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## Research and mapping for MCEECDYA project: student academic engagement

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Department of  
Education



# Research and Mapping for MCEECDYA Project:

Student Academic Engagement

Report 2012

Report to the Steering Group (WA Department of Education)  
for the Australian Education Early Childhood Development  
& Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC)

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In this report, the term Aboriginal is respectfully used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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# Glossary

<b>ACER</b>	Australian Council of Educational Research
<b>AIE</b>	Aboriginal Islander Education Officer
<b>ATAR</b>	Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking
<b>ATAS</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academic Support
<b>BER</b>	Building the Education Revolution
<b>BMS</b>	Behaviour Management System
<b>CE</b>	Catholic Education Office
<b>ESL</b>	English as second language
<b>EYLF</b>	Early Years Learning Framework
<b>GIRL</b>	Getting It Right Literacy
<b>GIRN</b>	Getting It Right Numeracy
<b>ICSEA</b>	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>Kinder Check</b>	Kindergarten Development Check
<b>PBL</b>	Positive Behaviour for Learning
<b>LBOTE</b>	Language background other than English
<b>LOTE</b>	Languages other than English
<b>LIPS</b>	Late Arrivals Intervention Program
<b>LNSLN</b>	Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs
<b>NAPLAN</b>	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
<b>NSAE</b>	National Student Academic Engagement
<b>PAT-R</b>	Progressive Assessment Tests in Reading
<b>PAT-M</b>	Progressive Achievement Test for Maths
<b>PL</b>	Professional Learning
<b>PSP</b>	Priority Schools Projects
<b>PBL</b>	Positive Behaviour for Learning Program
<b>PIPS</b>	Performance in Primary Schools
<b>SAER</b>	Students at Educational Risk
<b>SARIS</b>	Student Assessment and Reporting Information System
<b>SIS</b>	Safe Inclusive Schools
<b>SSPRA</b>	School Support Program Resource Allocation
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>WPL</b>	Work Place Learning
<b>VCAL</b>	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
<b>NEET</b>	North East Education and Training
<b>SAIS</b>	Student Achievement Information System
<b>EARS</b>	Electronic Assessment Reporting System
<b>First Steps</b>	Early Literacy and Early Numeracy Programs

# Executive Summary

## The Research and Mapping for MCEECDYA Project: Student Academic Engagement

The **Research and Mapping for MCEECDYA Project: Student Academic Engagement** has been funded by the Australian Government and project managed by the Department of Education Western Australian (DOEWA), in consultation with a nationally convened Steering Group of jurisdictional and non government school authorities' representatives. Researchers at the School of Education, Edith Cowan University have conducted the project through tender with the DOEWA.

### Purpose

The purpose of the project was to examine the characteristics of schools with a low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) from all jurisdictions that were identified to be making a difference to student academic achievement, and to identify the key drivers and characteristics of successful models of practice for increasing and sustaining student academic engagement.

In defining 'student academic engagement' this research has built on the definition used in the Pipeline project by Angus, McDonald, Ormond, Rybarczyk, Taylor and Winterton, (2009, p 101-102): 'the product of the student's attention, effort, emotions, cognitive investment and participation in learning and teacher actions that encourage participation and the development of competence in learning'. This was extended to include school leadership and other factors supporting school change in low ICSEA contexts.

### Key Research Questions

The study had two broad research questions, related to the issues of student academic engagement in low ICSEA schools. These questions were:

1. What are the key drivers and characteristics of successful models of practice for increasing and maintaining student engagement?
2. What are the policy implications of these findings for effective, sustained reform at the jurisdiction and national levels?

### Methodology

The study examined a sample of low ICSEA schools from across Australia. It was conducted just three years after the Commonwealth Government established its Education Revolution for Australian schools and established the Smarter Schools National Partnerships reform agenda. A review of the targets and initiatives that have been instituted by the State and Territory Departments of Education was also undertaken to provide a broader contextual framework for the study. State and Territory Departments of Education all require schools to monitor and report on aspects of student attendance, student performance and the quality of schooling in line with the national agenda.

A case study approach was used to explore school practices in the area of student academic engagement in order to identify which strategies had been successfully employed. The study also incorporated an analytical theory of student academic engagement, supplemented by consideration of recent literature. Seventy-three schools were nominated by all education jurisdictions across Australia as low ICSEA primary and secondary schools whose national reporting data indicated they had made a significant, sustained improvement in students' academic engagement. A desktop audit of these schools identified 25 potential case studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leadership teams of the identified schools, and school policies and performance data were examined. Twelve of these schools were selected and developed as case studies, to provide a sample of a range of low ICSEA Australian school contexts.

Significantly, eleven of the twelve case study schools were National Partnership schools and their innovations were strongly supported by National Partnership funding. In total 40 of the 73 (or 55%) of the schools nominated for selection in this study were National Partnership schools despite this not being a criteria for nomination or selection as a case study school.

## Key Findings

The six most important overall findings from the case study schools were as follows:

1. Each of the 12 schools demonstrated that their success in improving student academic engagement in schools was due to the **synergy of the special initiatives** they undertook. These initiatives were directly contributing to the successful implementation of the school plan.
2. Achieving such synergy is dependent on **insightful and effective school leadership** working to a distributed leadership model.
3. NAPLAN has made a major impact on improving engagement in these schools by drawing attention to the need to **monitor and review student performance and work** within evidenced base practice.
4. The National Partnership program has also had a major impact, assisting these schools to improve student academic engagement through **the development and implementation of targeted initiatives**.
5. All successful schools have used a whole of **school data management approach** to improve student performance in literacy, numeracy and productive behaviours and implemented effective case management practices to monitor the learning trajectories of students. The school response has been inclusive, proactive and focused on preventative measures, thus creating a safety net for students to ensure they were not overlooked by teachers.
6. There have been **common practices** in all successful schools across the areas of:
  - o leadership
  - o learning culture
  - o curriculum and pedagogy
  - o management of resources
  - o community partnerships
  - o collegial professional learning

Schools worked to embed these practices in their processes to ensure sustainability.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided for consideration at a national level:

### Recommendation 1:

Consideration is given as to whether further action is required at a national and jurisdictional level.

