

For the Dusseldorf Forum and Our Place:

Regenerating Doveton by investing in place

By Dennis Glover
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ourplace
because education is the key to the door



About the author

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Introduction

Is it possible to lift a place – a community, a neighbourhood or a suburb – out of deep social disadvantage? And if so, what is the best way? Can the right combination of public policy, public investment and philanthropy bring about the necessary improvements? Or is it simply a matter of waiting for time, economic change and demographic evolution to eventually lift places out of poverty?

These are important questions, but they are far from new. Indeed, the urge to improve poor communities has a long history, reaching back to church-led reform of morals campaigns in pre-industrial times, through to the creation of new factory communities during the industrial revolution, slum clearance and many more. The Our Place initiative, an initiative of the Colman Foundation, is working with ten sites in Victoria, with a further three planned, to try a new way of lifting up disadvantaged communities.

Our Place's approach, based on a wealth of literature and examples such as the Toronto First Duty Program, incorporates greater understanding of the nature of early childhood development and the shared responsibility of families, schools and communities in ensuring a child's educational success. It also reflects the growing importance of education to a child's future in an increasingly sophisticated economy where gaining qualifications is becoming a greater determinant of a person's future success. For those without formal education, the world is becoming harsher.

Our Place has an agreement with the Victorian State Government to implement this approach across ten sites, all of which are currently underway. The most advanced is Doveton College – a full-sized and fully-operating state school that has become a demonstration site for the Our Place approach. The college, which has been in operation since 2012, has attracted much national and international attention. The story of the genesis, establishment and early operations of the college has already been outlined in

easily accessible reports.¹ Rather than repeat that story, this report focuses on the college's role in the community and whether, after seven years of applying the core principles of the Our Place approach, it is making a measurable improvement to the place it was created to serve: the suburb of Doveton.²

The report begins in Part 1 by describing Doveton, to illustrate the sorts of communities where the Our Place approach is relevant. It might be noted that such post-industrial communities are now familiar parts of the landscape of Australia, Europe and the United States, generating political consequences that make them important. In Part 2 it describes, briefly, the main important features of the college, especially the innovations that will be of interest to those looking to emulate the Our Place approach. Part 3 examines the success of the college in improving the educational and employment prospects of students and parents. And Part 4 looks at various measures to see what improvements the college may be bringing to the suburb of Doveton.

1 Details of Doveton College's creation and programs are taken from two publications: *Doveton College: The Early Years* (2012) and *Doveton College: The Journey Continues* (2014), which can be found on the Our Place website at: <https://ourplace.org.au/portfolio-items/doveton/>

2 For the purposes of this report, Doveton is taken popularly as including the small adjoining suburb of Eumemmering, which shares its postcode of 3177, has similar socioeconomic characteristics and is in Doveton College's enrolment zone.

The Our Place approach is to open up local schools to the whole community and make them centres for educational, economic and social empowerment. This approach is stated as follows:

- We know that the **early years** set the foundations for lifelong learning, health and wellbeing – so our schools have early learning, playgroups, child health and parenting support on site.
- We know that **education is a key ingredient** in children’s success – so we support principals to create teaching and learning environments that ensure each child receives the support they need to achieve and thrive.
- We know that **parent education and employment** is what changes intergenerational disadvantage – so we provide a range of opportunities for families to engage in formal and informal learning, and link them into employment pathways.
- We know that families in the communities we work in are often experiencing challenging life circumstances – so we make it easier to access **effective support services**.
- We know that participation in **sport, volunteering and community activities** creates belonging and pride for children and families – so we create opportunities to be involved, join a team, volunteer and contribute.
- We know that **collaboration and partnerships** are the key to successful place-based initiatives – so we provide a team of skilled people, shared space and agile governance, the most important resources for effective implementation.



Doveton – the collapse of working-class affluence

The garden city movement

Past attempts to bring about place-based social improvement typically centred on the workplace.

In the early to mid-Nineteenth Century social reforming businesspeople like the Cadbury family in Bourneville, Robert Owen in New Lanark and Francis Cabot Lowell in Merrimack in the United States created industrial communities based on the idea that treating workers better was not only morally necessary but would generate improved products and higher economic returns. They paid their workers higher wages than the subsistence minimum offered by their competitors and created factory-centred communities where their workers and their families enjoyed decent housing, schools, medical attention and beautified natural surroundings. Such communities offered working people a huge step up in living standards compared to the harsh slums of the Industrial Revolution. These efforts inspired the Garden City movement that designed new towns and suburbs with a balance of economic opportunities and social amenities in pleasant physical surroundings.³ Out of such thinking came the suburb of Doveton.

Doveton's thirty glorious years

Situated approximately 35 kilometres south-east of the centre of Melbourne, Doveton was created by the Victorian Housing Commission between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s as a community of approximately 2500 homes for people working in the large automotive and food canning manufacturing plants springing up along the nearby Princess Highway.

These plants were attracted to the area by the Australian and Victorian governments as part of Australia's post-war reconstruction efforts. The suburb's population has remained steady since then at around 10,000. The vast majority of the new suburb's homes were freestanding houses of concrete or brick construction, built on generous allotments with fenced gardens and driveways. The residents were serviced by several local strip shopping centres, medical clinics, kindergartens and schools – being three state primary schools, one Catholic primary school and a public high school. Bus services connected those without cars to the adjacent regional city of Dandenong with its produce market, department stores and entertainments.

This employment was largely provided by a number of factories situated close by, the most significant of which were the 'Big Three': the automobile manufacturer General Motors Holden (GMH), the truck manufacturer International Harvester and the food canning giant Heinz. In 1970 those three factories alone employed the following numbers of people in permanent, full-time jobs: GHM 4500, International Harvester 1750 and Heinz 1200, for a total of 7450. Seasonal and casual employment added yet more jobs for the residents of Doveton and surrounding suburbs. While many Doveton residents worked elsewhere, and people from other suburbs worked in these and other local factories, this abundance of local unskilled and low-skilled jobs meant that the people of Doveton were never short of work. The children of this era enjoyed considerable upward mobility, completing twelve years of school, going on to TAFE colleges or universities and enjoying successful careers. This includes the author and his contemporaries. Amidst these pleasant surroundings, at its peak in 1966 Doveton's residents enjoyed almost literal full-employment, with an unemployment rate of less than 1 per cent (half the then national average of 2 per cent).

This model – a working-class suburban public housing 'garden suburb' built alongside manufacturing jobs – was replicated elsewhere (Broadmeadows-Coolaroo and Corio-Norlane in Victoria and Elizabeth in South Australia) and was a distinctly different conception from the high-rise housing 'projects' common elsewhere in Melbourne and other cities across the world. While derided today as social policy failures, largely forgotten and ignored, and all but unknown to the educated middle classes, these suburbs have an important place in Australia's social history – as a practical, state-sponsored equivalent of the morally-inspired utopian communities of the previous century. By providing its mostly working class residents with the chance to buy a home with a garden (modest in some ways by today's standards but usually a major improvement over the housing they had enjoyed in post-war Australia, Britain and Europe), Doveton can also be seen as an embodiment of what the French economist Thomas Piketty has called the thirty glorious years of working class affluence after the end of the second world war.

