



aitken  
COLLEGE  
In Mind and Spirit

# INSPIRING YOUR PERSONAL BEST

STRATEGY, 2023 and beyond

Prepared by  
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# OUR APPROACH

## Aitken College: inspiring young people to do their personal best in service to themselves and others.



### Background to process and key discoveries

Defining Aitken College's unique identity was the starting point for rethinking our strategy, clarifying our unique purpose, and gaining focus as a community for the years ahead.

In mid-2022, NoTosh undertook a full community listening exercise with the help of an in-house "Design Team" of students, parents, teachers, staff and leadership:

- **94 in-depth interviews** undertaken by the Design Team;
- nearly **1000 lines** of **survey data**;
- **52 hours of analysis**, with Board and leadership team meetings;
- Analysis of the **local landscape**.
- Inspiration from our work with leading international schools.

We consulted with the Leadership and Board for the future vision of the school and consolidated this vision with the needs and desires expressed by the community.

As a result of our analysis there were 18 choices across five types of choice category, and synthesis sessions with leadership narrowed these choices down by half.

We also undertook an analysis of the school's Mission Statement and Values.

The previous Vision and Mission Statements described what the school does, rather than why we do it. The statements assumed the prospective family or newcomer knew the identity of the school: they didn't show what differentiated us, and why that mattered.

We discovered that there is indeed a distinctive purpose at Aitken College. The source of that unique core was there - we've simply drawn it out and shone a bright light upon it.

The strategy for the school's future builds on those strong foundations, and centres on one core idea: that the school can be the place to inspire every learner to find their personal best in service to themselves and others.

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# OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## Vision

Aitken College sees a future where young people are inspired to do their personal best in service to themselves and others, in association with the Uniting Church in Australia.

## Mission

Aitken College will develop students' self-esteem and confidence; expand their skills and intellect; and encourage them to become vital and compassionate members of the community.

## Values

*Our values guide behaviour that builds strong character and promotes the highest standards. Students, in particular, are empowered to embrace the values to achieve their personal best in all aspects of their lives, including learning, service, citizenship and wellbeing.*

## Compassion

We display genuine concern and support those in need.

## Excellence

We strive to achieve our personal best.

## Honesty

We behave and act truthfully and in good faith when engaging with others.

## Kindness

We are considerate of others and treat them with empathy and generosity.

## Respect

We accept and appreciate ourselves, others and our environment.

## Aims

*Through all our work, we aim to:*

Make the Christian faith relevant through an understanding of its major teachings and by encouraging a personal faith journey;

Inspire and challenge students to realise their academic, social and emotional potential;

Promote and develop creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, perseverance and self-improvement;

Encourage individuals and the community to be respectful, to take responsibility and to act accordingly;

Empower students to act with service, sustainably and in reconciliation;

Cultivate an adaptive, innovative and continuously improving school.

# STRATEGY OVERVIEW

**We are determined to become a school that inspires everyone do to their personal best, in service to themselves and other people.**

There are two big ideas in there that are our focus:

**‘Excellence’ is a personal goal.** Aitken College will be known as *the* school for helping young people find their calling and develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to pursue their own ambitious goals. We will do it by pushing every learner out of their comfort zone.

**Developing character matters** as much as developing talent. When we challenge young people and take them out of their comfort zone, what they develop alongside new skills and knowledge might not be assessable, but it matters greatly. We want every young person to succeed for their own future, but it is equally important that they put their talents to work in the service of others. Our commitment to Christian values will help us become a beacon for character development.

So what work needs to be done next?

## **Develop learning pathways**

**The curriculum is not one-size-fits-all. We will build up some world class curriculum pathways that will give a range of outstanding options for all students.** The best schools in the world offer a rich tapestry of pathways and qualifications that empower students to personalise their journey.

## **Create a hub for social development, justice and influence**

**We want to create a collaborative hub as a focus for the Aitken community and beyond in order to engage actively and visibly in the service of others.** As a focal point for the school and broader community, it will be seen as the place that can make things happen in support of the most needy and vulnerable. Social Development, Justice and Influence will be a vital incubator for fostering students’ talents and skills as well as building their character to create lasting and meaningful social change.

## How will we make this happen?

### **Live by a culture of innovation**

**A culture of experimentation is key to deep and exciting learning for students, and for the organisation as a whole.**

New ways of learning will be encouraged and facilitated through creativity, critical thinking and collaboration. This is increasingly part of the resilience we all want to see in our young people.

