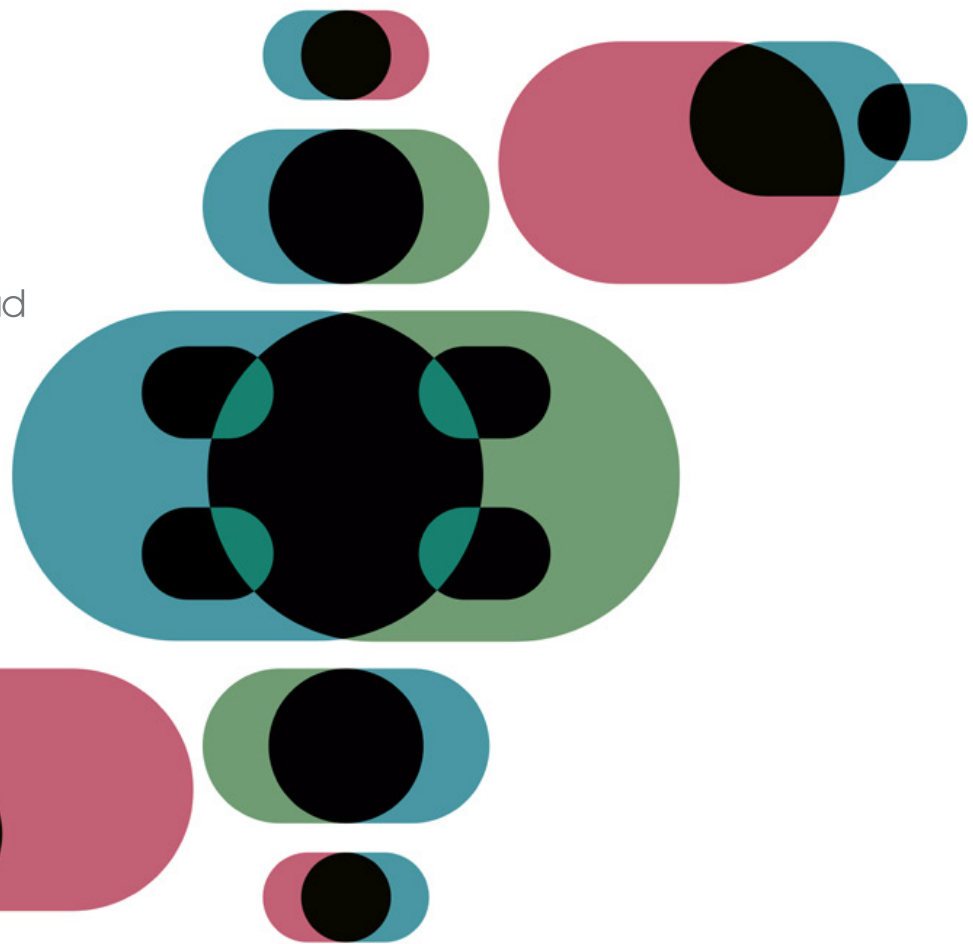




Intersection

How leaders lead



Learning from Experience

Independent Cultural Review
of Ballarat Grammar School

SUMMARY REPORT
JULY 2026

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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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About this summary

This document summarises the findings and recommendations of the Independent Cultural Review of Ballarat and Queen's Anglican Grammar School ('Ballarat Grammar'). The full report, titled *Learning from Experience*, was commissioned by the School Board in May 2025 and conducted by Intersection, a firm that specialises in organisational culture.

The Review was prompted by 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 was not an investigation, an audit or a determination of individual fault. It was a systematic examination of the culture of Ballarat Grammar as experienced by its students, parents, employees and former members of the community.

This summary report covers:

- the context for the Review
- how the Review was conducted
- what the school does well
- the challenges it now faces across each part of school life
- key findings of the Review
- what the school has already changed
- what the Review recommends.



A note on reading this summary

No school in Australia is immune from bullying and other harmful behaviour among students. Young people's brains, emotional awareness and capacity for empathy are still developing, and the part of the brain that governs impulse control and consequential thinking does not fully mature until the mid-20s. Schools operate at the coalface of that developmental process. Incidents will inevitably occur in environments where young people live, learn and gather. It is how an institution recognises, responds to and learns from these that matters. To this end, there are learnings for all educational institutions in the *Learning from Experience* report.

This summary contains findings that reflect well on the school and findings that do not. It also contains conclusions that some readers will agree with, and some will contest. Ballarat Grammar commissioned this Review because it recognised that an honest, independent examination of its culture was necessary in order to inform future change and practice. The school has decided to release the report of the Review in full as a sign of its genuine desire for change and accountability.



In brief

Ballarat Grammar is a school with both deep strengths and challenges. The Review found a community with a strong sense of belonging, a unique breadth of opportunity for students, a junior school that lives the school's values, a tradition of service, and dedicated staff.