3 For more information on the history of factory reform movements see Joshua B Freeman, *Behemoth: The Making of the Factory and the Modern World* (W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 2018).

4 The unemployment data referred to in this report is based on Small Area Labour Markets (SALM) publications which report on regional estimates of unemployment at the Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) and Local Government Area (LGA) level; produced by the Australian Government – see <https://www.employment.gov.au/small-area-labour-markets-publication>

The end of the glorious thirty

This success, however, did not last. For thirty not-so-glorious years after its factories began to shrink and close, Doveton has become a place all-too familiar across the de-industrialising world: a suburb with high rates of long-term unemployment, welfare dependency, drug use, crime and other social anomies.

Its once new and attractive streets became afflicted by the obvious signs of decay that accompany a generalised lack of affluence: empty lots, unkempt front lawns, rusting vehicles, boarded-up shops and the occasional burnt-out property. The cruel irony is that this has happened during the longest burst of uninterrupted economic growth in Australian history.

As Table 1 shows, Doveton's source of ready factory jobs disappeared rapidly. The picture of what happened to the Big Three illustrates the savagery of the local blue-collar jobs collapse. By 1995 their previous 7450 jobs had been reduced to 1250. By 2015 this was down to 540. That's a net loss of 6910 permanent, full-time jobs.

Table 1: Jobs at 'The Big Three', 1970-2015

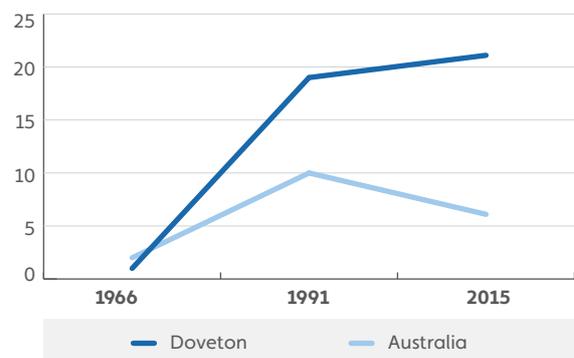
	1970	1995	2015
GMH	4,500	300	250
International Harvester (later IVECO)	1,750	600	290
H.J. Heinz	1,200	350	0
TOTAL	7,450	1,250	540

Sources: Bryson & Thompson, 1971; Bryson & Winter, 1999; Interviews with factory managers by the author

To put it another way, in 1970 there were three jobs in these factories for every Doveton family; by 1995 there was one job for every two families; and today there is just one job for every five families. The jobs may have gone, but while most of the 1966 residents have moved elsewhere, the houses remain. The result has been chronic unemployment for the new residents and those who remained. At the height of the major Australian economic recession of 1991 the unemployment rate in Doveton had reached 19 per cent (the national average then being around 10 per cent).⁴

As Figure 1 shows, by 2015, after a quarter of a century of uninterrupted economic growth, it was at 21.1 per cent (the national average being 6.1 per cent). Thirty years after the factories began closing down, the unemployment rate in Doveton was actually higher than during one of the most psychologically destructive recessions since the Great Depression.

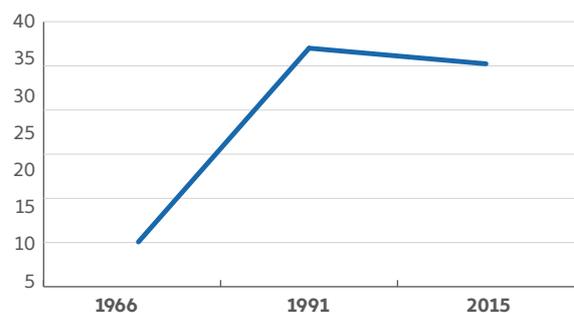
Figure 1: Unemployment (%), Doveton and Australia, 1966-2015



Source: ABS Australian Social Trends 1994; ABS Small Area Labour Markets 1991, 2016

The effect on income and living standards of these factory closures was equally dramatic. In 1966, 10 per cent of Doveton residents were in the lowest income category; by 1991 that had risen to 37 per cent; and in the 2011 Census 34.9 per cent of residents were still classed as 'low-income households' – which means they earned less than \$600 per week, or roughly the minimum wage of one working parent.

Figure 2: Proportion of Doveton residents on low incomes, 1966-2015



Source: ABS 1966, 1991, 2016

At the time of the 2016 Census, Doveton was still regarded as a poor suburb:

- its family median income stood at just 68 per cent of the national median income (\$976 per week compared to \$1,438 per week)
- approximately 75 per cent of its residents were eligible for a Health Care Card
- 21 per cent of its workforce were labourers compared to 9.5 per cent nationally
- 7.3 per cent of its residents were professionals, compared to 22.2 per cent nationally
- it had the fourth poorest ranking in Victoria on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) measurement (with the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage for Doveton, in Statistical Local Area 2, sitting at 825.8, where the national mean = 1000)

According to the *Dropping off the Edge Report 2015*, Doveton was in the highest band of disadvantaged suburbs in Victoria, and has been since the first report in 2004 – meaning its residents are far more likely than the rest of the population to be long-term unemployed, be exposed to child maltreatment, experience domestic violence, be on disability support or have a criminal conviction.

The human cost can be counted in tragic headlines. Between 2014 and 2018, Doveton was in the news for a series of disturbing home invasions and knife crimes, which resulted in two deaths and several other injuries. The perpetrators and victims were typically unemployed or suffering from drug-induced mental illnesses.

While statistics can tell us much, the casual visitor in 2012 would have noticed a general rundown in the state of Doveton's housing stock, streetscapes and shopfronts. Closed schools, industrial premises and shops had a tale to tell. The combined effect of these economic, social, crime and visual problems was to stigmatize the area, dissuading those who might otherwise be attracted by lower house prices from moving in to the suburb. In a world of failed economies and failed states, Doveton might be considered a failed suburb.⁵

Over the years attempts had been made to improve the physical appearance and social condition of the neighbourhood. This included the Victorian State Government's Doveton-Eumemmering Neighbourhood Renewal Project (2003 to 2011) which brought much needed improvements to local community facilities, public housing facades and streetscapes, as well as providing additionally targeted employment and training programs. While the project was reviewed positively, its efforts were, in retrospect, too small and not sustained enough to make more than a passing difference, often through reprioritisation and rebadging of existing funding rather than wholly new sources of money.⁶

The missing piece of Australian economic policy

The irony of Doveton's steep and enduring decline is that it occurred in a time of unprecedented Australian economic success. The modernisation of the national economy and the nature of Australia's affluence have come at the expense of places like Doveton.

