depth of their professional commitment to students and the program’s vision and purpose but also reveal some significant drawbacks in terms of workload issues and emotional strain associated with implementing the program.

Staff surveyed provided clear feedback that the attributes of leadership and at risk potential are key attributes considered for applicants. While a clear result for staff, it may also provide a clue as to why some clarification about the target group for the program may be necessary as there are some inevitable tensions around how leadership attributes and at risk potential are balanced out in a selection process.

**What attributes are considered in STAR students?**
Benefits

There were a large number of staff comments about the advantages of STAR. They were most strongly clustered around its capacity to develop leadership skills and meet the needs of the target group and its focus on community engagement. There were also a high percentage of comments relating to its safe and supportive environment and its capacity to build resilience and confidence.

![Bar chart showing advantages of STAR]

**Indicative comments included:**

*Students’ community awareness and engagement in community causes is excellent. The girls become real community advocates and community members not just of the school but of Canberra.*

*Advantages are providing the girls with an opportunity to be in a class together to develop their resilience and gives them a sense of belonging at LHS. The program also enables students to form strong relationships with female staff members which creates a caring environment.*

*STAR provides students with many opportunities to connect with and contribute to the school and wider community. It promotes healthy lifestyles and provides a supportive environment for young women to achieve their best.*

*Encourages a sense of belonging and commitment to the school. Sense of community and broader community is amazing! Welfare arm of the school that gets a big tick from me. Wonderful positive role modelling from an amazing group of teacher mentors.*

Negatives

Compared to the number of comments about the advantages of STAR, there were relatively fewer from staff about perceived disadvantages. Of the total number recorded there were some concerns about the potential for cliques to form while other responses were fairly evenly spread around access, workload and structural issues.
Improvements suggested
Over half of the staff respondents to the online survey recorded suggestions for improving STAR. Around one third of the suggestions related to the perceived need to clarify the purpose of the program. One quarter of the suggestions related to improving communication about the program.

Suggestions included:

Look at the program and why some students are accepted and others not. Students talk about the program and seem to be convinced it is more of an elitist program than what the goal of the program actually is. We need to look at what drives the program, what are the outcomes expected, what the goals of the program and to whom it should apply and why.

Transparency in what the program is and why students are selected. There is a notable shift in the types of students involved so it has become hazy as to what the purpose is.

The application process was very stressful for some students. The perception of the students about the popularity of the STAR students is a concern. Perhaps there needs to be more STAR classes so more opportunities to be in a STAR class.
The STAR PLC members responsible for this review also surveyed eight STAR teachers (current and past), four of whom have been involved in the program for four years or more.

Seven of the eight teachers found their involvement in the program satisfying, illustrating their responses with detailed comments that reflected on the professional rewards and drawbacks of their involvement in the program.

The most satisfying aspects for teachers include the opportunity to form strong staff/student relationships, to work in innovative and new ways with curriculum and across KLAs and to create a safe and supportive environment where students feel connected to the school and their peers.

The associated drawbacks appear to include: the increased workload and apparent lack of recognition and support for the time needed to organise community related events and the emotional commitment required to meet the needs of such a diverse (and often high – need) group of girls. Staff also referred to the time consuming and emotionally demanding selection process which usually requires extensive follow up and emotional support.

The ambivalence of STAR teachers’ responses was reflected in the comment:

*It is satisfying, but there have been many times when I have wanted to walk away due to the increased workload (extra-curricula events, increased contact with parents, meetings…) and high pastoral care demands.*

In response to a direct question about workload compared to a standard subject in your teaching area, seven out of the eight teachers responded that STAR required a higher workload, with five teachers indicating a significantly greater workload.

![Graph showing workload comparison](image)

**Does/Did it require a higher a amount of workload compared to a standard subject in your teaching area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, it was less</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, significantly more</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The STAR program is well resourced by the school**

![Graph showing resource comparison](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five of the 8 teachers responded that the most likely reason for them leaving the program (either in the past or in the future) would be due to teacher “burnout” or due to the increased workload.

