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Implementing a whole of school approach for students with ASD: A pilot study

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Abstract

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Implementing a Whole of School Approach for Students with ASD: A Pilot Study

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An effective school is one which provides a comprehensive curriculum to all students ensuring both quality and equity. A school can be described as effective only when every child is being educated successfully in it.

(Spedding, 1996. Cited in NSW DET. (1999). *Learning Together: Fostering a sense of community – A discussion paper for school communities.*)

Students with ASD

- Majority in mainstream schools
- Outcomes typically poor compared to other disability groups
- Needs often masked due to uneven profile of skills
- Under-achieve relative to cognitive abilities
- High rates of co-morbid mental health problems
- High rates of absenteeism, suspension, exclusion, home schooling
- Teachers report highest stress levels associated with autism

Key Issues – Parent Group

» High degree of parent and child frustration for limited achievement of children with ASD in educational settings

» Lack of communication

» Lack of knowledge and expertise

» Lack of options/choices

» Lack of flexibility

» Professionals as experts/devaluing of parent knowledge

» Need for specific educational programs to develop communication and social skills of children with ASD

» Inconsistency among schools and professionals

» Difference between early intervention and school progams

Factors Influencing Attitudes and Decisions of School Leaders

- Belief that students with ASD could be educated in inclusive classrooms and schools.

- Active engagement and relationships with students with ASD - Positive influence

- Formal training in special education – positive influence

- Understanding of behavioural characteristics of autism and knowledge of research on effective educational strategies leading to outcomes for students with ASD - Positive influence

- Years of experience in schools – Negative influence

- School level – varying influence – elementary more supportive of inclusive practices; middle and high school principals less supportive

(Horrocks, White and Roberts, 2007)

Effective Leaders in Inclusive Schools for Students with ASD

- Develop a shared purpose with school community
- Shared leadership model
- Evidence based decision making (effective practices for students with ASD & school-based data)
- Active in PD
- Effective managers of resources (human, material, environmental)
- Pursue systematic data gathering
- Formulate goals and interventions for students with ASD based on data
- Evaluate outcomes of interventions based on data

Autism Centre of Excellence

Good practice in autism education

- Individualised, student centred, student voice
- Multidisciplinary
- Strengths based
- Flexible, life span approach
- Functional approach to behaviour/PBS
- Ecological management, 2 way adaptation
- Hidden curriculum, specific strengths and needs
- Systematic instruction, structure, routine, visuals
- Collaborative, family involvement/family support
- Academic curriculum adaptations and adjustments
- Data based evaluation and review

