



**Vanier Catholic Secondary School
Review Report
October 2014**

Vanier Catholic Secondary School
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School Principal: Ryan Sikkes
Vice-principal: Jeanette Gallant

Date of Review: October 20-22, 2014

School Review Team: **Greg Storey, Superintendent, Area 3**
Lina Radziunas, Vice-principal, Holy Family Elementary
Danielle Sheldon, Partnerships Coordinator, FNPP
Doug Petriw, Science Teacher, FH Collins Secondary
Darren Hays, Principal, FH Collins Secondary
Lori Choquette, Former parent and School Council Chair
Simon Blakesley, Director, Student Achievement

Meetings with the School included:

Students
Teachers
VCSS Support Staff
VCSS School Council
VCSS School Growth Planning Team
VCSS School Administration

School Context

Vanier Catholic Secondary School (VCSS) is a faith-based secondary school serving approximately 360 students in Grades 8 through 12, where the inherent dignity of each child is celebrated and respected.

The school's catchment area includes all of Whitehorse and its surrounding area. A small number of Gadzoosdaa Residence students also attend the school. The school aims to educate the whole child, striving to meet their academic, physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs. Not a school for only Catholic families, VCSS is a Catholic school for all families who wish a faith-based program of studies and who are willing to have their children learn in an atmosphere that is distinctly Catholic. As the Whitehorse high school that offers this faith-based option, supports and resources are provided and allocated to specifically help students examine their values and live their lives with a fully informed conscience. Within this ethos the ability for students and staff to examine diverse beliefs and philosophies is created. An aim of VCSS is to develop students who are independent learners, committed to social justice, and able to make thoughtful, value-based decisions about all aspects of their lives.

VCSS data profile

VCS School - Enrolment history

VCS Grade	Sep-2014	Sep-2013	Sep-2012	Sep-2011
8	67	60	75	76
9	69	67	79	74
10	73	73	68	86
11	70	75	80	77
12	71	82	67	87
SU	13	14	15	23
Total	363	371	384	423

VCS School - Student Demographics

VCS Grade	Female	Male	First Nations	Non First Nations	Sep-2014	IEP
8	30	37	12	55	67	11
9	34	35	9	60	69	6
10	43	30	17	56	73	10
11	39	31	10	60	70	13
12	40	31	13	58	71	8
SU	5	8	7	6	13	7
Total	191	172	68	295	363	55
IEP	24	31	17	38	55	
IEP %	13%	18%	25%	13%	15%	

VCS School - Average attendance (Days missed)

RU	School	2013/2014	2012/2013	2011/2012
U	Vanier Catholic Secondary School	18	16	17
	Yukon	20	19	20

VCS School - BCP & School average marks

	VCS School 2013/2014	VCS School			Yukon		
Grade	BCP Exam	BCP Avg.	School Avg.	BCP Exams	BCP Avg.	School Avg.	BCP Exams
10	Apprenticeship Math 10	52%	69%	24	50%	65%	113
10	English 10	67%	63%	69	70%	71%	326
10	English 10 First Peoples	82%	71%	*	54%	62%	34
10	Fondements et Mathqs 10				71%	73%	40
10	Foundations of Math 10	61%	77%	48	60%	69%	214
10	Francais Langue Premiere 10				61%	65%	*
10	Science 10	64%	67%	69	65%	70%	292
10	Sciences 10				73%	80%	41
11	Civic Studies 11	59%	58%	10	58%	65%	14
11	Sciences Humaines 11				74%	85%	11
11	Social Studies 11	67%	68%	59	67%	72%	260
12	Communications 12	44%		*	66%	70%	71
12	English 12	68%	73%	76	65%	74%	294
12	Francais Langue Premiere 12				77%	71%	*
12	Francais Langue Seconde 12				65%	78%	28
12	Yukon FN Studies 12				53%	54%	*
	Total			362			1752

*These numbers are masked due to the number of students writing being less than 10