It also found challenges that have built up over years: a gap between the school's stated values and everyday experience that has led to an erosion of trust in school systems and leadership, growth that outpaced the systems needed to manage it, and perceptions of a lack of consistency, fairness and cultural complacency that have affected experiences of school life in multiple areas including behaviour management, student wellbeing, staff support, communication and operational decision-making.

Those challenges show up across every part of school life. Students described uneven belonging, social hierarchies, discrimination that was not always addressed, and a gap between reporting a problem and seeing a response. In boarding, harmful practices grouped under the word 'strapping' became normalised within a hierarchical, under-supervised peer culture, alongside the genuine friendships and support that boarding at its best provides. Parents described frustrations with communication, complaints and responsiveness, and a relationship that too often felt transactional. Employees described unsustainable workloads, a divide between teaching and non-teaching colleagues, and a reluctance to speak up. Governance had not kept pace with the school's growth, and the Board's view of risk was limited by fragmented data.

The challenges identified in this Review are systemic, reflecting patterns that have developed over time. They are also challenges the school has the capacity to address. Ballarat Grammar has the community support, the institutional resources and the external impetus to do the work ahead.

The Review makes 44 recommendations across seven areas to address both the immediate concerns and the conditions that produced them. The school has already made significant changes since the boarding incidents became public. These are positive steps. The task now is to hold and deepen those changes. This Review identifies further opportunities to build on that work and embed lasting change.



Context for the Review

Ballarat Grammar is an independent, co-educational Anglican school located in regional Victoria, with students from Early Learning through to Year 12. It operates a boarding program (for Years 7-12) that draws students from regional and rural Victoria and beyond. The school 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 February 2025, Ballarat Grammar publicly acknowledged allegations of student-on-student abuse in Dart House, one of the boys' boarding houses. The allegations included conduct referred to as 'strapping', involving physical violence by senior boarders towards younger boys, as a form of punishment for perceived boarding house misdemeanours.

The seriousness of the allegations, and the period over which the conduct was said to have occurred, raised fundamental questions about supervision in boarding, the culture of the boys' boarding houses, and whether the school's systems were able to identify, escalate and respond to harm.

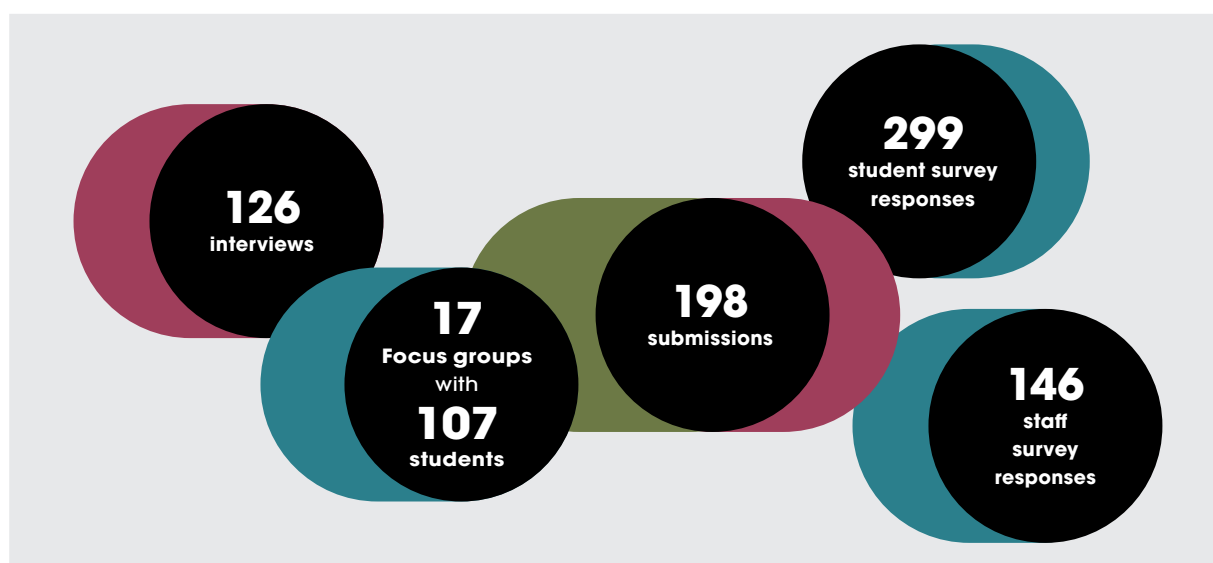
The school undertook significant remedial action. It commissioned an independent review of boarding operations, the Fenner Review, which made 32 recommendations, of which the school agreed to implement 31. It introduced enhanced supervision and safeguarding protocols, expanded training for boarding staff, new reporting systems including anonymous channels, and physical changes to boarding facilities. The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) also conducted a review and placed interim conditions on the school's registration of its boarding premises.

The Fenner Review was focused on the specific circumstances of Dart House and on boarding structures. This Independent Review was designed to complement it by examining the broader cultural conditions across the whole school that allowed such an environment to develop.