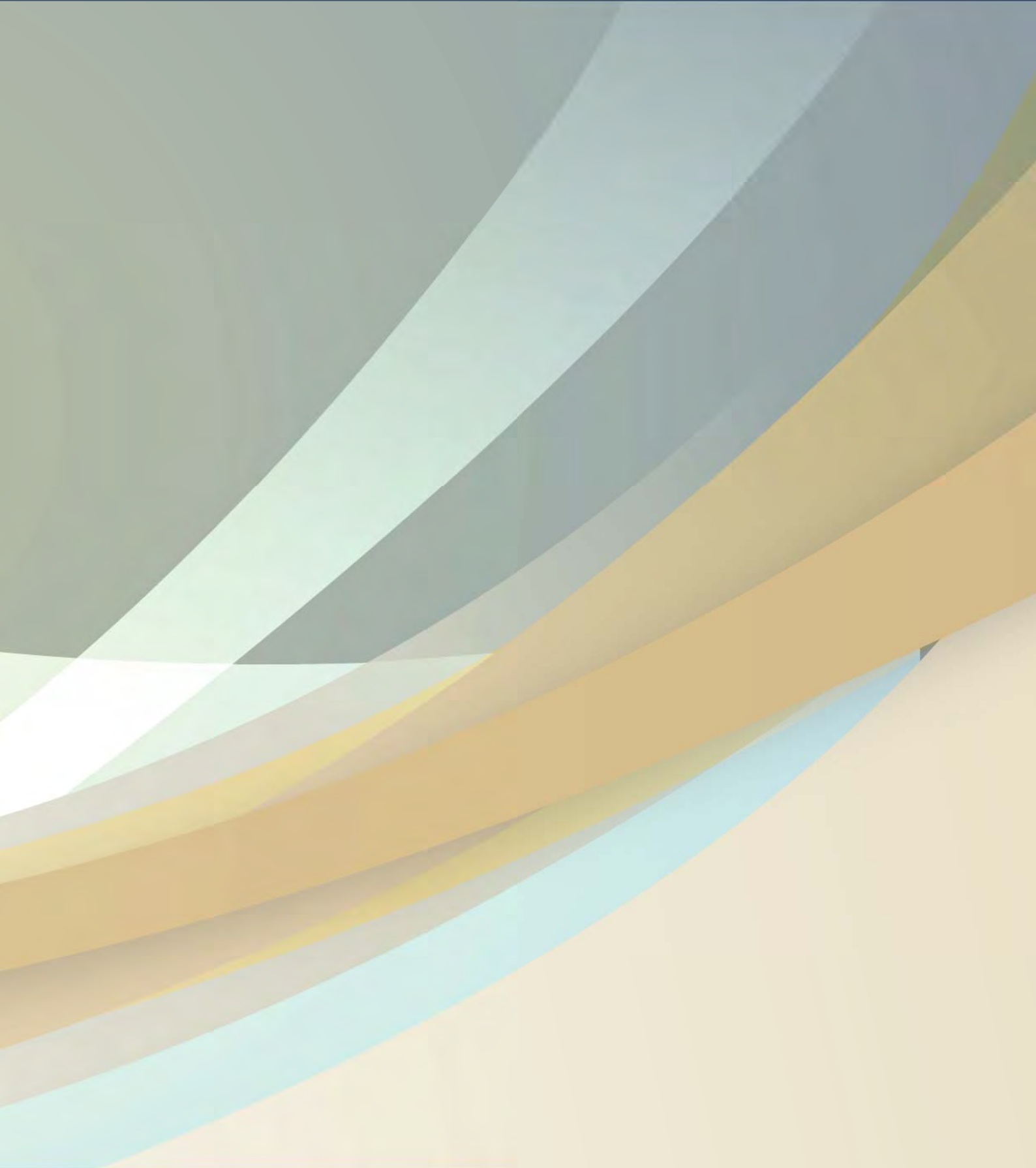
### Recommendation 2:

A link to the final report be uploaded onto relevant national and jurisdictional websites.





# Chapter 1 - Introduction



# 1.1 Student Academic Engagement

## What is Student Academic Engagement?

Student academic engagement is a concept that includes aspects of students' attention, motivation and effort in learning, along with aspects of teachers' encouragement and support for student participation and confidence in learning. Early research by Newman, Wellage and Lamborn (1992) defined engagement primarily as the student's psychological investment in academic work and equated this with the effort that students directed towards their work. In a similar vein Corno and Mandinach (2004) viewed academic engagement as being more of a disposition than a set of specific behaviours. Reeve (2006), drawing on the research of Fredricks, Blumenfield and Paris (2004) and of Furrer and Skinner (2003) identified the student elements of engagement as comprising a student's behavioural intensity, emotional quality and personal investment in their involvement in a lesson. In Reeve's model engagement is expressed in a student showing attention, effort and persistence.

## Links to Teacher Quality

More recent reports and research have added the quality of teacher instruction to earlier explanations and definitions of student academic engagement. For example, the OECD (2010), Covell (2010) and Gray and Hackling (2009) all identify the quality of the interactions between teachers and their students as being central to improving student engagement and learning. Teacher actions that are deliberate and designed to encourage participation and foster competence do improve student academic engagement. The authors of the Pipeline project, a forerunner to the current study, defined student academic engagement as "the product of the student's attention, effort, emotions, cognitive investment and participation in learning and teacher actions that encourage participation and the development of competence in learning" (Angus et. al, 2009, p.101-102).

## Links to School Leadership

Research has also made links between student achievement and factors supporting school change. For example, Alpern (2008) reported that leadership, data-driven decision making, a strong school community belief in the capacity to change, and high quality teachers made the greatest difference in high performing schools. Similarly, Bryk (2010) found that the key features of schools that were essential to advancing student achievement were a coherent instructional guidance system, the professional capacity of teachers, strong parent-community-school links, a student-centered learning climate and a strong leadership culture able to drive change. A link between school engagement and improved academic achievement was also made by Kirby and DiPaola (2011) who found that, given the features of schools as outlined above, students are more likely to be engaged in their school environment and learning, and more likely to achieve at higher levels, regardless of the individual student's socio-economic status or the socio-economic context of the school community.

## Student Academic Engagement in Low ICSEA Schools

This study of student academic engagement in relatively low ICSEA schools has sought information about students' learning performance and behavior, teachers' capacity to provide a student-centered learning environment and the role of school leaders in developing the learning culture of the school.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Mapping Project

The Research and Mapping for MCEECDYA Project: Student Academic Engagement project was designed to examine the characteristics of low ICSEA schools that were identified as making a difference to student academic achievement, and to identify the key drivers and characteristics of successful models of practice for increasing and maintaining student engagement. The study was to provide overall key findings from the case study schools.

### Project Goal

The project goal was to consider key drivers and characteristics of sustainable models of practice in successful low ICSEA schools that are related to:

- current national policies
- monitoring and planning
- literacy and numeracy
- 'at risk' case management
- leadership
- evidence-based practices and policies
- whole of school approaches
- relations between the school, the home and the community
- resources
- the development and provision of academic performance measures
- tools to monitor student engagement changes over time
- training for teachers and school leaders
- measures to ensure the sustainability of initiatives.

## 1.3 Research Questions

In order to address the project purpose and goals outlined above, the study had two broad research questions related to the issues of student academic engagement in low ICSEA schools. They were:

1. What are the key drivers and characteristics of successful models of practice for increasing and sustaining student engagement?
2. What are the policy implications of these findings for effective, sustained reform at the jurisdiction and national levels?

In order to address these research questions, the project was designed to:

- o describe the national and jurisdictional policy context in which low ICSEA schools are operating
- o identify 12 schools across the nation with a below average ICSEA score that were engaging students at better than expected levels, in consideration of the school demographics and context
- o cover all levels of schooling and a wide range of school locations, jurisdictions and sectors, including both public and private providers
- o identify key drivers and characteristics of successful models of practice through case studies of selected schools
- o provide recommended models of practice for increasing and maintaining student engagement at the jurisdiction and national levels.

## 1.4 Research Process

To achieve the above goals the study has reported data on the current national and jurisdictional policy contexts of schools and examined the ways in which a diverse group of low ICSEA schools have responded to improve student academic engagement. The data provide:

- o a descriptive account of the national and jurisdictional policies and initiatives related to student academic engagement, and
- o detailed case-studies of schools that were found to be making a difference to the academic engagement of students.

The concept of student academic engagement developed from the literature has informed both the data collection and analysis procedures. Recommendations have been developed with consideration of a wide range of factors related to students, school contexts, and jurisdictional and national policies and initiatives.