Whole School Capacity Building Model

Based on establishing and supporting school leadership teams to utilise disciplined dialogue to assess the current school's practice against the evidence-base of what works for students with autism spectrum disorders across five leadership areas linked to student outcomes (i.e. professional development, shared leadership, conditions for learning, curriculum and teaching, and parent and community support) and to utilise a systematic process to address gaps in school and student processes to achieve outcomes for students with ASD
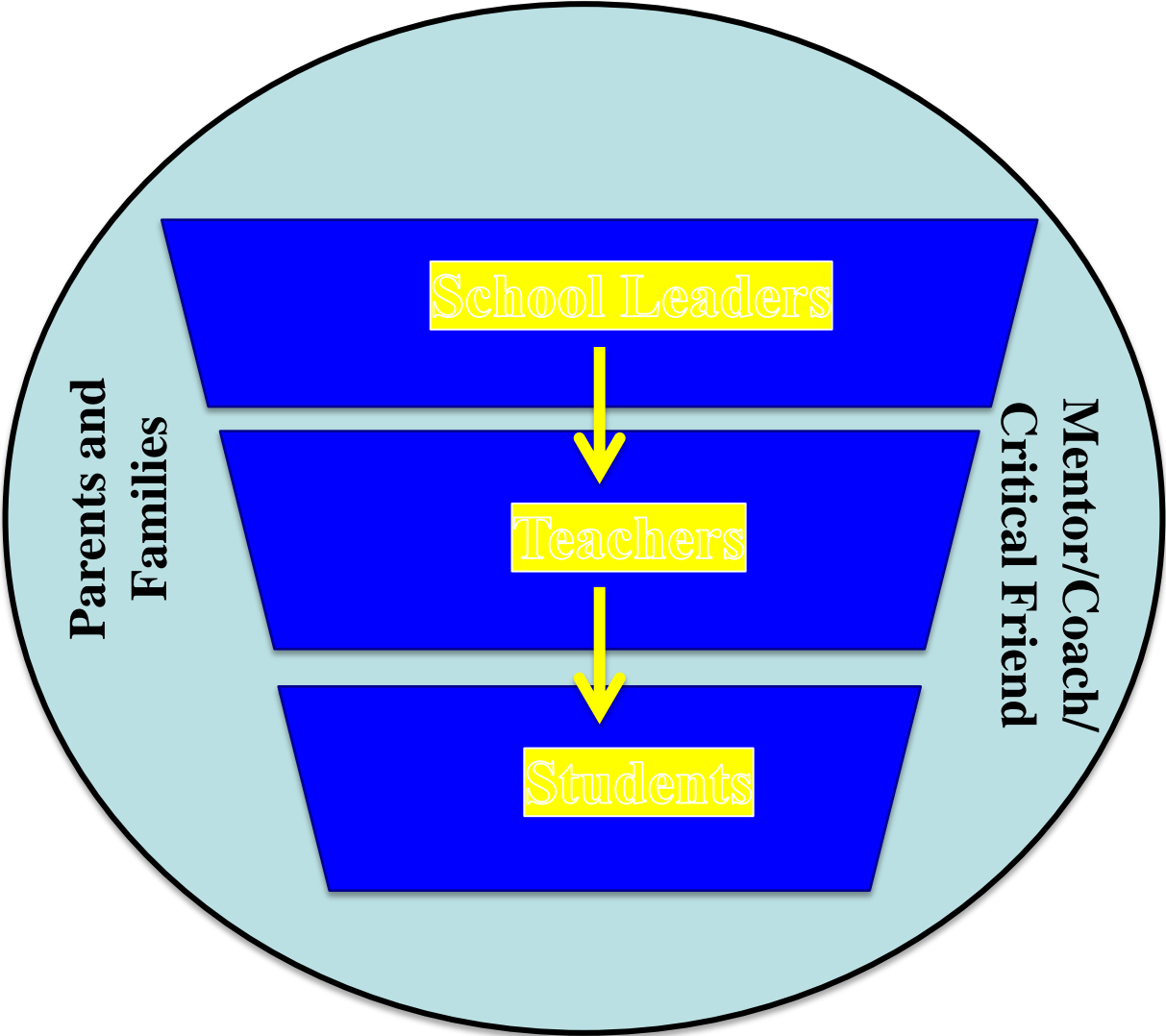
Whole School Capacity Building Model

Based on establishing and supporting school leadership teams to:

- utilise disciplined dialogue
- assess the current school's practice against the evidence-base of what works for students with autism spectrum disorders across five leadership areas linked to student outcomes
- utilise a comprehensive and systematic approach to establish processes, programs, and supports at school-wide and individual student levels that will enable students with ASD to achieve outcomes

A Systematic Whole-School Approach
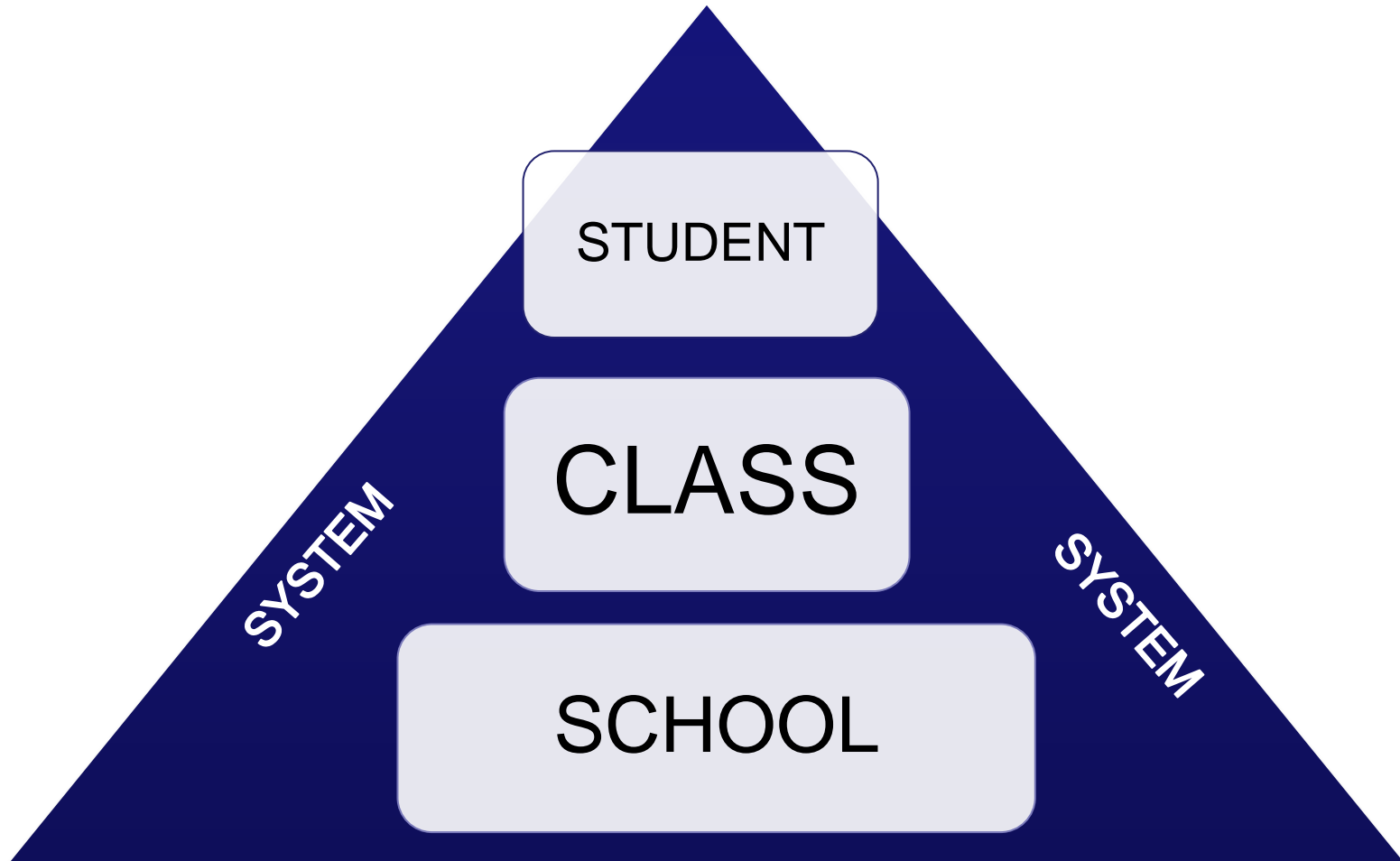
Participants – Pilot Study