How the Review was conducted

The Review drew on a wide range of sources of information about the school culture. More than 600 members of the Ballarat Grammar community took part, including current and former students, parents, employees and other stakeholders. The Review gathered this information through:

- 126 one-on-one interviews
- 17 focus groups attended by 107 students
- 198 written submissions
- 299 student survey responses and 146 employee survey responses
- 32 follow-up meetings with school employees
- a detailed analysis of the school's policies, available data, systems and governance frameworks.



Student safety was central to the way the Review was conducted. Participation was voluntary, and the Review team took care to protect the confidentiality of everyone who contributed. The different methods used to gather information allowed people to choose how they wanted to take part.

The survey responses were not large enough to be statistically representative of the whole school. For this reason, the Review primarily relied on evidence from interviews, submissions and focus groups, with survey data used to illustrate themes rather than to draw statistical conclusions. Where this summary reports that something was widely or consistently described, it reflects a theme that recurred across cohorts and methods, not a single account.

The Review recorded what participants experienced and perceived. In a cultural review, perception matters in its own right, because the way a community experiences an institution shapes trust, behaviour and willingness to speak up. Where accounts conflicted, the Review has explicitly noted this.



Who took part

The Review heard from a wide cross-section of the school community: current students from the junior, middle and senior years, current and former boarders, former students reflecting on experiences from a range of eras, parents of current and former students, current and former employees in teaching and non-teaching roles, members of the leadership team and the Board, and other people connected to the school. The level of engagement, particularly from employees and from former students, reflected a community that cared about the school and wanted to contribute to its future.

The Review team sincerely thanks every person who contributed. Many shared experiences that were painful to recount: students and former students described events that had shaped their sense 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, and employees reflected on times the school had failed to support them. Their willingness to speak candidly, particularly where doing so came at personal cost, is the foundation this Review stands on. That courage deserves to be met with action.

What the Review did and did not examine

This Review examined the culture of the school as a whole. It was not an investigation or fact-finding exercise into the Dart House incidents, which were the subject of separate processes, or any other specific incidents that may have occurred at the school. The purpose of the Review was to understand the conditions that allowed harmful culture to develop and persist, and to recommend the changes that will make the school safer, fairer and more consistent. Where the boarding incidents are discussed in this summary, they appear as context and as evidence of systemic patterns, not as the subject of a fresh investigation.



Key findings of the Review

What the school does well

Across all cohorts, people spoke about Ballarat Grammar with affection, pride and a genuine sense of belonging. These strengths matter in their own right. They also matter because lasting cultural change is built on the foundations of what an institution already does well.

A strong sense of community

The most consistently raised strength was the sense of community. Students, parents and staff described a school with a long history, strong traditions and a culture that, at its best, feels warm, connected and deeply relational. For many families the school is a multi-generational institution that has shaped identities, relationships and life paths. This sense of belonging showed up in the experiences of boarders who formed lifelong friendships, day students who found their interests through co-curricular programs, parents who valued the village feel of the school, and employees who spoke about colleagues and students with evident pride.

Breadth of opportunity

Ballarat Grammar offers a uniquely wide range of co-curricular, sporting, outdoor education and creative programs for a school of its size. Students and parents consistently described these programs as formative rather than supplementary. For boarding families in particular, access to these opportunities was often the reason they chose the school. A related strength was the school's whole-child educational philosophy. Across consultations, the Review heard that the school valued young people for more than their academic results and sought to support their growth as rounded individuals.

The Junior School

The Junior School was widely and consistently regarded as a strong, nurturing environment. Parents, staff and students who had passed through it described a place where the school's values were lived rather than simply stated, where relationships between staff and families were close, and where children felt known and safe. Several participants contrasted the Junior School favourably with the middle and senior years. That contrast is instructive. It shows the school already has, within its own community, an environment that delivers the culture it aspires to. 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.

Service and connection to community

The school's tradition of service and its connection to the broader Ballarat community, including through various programs and initiatives, were identified as distinctive strengths. Participants described an institution that values contribution as well as achievement and that takes its responsibilities to the wider community seriously.



Dedicated staff

Many employees spoke about the genuine sense of purpose they find in their work, and described relationships with students as the most rewarding part of their professional lives. The dedication and professionalism of staff across both teaching and non-teaching roles is an institutional asset the Review acknowledges, and one the school will rely on through the work ahead.

The challenges and what connects them

Alongside these strengths, the Review identified significant and persistent challenges that have developed over a number of years. They are not isolated problems. They are connected, and they share common causes that have compounded over time.

Gap between values and lived experience

The most significant challenge is the gap between the school's stated values and the consistency with which those values are reflected in practice. Participants described aspiration, compassion, courage, hope, integrity and responsibility as values that carry real meaning in the school community. The difficulty lies in the uneven translation of those values into everyday experience. For people who had raised concerns and felt unheard or minimised, that gap has eroded trust in the school's systems and leadership.