### National and Jurisdictional Policy Audit

A desktop audit was conducted to identify the national and jurisdictional policies and initiatives related to student academic engagement. The data from this web-based search informed the development of an interview framework to explore a contextual understanding at jurisdictional level. Interviews were conducted with senior personnel from each State Department of Education to determine that jurisdiction's understanding of student academic engagement, and to gain information about programs designed to promote this aspect of schooling and the evidence that has been collected at system level to evaluate links between student engagement and learning.

The Director of each State Department was asked by a National Steering Committee member to nominate a relevant key Senior Officer for the interview. The nominated officers held a diverse range of positions within their Departments and included a Senior Manager for Assessment and Reporting, A Program Manager for Teaching and a Manager for Student Well-being. It is acknowledged that the different roles may have influenced respondents' perspectives on the overall goals of Departments of Education. A web-search of departmental strategic priorities was also conducted to verify some of the commentary.

Interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Information about the project and the seven questions for the interview were emailed to each of the nominees beforehand (Appendix 3). Additional information was collated from Departmental websites.

## Case Study School Selection

For the purposes of reporting, schools were classified into three categories: nominated schools (n=73), visited schools (n= 25) and case study schools (n=12).

A series of research processes were adopted for the identification and selection of 12 schools for inclusion as case studies in the final report. The processes were:

## School Nomination

A request was made to each jurisdiction/state/territory to draw on system level data to nominate four to six primary and secondary schools that met the following criteria:

- a. below average ICSEA, of between 900 and 1000.
- b. a higher than expected academic performance as measured by NAPLAN or other measures of literacy and numeracy, indicating a high level of student engagement, and also including schools where students in their earliest years, boys, LBOTE and Aboriginal students had been successful.

This process generated 73 schools nominated by all jurisdictions and sectors.

## Identification of schools to be visited

A mapping exercise was conducted to review the characteristics of all 73 nominated schools with information collated from school websites and the **My School** website using the following criteria:

- a. jurisdiction and sector
- b. NAPLAN scores
- c. attendance data
- d. ICSEA score
- e. LBOTE proportion
- f. proportion of Aboriginal students
- g. school type and size
- h. school location
- i. case management processes.

This process identified 25 potential case study schools that the project would visit. This selection was designed to achieve a national sample of schools with a mix of schools, while avoiding duplication of cases and capturing the diversity of ways to support student academic engagement.

# 1.5 Research Process

## School visits

School visits to each of the 25 schools were made according to the tender requirements to place “minimal impost” on the school. The visits provided an opportunity to meet with key personnel in order to discuss the school’s initiatives and the types of data used to monitor their impact.

Information was collected during a focus group discussion with school leaders using a case-study proforma (Appendix 2). Schools also provided additional sources of information such as school reports and other documentation. The discussion and data collection focused on initiatives that promoted increased student academic engagement in the school, and these included:

1. contextual features of the school that particularly related to the initiatives undertaken
2. why the initiatives supporting engagement were important to the school:
  - a. the key drivers and critical forces
  - b. the consequences of not undertaking these initiatives
3. details of initiatives (programs, projects, other strategies to promote engagement):
  - a. description of each initiative – what was done, by whom, with whom, how, when
  - b. support received for any initiatives – e.g. grants, support-in-kind, staff support, parent or community support
  - c. what improvements were made, how, and the evidence of their success
4. any sharing of the successful initiatives with other schools or the community, or across a jurisdiction or sector.

Additional data was obtained from the school community (teachers, parents and students) using surveys in either an online or hard copy mode, depending on the school’s preference. This survey data was used to confirm focus group data related to the level of school community engagement and support for strategies and initiatives taken by schools to improve students’ academic engagement.

An initial analysis of the information was conducted to identify successful schools suitable for inclusion as a case study. This analysis focused on the following criteria:

1. evidence of student improvement in
  - a. academic performance data
  - b. attendance data
  - c. student and parent survey data that demonstrated connectedness to school
2. sustained improvement over two or more years
3. identification of targeted student cohorts (e.g. year group or whole of school, early years, boys, LBOTE)
4. an identified target set of initiatives.

This process generated 12 case studies, each of which is included in this report.

## Case study selection

The case study school selection processes undertaken in the project ensured a mix of schools. The 12 case study schools included an equal proportion of metropolitan and non-metropolitan government schools, and one example each of an independent primary school and a CEO school. Case study schools included at least one large non-metropolitan primary school and secondary school (700+ students); at least one large metropolitan primary and secondary school (700+ students); at least one primary school and secondary school with 300-500 students; and at least one small non-metropolitan school (less than 150 students). Ten of the case studies were selected as representative of government schools, and there was one case study from each of the Catholic and Independent school systems, selected as illustrative of these sectors.

In terms of representing the diversity of the Australian student population, the case study schools included at least two schools with 60+% Aboriginal students, and at least two with 90+% students from a LBOTE background. In terms of academic programs, all the case study secondary schools provided pathways to tertiary education and at least three of the case study secondary schools had a strong VET focus.

# Chapter 2 - Findings





## 2.1 National Context of the Study

This project was conducted in 2011; just three years after the Commonwealth Government established its 'Education Revolution' agenda for a national reform of Australian schools. This program of reform has been coordinated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) through agreements with state and territory Ministers of Education to develop targeted priorities for schools and a national data collection and reporting framework. There has also been a concurrent reform agenda, 'Close the gap', to address a broad range of issues related to Aboriginal disadvantage. This agenda has included a specific focus on improved schooling for Aboriginal students.

COAG agreed on the National Education Agreement (NEA), following the signing in 2008 of the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians by the then, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) - which subsequently became the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) before being relaunched as the Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) in April this year. The NEA has set out the goals for a 10-year strategy that is designed to ensure that:

- o all children were engaged in, and benefitted from, schooling
- o young people were meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and literacy and numeracy levels were improving
- o Australian students were able to excel by international standards
- o schooling promoted social inclusion and reduced the education disadvantage of children, especially Aboriginal children
- o young people were able to make a successful transition from school to work and further study.

The adoption of the NEA has placed bilateral responsibilities on the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to monitor and review school systems and schools, to support improved performance. The Commonwealth Government set out a new national framework for accountability and reporting against the goals of the NEA in 2008, when it legislated for the independent Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The authority was charged with responsibilities for developing a new national education data collection and reporting program, a new national assessment program (NAP) and a new national school curriculum.

ACARA established the *My School* website to house a profile of every Australian school and provide a repository for the mandated national assessment program for literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) data collected from every school. ACARA also took on the responsibility for the annual National Report on Schooling in Australia, for MCEECDYA, which is prepared in accordance the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia 2010 and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. The report provides evidence of achievement toward the national key performance measures that are aligned with COAG targets and the performance indicators contained in the NEA. The key performance measures covered by the report are school achievement in the NAP, school participation, attendance, completion and attainment, as well as the engagement of young people in vocational education and training.

Additional accountability and reporting also occurs in relation to a range of other national agreements, including the National Partnership Agreements which are listed in Appendix 4a and the National Reforms in Indigenous Education (NIRA), which are listed in Appendix 4b. Reporting for these agreements occurs through the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations. This accountability framework focuses on the achievement of results, efficient service delivery and timely provision of publicly available performance information to assess governments' progress against agreed objectives, outcomes and outputs. Performance data is provided via schools, systems and governments, and the COAG Reform Council supplies COAG with a comparative analysis of performance information as well as monitoring, assessing and publicly reporting on partnership outcomes and use of funds. In turn, the Commonwealth then makes determinations on reward

## 2.2 Jurisdictional Contexts

funding to those jurisdictions that meet 'ambitious' performance benchmarks.