VCS School - BCP Pass/Fail

	VCS School 2013/2014	VCS School			Yukon		
Grade	BCP Exam	Pass	BCP Exams	Pass%	Pass	BCP Exams	Pass%
10	Apprenticeship Math 10	14	24	58%	66	113	58%
10	English 10	60	69	87%	299	326	92%
10	English 10 First Peoples	*	*	100%	17	34	50%
10	Fondements et Mathqs 10	0	0		33	40	83%
10	Foundations of Math 10	32	48	67%	150	214	70%
10	Francais Langue Premiere 10	0	0		3	4	75%
10	Science 10	60	69	87%	259	292	89%
10	Sciences 10	0	0		41	41	100%
11	Civic Studies 11		10	80%	11	14	79%
11	Sciences Humaines 11	0	0		10	11	91%
11	Social Studies 11	56	59	95%	231	260	89%
12	Communications 12	*	*	50%	64	71	90%
12	English 12	72	76	95%	260	294	88%
12	Francais Langue Premiere 12	0	0		5	5	100%
12	Francais Langue Seconde 12	0	0		24	28	86%
12	Yukon FN Studies 12	0	0		3	5	60%
	Total	308	362	85%	1476	1752	84%

*These numbers are masked due to the number of students writing being less than 10

Norms and Culture:

Characteristics:

Continuously improving schools are socially and culturally inclusive with high expectations for each learner. A focus on continuous improvement is evident.

Observations of the Team:

- The school engages in a number of processes at the start of each week and school day to build community and share information. These include Bookend Meetings for staff, and morning prayer and intentions in individual classes. Teachers may then use prayer and intentions as the segue to curricular topics
- There is a clear Catholic identity associated with VCSS that holds the school community together in a way that is not forced or mandated. This way of being, or philosophy that permeates the school, is clearly stated in ways that the empathic and professional school staff welcome all students
- A very supportive staff culture exists at VCSS: while there appear differences with respect to the levels of “catholicity” between staff, there is also acceptance of and respect for individual differences and viewpoints. Irrespective of different faith-based viewpoints, the team observed that trust and commitment is evident between staff and the school administration in ways that support ongoing dialogue
- VCSS is a culturally rich school, where increasing immigration over a number of years has continued to add to the diversity of the student population. There is an acceptance of all students, regardless of ability, identity and individual differences at VCSS that is clearly visible in the interactions between students and staff. Relationships are a core value, and there is an ethic of “our kids” amongst the staff
- The Team heard from multiple students with whom they spoke that there is a strong, supportive culture at VCSS where students help other students. Students indicated that there is relatively little bullying at VCSS, though did suggest that there is the potential for fragmentation as the school’s population becomes increasingly diverse
- The Team also heard from students that the reasons behind device use and ear bud rules appear unclear, and this leads to some confusion.
- With respect to lunches, the team heard from students that having a debit machine as a form of payment available would help them to purchase cafeteria lunches. The team also heard from Gadzoosdaa Residence students that the lunch break may be too short for them to go to the residence for lunch

- The school engages in a large number of outreach activities that see VCSS students working at the Food Bank, the soup kitchen, Yukon Connects, CAIRES, FASSY, and supporting the Outreach Van

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Seek ways recognize, celebrate, and share culture and identity while concurrently focusing on bringing a diverse group of students together as one community in order to avoid becoming a collection of groups where differences may divide rather than unite
- Social justice and inclusion is a clear strength of the norms and culture at VCSS. This said, the team recommends that an inordinate amount of initiatives and work not be placed on the social justice committee body to the point where it becomes less effective
- Ensure that there are accessible channels for students to provide their thoughts with respect to school rules and their ideas for how the school environment may be improved

School and Community

Characteristics: In continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, school council, First Nations and community to support student learning. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture and the school communicates about progress and challenges in multiple ways.