Growth outpacing systems

Another major challenge is the effect of growth without matching investment in systems, structures and ways of working. The school has expanded significantly over the past decade, and its systems, structures and practices have not kept pace with that growth. As the school has become larger and more complex, it has too often operated reactively, responding to issues as they arise and relying on local workarounds rather than consistent, whole-of-school approaches. The result is a perception that the school manages symptoms rather than addressing underlying causes.

Lack of consistency and perceptions of fairness

The Review heard about a broader lack of consistency that affected school life in multiple areas including behaviour management, staff support, communication, student wellbeing and operational decision-making. Concerns about uneven responses with respect to behaviour management and the handling of incidents and complaints were raised by students, families and employees. However, this is not just an issue of individual responses. This inconsistency reflects a structural problem produced by the absence of standardised processes, uneven training and a leadership culture that has historically tolerated variation rather than addressing it.

Across student, parent and employee perspectives, the Review identified strong concerns about fairness, influence and differential treatment. This included social hierarchies among students, experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion not adequately addressed, and a House system which reinforced structural divisions and gendered dynamics. For employees, the division between teaching and non-teaching staff emerged as a persistent theme.



Communication and transparency issues

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. Some experienced this as communication that was delayed, inconsistent or that appeared more concerned with managing risk or reputation than with building understanding and trust.

Employee wellbeing and the school as a workplace

Employee wellbeing emerged as an issue, with some staff describing 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.

Culture of complacency

Over time these issues have contributed to a culture of complacency and an environment in which inconsistency is accepted and concerns 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.

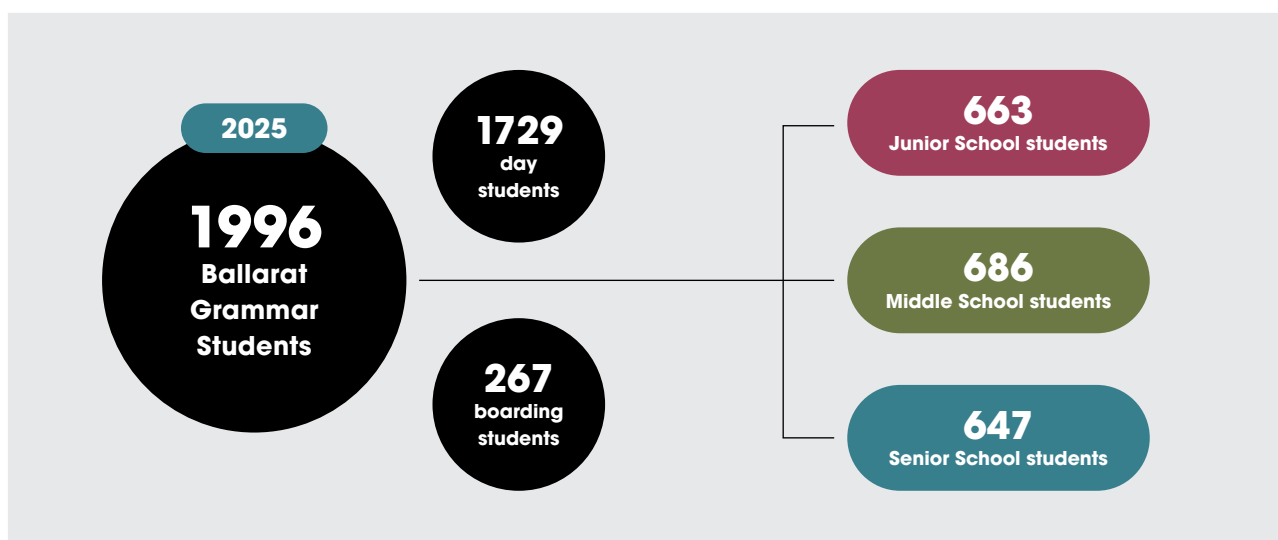
The sections that follow describe how these patterns play out in each part of school life – for students, in boarding, from the parent perspective, and for employees for whom the school is a workplace.

Student experience

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

Many students spoke with pride about the sense of community, the breadth of opportunity, the tradition of service and the quality of their relationships with individual teachers. For many, Ballarat Grammar is a place where they feel they belong and have the chance to develop as individuals. A culture of checking in on peers and genuine warmth between students and staff were described as real strengths.

At the same time, the Review heard about significant challenges. Social hierarchies based on perceptions of wealth, family connections, leadership positions, gender, race, sexuality, disability and friendship groups create divisions that students find hard to manage and that carry real harm. Experiences of bullying, exclusion and discrimination were reported across all year levels, and the school's systems were not always equipped to identify or respond to them.



Belonging, diversity and inclusion

Belonging at Ballarat Grammar is uneven. Students who fit the dominant culture of the school tend to experience it as warm and connected. Students from diverse cultural, religious and gender-diverse backgrounds, and students with disability or neurodivergence, more often described exclusion, and a school whose systems were not designed with them in mind. Some students reported experiences of racism and discrimination that were witnessed but not adequately addressed, which taught them that raising such matters was unlikely to change anything.