Under these mechanisms, schools are now accountable to a number of agencies as well as to parents and the community at large. Schools are obliged to:

- report to parents on individual student progress
- participate in NAP student assessments including NAPLAN, PISA and TIMSS
- publish an annual report that is publicly available on the Internet
- contribute to the range of information published on the *My School* website, including results from NAPLAN, Year 12 attainment, and post-school destinations
- meet the various school planning, school reporting and school review/evaluation and/or school improvement requirements of their school authority or school system.

These accountability and reporting requirements of schools by systems, jurisdictions and the Commonwealth, have created a new culture of evidence-based school improvement. Schools, particularly those in government school systems, have become more involved in the collection of data on educational outcomes and participation. Use of data has become more than ever before linked to school reporting and planning processes and it is being used to frame internal and externally supported school improvement processes and system interventions. (MGSE, 2011, p30).

Interviews with senior officers and managers of state education departments indicated that student academic engagement as it is described in this document has not been adopted across the Australian school system. The terms 'student engagement' and 'student well-being' are used in departmental documents. 'Student academic engagement', however, was regarded as being more comprehensive and as providing greater opportunity to build in a long-term perspective that included an emphasis on transitions across the stages of preschool, school and post-secondary pathways.

State and territory education department targets and initiatives related to student engagement were able to be broadly classified into the three areas of student attendance, student performance and quality of learning. A brief outline of the main focus of these areas is presented below:

- **Student attendance targets** were concerned with attendance rates, school retention and completion, and the collection of data to monitor the participation of Aboriginal students and student pathways through Years 10 to 12. Initiatives and data to comply with the requirement for student participation to age 17 also featured.
- **Student performance targets** related to achievement measures in literacy and numeracy, assessed through NAPLAN and other state and territory measures.
- **Quality of learning** initiatives concerned teacher effectiveness and teachers' capacity to use data to match pedagogy, individual student needs and interests in learning.

An examination of each of the departmental websites was also conducted to verify the points of view expressed by the senior officers. Each state department's strategic plan identified targets, supporting strategies and reporting procedures that were consistent with the NEA and were relevant to the each of the three areas identified above. While some departments placed a stronger emphasis on the quality of the student learning experience it was evident that they all collected data on student attendance, retention and performance.

Discussion with senior officers about the support given across systems to help schools to achieve targets also indicated that operational responses to the issues of student academic engagement were managed through these three areas of student attendance, performance and quality of learning.

For attendance, retention and school completion, targets have been typically managed through a three-tiered system where state departments have set enrolment and retention targets that are then negotiated and monitored at school level. Schools are expected to closely monitor students considered to be at risk of disengaging from school. Principals have been encouraged to work with teachers to set goals for students at risk and to monitor their attendance more closely. In some states and territories student data have been stored and accessed centrally through a system-wide data management system, and some departments have notified schools of the students who are considered to be at risk. Education departments have also been proactive in providing schools with information about the strategies they might adopt to address persistent problems associated with attendance.

Targets for student performance are reflected in an emphasis on literacy and numeracy achievement within schools and system wide, using the NAPLAN achievement indicator and other state and school-based measures. Quality of learning targets were linked to improvements in the quality of teaching and school leadership. There was a strong commitment to the use of strategies that support continuous improvement and encourage a whole of school approach to improved achievement outcomes and quality of learning for students. Centralised and regionalised programs have provided targeted professional learning support for teachers and principals. Additional specialised curriculum support staff for literacy or numeracy had been provided to high need schools, while professional development programs have focused on improving teacher capacity to use more student-centred and adaptive pedagogies.

State policies and reporting requirements were typically reported through the School Improvement Plan, which is often a mandated requirement. Examples of the type of data collected in the areas of attendance, student performance and quality of learning included:

For attendance:

- school attendance
- student pathways and transitions
- Year 12 completions, including VET
- post school destinations: especially for Year 10 and 12 students
- the percentage of children attending preschool.

Reporting of attendance data for students to age 17 was mandatory.

For student performance:

- for literacy and numeracy: particularly NAPLAN, and at school level other measures, especially PAT Maths/PAT Reading
- A-E assessments of student performance across a range of subject areas
- preschool developmental assessments (e.g. PIPS, kindergarten developmental checks)
- Aboriginal student progress data.

Mandated reporting was in place for literacy and numeracy, including NAPLAN, early screening/developmental checks and first year of compulsory schooling data (e.g. PIPS).

Data broadly related to the quality of learning environments in schools have reflected:

- the school environment
- leadership
- teacher pedagogy
- student well-being and behavioural data – including data on suspensions and expulsions
- student satisfaction surveys
- parent surveys
- ESL performance levels
- the percentage of ECE trained teachers
- early years learning framework.

Mandatory reporting includes data related to the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), student satisfaction survey data and parent surveys, although the amount of mandatory reporting varied among states and ranged from a single item to an extensive list of items.

Education departments have attempted to link reporting to their pedagogic framework, and at least one department was developing a new set of rubrics for schools to report data on complex activities, such as pedagogy and quality of teaching.

In general the senior officers indicated that the support and reporting requirements for schools have had a positive impact on student participation and learning in schools in each state and territory. The officers were optimistic and believed that schools were now more accountable for student needs. Comments from the Officers suggested that the new initiatives and reporting requirements have resulted in the following changes:

- Schools have adopted more **student-centered approaches** to teaching and learning.
- **Literacy and numeracy** learning have become a priority.
- Learning frameworks and **teaching pedagogy** have become more **focused on learning processes**. There is a stronger emphasis on how learning occurs and the need for metacognitive processes in learning.
- Students have been given more access to **flexible learning options**. There is a stronger emphasis on individual goals for learning and pathways beyond school.
- There is an improved **emphasis on student well-being** with a greater recognition of young people's wants and needs and improved frameworks for student behaviour management.
- There is greater recognition of the importance of the **cultural needs of Aboriginal students** in schools.
- **Teacher quality has improved** through greater use of more adaptive pedagogies.
- **Teachers** have become **more data literate** and more focused on capability development.
- **Teacher professional learning** is more focused on shared processes.
- **School leadership and decision making** processes in schools have improved through the use of data and reporting and school improvement planning.
- **Greater attention is being given to critical stages of schooling**, e.g. early years and Year 10, and there is a strong emphasis on students gaining pre-employment skills prior to leaving school.

Officers' suggestions for further improvements to schooling focused on the need for:

- further improvements in teacher capacity and school leadership
- the development of a more comprehensive definition of student academic engagement that went beyond the parameters of attendance and achievement and could be used to focus attention on what teachers and school leaders can do to promote student interest, cognitive curiosity, persistence in learning, and well-being
- an increased emphasis on case management and evidence-based processes, beginning with more accurate assessments of student learning needs to assist teachers to use targeted teaching strategies to enhance learning
- greater flexibility of school hours to create more attendance options for students, for example, evening classes for secondary students
- strategies that help schools to develop closer links with their communities, to better address the diverse needs and learning pathways of students, and to improve student attendance
- more sustained support for schools through long-term initiatives in schools and systems, as funding for two years or less did not allow enough time to make substantial changes in schools.