- 3 schools in Regional Queensland
    - 1 high school, 1 primary, 1 combined
    - 80 students with ASD broad measures
    - 40 students with AS specific measures
- No special school in area
- Varying demographics

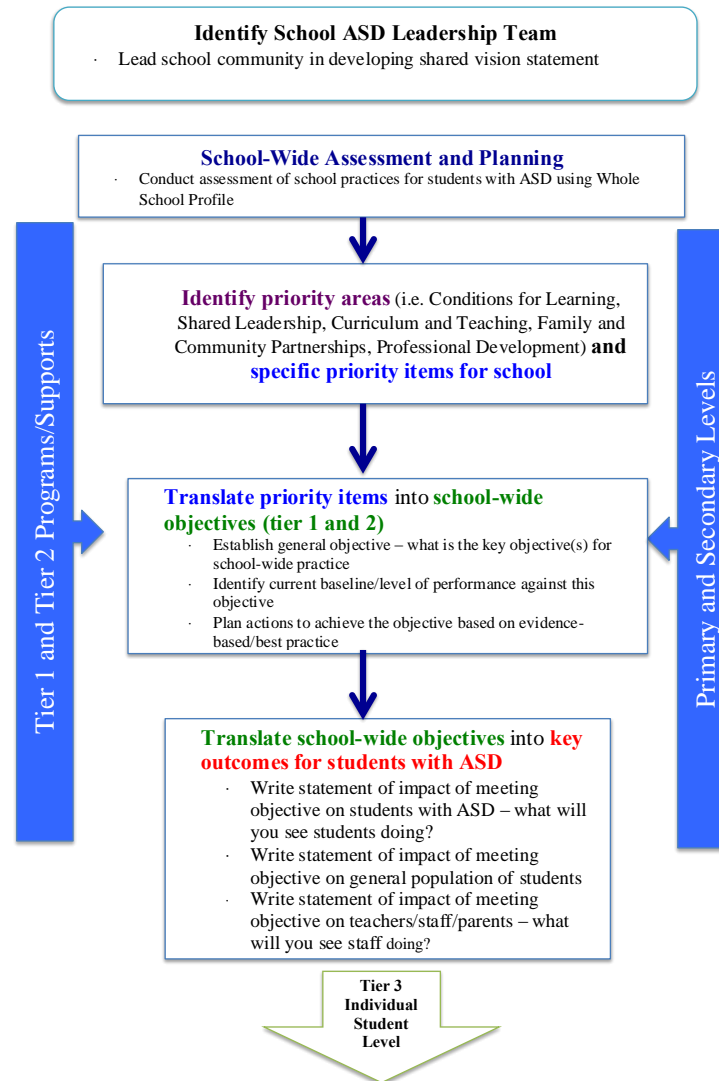# Whole School Approach – A Visual

Identify School ASD Leadership Team
- Lead school community in developing shared vision statement