Support for students with disability and neurodivergence was identified as an area of particular pressure. Families and employees described inconsistent adjustments, stretched specialist resources, and a reliance on the knowledge and goodwill of individual staff rather than an informed, school-wide approach.



Student voice and leadership

Students described having few avenues through which their concerns or ideas were sought, heard or acted on. Student leadership exists, but it was often described as ceremonial rather than influential. The Review found limited mechanisms for students to shape decisions about the culture, safety and wellbeing matters that affect them directly. The absence of genuine student voice is itself a cultural signal: it communicates that the perspectives of the people most affected by decisions are not treated as essential to making them.

Values and behavioural culture

The school articulates its values clearly, and has invested in a behavioural framework, formerly the Positive Behaviour @ Grammar framework and now the Teaching, Learning and Wellbeing Framework, delivered through the school's CREW pastoral groups. The challenge is consistency of delivery. The Review found gaps in the way behavioural and values education is sequenced across year levels, and in particular in upstander and active bystander education, which equips students to respond when they witness harm.

The House system

The House system is valued by many students and is, for some, a genuine source of belonging. House systems, when designed and managed well, are a recognised mechanism for fostering cross-year connections and building school identity. However, the Review found that the current House system has reinforced harmful dynamics of hierarchies and exclusion, in which Houses remain divided between day and boarding students; students are allocated to Houses based on gender and family legacy (where a student is placed in their sibling's House or parent's former House); and House membership functions as a form of social currency.

Safety, reporting and trust

An institution's response to reported incidents is among the most powerful drivers of its culture. The Review found a long-standing pattern of inconsistent or inadequate institutional response at Ballarat Grammar that has functioned as a signal to students that harmful behaviour carries limited consequence. Many students said they did not know what happened after they raised a concern, which reduced their confidence in the system and made them less likely to report again. Responses to incidents were described as inconsistent, with consequences that could vary depending on who a student was, which House they were in, and which staff member was involved.

Some variation in how the school responds is appropriate. Every student's circumstances are different, and staff need room to take those circumstances into account rather than applying consequences mechanically. The problem is that the school has not explained the factors it considers or communicated what has been done in response, so a considered, student-specific response can look the same as an unfair one.



Boarding experience

Boarding, when it works well, offers something a day school cannot. It creates a shared living environment in which young people learn to manage conflict, build independence, support one another and form relationships that often endure beyond school. Many current and former boarders at Ballarat Grammar described exactly these strengths: friendships and strong connections, mutual support, access to opportunity, and a sense of fun and belonging. Any account of boarding has to hold those experiences alongside the harms the Review also documents.

The boarder and day student divide

Boarding at Ballarat Grammar has operated as a world somewhat apart from the day school. Structural features reinforce that separation, including a vertical House structure, a separate boarding dining arrangement, and the physical and social distance between boarding and day life. That separation has benefits for boarding identity, but it also reduces the everyday oversight and integration that help keep residential environments safe. The single-sex boarding structure also has genuine benefits. However, this structure has also amplified gendered dynamics in boarding without the moderating influence of cross-gender contact or other strategies to address these dynamics.

The practice of strapping and how harm became normalised

The practice referred to within the boarding community as 'strapping' needs to be explained carefully, because the term covers a wide range of behaviours and is understood very differently depending on who is describing it. 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. At one end it involved light-hearted dares and errands that many students experienced as harmless, bonding and even fond memories. At the other end it involved physical punishment and humiliation, including the serious conduct that became public in 2025.

The same word covering both ends of that range is part of how harm became normalised. A practice understood by many as a rite of passage created cover for conduct that was abusive. The practice was rooted in a hierarchy in which seniority conferred authority, and in which Year 12 students in particular were understood to hold an enforcement role over younger boarders. A vertical House structure that placed students from Years 7 to 12 together was the primary factor enabling the power differential that underpinned these practices.

A culture of silence

Harmful practices persisted in part because of a culture of silence, captured in the idea that what happens in boarding stays in boarding. New boarders learned quickly that speaking outside the House was discouraged. That code of silence, combined with the status attached to enduring and later administering rituals, made it difficult for students to seek help and easy for adults to remain unaware.



Wellbeing and the moments that matter

Residential life concentrates both the benefits and the risks of school. A boarder's wellbeing depends on the adults around them, the friendships they form, and the support available when things go wrong, often late at night and far from family. The Review found gaps in wellbeing support and identified transition points as moments of particular vulnerability: a student's first weeks in the House, the move between year-level bands, and the periods when homesickness or difficulty at home compounds the ordinary pressures of boarding. These are the moments when a strong pastoral system makes the most difference, and they are the moments the Review found the school had not consistently covered.

The school's response, and how students experienced it

The school's response to the Dart House incidents has been substantial. It has included the implementation of almost all of the Fenner Review recommendations, restructured supervision, new reporting channels, revised codes of conduct, additional training, the establishment of a co-educational junior boarding house for Years 7 and 8, and physical changes to facilities. That response has not been without tension. Some students and employees described the changes as over-corrective, creating an environment that can feel punitive and over-surveilled. Holding the balance between necessary safeguarding and a positive living and learning environment remains an active challenge, and the Review recommends further structural reform alongside attention to that balance.