## 2.3 School Contexts

This section has collated data from the 12 low ICSEA case-study schools identified through national data as improving student academic engagement. This section describes how different schools have drawn upon national and jurisdictional policies to develop their response to the challenges presented by their school context. The analysis is largely qualitative and reports on how schools have:

- o used performance information to identify the trajectory of disengaged students and plan improvements to this
- o employed effective strategies to improve student performance in literacy and numeracy for all disengaged students
- o implemented effective case-management practices to monitor disengaged students from year to year.

The findings also reflect on:

- o the role that school leaders have taken to establish productive school climates for student academic engagement
- o how schools have used evidence-based practices to inform the development of school policies and practices related to student academic engagement
- o how schools have implemented whole of school approaches
- o partnerships between home and school.

The 12 schools comprised six primary schools, two district high schools incorporating primary and secondary students, and four secondary schools. A noticeable feature of these schools was the challenging circumstances in which they were working. This was not surprising because they were selected on the basis of a low ICSEA score of approximately between 900-1000. All of the schools emphasised that their success did not rest on any one initiative but rather on the synergy of a number of initiatives and the extent to which these aligned with their school plans. Many of the reported initiatives and strategies appear to be normal and unremarkable school activities. However, when considered in the context of the school community and the difficulties schools faced in engaging all students, these actions were indeed remarkable. The researchers concluded that this reliance

upon synergy and alignment demanded outstanding and vigilant school leadership, and this quality of school leadership was thus identified as the major common factor in the success of these schools.

Significantly, 11 of the 12 case study schools were National Partnership schools and their innovations were strongly supported by National Partnership funding. In total 40 out of 73 (or 55%) of the schools nominated for selection in this study were National Partnership schools.

While the majority of the case study schools were National Partnership schools this was not one of the criteria for selecting schools. Rather, the case study schools were nominated under the project selection criteria by the jurisdiction leaders and the NSAE project steering committee, because they were performing above expectations for their school demographics and were noticeably changing the way they worked.

The case study reports indicate that schools had taken a whole of school approach to the management of student academic engagement. Schools did not identify a single approach or project to improve student academic engagement, but rather a range of interlinking initiatives. The initiatives have been reported graphically in each of the case studies under the heading of 'Synergy of linked initiatives', to draw attention to their range and focus. The synergy of linked initiatives demonstrates that the response of schools to the issues of student academic engagement was inclusive, proactive and focused on preventative measures. Successful schools created a safety net for students to ensure that they were not overlooked by teachers. The findings reported in the remainder of this section were derived through an analysis of trends reported in the case study reports, and the six major trends were as follows:

1. The use of student performance information.
2. A substantial emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy.
3. The case management of students.
4. Strong school and jurisdictional leadership.
5. Evidence-based selection of policies and practices.
6. Well integrated policies across the school, and encompassing the school's community.

### 2.3.1. Schools' use of Performance Information

Case study schools were active in using performance information to plan curriculum initiatives and manage the trajectories of all of their students. The major findings from the case studies in relation to the monitoring of data were as follows:

In each of the 12 schools success in improving student engagement in schools was due to the synergy of the special initiatives they undertook, and collectively these initiatives contributed to the school plan.

1. Achieving such synergy is dependent on insightful and effective school leadership working to a distributed leadership model.
2. NAPLAN has made a major impact on improving engagement in these schools by drawing attention to the need to monitor and review student performance and work within evidenced base practice.
3. The National Partnership program has had a major impact on assisting these schools to improve student engagement through the development and implementation of targeted initiatives.
4. All successful schools used a whole of school data management approach to improve student performance in literacy, numeracy and productive behaviours, and implemented effective case management practices to monitor disengaged students from year to year. Their response was inclusive, proactive and focused on preventative measures. This created a safety net for students to ensure they were not overlooked by teachers.
5. The common set of practices evidenced by all successful schools included aspects of:
  - Leadership
  - Learning culture
  - Curriculum and pedagogy
  - Management of resources
  - Community partnerships
  - Collegial professional learning.

Schools worked to embed these practices in their processes to ensure sustainability.

Leaders in the case study schools reported that growing public awareness about student performance, research about teacher quality and supporting information from jurisdictional directorates helped them to develop coherent strategies to manage student learning trajectories more effectively. NAPLAN assessments have given schools performance related data on their schools and individual students. This data stimulated them to reconsider how they managed student learning trajectories in their school, and to seek further supporting information on how to better target the learning needs of their students, particularly in the core areas of literacy and numeracy.

All of the case study schools collected multiple sources of data on their students, which were used to identify learning needs at transitions into primary school and secondary school and to assist with transitions out of school. During schooling, data were collected to measure learning progress, and to diagnose specific learning needs. In primary school these data sources were primarily from literacy and numeracy measures, while in secondary school the data sources focused on literacy, numeracy, subject discipline areas and behaviour. All schools collected data at individual, class and year levels to help identify patterns of learning and to ensure individual needs were addressed. School-wide student progress data was analysed for trends, particularly in target areas of literacy and numeracy, and this informed whole of school planning.

Summaries of the types of evidence collected by these schools to develop individual student and class profiles are presented in the next section. This commences with data monitoring student transitions and pathways for secondary students, attendance and behavior, school opinion, group placement, and learning in the core areas of literacy and numeracy.

## 2.3.2. Transition and Pathways Data

### Data collected on entry to school

All of the primary schools used an early years screening or school readiness measure to gauge children's early learning needs on entry to school. The measures that were used assessed a range of cognitive, motor and emotional skills. In one school this screening had been conducted by the school nurse on behalf of the teachers, who then passed the information on to teachers to inform their teaching plans. Another school used an early readiness assessment that fed into the school's tracking mechanism that had begun three years before children attended full time school. In this school the preschool assessments were also compared to Year 3 NAPLAN scores in order to provide a longitudinal map of children's early learning at school.

### Data related to the transition to secondary school

Secondary transition coordinators liaised with each school's feeder schools to obtain data on the incoming students, including NAPLAN data. The secondary schools conducted early assessments of literacy and numeracy to supplement data obtained from primary schools. This provided base-line data for tracking performance during the year. More importantly it was used to identify students with special learning needs to ensure additional support was provided early secondary schooling. The data were also used to prepare class groupings in the school to enable the school to provide more student support in other areas.

The data collected at transition were collated in student files. As time progressed further information was added to build a comprehensive assessment portfolio, such as Year 7 and 9 NAPLAN literacy and numeracy data, PAT-R and PAT-M data and other literacy and numeracy test results. Data on behavior, and assessment information from discipline areas were also added. The data were stored and accessed online and immediately available to all relevant members of staff.

### Data related to secondary student pathways

Secondary schools monitored students during the final years of schooling, particularly during Years 10-12. Schools were aware of their obligations to support young people under 17 in completing Year 10 and they were also committed to encouraging students to develop choices that provided a realistic pathway beyond their school years. Data were collected at Year 10 to monitor

student choices for employment, vocational education and senior high school pathways. Schools also collected destination data of students who left after Year 10 for employment or to take up study elsewhere such as VET, and they collected Year 12 completion data.

One school's recruited Year 10 students through their subject selection counselling process into a supported senior school program for literacy and numeracy. The program targeted students who had shown limited engagement in Year 10, and enabled them to gain a certificate of competence for literacy and numeracy for articulation into TAFE. The students in this program were allocated a classroom that was open from 9 - 2pm daily and had food and ICT facilities.

Flexible learning options programs provided support to students who have experienced difficulties and have been unable to stay at school. These programs are designed to maintain connections with the school. Students are supported in their study in alternative settings and on the school site. These programs are designed to help students reenter mainstream school where possible.