Observations of the Team

- The VCSS staff works to integrate both world and Yukon issues into school activities and teaching. For example, VCSS students were attending the Me to We social consciousness event, held in Vancouver during the review
- Awareness and acceptance of First Nations culture and spirituality has increased since the last review. The team heard numerous times how the Yukon First Nations culture week held the previous school year was a catalyst for greater cultural awareness at VCSS and a springboard to future activities integrated throughout the school year
- The Team heard from staff and administration that the Filipino student population is growing at VCSS, and as a result there are increased needs for support for ELL (English as a Learned Language) students. This growth contributes to the school though is not without its challenges: in particular, connecting with families was identified as an area requiring attention, as was ensuring that students do not become marginalized

- There is a clear expectation amongst all staff that they will connect both formally and informally with their students. This clearly contributes to the feeling of community that has been built at VCSS
- The Team observed that VCSS is a very clean, orderly, and well-maintained school that students take responsibility for. In particular, the school cafeteria is a very social place where students and staff enjoy spending time together, and is left clean after lunch
- The Team heard from staff that VCSS has been through a period of instability over the past three years due to differences in direction and a philosophy for the school, and that this has been a difficult time for some staff members. The Team noted that there appear to be unanswered questions regarding fundamental governance issues, and that this fosters a sense of unease which may hinder the progress of moving forward

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Seek ways to build on the strengths of the Yukon First Nations Culture Week in order that activities are expanded and embedded throughout the school year in order to build upon the successful week-long event
- Identify a process to assist staff to come together and work through their experiences of the last three years in order to move forward. A visioning process with timelines to help encourage staff engagement could be helpful in charting a course forward
- Given the increasing Filipino population at VCSS, explore opportunities for a liaison with the Filipino community as a means to support students, families and teachers in their work together. Consider use of the Cultural Inclusion Fund if planning events that support cultural awareness and understanding for VCSS students

School Organization

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools organize structures, actions, and interventions to ensure success for each learner. Work in the school is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. Actions and interventions include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The Department supports the school and makes connections across the Territory to build capacity.

Observations of the Team:

- The team heard that School Based Team has become more inclusive in its practices since the last review, though some teachers did not appear to be entirely conversant with the

referral process. Some staff expressed the desire for follow-up with students at a level greater than the notes sent to staff on First Class

- Students indicated to the Team that their teachers are specialists who do their best to teach, and that they attend VCSS because they believe it to be the best school. Some students also suggested that they could benefit from a greater span of teaching styles/techniques, and more individualized pathways to learning
- A review of enrolment data at VCSS indicates a declining trend: over the past 4 years, VCSS enrolment has declined 60 students. The team wondered to what extent this decline has prompted discussions at the school level regarding innovation in programming and instructional delivery models
- Grade 7 to 8 transitions appear to be very well-coordinated and thought out. For example, VCSS administration takes current Grade 8 students with them as a resource when visiting feeder schools. Feeder schools also create the Grade 8 class list for VCSS based on their knowledge of and experience with these students
- Related to the Grade 7 to 8 transition, programming and timetable changes have resulted in Scimatics and Humanities as a means to reduce student movement and class rotations, provide larger instructional blocks, and support new students as they build relationships with their teachers
- VCSS students strongly support the Skills Room and feel it is a valuable resource for them. The Team heard examples from students describing how the Skills Room helped them to not fall behind, and provide additional help with learning new concepts
- VCSS employs a number of clubs to provide a wide-range of opportunities for students to engage in. These include not only clubs with a sports or music focus, but also clubs that have a social justice and responsibility focus
- The Team heard from staff members that there is a desire for a closer connection between VCSS and the parish

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Given the change to Scimatics and Humanities at Grade 8/9, identify a clear set of indicators that will be able to show the effects of this change in terms of academic achievement and student satisfaction

- Ensure that all staff are conversant with School Based Team processes and know where follow-up information can be retrieved and acted upon. Communicate these processes clearly, particularly when new staff arrive at the school
- In order to build stronger ties between the school and the parish, consider a broader professional development approach that helps to support the parish, feeder schools, and CEAY (Catholic Education Association Yukon) to work together more closely
- Explore whether self-paced learning, blended learning models, or other organizational models may better suit the needs of VCSS students. Previous models and program offerings may now be less effective due to a declining enrolment and a changing context. This may help to address the “plateau” in achievement observed by the School Growth Planning Team

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools take responsibility for improving outcomes for students. They use evidence to guide decisions and actions and have processes in place to collectively monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work. They demonstrate improvement over time – for individual students, groups of students, and the school.