Parent experience

Many parents spoke positively about Ballarat Grammar, describing strong opportunities, committed teachers, excellent facilities and a real sense of community. Some families had received deeply personal support during difficult times and were grateful for the care their children received. A recurring theme, though, was that the school's strengths rely on particular individuals rather than on systems, so that positive experiences are uneven across families, year levels and Houses.

Trust, communication and responsiveness

Trust in the school's leadership was affected by the boarding incidents and by how the school communicated through that period. More broadly, parents described frustrations with communication, transparency and the school's responsiveness to concerns. Communication quality varied between individuals and between parts of the school, and boarding parents in particular described being poorly informed. Parents wanted to be treated as partners in their children's education, and too often felt treated as clients.

Growth, complaints and the loss of community

Some longer-standing families described a sense that the village feel of the school had been diluted as it grew. The absence of a clear, accessible complaints process was one of the most frequently raised issues. Several parents described a dynamic in which raising concerns was discouraged or met with inconsistent responses or defensiveness, or in which they could not find out what had happened after they raised something. The Review heard that the lack of a defined, trusted process left both families and employees exposed.



Diversity and inclusion

Parents of students from diverse cultural, religious and gender-diverse backgrounds, and parents of children with disability or additional needs, more often described a school that did not fully understand or accommodate their children. Their accounts mirror what the Review heard from students directly: that inclusion at Ballarat Grammar has depended too much on the awareness of individual staff, and not enough on settled systems and a shared understanding across the school. For these families, the gap between the school's stated values and their lived experience was felt most sharply.

Parent culture and representation

The Review also heard that parent culture has, in some cases, contributed to the challenges the school faces. A smaller number of accounts described influential families wielding disproportionate power, a transactional approach to the relationship with the school, and pressure on employees. These accounts were not the dominant theme, but they are consistent with patterns identified elsewhere in the Review and they warrant attention, because a healthy parent-school relationship runs in both directions. The Review found limited formal mechanisms for parent representation and consultation, which leaves the relationship dependent on informal access rather than structured voice.

Employee and workplace experience

As of October 2025, Ballarat Grammar had 564 employees. Just over a third were employed full time, just under a third as casuals, and around a third part time. Women made up 70% of the workforce. The strong engagement of employees in this Review reflects a workforce that cares deeply about the school and its future.

Many employees described a warm, collegiate and values-driven workplace grounded in a shared commitment to student wellbeing. Strong collegial relationships, compassionate leadership in parts of the school, and a genuine sense of community were named as strengths, and almost 80% of survey respondents indicated the school was a safe and respectful workplace most or all of the time. For many, those qualities were the reason they had chosen to work at the school and to stay.

Psychological safety and the divide between staff groups

Alongside this, the Review heard evidence of systemic challenges. Psychological safety for some employees has been undermined by low trust and a reluctance to speak up for fear of being labelled a troublemaker. 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.

Leadership, workload and development

Leadership practices were praised in some areas and, in others, described in terms of 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 grew without matching investment in resourcing, role clarity or professional development.



Teacher burnout and heavy workloads are widespread issues across the education sector, and the school has aimed to address these issues through strategies aimed at providing staff with a fairer workload and remuneration. While some employees welcomed these changes, others were less positive about their impact in practice. Access to professional learning was uneven, and non-teaching employees and those supporting students with additional needs felt this most acutely.

Interactions with parents

Employees described a shift in the parent-school relationship from partnership towards a more transactional and, at times, demanding dynamic with a direct and cumulative effect on their wellbeing and professional confidence. Some felt unsupported by leadership in these interactions and felt the school's instinct was to appease parents rather than protect staff.

Harmful workplace behaviour

The Review also heard accounts of harmful workplace behaviour, including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, and of a historically male-dominated culture that had at times been a hostile environment for women, particularly women in leadership. The school has made progress, with women in a significant majority of leadership roles under the current leadership structure, but underlying attitudes appear to persist in some areas. Confidence in reporting was undermined by fears of reprisal, unclear pathways and a perception that reports were not always taken seriously.

Employee wellbeing and morale

The cumulative effect of these factors, compounded by poor communication, inadequate change management and the impact of the Dart House incidents on morale, presents a number of psychosocial risks for employees. Strong pockets of positive culture and genuine care continue to exist, but they appear to depend on the deliberate efforts of individual leaders rather than being supported by the school's structures.

Governance and oversight

Effective governance in a school is not confined to financial oversight and strategy. In a child safe environment, the governing body carries a direct responsibility for ensuring that the systems of safety, accountability and culture are working as intended. The Victorian Child Safe Standards place governance at the centre of child safety, and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that failures of governance were a common feature of institutions where children were harmed.