Unskilled and low-skilled manufacturing jobs have given way to higher skilled ones in the services sector – and even the abundant manufacturing jobs now springing up in the new industrial hinterland south of Dandenong often require high skill levels that many of the new residents of Doveton do not possess. The housing boom has created newer, larger and more appealing houses than the ones Doveton can offer. The generation who grew up in Doveton in its heyday left for greener pastures, with their places taken by welfare recipients, recent migrants and refugees, starting on what might be called the lower rungs of Australia's ladder of social opportunity.

When the transformation of Australia's economy began in the 1980s the assumption was that all would benefit from the changes or be helped to adjust to them. Doveton and places like it stand as evidence that this did not happen. To this extent, an important part of our economic modernisation strategy can be deemed to have failed. Doveton and like suburbs therefore represent the missing piece of Australia's economic policy.

Australia, like the rest of the world, is now undergoing a new period of economic transformation as post-industrialisation enters its next phase – commonly called the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'. The lesson from the failure of places like Doveton to adapt to past change is that far greater efforts must be made to ensure it doesn't happen again, because more change is definitely coming. While there is no consensus about what proportion of existing jobs will be destroyed by innovations like the combination of big data, mobile robotics and artificial intelligence, the consensus is clear about who will succeed: those with education and technical and interpersonal skills. This, therefore, is where our efforts must lie.⁷

5 For a longer treatment of Doveton see Dennis Glover, *An economy is not a society: winners and losers in the new Australia* (Black Inc., Melbourne, 2015).

6 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *What next for place-based initiatives to tackle disadvantage? A practical look at recent lessons for Australian public policy* (BSL, Melbourne, August 2015). <http://youthlaw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What-Next-for-Place-Based-Initiatives-to-Tackle-Disadvantage.pdf>.

7 For the latest brief discussion of this point, see: *The path to prosperity: Why the future of work is human* (Deloitte June 2019). <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/technology-and-the-future-of-work/building-the-lucky-country.html?id=us:2el:3dc:4diAU22531:5awa:6di:fow&pkid=1006529>

Doveton College

A new start for Doveton's existing schools

The new regeneration project, Doveton College, is situated on a hill in the heart of the older part of the suburb (which local residents call or used to call 'Old Doveton' because of its older-style Housing Commission housing).

Its site is that of the now demolished Doveton Heights Primary School, adjoining the community's long existing local swimming pool, Doveton Pool in the Park. The Prenatal to Year-9 college, which is built for 900 students and early childhood education and development places (ECED), opened in 2012. It is an amalgamation on a single new campus of several local primary and secondary schools which had suffered falling enrolments linked to the suburb's economic and social decline, and which had already begun merging and consolidating their students and resources:

- Doveton Heights Primary School and Doveton North Primary School – which had merged 2009 into the new Doveton Primary School
- Eumemmering Primary School
- Endeavour Hills Secondary School – which many years before had been created by a merger of Doveton High School and Doveton North Technical School.

The college also incorporated a number of local early childhood and family services offered by not-for-profit providers and which, lacking adequate scale and coordination, had been struggling to meet the high demand and complex needs of the area's residents.

Doveton's students

To understand how the college evolved into the form it did, it is necessary to describe briefly the educational situation that confronted its creators.

It is in the nature of school funding arrangements that falling enrolments lead to the loss of experienced teachers and less money for much needed maintenance works and remedial programs to turn the deteriorating situation around. A totally new start is often the best way forward in such circumstances.

One of the results of the decline of the suburb into intergenerational poverty was the high proportion of children with troubled family backgrounds that effected their educational progress. The problems they faced included: poor health and wellbeing; parents with low parental confidence and capacity; child abuse; drug, alcohol and family violence issues within the home; unemployed parents and siblings and a corresponding lack of role models; and frequent changes of home address. Because Doveton has become a home for many recent migrants, including refugees from impoverished and often war-torn nations, low English language proficiency and discrimination were also big problems. According to the Australian Early Development Index, in 2009 32.4 per cent of Doveton children and 55 per cent of Eumemmering children were considered 'developmentally vulnerable' on one of more domains – compared to a national average of 10 per cent. Local children also performed poorly on nationwide NAPLAN testing for reading and numeracy. In short, these schools were suffering from falling investment, run-down facilities, low academic performance and low student retention rates – the classic symptoms of social disadvantage and middle-class flight.

The Doveton Regeneration Project

Several attempts had been made over the years to address this problem, all proving inadequate. From 2007 onwards, however, a combination of new ideas and resources came together to allow a new approach. These included:

- the Labor Victorian State Government's recognition that something needed to be done and the adoption of two new initiatives: the *Victorian Schools Plan* – a ten-year investment plan to transform Victorian schools by 2016; and new policy approach called the *Building Futures Initiative* – that sought to get communities involved in the planning of new school infrastructure
- the Rudd-Gillard Labor Government's new *Building the Education Revolution* program (part of the economic stimulus measures to counteract the Global Financial Crisis) and its strong interest in the educational and social benefits of early childhood education and learning
- the involvement of the Colman Foundation, whose founder Julius Colman had been impressed greatly by the model provided by the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy in Las Vegas and the work of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York (both of which had a record of success in tackling the educational disadvantage of poorer children) and wanted to undertake something similar with children from kindergarten to Year 12 in an area of social disadvantage in Victoria – ideally one with a large migrant and refugee population.

After lengthy talks, these three groups came together in 2009 to create what was called the Doveton Regeneration Project with the aim of creating a new school to meet the suburb's educational needs. Its Board was chaired by a representative of the Department of Education and Training Victoria (DET Victoria) and its members were drawn from local educators, community members and the Colman Foundation. The three bodies contributed a combined \$37.8 million for the build phase (\$36 million from the Australian and State governments and \$1.8 million from the Colman Foundation) of a new school to tackle the educational and social needs of Doveton children and its community generally. It was agreed through a Memorandum of Understanding that while ongoing educational funding for the college would come from the State Government, the Colman Foundation, assisted by other philanthropic partners, would provide long-term resourcing to support ongoing, community engagement and innovation services (strategic planning, research and evaluation) that provides many of the college's unique features.

Although planned as a Prep to Year 12 school, this was altered to Prenatal to Year 9. This reflected enrolment projections for senior students, the availability of Year 10–12 places in neighbouring schools and the desire of the Colman Foundation to concentrate resources on providing support for children in the earlier school years, where most help is needed.

The aim of Doveton College

To address the community needs outlined above, the approach adopted was to create something different from a traditional school.

It would be a community learning centre in which school and community resources could be restructured and woven together to support the suburb's vulnerable children, parents and families. To put it a slightly different way, the college would take a place-based approach to tackling social disadvantage, taking into account the latest research about the crucial importance of children's early learning capabilities, health, welfare and home life to their future success. The college therefore aimed to meet the developmental, welfare and educational needs of children from birth to young adulthood, and in that way lift the future prospects of the local community. The college's self-description is:

...a community focused school catering for families and children, prenatal to Year 9. It offers fully integrated wrap-around service including early learning, family support, maternal and child health and Prep to Year 9 schooling in purpose-built learning communities for the 21st Century.