### **Strive to make the world better**

**Our 'commitment to social justice' is a defining attribute of the Aitken College graduate**, and is crucial in developing the types of characteristics that we value in others, for example: empathy, consideration of others, and being action-oriented. It's an attribute that doesn't work well as a solo effort, either: it requires a whole community to role model what it means to live with this commitment.

### **Use everyone's strengths to have the biggest impact**

**We need to build a strengths-based program for students to be able to identify and foster their own unique talents.** That self-awareness will ensure that they have the biggest impact on those things that matter most. This approach provides students and staff with the tools to locate, harness and build strengths. Students will act with more confidence knowing that they can achieve (or at the very least strive towards) the goal in front of them.

What superpowers from within our community will we use?

### **Turn community connection into community action**

**Aitken has a strong sense of family between parents, students and educators. What would it take to turn a feeling of connection into reliable structured action on the ground?**

Mentorship for students, a talent bank that can be drawn upon to add richness to classes, or offer work placements and internships?

### **Develop practices that are sustainable and regenerative**

**One of our superpowers is the way we use our facilities and assets to enable regeneration** – in the environment and in communities. We harness energy, we grow food, we replenish biodiversity, we build relationships. All with a view to create surplus that we can share with others nearby, as well as enrich the students' learning experience and the desire to create more than we use.

### **Invest in leadership**

**Balancing a strong consistency across the college, strong accountability and inspiring innovation in teams takes highly capable and agile leadership.**

Leadership development, throughout the school, is a priority – moving from management to leadership. Let's focus on clear decision-making capability and collaborative whole school development.

## What systems will make it easy?

### **Personalised mentorship for everyone**

**We'll facilitate a roster of teachers, parents and community members to provide mentoring to every child for their journey through high school.** There is nothing like a personal mentor to understand you, guide you and push you at the right times. They know the right questions to ask to bring out the best in you, and they hold you accountable to the goals that you have set for yourself. We know that leaders in all industries and elite performers everywhere take advantage of this personalised approach to learning and personal development.

### **A system for promoting creativity and innovation**

**Aitken College will develop a signature system for enabling creative autonomy with a clear sense of direction.** Autonomy and freedom to explore are engines of innovation, but left without constraints they can be unhelpful and lead to feelings of aimlessness and a lack of synergy. Our innovation system will apply to students in their conduct and learning experience, as well as staff in their pedagogy and broader creative professionalism.

### **Promote a mentally healthy community**

**We need to make sure that we maintain and develop the reliability of our existing work on pastoral care and relationship-building.** They are a core part of the Aitken College experience, so we want to ensure that they are not left to chance, squeezed out by other pressures.

### **Build great two-way communication**

**We will ensure that everybody gets the right information at the right time, and that includes the schools receiving feedback on how we're going.** A prominent theme in our community's data is the need for better communications. But this doesn't just mean from the school to home. People want easier, more flexible ways to have dialogue between home and school, too.



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## APPENDIX 1

# OBJECTIVES & KEY RESULTS



# APPENDIX 1:

## OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULTS

### What are Objectives?

Objectives are goals, often unmeasurable, definitely ambitious, and they express the end result that is desired.

### What are Key Results?

Key Results are the measurable results that you expect to achieve on the way towards realising the Objective. It's a good idea for the leadership team to identify a small number at the highest level, and from their position (e.g. High School, Elementary, Ops). By looking at the OKRs of each senior team leader, you get a picture of what the overarching key results for the whole school might be. Their key results then cascade down from that. Their middle leaders then need to do the same - how can high school teachers' key results for the year align with those of the senior leader of the high school, for example?

And in this way, over time, those working on the delivery of ideas can start to influence and shape the goals of the whole organisation, through their successful projects (and what they've learned from those that didn't work out so well).

### What are the greatest challenges with OKRs?

School leaders can create goals about three things:

#### Inputs

Goals about what the leadership team, budget or Board can provide for the community. It is easy to set a goal, because relatively few permissions need to be sought. There is no guarantee that inputs will lead to any outcomes, so a school can feel they've got a great set of ambitious goals but there's no sense that any impact has been achieved.

#### Process

Goals about what systems and processes we'll create, and often what teaching staff will do. These can be really important because they provide evidence that the right action is happening, and often there's a degree of confidence that they will lead to a positive outcome (e.g. research says that focus on feedback routines will lead to improved engagement and learning outcomes, so we're going to ensure that every lesson has opportunities for reflection and feedback).