School-Wide Assessment and Planning
- Conduct assessment of school practices for students with ASD using Whole School Profile

Identify priority areas (i.e. Conditions for Learning, Shared Leadership, Curriculum and Teaching, Family and Community Partnerships, Professional Development) **and specific priority items for school**

Translate priority items into **school-wide objectives (tier 1 and 2)**
- Establish general objective – what is the key objective(s) for school-wide practice
- Identify current baseline/level of performance against this objective
- Plan actions to achieve the objective based on evidence-based/best practice

Translate school-wide objectives into **key outcomes for students with ASD**
- Write statement of impact of meeting objective on students with ASD – what will you see students doing?
- Write statement of impact of meeting objective on general population of students
- Write statement of impact of meeting objective on teachers/staff/parents – what will you see staff doing?

Tier 3 Individual Student Level

Tier 1 and Tier 2 Programs/Supports

Primary and Secondary Levels

Establishing a School ASD Leadership Team

- Principal/Deputy Principal
- Head of Special Education
- Parent
- Classroom Teacher

Essential Tools

- Whole School Profile
  - » Assists the school to develop a shared purpose for students with ASD
  - » Examine current practice in 5 key areas of leadership merged with key practices for students with ASD
  - » Sets the stage for disciplined dialogue and establishing baseline and priorities for Schoolwide Action Plan
- School-wide Action Plan

Findings from Pilot Study – Intermediate Findings

- Questions/Interviews
- Case Studies
- Critical Factors
- Challenges/surprises
- Individual School Journeys
- Future Research

How has the ASD Developing Capacity of Schools project enabled you and your school to address key issues you face when working with students with ASD?

- Structure to review and reflect

- Involvement of significant members of school community

- Critical friend

- Documentation of good practice for sustainability

- Raising awareness of needs of students with ASD

- Heightened knowledge at executive level

How have you and your school changed your practice in using evidence-based practices when working with students with ASD?

- Reviewing and improving writing of goals and plans (education and behaviour)

- Reframe staff thinking with student at centre of education process

- Maximised efficiency of resources

- Eliminated dependency on teacher aide through development of other strategies

- Improving case management to ensure clear expectations for each student are established in both social and academic areas.

- Reviewing and improving writing of goals and plans (education and behaviour)
- Reframe staff thinking with student at centre of education process
- Maximised efficiency of resources
- Eliminated dependency on teacher aide through development of other strategies
- Improving case management to ensure clear expectations for each student are established in both social and academic areas.

What has you/your school achieved so far as a result of the project?

- Program Access Outcomes
  - » 3 students who had been disengaged from school for between 5 months and 2 years have re-engaged and are learning on a daily basis.
  - » 1 student who had been at a special school is working at year level.
  - » 5 students who had reduced attendance or had been excluded from other schools are full time members of mainstream classes.
  - » 3 students have moved from an alternate program to a mainstream program.
  - » SEP enrolment has grown from 28 to 60 students

Student Outcomes

» Behaviour Outcomes

- The representation of students with a verification in the red zone data has dropped from 40 % to zero.

- 100% of students who require a behaviour plan have one with an identified teachable behaviour.

- 100% of students with recorded behaviour incidents had a decrease of between 60-100% in behaviour incidents.

» Academic Outcomes

- Reading - 90% of all ASD students made progress in reading.
- 17% of students have gained 11 – 16 reading levels
- 34% of students have gained 5 -10 reading levels
- 39% of students have gained 1 -4 reading levels
- Ability Level - 30% of students have achieved year level standard for 1 or more KLA's.
- 85% of students have gained 1 or more year levels in a KLA

Leadership Outcomes

- » Shared responsibility for behaviour management and outcomes for students with ASD
- » Shared vision communicated and modeled by school leaders
- » Increased engagement of school leaders with students with ASD
- » Documents developed to support practices
- » Support for development and implementation of school-wide processes and collaborations

- **Staff Outcomes**
  - » PD provided to all teaching staff on differentiation;
  - » knowledge and understanding of ASD has improved across school;
  - » staff encouraged to undertake further studies in ASD.;
  - » self reflection on what we know and how we need to travel to get to the end result

What have been the greatest challenges your faced in implementing the project?