Here is the unique feature of Doveton College. Whilst previous attempts to improve the lives of poor communities have revolved around providing work and improved housing for adults, this one centres on a school and developing the full capacities of children and their parents.

The emphases of the college are:

- early childhood development, from the antenatal period onwards
- early intervention to address health, welfare and learning needs through collocation of relevant community and welfare services and a network of community-based services
- the pursuit of high educational standards, with high expectations for student success, using innovative approaches to pedagogy most suitable for the college's students – such as personalised learning, a highly flexible curriculum, the use of data to monitor and improve student and teacher performance, and so on
- education, training and employment assistance for parents
- a culture that embraces research, measurement and evaluation to improve results.

Ambition and innovation

Doveton College features many of the new approaches to school design and pedagogy common to other schools, for example: personalised learning, a division into Early Years (Prep–Year 3) and Middle Years (Years 4–9), outcomes measurement, and so forth.

The uniqueness of Doveton College lies in its combination of ambition, determination and innovation to make itself more than a high performing school, but a community learning centre that seeks to support the needs and aspirations of children, parents and community members alike. A number of the college's main features are worth assessing for the lessons they provide for others.

1. It has co-located services based on the Our Place approach

From the beginning, the college understood that for its children to thrive, their parents would have to be engaged and assisted. The most direct way to do this was not the usual one – creating networks of off-site service providers – but to bring as many of the services as possible together in one place: the college campus.

In addition to its Prep to Year 9 classrooms, the college campus therefore includes on one site:

- an Early Learning Centre (ELC) – providing kindergarten and long-day care for children from 16 months to 5 years of age
- maternal and child health and wellbeing services, including first-time mother's groups, immunisations and other early childhood intervention programs – with opportunities to make appointments a range of health professionals including social workers, psychologists, speech pathologists, GPs, paediatric fellows, nurses and associated allied health services
- education, life skills, pre-vocational and employment services for parents – including sewing, nutritious cooking and conversational English classes; citizenship sessions; leadership, kitchen and computer training skills; a men's club; formally recognised vocational certificates (most notably in the areas of Community Services, Children's Services and Education); and job placement activities
- before, during and after school activity programs, including: Homework Club; the Doveton Engagement and Enrichment Programs (DEEP), which engages children through sport, the arts and multimedia; and programs to encourage parents into classroom support and other engagement activities
- support services for refugees and recent migrants.

These services were previously coordinated by the College's Director of Family Children's Services and are now integrated into College practice with governance shared across key leadership roles. The College seeks to operate on a no wait list policy so that assistance is provided when it is really needed, avoiding the frustration, disappointment and disillusion which follows long waiting times.

A Wellbeing Team provides case management and coordination to access support for the most vulnerable children to provide or connect them with the specialist support they need. For example, some of the college's children are in regular need of referral to child protection services and the government welfare agencies.

The College endeavours to connect children and families to appropriate services however as it is not possible or appropriate to have all services provided on-campus, the college also refers children and families to its off-site network of service providers.

2. It is physically open to the community

One of the most simple, practical and important features of the college – on which the Our Place approach of engaging parents with their children’s education depends – is that it is, literally, open to the community. Unlike most other schools, where parental access to the school is limited by security concerns and sometimes overly-cautious regulations, Doveton College has been designed around a common single-front entrance area which welcomes parents and draws them in to the many services on offer to them. This ‘single entry point’ for students, parents and the community was a crucial part of the initial architect’s brief and is designed to provide a welcoming, inclusive and untied gateway to all of the College’s offerings – and a mindset that says to those who enter ‘what can we do for you?’ rather than ‘what do you want?’. Parents and community members are free to access all relevant parts of the college, with the exception of classroom and playground areas. Because many of the college’s parents have low levels of formal education, poor experiences of school life and often poor English language skills, they might otherwise be easily discouraged from using the college’s crucial community and parent services. The importance of this simple design feature of the college cannot be underestimated – without it, the college would not work.

3. Its governance structure reflects the college’s unique role

Doveton College has a unique governance structure that reflects the college’s role not just as a school but as an innovative organisation dedicated to early learning and the service of the local community. The governance structure demonstrates that these elements are not add-ons to the school but integral to its strategy and daily operations. One of the most important innovations of the college is that it is the first state school in Victoria to have the active involvement of a private foundation, including direct representation on the Doveton College Council. Historically, the Council’s twelve seats comprised four parent representatives, two co-opted community representatives, one senior manager from the early childhood sector onsite, one representative from the state’s education department and four representatives approved by the Colman Foundation. In recent years this has altered, with the senior early years role being replaced by an additional Colman Foundation representative. The College’s Leadership Team, which makes day to day decisions about the running of the school, includes the Principal, two Assistant Principals, the Director of Early Learning and the School Business Manager. The College also has a Parent Advisory Group and a Community Team that offers connection to the wider school community, partner agencies and local practitioners.

4. Leadership and determination to make the Our Place approach work

Sometimes the most important factors in any successful social venture are determined leadership and committed followers. The easiest thing to have happened at Doveton College was for it to have succumbed meekly to the sorts of potential behaviours that might have combined to render the grand idea of the community learning centre inoperable. For example: the desire of the school leaders to limit the involvement and access to the college of the community program providers; the desire of teachers to limit their extra-curricular ‘social welfare’ responsibilities and concentrate instead on pursuing academic targets; allowing security scares to compromise the ‘single entry point’ policy; swallowing up dedicated community spaces within the college for additional classrooms, and so forth.

It is easy to see how, faced by such pressures, the college may have become just another school, with several bolted-on features to reflect its community’s peculiar needs, evolving slowly into another disadvantaged school. Instead, the college has pursued its mission determinedly and thoroughly, ensuring its leaders and teachers share it strongly too. Its mission is reflected strongly in its governance structures and since the establishment of the college, the college has actively sought both leadership and staff members who share the vision and are committed.

Measuring the success of students and families

How has the Doveton College model worked in practice?

Having opened its doors to students in 2012, Doveton College has yet to graduate a full cohort of its students from 12 years of schooling – the traditional measure of success of any school, or at least any secondary school.

Given that the Doveton community has not had its own Years 7–12 secondary school for some time, and Doveton College is a P–9 school only, this would make establishing a baseline difficult anyway.

How then should we set about measuring the college's success? After seven years of operation, the college's effects on early childhood development, school attainment and the welfare of the parents involved in its programs should be measurable. The following analysis, drawn from data provided by the college, DET Victoria, the ABS, the Crime Statistics Agency and private organisations, looks at the available data to draw some early conclusions.

As outlined above, the rationale for the college is that improvements to children's learning and development need to start at the earliest age and address what happens not just at school but at home as well – to produce greater opportunities and success in later life, helping break the cycle of poverty for families and the community. The most immediate evidence of the school's success will therefore be in rising student attainment levels, measured in various ways. A number of important measurements of student progress at Doveton College provided from data collected by the school are presented here.