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 at times been unclear. The Board's composition has not fully reflected the diversity of the school community or the range of skills required to oversee risk, culture and child safety. Its visibility within the school community has been limited or inconsistent, and its responsiveness to concerns, particularly around the Dart House incidents, has eroded trust.

To address the gap in risk and assurance, the Board has established committees with mandates which include a specific focus on child safety, risk and governance, and oversight of the school's implementation of this Review and culture change. It has also responded to the VRQA conditions with reporting requirements and a dedicated child safety role. But its capacity to assess whether policies are working in practice is constrained by gaps in data and reporting. The school's mechanisms for recording incidents are fragmented. Until recently, governance oversight has focused more on whether a policy exists than on whether it is working. The effect is that risks visible at the operational level have not reliably reached the Board until they materialised publicly.

Governing for culture

Culture is a governance responsibility, not only a management one. A Board that wants to know whether its school is safe and healthy needs more than confirmation that policies exist. It needs information about how the school actually feels and functions, drawn from both leading indicators, which signal risk before it materialises, and lagging indicators, which record what has already happened. At Ballarat Grammar, the Board has relied too heavily on lagging information, and on assurance that arrived after problems had become serious. The establishment of the Cultural Review Committee gives the Board a standing mechanism to oversee culture and the implementation of this Review, and the recommendations are designed to give that committee the data and visibility it needs to govern for culture rather than react to crises. Greater Board presence and accessibility within the school community would also help rebuild the trust that recent events have eroded.

The policy framework

The school substantially rebuilt its policy framework in the second half of 2025 and into 2026, in the period following the Dart House incidents and the VRQA review. That is a significant body of work, and the school now has, on paper, a wide-ranging suite of documents covering student safety, wellbeing, behaviour, inclusion, complaints and governance. Notwithstanding this, the Review found systemic concerns, including fragmentation across a large number of documents, absent or inadequate anti-discrimination and anti-racism infrastructure, reporting pathways that are uncoordinated, and gaps in disability inclusion and in cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. As the Royal Commission found, the presence of policies, even well-drafted ones, is not by itself evidence of a child safe culture. Moving forward, the challenge will be whether the suite of policies are coherent as a system and capable of being implemented in practice.



What is driving these challenges

The challenges experienced by each cohort set out above are connected. The Review identified six underlying drivers that have compounded over time. Addressing any one of these drivers in isolation will not produce lasting change. The recommendations are designed to work as a system.

- Growth without the systems to match it. The school has grown faster than its structures, management capability and administrative support, so it still runs in many ways as though it were smaller and simpler than it is.
- Inconsistency. The experience of the school depends too heavily on which campus, House, year level or staff member a person encounters, so standards, communication and support all vary.
- A habit of avoiding difficult issues. Known problems were managed rather than confronted, reflecting a tendency to prioritise harmony over accountability, and a culture in which speaking up was not always safe.
- A gap between governance and day-to-day operations. The Board sets policy, but its ability to see whether those policies are working in practice is limited by gaps in data, reporting and operational visibility.
- No central record of incidents and complaints. Reports made through different channels are not connected, so the school cannot reliably see patterns, track whether responses are adequate or give the Board an accurate picture of risk.
- Too little genuine consultation. Decisions have largely been made from the top down, with few real avenues for students, employees and parents to shape the direction of the school before problems escalate.

What the school has already done

It is acknowledged that since the boarding incidents became public, Ballarat Grammar has made a number of significant changes. They do not resolve the systemic issues the Review identifies, but they show the school's capacity and willingness to act, and several of the Review's recommendations build directly on work already underway. These changes include:

- Implementing almost all of the Fenner Review recommendations on boarding, including restructured supervision, new and anonymous reporting channels, revised codes of conduct and additional staff training.
- Establishing a co-educational junior boarding house for Years 7 and 8, and making physical changes to boarding facilities.
- Beginning to implement changes to the pastoral care and House system for 2026.
- Rebuilding its suite of child safety, wellbeing and behaviour policies through 2025 and into 2026.
- Establishing a Cultural Review Committee as a standing committee of the Board, engaging a governance consultant, and undertaking director training through the AICD and similar bodies.
- Developing a new risk management framework with a specific focus on psychosocial safety.



What is being recommended

The Review makes 44 recommendations across seven areas: the student experience, the boarding experience, the parent experience, the employee experience, governance, policy and change management. They are designed to address both the immediate concerns raised by participants and the underlying conditions that produced them. Many recommendations are interconnected, reflecting the reality that the issues identified do not sit within neat organisational boundaries.

What follows is a plain-language summary of the main areas the recommendations cover. The full report contains the detailed recommendations and the reasoning behind each one.

For students

- Establish genuine, ongoing mechanisms for student voice on matters of culture, safety and wellbeing, including a Student Advisory Group with access to the Principal.
- Redesign the Day House system so that Houses are co-educational, with both boarding and day students as members of every House, and remove gendered allocation and legacy-based placement.
- Develop a sequenced wellbeing and behavioural curriculum from Years 7 to 12, delivered through the CREW structure and building on the values-based approach used in the junior school, including upstander and active bystander education.
- Overhaul the systems for reporting and responding to bullying, harassment and harmful behaviour, with particular attention to closing the gap between a student reporting something and being told what was done in response.
- Build staff capability in diversity, respectful relationships and pastoral accountability through ongoing professional development.