#### Outputs

What is the impact we expect from what we put in? These are the best objectives and key results to focus on, as they tell us how the young person and their families, or the staff, will benefit. They don't have to be about young people every time - outcomes and impact on staff can be important, too, for example.

<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Aitken College is a beacon for character development; its staff, students and parents embody a culture of respect, kindness and compassion for others by positively impacting local and global communities.</b>		
<b>Key Results</b>	<b>By December 2023</b>	<b>By December 2024</b>	<b>By December 2025</b>
<b>The school community is engaged in significant projects of social development, justice and influence.</b>	<p>Communicate the intent to run significant external schoolwide projects and seek expressions of interest.</p> <p>Form a committee of parents, staff and students and commence identifying opportunities for possible projects.</p>	<p>Commence work on the external project and communicate progress to the school community.</p> <p>Seek to engage as many students from as many year levels as possible in the project.</p>	<p>Grow the school community's participation in the project in terms of both participants involved and activities undertaken.</p>
<b>Student and staff strengths are harnessed to enact respect, kindness and compassion through commitment to actions which benefit others in the school.</b>	<p>Identify a strengths-based framework that can be used for staff (and students) to identify their strengths.</p>	<p>Build upon a system that recognises and encourages acts of respect, kindness and compassion.</p>	<p>Run a campaign in school to make these activities a focus and encourage students and staff to participate.</p> <p>Record and publicise acts of respect, kindness and compassion from the perspective of both the 'giver' and the 'receiver'.</p>

<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Aitken College enables students to achieve their personal best by engaging their strengths through a range of opportunities, experiences and curriculum pathways.</b>		
<b>Key Results</b>	<b>By December 2023</b>	<b>By December 2024</b>	<b>By December 2025</b>
<b>Enhanced opportunities for creative and innovative thinking, for both staff and students.</b>	<p>Develop a team to start planning and devising a schoolwide Innovation Challenge program.</p> <p>Source a PD speaker on innovation for 2024.</p>	<p>Provide staff PD in incorporating creativity and innovation into their lessons.</p> <p>Launch a schoolwide Innovation Challenge program.</p>	<p>Staff design learning tasks which deliver more creative and innovative outcomes.</p>
<b>Develop students' ability to identify their strengths through a range of experiences designed to take them out of their comfort zone.</b>	<p>Identify a strengths-based framework that can be used for staff (and students) to identify their strengths.</p> <p>Identify staff strengths and provide opportunities to increase collaboration.</p>	<p>PD for staff to create provocative learning 'experiences' and experimentation within their own classroom/learning area.</p> <p>Sharing stories of success (and failure) around what works (and doesn't).</p>	<p>Staff implement learning 'experiences', using them as triggers to help students identify strengths and weaknesses.</p>
<b>Staff and students meaningfully engage with the Aitken College surroundings.</b>	<p>Staff plan and trial how to best utilise the surroundings when planning units and lessons.</p> <p>Establish a Regeneration Group, committed to maximise the surroundings to go beyond 'sustainability'.</p>	<p>Staff deliver more units of work and lessons that incorporate the surroundings.</p>	<p>The Regeneration Group considers running specific mini-projects in consultation with year level staff.</p>



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**APPENDIX 2**

**STRATEGY  
CHOICES  
IN DETAIL**

# APPENDIX 2: STRATEGY CHOICES IN DETAIL

## What do we want?

### **A school that inspires everyone do to their (personal) best**

#### What is the choice?

Excellence is a personal goal, not a comparative one. Aitken College will become the school for helping young people find their calling and develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to determinedly pursue their goals by overcoming hurdles and persisting through the challenges. This way they'll be able to get the very best out of themselves

#### Why is this choice important?

- Under the Values section on the Aitken website is that: “Our students are empowered to embrace these values, whilst achieving their personal best in all aspects of their learning.”
- This approach fully recognises each person’s strengths, not only through a set of pre-defined options in a prescribed curriculum but also in a way that sets continual improvement as the goal, rather than striving for an unattainable idea of ‘perfection’ that can be demoralising. People talk about ‘diversity and inclusion’, but it means little if we don’t appreciate that different people will arrive at different destinations, in different ways.
- This approach is about ensuring close enough isn’t good enough, it’s about pushing students to the limits of their abilities in order to get the best out them and for them to achieve things beyond what they thought possible.
- “We have accepted ‘average’ – now we need to drive the change to do better.”  
(Teacher)

# Be a beacon for character development

## What is the choice?

Be a beacon for the whole region, a magnet that draws families for the way it develops students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management skills, ensuring they remain aligned and true to Christian values. It also incorporates Aitken's values of honesty, respect, kindness, compassion and excellence along with those values underpinning Positive Psychology.