#### Attendance Data

Daily attendance monitoring was recorded by all schools, and absences were followed up by contacting parents to inform them of the absence and seek further information. Contact was usually made by either a school attendance officer or by an agency on behalf of the school, on the day of the unexplained absence. Some schools shared attendance information internally through web-based recording. This provided classroom teachers with an immediate record of who should be in class, and also permitted schools to identify any unexplained student departures during the school day.

Issues regarding the management of attendance were assigned to senior staff, usually the Deputy Principal. Meetings to report and review attendance figures were held regularly, and information about improvements or negative trends was noted for possible future action.

### 2.3.3. Behaviour Related Data

The portfolio for behavior management in the case study schools was normally assigned to the Deputy Principal who also oversaw student welfare. Schools sought to develop a disposition toward more positive behavior by focusing on increasing students' metacognitive awareness of their behavior, its consequences and ways to improve it. They used management techniques that emphasised a restorative approach, seeking to develop students' understanding of the implications of their misdemeanours on both their own learning and the learning of others. To promote a more positive school climate the schools collected behavioural data about positive as well as negative referrals. Reports of positive behaviour data were linked to school reward schemes and negative reports were discussed with students and parents. Schools kept files of serious negative behaviours to ensure students did not exceed the school's set limit. Exceeding the limit usually resulted in a suspension and was recorded and reported to the district/regional education office.

Schools were interested in the quality of data about behaviour that was being collected and teachers reported they wanted more skill in identifying and supporting appropriate positive behaviours. One school was working with the Positive Behaviour team from the state directorate to collect more detailed information for the state's Safe Inclusive Schools (SIS) data base. This data base aims to provide teachers with a checklist to help them identify positive and negative behaviours more readily, and it is also intended to create a future baseline for schools to use to measure behaviour performance. There was strong interest in data of this type by schools in this study.

### 2.3.4. Opinion Surveys

Opinion Data was regularly collected from students, parents and teachers using survey instruments. In most cases the surveys were generated by the school or state system and reported in the annual school report. Staff at one primary school commented that the student surveys did not provide them with information they could use for further planning. The teachers at this school designed a student request sheet for students to seek more information about their learning. They reported this did help to stimulate student interest in reviews of their own learning.

### 2.3.5. Data and Learning Group Placement

Schools used a variety of instruments including some diagnostic and school generated assessments to profile student learning attributes, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Student profiles were collated and accessed by teaching teams in order to form student learning groups for literacy and numeracy instruction that reflected particular skill levels. These groups included students from different year levels. The groupings were flexible in that individual students might switch to another group when new data suggested their learning needs had changed. Reviews normally occurred on a monthly basis, following a period of explicit teaching that focused on the identified needs of the assigned group. The next section presents a summary of the approaches taken by schools to support students' development in the key areas of literacy and numeracy.

### 2.3.6. Support for Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy and numeracy were the focal points of curricula in all of the case study schools. Schools were very aware of the national and state accountability processes for these two areas of learning and the importance of these skills for students' futures. They were collating data for external reporting, and generating diagnostic and other data for internal uses. All schools collected data to monitor the literacy and numeracy learning trajectories for each child in the school. They also conducted internal cyclical reviews of individual, class and year progress data to assist with grouping strategies (described above), teaching strategies, staffing allocations and program review.

#### Literacy

Specialist literacy teachers, ESL support teachers, assistant teachers, and Australian Indigenous Support Officers (AIEO) provided much needed additional resource for schools. In particular, the specialist literacy teachers assisted teaching teams to develop and refine literacy teaching strategies for implementation across the whole school. Literacy specialists presented professional training sessions for teachers, observed teaching, provided feedback on pedagogy and worked alongside teachers to help them to become more skilled in the use of assessment for teaching.



Secondary schools appointed a senior member of staff from their normal staffing complement to act as a literacy leader for the school. The literacy leader oversaw the development of the school literacy plan. This included consideration of literacy within other discipline curriculum areas. The senior literacy leaders coordinated the collection of school data on literacy, established a professional development plan for all staff, and helped to develop a culture for literacy in the school that used data to identify students with learning needs and progressively tracked student achievements.

Literacy support for Aboriginal students featured explicit teaching of the use of standard Australian English, with routines and structures modelled by the teacher. One school reported the use of a district-wide approach that had been implemented to improve continuity in learning when students moved between schools. LOTE support for Aboriginal students was part of the Indigenous languages program in one school. The language program was supported by AIEOs and featured the two most prevalent languages spoken by the people in the local communities.

### Primary school literacy

Primary schools used assessment to provide targeted teaching to support students' learning of reading and writing. These programs were offered through a whole of school approach where students were assessed and grouped for instruction. The assessment and grouping strategy was linked to periods of explicit teaching with cyclical review processes to ensure groupings were fluid and students' needs were met as they changed over time.

Examples of specific literacy initiatives identified by case study schools were:

- **Appointment of literacy specialists**, normally with funding support from the National Partnerships initiative, although at least one school was supported with funding from a community agency
- **Reading to learn program, a guided program** for reading and writing
- **Literacy blocks**, where schools time-tabled longer class periods to provide periods of sustained literacy learning
- **Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)**, a

variation on the more commonly known silent reading session, was planned for the whole school to read every day, for 15-20 minutes after one of the food breaks

- **Conversational reading**, implemented as an interactive program where teachers read to students and students read to each other
- **First Steps Reading**, used by schools to provide a learner-centered early years reading programs
- **First Steps Writing**, used by schools to provide an early years writing program
- **Books in homes program**, implemented to encourage students to borrow books
- **Inferential thinking and comprehension**, developed in one school as a school wide approach to focus on the use of language in tasks requiring comprehension.
- **Middle range achievers**, planned for use by one school in 2012 to collect data on student potential and performance in literacy. IQ data from a random sample of 25 students will be compared with NAPLAN data see whether the results are predictive.

### Secondary school literacy

Secondary schools developed profiles of student literacy and numeracy as part of the transition program for students moving on from primary school. Information from primary schools, including NAPLAN data were collated by transition support teachers. Schools used this information to provide support from the beginning of secondary schooling to focus instructional support on particular literacy learning needs, including the provision of support to students with English as a second language (ESL).

Support for Aboriginal students at the commencement of secondary schooling included a program of one-on-one support within the classroom for literacy and numeracy. Additional support was provided by one school after hours, with this students remaining at school for a longer school day. The nationally funded literacy program **Follow the dream: partnerships for success** provided Year 12 Aboriginal students with additional support. In this program academic tutors

provide 2-hour after-school sessions three times each week with supporting one-to-one tuition in the regular English class. This program was also adapted as the **Towards the future** program by one school to provide a mathematics and literacy support program for all Year 8 – 12 migrant and refugee students.

### Numeracy

As for literacy, the schools in this study used a whole school approach to support numeracy. The strategies for numeracy paralleled those for literacy and included the employment of specialist teacher support, ability groupings and assessment-led teaching interventions.

Most case study primary schools adopted a whole school approach to numeracy. They also employed specialist numeracy teachers to lead staff planning groups to establish a whole school numeracy plan. This included support to use assessment instruments to organise students for instruction using year level and vertical age groupings. Numeracy specialists also worked with staff to model best practice and to help them to develop assessment led teaching strategies in their classrooms.