Students are starting school 'ready to learn'

The evidence shows that Doveton College's early learning efforts are leaving children better prepared to start the first year of primary school – meaning they have more advanced language and self-regulation skills, which are considered crucial predictors of continuing success at school.

The Doveton College Early Learning Centre has been awarded the highest possible EXCELLENCE quality rating by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), receiving an Excellent Rating on two occasions (2014 and again in 2017). At the time of writing, there have been more than 10,500 attendances by children or parents at structured playgroups provided by the College's in-house service providers; previously Good Beginnings and for the past four years, Save the Children.

Analysis of the College's 2017 academic data suggests these efforts are having measurable success. External exploration of this data suggests that children attending Doveton ELC in 2013 have achieved significantly higher performance in reading and numeracy as Year 3 students than those that did not attend Doveton ELC. Compared to their school peers who did not attend ELC during this period, children who attended Doveton ELC demonstrated:

- an advantage of around 6 months in reading ability measured by Prep entry testing
- an advantage of 15 months in reading ability and 3 months in numeracy measured at Year 3 level testing
- achieved higher scores in NAPLAN Year 3 tests – although the small sample size makes the results not statistically significant.

Similarly, the number of children identified as 'developmentally vulnerable' on one or more domains as measured by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) has fallen by nearly one-third since 2012 (from 55 per cent to 37 per cent). Doveton College's emphasis on engaging parents and families from early in a child's life through maternal and child health programs, playgroups and high quality early learning is likely to have contributed to this.

The college is keeping students engaged in school

Data collected by Doveton College shows that its students are spending more time in school and have a more positive view of schooling. For example:

- absenteeism has fallen by 24 per cent since 2012 – an important measure of success
- more Year 7–9 students report feeling that learning is stimulating and feel motivated and interested in learning – with results placing them in the top quartile of students in Victoria, representing a major improvement from 2013 where Doveton College students were below the state average
- in 2018 almost 60 per cent of students undertook at least one outside-hours arts, music, technology or sports activity, compared to just 7 per cent in 2015; 47 per cent undertook at least two activities. This is helping students develop physical fitness and confidence, important social skills and interests, while providing positive outlets for energies that in the past may have led them into potential trouble.

Academic attainment is improving strongly

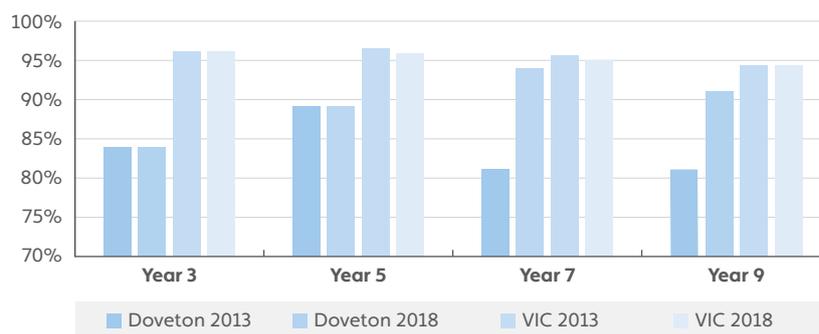
The proof of the pudding in any school is ultimately higher academic attainment levels. NAPLAN test results show a clear improvement in student literacy and numeracy – considered crucial building blocks of later academic success.

As Figures 3 and 4 show:

- students at years 7 and 9 show marked improvement in reading between 2013 and 2018
- students at years 3, 5 and 9 show very high levels of improvement in numeracy
- students in years 7 and 9 are close to the National average of attainment in reading and above the average in numeracy.

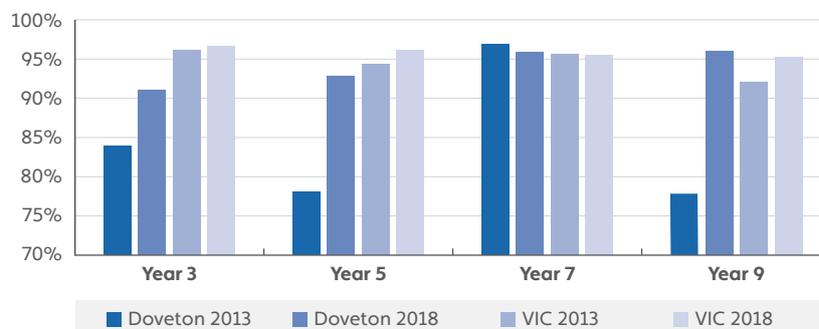
These strongly positive results mean Doveton College is now considered a 'medium to high-growth' school for NAPLAN results. The school is coming off a low base, due to the socio-economic background of its students and is making a significant measurable difference to student attainment.

Figure 3: Percentage of students performing at or above national minimum in READING as measured by NAPLAN by year level: 2013 and 2018, Doveton and Victoria



Source: NAPLAN 2013, 2018 (internal)

Figure 4: Percentage of students performing at or above national minimum in NUMERACY as measured by NAPLAN by year level: 2013 and 2018, Doveton and Victoria



Source: NAPLAN 2013, 2018 (internal)

Importantly, strong students are emerging among the senior age group, stating their desire to go on to complete their VCE, hoping to get places at highly regarded secondary schools.

Parents are staying engaged

One of Doveton College's most important objectives is to keep parents and carers involved in their children's education and wellbeing – as a means of (a) encouraging children to attend school, study and thrive, and (b) as a way of encouraging and assisting parents to develop their own life skills, continue their own education and, where possible, find employment.

As a result of the college's programs it appears parents are far more engaged in their children's education than before. For example:

- more than 100 placements are filled by parent and community members across the college each week – half in classroom activities and specialist lessons, and the other half in broader activities such as after-school programs and breakfast club
- since 2016 there has been a 20 per cent increase in the number of parents reading to their children; parents are twice as likely to talk about reading with other parents; and children are twice as likely to ask their parents to read to them.

And getting qualifications and jobs

Positive results are being achieved in encouraging parents to improve their own life circumstances. Many parents and community members have taken up training and employment support opportunities, with some going the full journey with the college from life skills training to accredited education and into paid employment. Others have used the college as a starting point to other education and job opportunities. Since 2013:

- more than 500 parent and community members have attended and completed life skills, pre-vocational and Certificate II level training courses – 40 per cent of these were for conversational English courses, which have been offered since 2015
- adult attendees from the Doveton College community have completed more than 150 courses at Certificate III, Certificate IV or Diploma level, usually conducted offsite
- almost 100 parents who completed study or were provided with career and job support from the Our Place community team have gained employment, many for the first time – equating to 20 participants finding jobs each year.

These training and employment gains must be counted as a major success for the college, which was conceived not just as a school but as a centre for socio-economic advancement for the whole Doveton community.