Observations of the Team:

- The Team was impressed at the thorough and detailed manner in which the recommendations from the 2011 VCSS School Review were presented and addressed by the School Growth Planning Team
- Student achievement is clearly posted near the school office and is celebrated in well-attended ceremonies and at community barbecues
- With respect to student achievement once having left school, the Team heard of many students who have gone on to work in the Yukon trades sector in part due to their involvement in the strong trades program at VCSS
- The Team noted that the VCSS staff is increasingly employing data to learn more about their students and to meet their needs. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) employ School Wide Write and DART (District Assessment of Reading) data early on in the school year to guide instruction

- Data is visible and posted in the staff room in the form of grade-level collections. In order to better understand all of their students, teachers outside of the subject-area mark student work (i.e. Math teachers marking English assessments) in order to “cross-pollinate”
- VCSS has deployed its own student satisfaction survey for the second time, and is in the process of analyzing their data and comparing their second survey to the first round
- The team heard from staff and administration that their study of achievement data suggests a “plateau” in terms of student achievement. Both the Review Team and the School Growth Planning Team wondered what factors might be behind this leveling-off
- When meeting with the School Council, it was clearly evident that they have the same student data-sets as the staff use. School Growth and working with school data is a standing item on the School Council agenda: this contributes to a team approach and has contributed to positive relationships between school administration and School Council
- Students were clear in their belief that the teachers at VCSS are specialists who know their subject areas very well. For senior students, their teachers were a key factor in their choice to attend VCSS
- While there appears to be a strong effort placed on school growth planning, and staff are aware of and support the writing goal for the school, the team was unsure as to how the School Growth Plan is communicated to various stakeholders

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to examine the data generated as a result of the satisfaction survey as an important way of knowing more about your student population and their needs, and informing future actions
- Continue to use multiple sources of data to better understand and inform decision making, as well as assessing the effects of program and timetabling initiatives
- Work to ensure that the School Growth Plan is widely distributed to all stakeholder groups as a means of communicating as broadly as possible the direction and goals of the school, and that any applications to the Cultural Inclusion Fund are connected to the School Growth Plan to ensure success for all students

In conclusion

The Review Team clearly sensed and witnessed the community of caring that is abundantly evident at VCSS, and the pride that is felt when students succeed. The Team was very impressed at the strong focus on students, and was further impressed by the extent to which students praised their teachers in their care for them.

The staff at VCSS are there for each other and work together to create a welcoming climate where the student body is referred to as “our kids”. This positions the school very well as they continue to explore data and work towards continued innovative instructional improvement and growth.

VCSS faces a challenge in the future which will be critical to the school’s future success. The team reflected upon the following question: “How will VCSS maintain and celebrate the multiple cultural identities at the school, while concurrently building and maintaining one school community?” Addressing this complex question will require the growth of a vision from within the school community, in order to ensure that differences bring people together rather than be divisive. The Team feels that the current levels of trust and caring at VCSS position the school well to meet future challenges

Practices to share:

- The staff at VCSS begin and end each week with a “bookend” meeting, which sees all staff come together to as a community

For consideration by the Department of Education

- Consider ways that the counselling needs of VCSS students could be met both in terms of supporting the attainment of counselling credentials and skills, and the time available for counselling
- Consider ways to support the school as it strives to meet the needs of an increasing ELL student population
- Consider ways to support the process of the development of a common vision for the broader VCSS school community