Across the twelve schools there was a noticeable trend to implement new strategies with literacy first and to make plans to address numeracy at a later stage. This was chiefly because the language needs of students were fundamental to instruction in other curriculum areas. Schools also found that the assessment and case management of numeracy presented more challenges to staff, as the range of diagnostic assessment resources were not as readily available as they were for literacy. Teachers also lacked the knowledge and information they needed to teach numeracy across the secondary discipline areas.

### Numeracy in primary schools

Examples of successful approaches to the improvement of numeracy in primary schools were:

- **Count me in Too**, for young children in the first years of schools who were at risk for early numeracy
- **Counting On**, used for students who were performing below benchmarks in the middle primary years (schools commented that the implementation of this program depended on specialist support)

- **Year 4 Nintendo project**, targeted at underperforming boys and designed to increase their engagement and performance in numeracy
- **PAT-M**, an ACER-scored, norm-referenced numeracy instrument used to measure student achievement and also to inform groupings and instructional needs
- **Newman's Error Analysis test**, used by two schools to provide classroom data to group students for numeracy instruction and to help teachers develop program plans
- **Aboriginal Numeracy Strategy**, a dedicated, timetabled hour each day for numeracy when everyone in the class followed the same lesson routines based on an action planning cycle. Schools with high Aboriginal student intakes also employed AIEOs to provide additional support for numeracy.

### In secondary schools

Examples of successful approaches to the improvement of numeracy in secondary schools were:

- **Appointment of a numeracy coach**, reported by one school to improve student learning outcomes, reduce the number of students scoring at below expected levels, and to raise the school's ranking in mathematics benchmarks for the state
- **Use of online mathematics assessment tools**, provided by the state directorate, reported by one school to have a positive impact on student learning outcomes, as judged by a rise in that school's ranking against state mathematics benchmarks
- **Maths Academy**, offered by one school as a mathematics extension program to provide more opportunities and specialized instruction for aspiring students, to assist with mathematics competitions and to provide the opportunity to participate in a mathematics summer school.

### 2.3.7. Case Management Practices

As indicated previously in this section on findings, all primary and secondary case study schools used extensive data collection to manage student learning and behavior trajectories. There was a consistent trend toward whole of school management through centralized data collection and storage. This meant that information about students who were 'at risk' for any reason was able to be accessed by teachers when they needed it. Another notable feature of the case management process use by these schools was the frequent cyclical review of individual, whole class and year level data. Data on students was typically reviewed in four to five week cycles, to provide regular feedback to teachers and students. Schools also used data to monitor and support disengaged students as they moved from year to year. The case management systems used were either developed specifically for individual schools or linked to the case management system of the jurisdiction.

The case management process included data collection on literacy and numeracy, other academic learning, attendance, behaviour and any other information that influenced performance in these areas. There was a trend for schools to involve students in the case management process to help them understand information about, and to learn to manage, their own learning and behavior. Data were also shared with parents, particularly when students were deemed to be 'at risk', or had special needs that required an individualized management plan. Typical case management practices in schools in this study included the development of:

- o **individual case files** for each student, with details of performance in attendance, behavior and academic learning
- o **case files** for low achieving students or students identified as being at risk for literacy and numeracy that were used to develop individual learning plans
- o **class profiles** that were collected to identify class trends. Schools also evaluated trends at individual and year levels to monitor patterns of achievement as students moved through school. This type of information was used by schools to evaluate aspects of the curriculum and other school processes

- o **personal case management files** for senior school students to help them track and plan their pathway from Year 10 onwards. Students developed their personal goals and reviewed these at intervals to help evaluate their progress to further study or employment.

### 2.3.8. Leadership and engagement practice in schools

School leadership emerged as a major force behind the schools' successes in student engagement. The strength and persistence of school leadership was evident in principals' actions. For example, a number of the principals had issued non-negotiable invitations to staff for their involvement in the school's new initiatives, and changes in school culture had typically been forged over a period of five or more years.

The school leadership team usually comprised the principal and deputy, and sometimes one or more associate or assistant principals, who typically each had responsibility for at least one portfolio in the school. The team monitored policies, plans and performance data, prepared reports, motivated and collaborated with staff and kept them informed of operational requirements. These positions and their associated roles drew attention to the pattern of distributed leadership adopted by the principals to build school capacity to the address the many issues related to student academic engagement.

Examples of leadership positions in the 12 case study schools were:

- o **year leaders and assistant year leaders** to support class teachers to develop curriculum, monitor year level standards, track data on student progress, identify individual student needs and provide pastoral care
- o **literacy and numeracy leaders** to coordinate the development and implementation of curriculum and teaching practices across the school
- o **faculty area head teachers** to ensure common standards and inclusion of literacy support in the secondary school discipline areas

- **team leaders for sub-schools** to provide assistance to associate principals
- **projects leaders** to co-ordinate project submissions and approved projects
- **pastoral care leaders** (normally the deputy principal) to provide leadership to supporting care specialists, including special needs teachers, teacher aides, school chaplain, district psychologist or guidance officer, behavior officer, attendance officer and flexible learning unit staff
- **attendance officers** to oversee the collection of attendance figures, to make contact with parents or the district office, to report poor attendances, and to coordinate home visits by school staff or support agencies
- **marketing manager** to raise the school's profile in the community – an interesting innovation used by one government school principal to build good community relations and increase school numbers.

### Leadership Styles

The principals of the case study schools exhibited high levels of leadership ability and a commitment to building the capacity of leadership in their schools. They inspired their staff to find opportunities and strategies to support new initiatives to address the problems of student academic engagement in their schools. They also inspired students and fostered the belief among the school community that anyone can be a leader. All of the principals were motivated by research and evidence on student behavior and achievement. They were particularly motivated by the work of Hattie (2009) regarding the impact of teacher quality on student learning outcomes for schools.

The leaders of the case study schools were people of vision and motivators of change. They worked well with their staff and encouraged and supported them to think about students' needs in new ways. Leaders actively sought resources for their schools, built the capacity of teachers, improved curriculum delivery and improved school environments. This in turn created a new spirit of community within the school and the local neighbourhood.

The principals responded decisively to external demands and crises, including the publication of a poor NAPLAN performance by their school. In some cases the principals had held leadership positions for over 20 years. It was evident from their accounts that the national agenda and its implementation through state and territory reporting requirements had inspired them to change the focus of teaching and learning in their schools to evidence-based and student-centred approaches. While they worked proactively to nurture these changes with existing staff they also took action through recruitment criteria, and in some cases delivered non-negotiable directives to the school team.

Across the case study schools principals took the following actions to reshape school processes:

- **They set and promote the school's vision** for achievement and positive learning behaviour for all in the school community.
- **They aligned the goals** of the school plan with evidence-based information about student learning and behaviour needs.
- **They aligned school practices and curriculum developments** with the school plan.
- **They used cycles of evidence collection and review** to assess outcomes and review future planning.
- **They established structures and processes** through distributed leadership, sub-school structures, working groups and committees, with reporting requirements, to ensure the goals for the school's vision are implemented and reviewed.
- **They set up collaborative teams** of staff with clear expectations for students, teachers and the wider school community.

Importantly such leadership created a whole of school approach to practices in order to support student performance and transition through schooling.

The principals also acted in response to external demands and worked to improve the position of the school by building relationships with local business, government, community agencies, other schools (in Australia and overseas), and professional bodies at state, national and international level.