The college's overall socioeconomic status is rising

The school data provided above gives an overall picture of improvement, but is there a way of measuring the overall success of the student and parents combined at Doveton College? DET Victoria uses several indexes of the employment and educational attainment of parents to measure the socioeconomic status of schools to inform the allocation of equity funding:

- Student Family Occupation (SFO) – which is an index of the occupations of parents of children at a school across five categories (in broad terms: senior management and professionals – associate professionals – tradespeople – labourers and service workers – unemployed)
- Student Family Occupation and Education (SFOE) – which combines SFO with an index of the educational attainment of parents (in broad terms: degree – advanced diploma – trade qualification – year 12 – year 11 – year 10 – year 9 and below).

As table 2 shows, since the use of SFOE, beginning in 2016, the occupational and educational status of parents at Doveton College have both risen (with 0.00 being the least socioeconomically disadvantaged and 1.00 being the most socioeconomically disadvantaged scores).

Table 2: SFO and SFOE for Doveton College 2012-2019

Year	SFO	SFOE
2012	0.7987	
2013	0.8175	
2014	0.8286	
2015	0.8637	
2016	0.8669	0.7227
2017	0.8619	0.7224
2018	0.8435	0.7039
2019	0.8235	0.7074

Source: Doveton College Internal Statistics, 2012-2019

What we draw from this? While the rising socioeconomic status of the families using Doveton College may simply be a reflection of new residents moving into Doveton, it may be that the rising numbers of parents obtaining education and employment through the college is having a positive effect. Given that research shows a positive correlation between parental education and employment levels and school attainment, this can only be a positive development. The rising level of educational attainment of the college's students may also, in turn, be acting to increase public confidence in the college and the suburb – creating a virtuous circle. These factors are possibly small, but this is the sort of community improvement that the college was founded to bring about.

Measuring success for Doveton

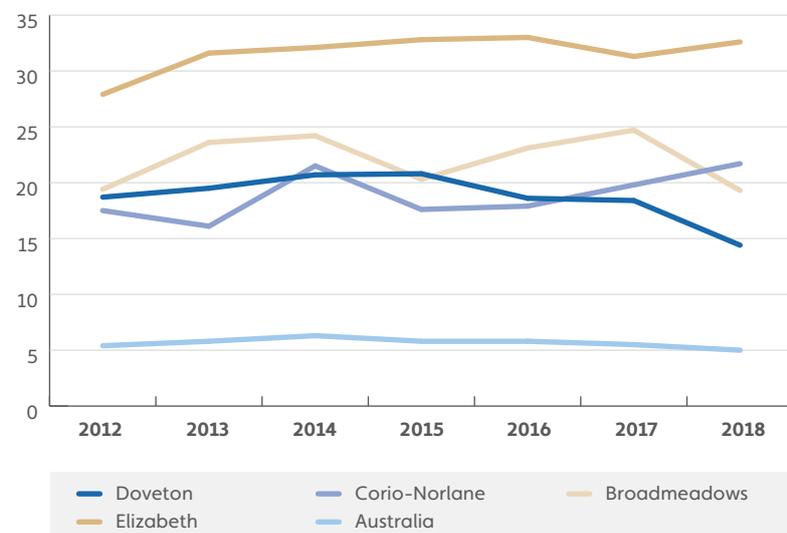
We now address the second criteria of Doveton College’s success: its effect on the wider Doveton community. A number of measurements are used to assess changes to Doveton’s overall socioeconomic status – employment, income, property prices and crime rates – that may reflect the success of the college or be a cause of the college’s success.

Unemployment is falling

Given the language and employment training programs offered by the college, one of the most obvious places to look for positive change in Doveton is its unemployment rate.

As Figure 5 shows, while climbing from 18.7 per cent in December 2012 to 20.8 per cent in December 2015, Doveton’s rate has fallen considerably since then to 14.4 per cent in December 2018.⁸ The comparable suburb Broadmeadows has shown a similar fall, but from a higher starting point, while unemployment in other comparable suburbs of Corio-Norlane and Elizabeth – whose automotive factories closed in September and October 2016 – has risen.

Figure 5: Unemployment Rate in Doveton, Corio-Norlane, Broadmeadows, Elizabeth and Australia, December 2012 to December 2018



Source: ABS Small Area Labour Markets 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

⁸ The unemployment data referred to in this report is based on Small Area Labour Markets (SALM) publications which report on regional estimates of unemployment at the Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) and Local Government Area (LGA) level; produced by the Australian Government – see <https://www.employment.gov.au/small-area-labour-markets-publication>

Income is rising

Especially since the closure of its nearby factories, Doveton has had lower levels of income than Australian average.

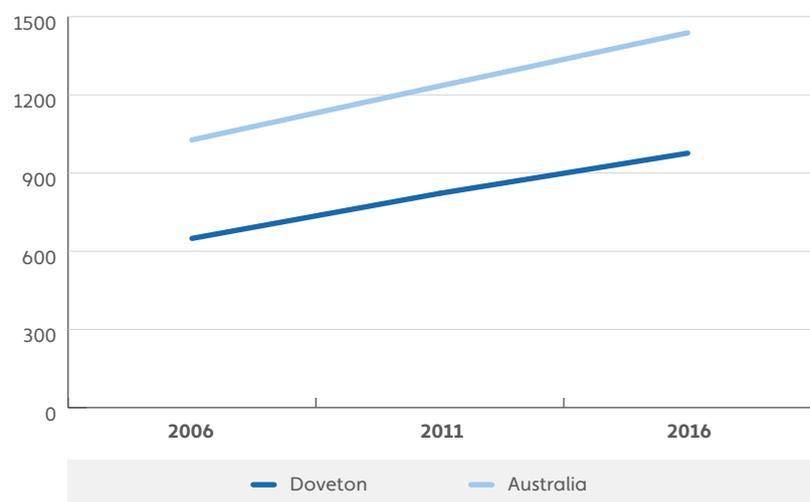
As Table 3 and Figure 6 show, median weekly household income in Doveton has risen slowly but noticeably in dollar terms and as a proportion of the national median household income over the last decade and a half.

Table 3: Doveton median weekly household income as a proportion of Australian median weekly household income, 2006-2016

	2006	2011	2016
Doveton	649	822	976
Australia	1,027	1234	1,438
Proportion	63%	66.6%	67.8%

Source: ABS 2006, 2011, 2016

Figure 6: Median weekly household income, Doveton and Australia, 2006-2016



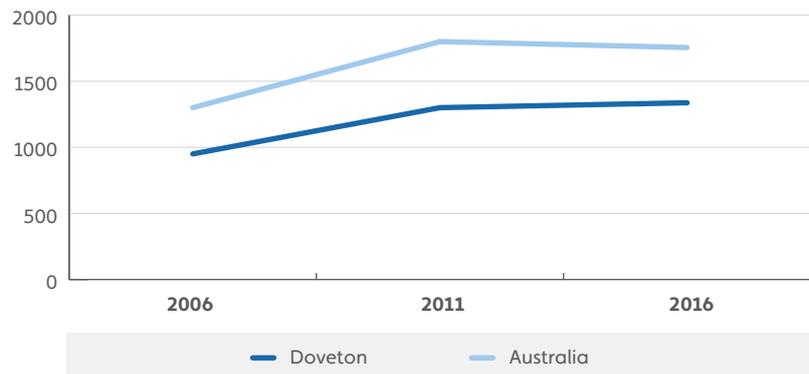
Source: ABS 2006, 2011, 2016

Property prices are rising

As a place-based initiative, one of the signs that Doveton College is working might be a reduction of the social stigma associated with living in Doveton. One way of measuring this is through the movement of the suburb's house prices and rental costs relative to other Melbourne suburbs. Based in the 2016 Census, housing in Doveton is typically a 3 bedroom house (approximately 65 per cent of all dwellings, compared to a national average of 41.1 per cent) and rented (40.5 per cent of all dwellings compared to a national average of 30.9 per cent). Fewer people in Doveton own or have a mortgage for their home (53.2 per cent) compared to the national average (65.5 per cent).