## Why is this choice important?

- These skills and capacities will serve every Aitken student, whatever path they take after graduating from Aitken College and is articulated in the College's aims. Aim number two is: "Inspire and challenge students to realise their academic, social and emotional potential to equip them for the 21st century."
- One of the things that came out of the data overall was the good values the college already upholds. This aspiration takes it to the next level by coming to define the school.
- "Students hold good values." (Alumni)

## What are we going to do?

# Offer opportunities via multiple curriculum pathways

### What is the choice?

We will build out some world class curriculum pathways – for example, in performing arts, environmental studies, culinary skills and/or sport – to give a range of outstanding options for all students.

### Why is the choice important?

- Pearson College UWC in Victoria, Canada has recently launched its [Climate Action Leadership Diploma](#) pathway, built around the International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme framework. Similar initiatives are being launched by [Montreux International School](#) in Switzerland to facilitate innovative alternative pathways. Aitken could lead Victoria, Australia by creating its own unique pathways and educational offering.
- “Different and appropriate pathways for the students - need to keep on radar.” (Teacher)
- “We have the big learning centre – so we need to support suitable and appropriate pathway opportunities for those learning centre students” (Teacher)
- “Diversity of pathways for students is good.” (Board Member)

# Create a hub for social development, justice and influence

### What is the choice?

To create a collaborative hub as a focus for the Aitken community (and beyond) to actively engage in the service of others. As a focal point for the school and broader community, it will be seen as the place that can make things happen in support of the most needy and vulnerable. Aitken College’s Hub for Social Development, Justice and Influence will be a vital incubator for fostering students’ talents and skills as well as building their character to create lasting and meaningful social change.

### Why is the choice important?

- Aim number five on the Aitken College web site is: “Instil in students a sense of service.”
- “There is awesome potential in cross subject activities, at present not a lot of connection across departments and some people are not so willing to change. This could look like service learning for example - something bigger than a single subject, or a project about the school.” (Teacher)

## How are you going to do it?

### A culture of innovation

#### What is the choice?

We pride ourselves on the fact that mistakes are essential to learning and that FAIL stands for First Attempt In Learning. This is not something that our parents always find easy to accept, which is why we will make this our signature approach. A culture of experimentation is key to deep and exciting learning for students, and for the organisation as a whole.

#### Why is the choice important?

- If everyone passes every test always, then a culture of mediocrity and laziness flourishes. If students know that they've failed, but that it's ok to fail – that builds a culture of growth and aspiration.
- “Moderation – ditch it! Kids need to know that they failed. Pass mark should not be 40%.” (Teacher)
- “The school's vision is to trial new things and being prepared to do away with the old. Trialling new ideas, we need extra time to adjust. Perhaps even trialling with a small group first not the whole school.” (Staff)

## Everything we do strives to make the world better

#### What is the choice?

As a defining attribute of the Aitken College graduate, this 'commitment to social justice' is crucial in developing the types of characteristics that we value in others: empathy, consideration of others and being action oriented, just to name a few. It also needs to be understood that students can't be simply believe that individuals are expected to solve these issues alone, no, it requires a whole community of role models all 'learning to live with' this commitment.

#### Why is this choice important?

- Aim number four on the Aitken web site: Encourage individuals and the community to be respectful, take responsibility and to act accordingly.
- Ensuring everything we do at Aitken College links back to some theological expression aligned to the Uniting



Church allows us to truly express what the Church's involvement in education can really look like.

## **Use everyone's strengths to have the biggest impact**

### What is the choice?

Build a strengths based program for students to be able to identify and foster their own unique talents to ensure that they have the biggest impact on those things that matter most. By encouraging people to use their voice in determining and nominating what they can do they become empowered to be active agents of change.

### Why is the choice important?

- There are different ways to build students' talents and confidence and this approach provides students and staff with the tools to locate, harness and build strengths. Students act with confidence knowing that they can achieve (or at the very least attempt) the goal in front of them.
- In a similar way, are there opportunities to expand this out to include identifying staff strengths and allowing them to make the biggest impact they can, as individuals and as a collective.

## What superpowers will we use?

# Turn community connection into community action

## What is the choice?

The first teachers are your parents. The second teacher are those educators at school. The third teacher is the physical space in which you learn. Aitken has a strong sense of family between parents, students and educators. What would it take to turn a feeling into reliable structured action on the ground: mentorship for students, a talent bank that can be drawn upon to add richness to classes, or offer work placements and internships?

