



Summary of the Independent Cultural Review

A summary for senior school students

What is this?

In 2025, the Ballarat Grammar Board asked an organisation called Intersection to conduct an independent review of the school's culture: how people treat each other, how safe everyone feels, and whether the school's values show up in everyday life. More than 600 people took part, including senior school students. This is a short summary of what we found, what the school will do, and what you can do.

Strengths

- A strong sense of community and belonging for many students.
- A wide range of co-curricular opportunities and teachers who genuinely care and go above and beyond.
- A culture of service, and a school that values you as a whole person, not just your results.

What needs to change

- **Unfair and uneven consequences.** Consequences for poor behaviour seem inconsistent and unfair sometimes. Many students said they never found out what happened after they reported something, so they stopped reporting.
- **Social hierarchies.** Popularity, leadership positions, hobbies and friendship groups shape who feels like they are accepted and belong. Students seen as different, including because of race, sexuality, disability or gender, face more exclusion and bullying.
- **A culture of disrespect.** Students told us about their experiences of racist comments and discrimination that other students, and sometimes adults, saw but let slide. When nothing happens, everyone learns that speaking up changes nothing.
- **Student voice.** Student leadership exists but often felt tokenistic. Students felt like they had few real ways to influence decisions about the things that affect them most.
- **Values fade.** The school's values are taught well in junior school but talked about far less by the senior years, when the pressures are greatest.

Day students and Boarding students

The review looked at both Boarding and the Day School. Boarders described real friendships, a family feeling and staff who care. But the review also found out about some serious problems in the past. The practice known as 'strapping' ranged from dares and errands to physical punishment and humiliation. It continued because seniority gave older students power over younger ones, and because of a culture of silence: what happens in boarding stays in boarding.





The review also heard about the divide between boarders and day students: eating separately, stereotypes on both sides, and two groups acting like two different schools.

The school will make big changes to boarding and the House system over the next few years. Whether you board or not, you can make a difference:

- If you are a boarder, use your seniority to protect younger boarders, not to control them. Speak up when something is not right, even when the pressure is to stay quiet.
- If you are a day student, help close the divide. Invite boarders into your group and get to know them better.

What the school will do

- Have one clear behaviour framework, with consequences that apply fairly to everyone.
- Redesign the House system so Houses are co-educational and include both day students and boarders.
- Increase values and respectful relationships education in every year from 7 to 12, including how to be an upstander.
- Create better reporting systems with real follow-through, so you know what happens after you speak up.
- Set up more ways for students have a real say in decisions.

What you can do to make this school a better place

You told us honest and sometimes difficult things, and they are at the centre of this report. The school has promised to change, and the adults are responsible for making that happen. But don't wait for them. Culture is made every day, in hallways, group chats, classrooms and boarding houses, by what you accept and what you refuse to accept. As senior students, you set the tone. Younger students copy what you do, not what they are told.

- Be an upstander. If someone is picked on, in person or online, say something or get help. Laughing along or staying silent tells everyone it is okay.
- Break the pattern. If older students made things hard for you, that is a reason to end it, not to repeat it. Be the year level that stops it.
- Stand with people who speak up. Standing alone is hard, and your support can decide whether they are heard.
- Use your voice. Talk to staff, and tell the school what is working and what is not. Your ideas can make a real difference.