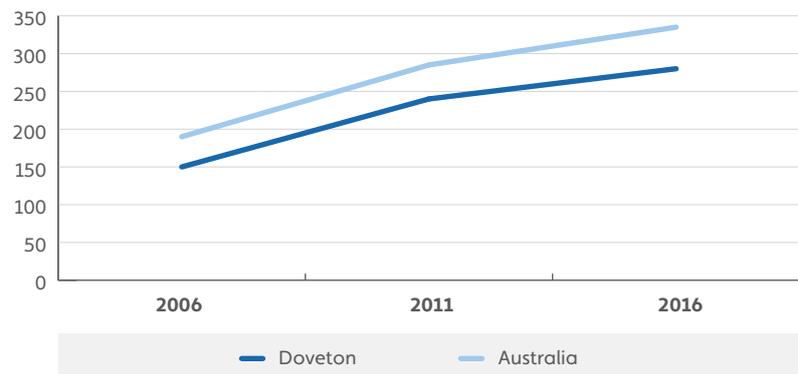
As Figures 7 and 8 show, median monthly mortgage repayments and median weekly rents in Doveton have increased at faster than the national medians. In 2006, median monthly mortgage repayments were 73 per cent of the national median, rising to 76 per cent in 2016. Over the same period, Doveton's median rent was 78.9 per cent of the national median, rising to 83.6 per cent. This suggests a gradual rise in the area's property values.

Table 7: Median monthly mortgage repayments, Doveton and Australia, 2006-2016



Source: ABS 2006, 2011, 2016

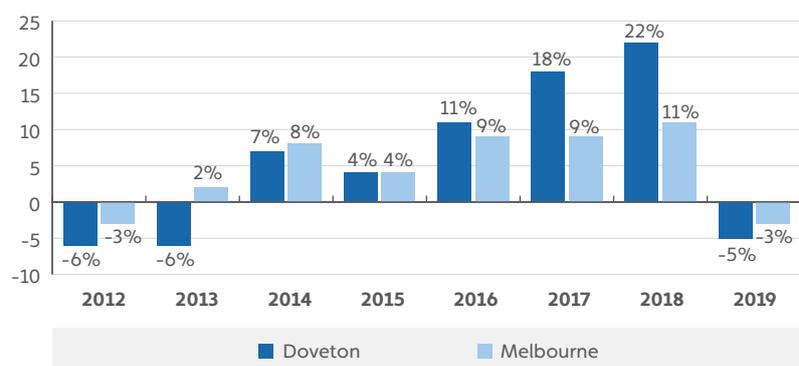
Table 8: Median weekly rent, Doveton and Australia, 2006-2016



Source: ABS 2006, 2011, 2016

Data supplied to the author by realestate.com shows that there has been a major rise in real estate prices in Doveton since 2012. Doveton's median housing price has actually grown at a greater rate than for the larger Melbourne metropolitan area, although this has tailed off in line with the loss of steam in the national housing market after the Banking Royal Commission (though less dramatically than in the rest of the Melbourne property market).

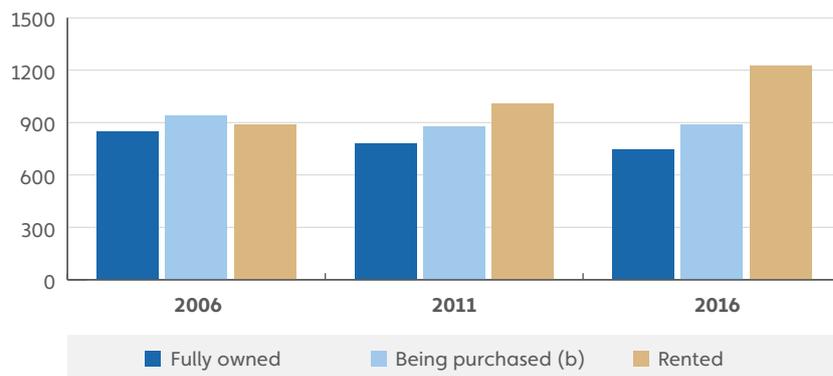
Figure 10: Year on Year median house price growth in Doveton and Melbourne 2012-2019



Source: realestate.com data provided to the author

There has been a significant increase in the number and proportion of households who are renting compared to those who fully own or are buying their homes.

Figure 11: Housing tenure type in Doveton, 2006-2016



Source: realestate.com data provided to the author

To get a sense of what has been going on in the Doveton property market, several real estate experts at realestate.com, Doveton-based Platinum Real Estate and Berwick-based Grants Estate were interviewed by the author.

Platinum Real Estate said that interest in Doveton housing had been rising steadily in recent years, spiking by as much as \$100 000 per property over a six to eight month period from late 2017 when Doveton started to be noticed by homeowners and investors. According to them, 58 per cent of properties were being purchased by owner occupiers and 42 per cent by investors. The composition of the home buyers was changing, with demand noticeably moving up the income scale to include a growing proportion of tradespeople.

According to Berwick-based Grants Estate Agents, in the 12-month period to September 2017, house prices in Doveton increased 31.4 per cent.

The experts suggested the changes were due to:

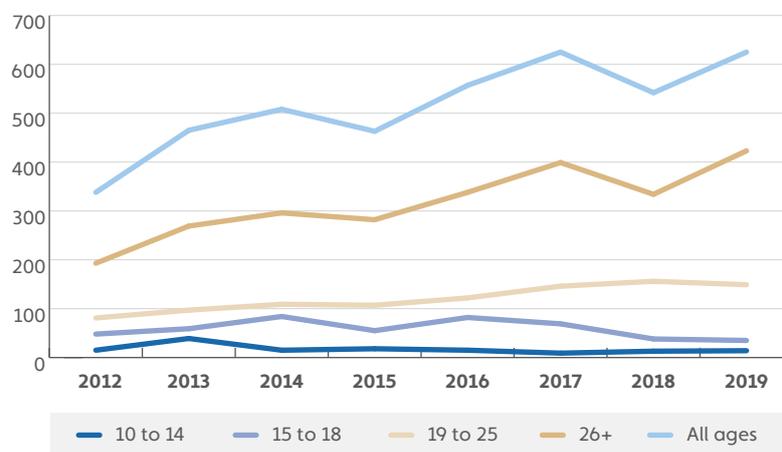
- Doveton’s closeness to the CBD compared to newer housing developments in Berwick, Pakenham and elsewhere (Doveton is approximately 31kms or just 30 minutes’ drive from the Melbourne CBD non-peak hour, compared to 61kms or 50 minutes from Pakenham)
- the presence of many large housing blocks (600 square metres in Doveton compared to 300 square metres in newer estates in suburbs like Clyde), which also provides opportunities for larger replacement homes or sub-divisions
- investment opportunities, as Doveton became ‘the next place out’ from the centre of the city for bargains and ‘a middle suburb’ rather than an outer one as the city boundary expands inexorably
- relatively affluent Afghan families choosing Doveton because it is close to and more affordable than Dandenong
- the replacement of older housing with newer-looking houses and townhouses, improving the streetscape
- the presence of more local jobs in the employment growth corridor south of Dandenong
- noticeable improvements to local amenities including the Autumn Place shopping centre and Doveton College.