STAR staff were less than positive about the level of resourcing for STAR by the school and included suggestions like more time for planning events, meetings etc, school staff support, more funds and more administration support as a way of addressing workload issues.

Six of the eight STAR staff commented about their motivation to be a STAR teacher. Many of their heartfelt and positive comments were reflected in the chart of responses to the question: What were/are your highlights of being involved in the STAR program?
Indicative comments about teachers’ motivation included:

My motivation was to enrich the experience of students and create a deeper learning experience for the participants. Also to model and showcase the benefits of a cross-curricular approach.

To provide students with opportunities to be healthy, active, contributing members of society. Teaching a cohort for two years enables teachers to really get to know the students and appropriately support individual needs.

I believe passionately in the philosophy of the program, the ways to wellbeing and the empowerment of young women. I feel that the program makes such a difference to the lives of many young women and gives them opportunities that they would not receive otherwise.

Finally, I think that STAR or an equivalent (single gender PE/SOSE classes) should be offered to as many girls as would like to apply. Last year we could have potentially had two classes.

Recommendations

Recommendations 1 & 2 that resulted from student feedback are equally applicable to issues raised by staff.

The point made in the student section that entry to the STAR program is based on a diverse range of attributes (academic performance, leadership potential, sporting ability, at risk and for social inclusion) in contrast to other special programs at LHS is also just as relevant in considering the issues raised by staff. Just as students find the selection process by attributes rather than by measurable skills, talents or performance difficult to understand so do many staff find it somewhat mystifying. Continuing to place communication about STAR’s purpose and the student need it is meeting as a key priority (as in Recommendation 2) can only improve the development of a shared understanding about the program across the whole school.

Staff responses indicate that the level of community engagement activity in the STAR curriculum, involving so much outside class time face to face contact, is an area of most intense pressure. However the significant pastoral care commitment required in working with STAR students also needs to be recognised for workload purposes.

3. That the selection/application process for STAR students continues to be reviewed and revised annually (as it currently is by STAR teachers) to reflect the program’s purpose and needs of the target group.

4. That the school consider, as part of this continuous review process, ways of ensuring that the large numbers of girls seeking entry to the program are able to access the positive aspects of STAR in other ways, in the case it is not possible to expand the current program.

5. That school executive consider the impact on teacher workload caused by the level of community engagement activity (a significant percentage of which is out of hours) expected of STAR teachers with a view to negotiating some flexible arrangements with staff to address those workload issues.

Parents/caregivers results

Summary

Twelve survey responses were completed by parents/caregivers of STAR students although it was clear that at least two of these respondents were students currently enrolled in the program. It was
clear that their detailed comments, written in first person, reflected their current experiences of STAR.

The responses of (possibly 10) parents/caregivers reinforced the conclusions drawn from STAR students’ responses that the rich curriculum, high expectations and a strong sense of belonging were perceived to be among the key advantages of STAR.

Parents/caregivers also clearly indicated leadership as one of the key attributes to consider in applicants, indicating strong alignment with the program’s stated selection criteria.

What attributes are considered in STAR students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk potential</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership potential</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting ability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, it is obvious that students, staff and parents/caregivers are in broad agreement that STAR delivers its intended outcomes and that it is a highly valued program at LHS.

Indicative comments included:
Extremely positive experience for girls to feel part of something strong powerful and worthwhile

I think it works well for the girls to have some female only classes, not having to concern themselves with boys – what they think, what they say. I really value the feminist perspective that underpins the SoSE subject matter. The program gives a sound grounding in group dynamics (sometimes positive and sometimes not!) over the 2 years. Making special connections with the STAR teachers has been a particular advantage for my 2 daughters who have participated in the program.
Negatives
Only 8 comments about possible disadvantages of STAR were recorded by parents/caregivers. The comments were spread across a very wide range with no evident clustering around a key theme.