## Why is this choice important?

All schools care for their learners. All schools claim a sense of family. You actually have that family connection running through your veins, but don't make the most of it to expand the opportunity and options for young people, particularly those who are feeling out what they want to do with their life. Many schools focus on grades alone, on the academics, but schools like yours often offer a network in addition to that: and this is what Aitken College needs to put front and centre.

# Our practices are sustainable and regenerative

## What is the choice?

One of our superpowers is the way we use our facilities and assets to enable regeneration – in the environment and in communities. We harness energy, we grow food, we replenish biodiversity, we build relationships. All with a view to create surplus that we can share with others nearby, as well as enrich the students' learning experience and the desire to create more than we use.

## Why is this choice important?

- Sustainability is no longer sufficient for the scale of the local and global climate and natural emergency. We need to look for ways to build regenerative practices into our ways of living and working.

- This could also be a guiding principle in the development of the Aitken College facilities in the future.
- “More regeneration: trees, wellbeing walk, rough and ready, not overly manicured – student empowered – relatively cheap to so, make it core not an add on. Thought and coordination. Fits in with the school value.”  
(Board Member)

## Invest in leadership

### What is the choice?

Balancing a strong consistency across the college, strong accountability and inspiring innovation in teams takes highly capable and agile leadership.

Leadership development, throughout the school, is a priority – moving from management to leadership. Focus on clear decision making capability and collaborative whole school development.

### Why is this choice important?

- It sounds like school teams largely wait to be told what to do. Entrepreneurial action for the benefit of the whole school is tough to raise to the surface.
- Many of the initiatives of the current strategy are led by senior leadership team members, but operate within departmental silos. Middle Leaders tend to have a greater capacity to work between departments, between silos, informally and formally.

## **What systems will make it easy?**

# **Personalised mentorship for everyone**

### **What is the choice?**

Facilitate a roster of teachers, parents and community members to provide mentoring to every child for their journey through high school.

### **Why is this choice important?**

- There is nothing like a personal mentor to understand you, guide you and push you at the right times. They know the right questions to ask to bring out the best in you, and they hold you accountable to the goals that you have set for yourself. We know that leaders in all industries and elite performers everywhere take advantage of this personalised approach to learning and personal development.
- “Mentoring should be more like a study or get rid of it! It’s like doing double life-skills.” (Teacher)
- “Enhance alumni and mentoring and coaching.” (Board Member)

## **A system for promoting creativity and innovation**

### **What is the choice?**

Autonomy and freedom to explore are engines of innovation, but left without constraints they can be unhelpful and lead to feelings of aimlessness and a lack of synergy. Aitken College will develop a signature system for enabling creative autonomy with a clear sense of direction. This applies to students in their conduct and learning experience, as well as staff in their pedagogy and broader creative professionalism.

### **Why is the choice important?**

- Many in the Aitken College community spoke of a desire to enhance the performing arts aspect of the school, but what if it went beyond that to develop a system whereby students took creative responsibility for anything they did,

and didn't let subject delineations stop them from creating awesome outcomes? That would be a very powerful system to empower students.

- “It would be cool to see more teachers get involved in extra-curricular activities that fall outside sport, performing arts, science. There is not much cross-curricular eg STEM. There is awesome potential in cross subject activities, at present not a lot of connection across departments.” (Teacher)

## Promote a mentally healthy community

### What is the choice?

Pastoral care and relationship-building are a core part of the Aitken College experience. You don't want to focus relentlessly on this – there are other important areas of focus – but you do want to ensure that those things that matter to you are not left to chance or simply to individual skill of each educator.

### Why is the choice important?

- “The college is getting better at understanding student wellbeing.” (Year 12 Student)
- “What I really like about Aitken College is the community, and its focus on wellbeing.” (Staff)
- “Keep the wellbeing focus (it's very strong – keep it!) – if you feel good, you give more and students and parents pick this up.” (Parent / Teacher)

## Build great two way communication

### What is the choice?

A prominent theme in the data is the need for better communications. But this doesn't just mean from the school to home. We will ensure that everybody gets the right information at the right time, and that includes the schools receiving feedback on how we're going.

## Why is this choice important?

- “Communication between pastoral and subject teachers - we care about the students too and would like to be aware. Could be better at this” (Teacher)
- “More communication from teachers to parents.” (Primary Parent)
- “Too much use of formal emails - should be using informal platforms like Teams.” (Teacher)



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