- Development of the knowledge, processes and tools required by the staff to implement the actions.
  - » Professional development to the SEP staff initially to develop the required skills and to become confident in conducting the required professional conversations to get teachers to buy into the actions.
  - » Resourcing, timetabling, accessing other professional supports and co-teaching priorities established.
  - » On going professional dialogue with other school leaders, class teachers and teacher aides to maintain commitment to actions and to encourage others to lead.
  - » Scheduling and preforming accountability checks.

- Staff change
- Notice of issues with students not identified but performing lower than students with ASD.
- Difficult to put into practice in classrooms with students with many ability levels
- Personal Skills and Leadership Skills
  - Challenge people in a constructive manner – ask difficult questions and be able to offer solutions.
  - Innovate
  - Include the ideas and aspirations of others.
  - Keep the focus on core business which is improved outcomes for students.
  - Be an active learner alongside staff.
  - Use data to support decision making.
  - Connect to research to provide an evidence based approach.
  - Support leadership opportunities for others

- Time
- High number of students with ASD
- Prioritisation of multiple demands in school environment
- Doing justice to the work

Case Studies

» School-wide understanding of and resilience around ASD

» Flexible service delivery

» Using data to make decisions for students in 3 level system of differentiation (curriculum, content, pedagogy)/ developed support structure

» School leadership team who are inclusive and knowledgeable about ASD and disability and are able to consider to what else has led to and deal positively with behaviour incidents

- Teacher
  - » Proactive and flexible actions to address anxiety and increase attendance of students with ASD
  - » Use of SEP team as effective resource across school – maximising case management of students and collaboration with class teachers
  - » Development and use of support services committee – team of support staff to present cases worried about, teachers are supported because concerns about student support and discuss through plan of action. – shared responsibility

- Student
  - » Reducing behaviour issue- Using consistent plan/FBA reduced behaviour incidents on playground. Other students more tolerant. Progression of students through levels of placement from nonenrolled/special school to fully inclusive and strong academic outcomes
  - » Complex case management to assist families with multiple diagnosis
  - » System of collaborative case management and coteaching between general and special education resulting in more inclusion and higher outcomes for students

Key Findings - Critical Factors in Success

- Engagement of school leaders in whole school approach most important and essential factor in leading to school-wide change and outcomes for students.

- Support at systems and school level – build sustainability

- Communication with parent and school community

- Support through mentoring/coaching/critical friend who is knowledgeable about ASD and evidence-based practice and who is able to assist the school with the establishment of the action plan and the ongoing implementation, professional development, and troubleshooting of issues.

- Redefining support - enabling schools to utilise resources and personnel to create a flexible continuum of supports and programs to meet the needs of students with ASD

- Support for flexible service delivery

- Ongoing communication and shared responsibility of all staff for students with ASD.

Challenges and Surprises

- Need for a vision statement

- Discussion re. leadership teams

- Staff turnover

- The good and bad in data collection

- Face-to-face mentoring/coaching required

- PD on goal setting – Use of Goal Attainment Scales

- **Successful Collaboration and Supports**
  - » The role of the critical friend/mentor/coach – GU and FNQ ACE teams

Coach

- The *Coach* provides specific instruction to different members of the school community. Starting with the initial professional development, which provides details on the whole school process and evidence-based practice for the ASD school leadership team, the *Coach* will then provide specific training when needed by the school on different aspects of the process.

Mentor

- The primary responsibility of the *Mentor* is to provide guidance, support and feedback as the school progresses through their journey. The most important aspect of the *Mentor* is that they are a person who is outside of the daily life of the school and therefore can provide a more objective perspective throughout the process. At various times, the *Mentor* may offer advice, encouragement, feedback, and assistance in troubleshooting. The role of *Mentor* is fairly fluid with the role of *Coach* with both roles generally fulfilled by one person.

Critical Friend

- The *Critical Friend* is the person who provides information on the latest research that will support schools to achieve outcomes for students with ASD. This is a person who might provide some initial research and who can be contacted by either school communities or the Coach/Mentor in order to obtain information on key research related to ASD. This persons is often a researcher or person based in a research

Individual School Journeys

- School 1 (Primary) – Synergy of special ed/mainstream ed for a whole school support process

- School 2 (primary/secondary) – Engaging school leaders and teachers in a community of practice

- School 3 (High) – Developing a school-wide understanding of ASD

All three school communities travelled their own journeys and achieved unique results/outcomes.

The only measurement of outcomes is the progress a school community makes from point A to B in progressing outcomes for students with ASD.

Continued Research

- Defining levels of support at each school
- Translating processes to teacher/student level
- Ongoing and meaningful involvement of parents
- Classroom processes
- Integration of special/education and regular education – case management process
- Roles of leaders, parents, teachers, students
- Self determination of students

Thanks for Coming

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