Improvements suggested
Only four specific suggestions for improving STAR were received from parents/caregivers. Three of the four suggestions related to improving areas of communication.

Better communication with parents directly, rather than through the student/newsletters etc, ie weekly email updates and reminders or something to that effect.

You need to figure out a way to better communicate with students and parents to get across important information.

Other comments
Some parents/caregivers used the opportunity provided by the online survey to add general comments in the section headed: suggestions for how STAR could further improve. These comments were generally positive in flavour:

Think it’s a great program which has really benefitted my daughter socially and given her more motivation with her studies. Has also provided her with great opportunities.

I was very impressed with STAR – my daughter just loves it. She is motivated to do things she would not have been interested in so much previously. Pete

I think it might be a good project for some of the older girls to research, plan, budget for and take responsibility for the camp, accepting input and responding to queries from other girls (and parents)...just like in real life.

Recommendation
6. That communication strategies be developed to better meet the needs of stakeholders while reducing the workload of teachers. Parents and caregivers need to be provided with the opportunity to take a greater role in this area.
Other considerations
As has already been emphasised applicants for the STAR program have been steadily increasing each year since its inception in 2010. Despite changes to the application process in 2013-2014 that increased its rigour (which resulted in a reduced number of applicants the following year) there were still 65 students, representing about 50% of the possible cohort, seeking one of the 25 places available in this year’s program.

The fact that such a relatively small group of students is selected for the program causes a number of other related issues that have been described in this review. It also needs to be recognised that because of the sheer numbers involved and the perceived high stakes, “restrictive” nature of achieving admission to the program, the selection process on its own represents another significant workload issue for STAR staff involved.

In a sense the majority of issues raised in this review have largely been caused by the STAR program’s success!

Conclusion
The review has provided an excellent opportunity to collect and analyse data on a successful program that was established over 5 years ago at LHS and has evolved to its current form. It is stated that a core aim of the program is to empower young women to think about their place in the world, tackle local and global issues and actively advocate for change with students selected for the attributes of academic performance, leadership potential, sporting ability, at risk and for social inclusion. Survey responses indicate that there is a strong awareness and valuing of the program and its capacity to deliver positive outcomes for participating students, across the whole school community, in these attribute areas.

The large numbers of girls seeking the limited numbers of spaces available in the program each year is a powerful indicator of its great success but also a contributing factor to some of the issues raised in student and staff feedback.

One of the key characteristics of the program is that a diverse group of girls is selected each year for STAR (approximately 5 students in each of the attribute areas) which is possibly another contributing factor to some staff and students feeling a level of confusion about the selection process, the target group for the program and to perceptions of “exclusivity” among some groups.

The review provides an opportunity to develop even greater clarity about this highly successful program, the students it targets, possible opportunities for expansion and an opportunity to ensure its sustainability in the longer term, especially in regard to staff workload issues.

Recommendations (summary)
1. That staff (STAR staff and other staff) investigate the extent and nature of “negative perceptions” held by students and staff with a view to developing whole school practical measures to counter it.

2. That communication about the purpose of the STAR program, and the student need it is meeting continues to be an ongoing priority in the school. The involvement of the leadership team and non STAR staff in this process is essential to the effectiveness of this recommendation.
3. That the selection/application process for STAR students continues to be reviewed and revised annually (as it currently is by STAR teachers) to reflect the program’s purpose and needs of the target group.

4. That the school consider, as part of this continuous review process, ways of ensuring that the large numbers of girls seeking entry to the program are able to access the positive aspects of STAR in other ways, in the case it is not possible to expand the current program.

5. That school executive consider the impact on teacher workload caused by the level of community engagement activity (a significant percentage of which is out of hours) expected of STAR teachers with a view to negotiating some flexible arrangements with staff to address those workload issues.

6. That communication strategies be developed to better meet the needs of stakeholders while reducing the workload of teachers. Parents and caregivers need to be provided with the opportunity to take a greater role in this area.