Youth crime rates are falling

One of the measurements of social disadvantage discussed in Part 1 is the incidence of crime. Statistics have been obtained from the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency to plot the incidence of the most serious offence types in Postcode 3177 by age group since the opening of the college in 2012: Crimes against the person, Property and deception offences and Drug offences.

As shown in Figure 12, these statistics show that youth offending (in the 10–14 and 15–18 years groups) has fallen in recent years. At the same time, offending has increased significantly in other age groups – by 96 per cent for 19–25 years and 119 per cent for 26 years and over. (For a full table of results, see Appendix 1.)

Figure 12: Offender incidents by age group for Postcode 3177, 2012–19



Source: Statistics supplied to the author from the Crime Statistics Agency – see Appendix 1.

The possible significance and causes of this fall in youth offending were discussed with Magistrate Pauline Spencer from the Dandenong Magistrates Court, who has taken an active interest in the youth offending in the Doveton area. The statistical fall in youth offending from Postcode 3177 is consistent with her impression that: 'Doveton kids are not appearing before the Magistrate's Court in numbers anything like they used to.' Her view is that the more serious levels of youth offending before her court are coming not from the Doveton area but from young people in suburbs further out from the city. The comparative rise in offending in the 19–25 and 26+ age groups, she believes, may in part be explained by several factors:

- the significant increase in police numbers in the area between 2012 and 2019
- the increase in reporting of certain types of crime, particularly family violence (Offences against the person)
- the appearance of methamphetamines ('Ice'), which is a particular problem among young adults, including those with employment and money.

She noted that youth offending falling significantly in the face of increased police presence and crime reporting pointed to (a) possible demographic shifts in Doveton's population, but also (b) the success of Place Based Victorian Government crime prevention grants that have funded joint projects by a range of services, local councils and other community based programs. She believes the college's approach is consistent with current thinking about how best to tackle high local crime rates, especially the importance of taking children out of a milieu in which risk-taking and offending are regarded as the norm. 'Place-based offending needs place-based solutions like the approach taken by Doveton College.' By addressing the factors that lead to higher youth crime rates – poor family employment history, poor school results, bad family relationships, pro-criminal attitudes – 'the college is on the right track'.

Conclusion

The fate of Doveton is one now all too familiar across the world: a once affluent suburb left behind by economic change. Like many similar places, its creators were motivated by the altruistic and even mildly utopian idea of creating a pleasant place to live for working people. What should our response be to its decline? Can anything be done?

One answer is to say 'no' and leave the job of lifting the suburb out of poverty to the market and the hands of time. One might argue that this is what is happening anyway. Certainly the improvements in Doveton's socioeconomic status outlined in this report are partly influenced by big changes going on in Melbourne's economy and demography. The falls in unemployment and crime and the rise in incomes and house prices no doubt owe much to these factors.

On the other hand, the changes that are recorded here are fully consistent with Doveton College's aims. In a world facing unending economic and technological change, requiring people to upgrade their education and skills, Doveton College is on the right track. It is probable that the college is one of the many push factors influencing positive perceptions of the suburb and its rise in various measures of social and economic improvement, and had the college not been founded, improvements would have been slower – although how much slower it is not possible to say.

Such arguments overlook an important point: for the families using Doveton College, things have already improved significantly. As this report demonstrates conclusively, families are getting the help they need to overcome their sometimes serious problems. Children are leaving the college's Early Learning Centre and starting school better prepared to learn. The foundations of future

success at school – literacy and numeracy – are being created. Students are taking up wider interests – sport, the arts and multimedia and others – that we know are important to their development and self-confidence and contributing to keeping them out of trouble. They are looking forward with greater ambition to their later years of schooling and the possibility of further education at TAFE or university. Their parents are ending their isolation, becoming more proficient in English, making connections, learning how to help their children, becoming better role models, obtaining formal vocational qualifications and even getting jobs.

In the absence of Doveton College, these people would be left behind – pushed out of the suburb and its increasingly sought-after real estate by newcomers with greater resources and better prospects. Without Doveton College, Doveton's current children and parents would eventually be dumped somewhere else, into another struggling community further out from the city's centre, making them someone else's problem to solve, but making the cost to the nation even higher. If a place is more than its real estate, then Doveton College has been worth creating, persisting with and replicating elsewhere.

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Appendix 1:

Crime rates by age group for postcode 3177, 2012–19

Data extracted from LEAP on 18th April 2019 and is subject to change

Table 1. Alleged offender incidents for postcode '3177' by age group and principal offence type - April 2011 to March 2019

Age	Offence Division	Apr 2011 - Mar 2012	Apr 2012 - Mar 2013	Apr 2013 - Mar 2014	Apr 2014 - Mar 2015	Apr 2015 - Mar 2016	Apr 2016 - Mar 2017	Apr 2017 - Mar 2018	Apr 2018 - Mar 2019
10 to 14 years	<i>Total</i>	15	39	15	18	15	9	13	14
15 to 18 years	A) Crimes against the person	21	17	30	14	24	12	12	12
	B) Property and deception offences	23	24	42	35	36	37	16	15
	C) Drug offences	≤3	4	4	≤3	6	9	≤3	≤3
	All other offences	≤3	14	8	4	16	11	8	6
	<i>Total</i>	48	59	84	55	82	69	38	35
19 to 25 years	A) Crimes against the person	37	37	29	44	47	44	50	49
	B) Property and deception offences	27	27	36	23	30	39	56	46
	C) Drug offences	5	14	19	18	21	32	21	23
	All other offences	12	19	25	22	24	31	29	31
	<i>Total</i>	81	97	109	107	122	146	156	149
26 years and over	A) Crimes against the person	95	104	106	112	128	148	116	153
	B) Property and deception offences	44	69	91	72	94	100	74	117
	C) Drug offences	29	26	26	24	42	51	46	60
	All other offences	25	70	73	74	74	100	98	93
	<i>Total</i>	193	269	296	282	338	399	334	423
Grand Total		338	465	508	463	557	625	542	625



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