For boarding

- Continue reorganising boarding so that students live with others close to their own age, with Years 9–10 and Years 11–12 each having their own boarding arrangements. Senior boarding houses for boys and girls should stay single-sex.
- Redefine boarding houses as residences, separate from the day school House system, so that boarders are members of the same Houses as day students.
- Close the boarding dining hall during school hours so boarders eat alongside day students, reducing the structural separation between the two groups.
- Develop a boarding-specific behavioural and cultural program that addresses the particular dynamics of residential living, including how harmful traditions become normalised.
- Establish a boarding student advisory group and strengthen the induction program for new boarders.
- Require quarterly reporting to the Board on boarding culture indicators.



For parents and families

- Reset the parent-school relationship as an educational partnership, with clear expectations on both sides, and develop a Parent Code of Conduct with parent input, embedded in the enrolment process.
- Develop and publish a clear, accessible complaints and concerns process with defined contact points, timeframes, feedback to the person who raised the concern, and an independent pathway for unresolved issues.
- Develop a whole-of-school communications strategy that sets clear expectations for who communicates what, to whom and when, with specific attention to communication with boarding parents.
- Establish a formal parent advisory body with diverse membership and a direct reporting line to the Board.

For employees and the workplace

- Strengthen communication and cohesion across staff groups, particularly between teaching and non-teaching teams.
- Clarify organisational structure, roles and leadership accountability through transparent, merit-based processes.
- Ensure behavioural standards and policies are applied consistently, with accountability tied to performance measures.
- Address role ambiguity, unsustainable workloads and resourcing gaps contributing to staff stress and turnover.
- Build a structured professional development framework accessible to all staff, including non-teaching employees.
- Strengthen protections and support for staff who raise concerns, and formalise the school's approach to managing parent conduct that affects staff.



For governance and policy

- Clarify the governance and leadership structure, including the respective roles of the Board, the Principal and the leadership team.
- Review Board composition to ensure the skills and diversity needed to govern a school of this size and complexity.
- Strengthen risk management, including regular Board reporting on behavioural data and incident patterns.
- Increase Board visibility and accessibility within the school community.
- Consolidate the school's policy framework and develop standalone policies where gaps exist, including anti-discrimination and disability inclusion, with an independent audit within 24 months to assess whether the policies are working in practice.
- Establish a centralised system for recording, tracking and analysing incidents, complaints and concerns across reporting channels, so the school can identify patterns and respond to risk before it escalates.

For managing the change

How the school implements this Review is itself a test of whether the culture is changing. Employees have direct experience of change that did not go well, and they will judge this process not only by what is implemented but by how. The recommendations are designed to make the implementation reflect the values the Review asks the school to adopt.

- Appoint a dedicated Change Coordinator to oversee implementation of the Review's recommendations.
- Create a dedicated implementation budget that covers the Change Coordinator role, external expertise and backfill for staff involved in the work, to ensure implementation is not simply added to existing workloads.
- Publish an implementation plan within three months, with clear timelines, named owners and regular progress reporting to the school community.
- Involve employees, parents and students in shaping how changes are implemented, consistent with the consultative approach the Review recommends.
- Monitor for change fatigue and provide adequate support to staff through the process.
- Commission an independent progress review within 36 months to assess how implementation is tracking.



How the recommendations fit together

The recommendations are designed as a connected program, because the problems they address are connected. Redesigning the House system supports the work on student belonging and on boarding. A centralised record of incidents and complaints is what allows the Board to govern for culture, the wellbeing team to see patterns, and families to trust that raising a concern leads somewhere. Genuine consultation with students, employees and parents is both a recommendation in its own right and should be integral to implementing the other recommendations.

Sequencing of the recommendations is important. The school will need to decide what to do first, which actions are dependent on others, and how to resource the work without overwhelming the staff who have to deliver it on top of their existing jobs. The Review recommends it be done through a consultative process with students and parents. The full report sets out the interdependencies between recommendations in detail, and the school should treat them as a guide to coordination.

A program of this scale cannot be completed in a single year, and attempting to do so would risk the change fatigue the Review warns against. For this reason, the Review recommends an independent progress review within 3 years to assess: whether the recommendations are being implemented in substance not just on paper; how the changes are being experienced by students, parents and staff; and whether the school is making progress in changing not just policies but its systems and habits, and achieving sustained, visible cultural change. All recommendations should be implemented within 4 years.

How to access the full report

The full report provides substantially more detail on each of the areas summarised here, including the evidence gathered, the analysis conducted and the reasoning behind each recommendation. Anyone who wishes to read the full report can access it on the school's website.

[→ Access the full report](#)



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.