### Leadership from Jurisdiction and Non-government Authorities

The policies and initiatives of state education departments and independent school or CEO authorities provided valuable information and support to help principals develop and implement effective agendas for change in their respective schools. A particularly important factor was the quality of professional learning support given to school principals. This support helped principals to:

- develop a vision for their school
- build the strength of the leadership team
- improve support for students
- use evidence to improve targeted instruction
- build strong teams of staff
- obtain new resources to provide additional support to the school community.

The quality of the school leadership and the resources they were able to garner were important factors in determining the response of teaching teams to the NAPLAN data, and they were also instrumental in developing teachers' belief that they could change the learning outcomes for the students at their school.

### 2.3.9. Evidence-based Practices Relating to Policies

Each of the case study schools used evidence-based practices to inform the development of policies and practices related to student academic engagement. The case study reports show that the three key drivers for change were:

- the national agenda for schools
- the compelling research about teacher quality and student outcomes
- the performance indicators for student learning at their school.

These three drivers motivated school leadership teams to create a vision and a set of goals to address the problem of underperforming students. School leaders engaged their teaching teams in a problem-solving approach to respond to the needs for their school. This led to the development of a range of initiatives designed to have an impact on students' learning trajectories. These initiatives have been summarized for each school and are shown in the synergy map presented in each of the case study reports.

The schools' multifaceted approach necessitated the collection of multiple forms of data to report on student trajectories for learning and behavior. Schools used data to further inform the development of policies and practices. Examples of areas of school policy and practice that have been influenced by evidence collected were:

- the implementation of a **school-wide approach** to the monitoring of student learning and behaviour, in order to measure learning outcomes and identify areas of need
- **case management strategies** commencing on entry to primary and secondary schooling for the purpose of targeting student learning needs at transition
- behaviour and attendance management and reporting procedures to **improve pastoral care** and take some of the burden off classroom teachers, with a focus on individual, class and year level profiles and needs

- an **improved curriculum for literacy and numeracy**
- improved use of **assessment for literacy and numeracy to inform teaching practice**
- **pedagogy that is student-centred** and focused on problem-solving and higher order thinking
- **teacher professional learning that is collegial** and based on evidence
- **improved home-school partnerships**
- greater **integration between the school and community agencies** in order to improve support to students and their families.
- **parent/community or drop-in centres** on school grounds
- **community events** profiling school curricula achievements.

Other forms of partnering by schools with their communities included:

- **curriculum sharing with other schools** in the district to increase student choice
- **negotiated curriculum with community**
- the **teaching of local culture and languages**
- the provision of **translators for families** in the community
- **networking with local agencies**
- **liaison with local police**
- the involvement of **voluntary groups to support school-to-work opportunities**
- **marketing** within and beyond the school and its community
- **round table student-parent discussions.**

### 2.3.10. Integration of home, school and community

All schools promoted home, school and community partnerships. The principals recognised that without engaging the parent body in low ICSEA areas it was extremely difficult to engage the students in a long-term commitment to schooling. As well, schools partnered with their local communities in various ways to support the development of children from birth through to the completion of secondary schooling.

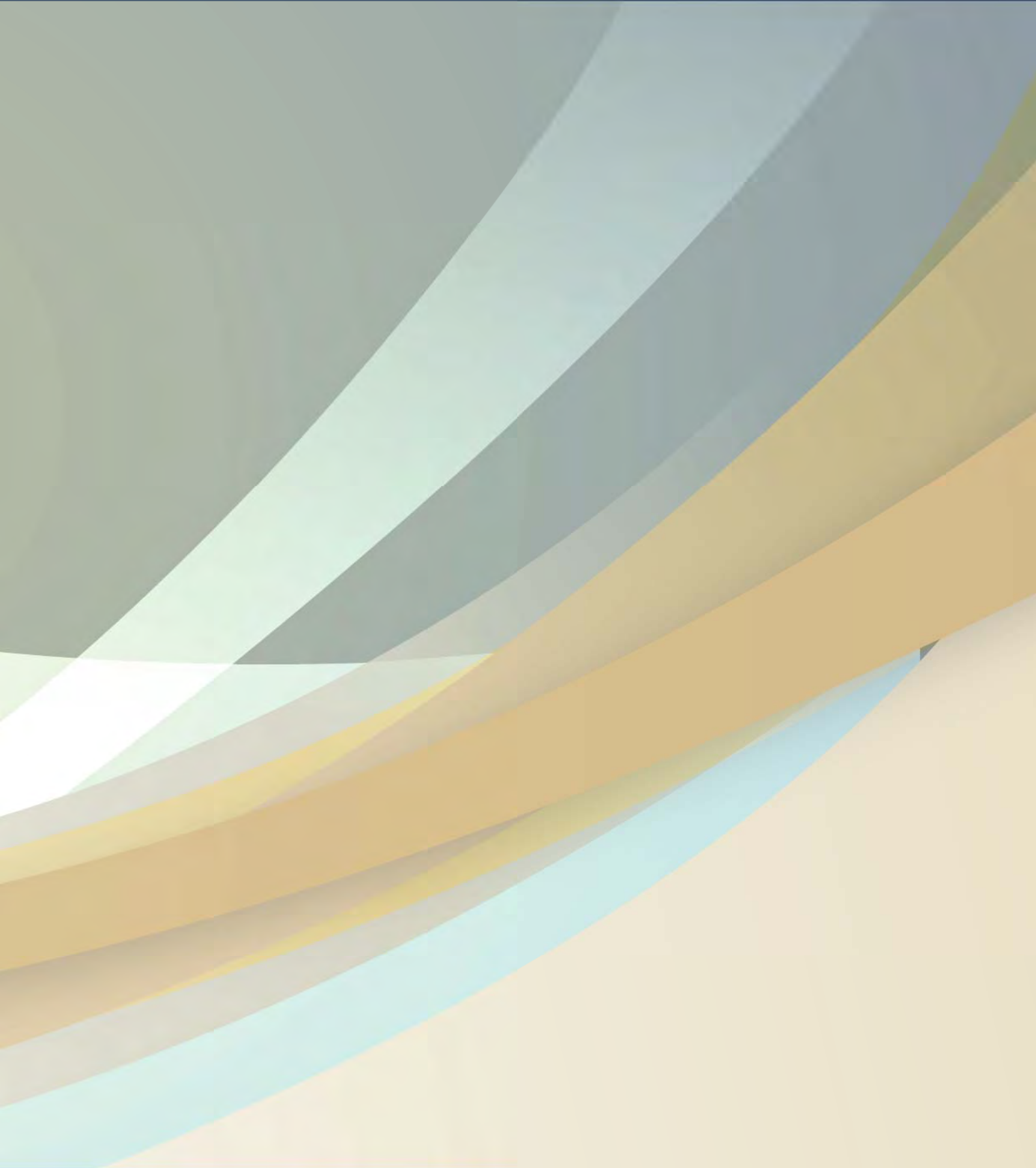
Relationships with families prior to school commenced with parental involvement in early years parent-child programs. The outcome of this early engagement was an engaged parent body and enhanced learning readiness of children prior to commencement at kindergarten and school – readiness that consists of increased motivation to attend regularly and improved pre-literacy and pre-numeracy competencies.

During the school years, partnerships with parents helped to engage them in their children's learning and to support regular attendance. Some common strategies used to help develop these partnerships were:

- **working with parents to increase attendance through attendance** or liaison officers
- **regular meetings with parents**, either one-to-one discussions about student performance or discussions with groups of parents about new initiatives, events they can join in or whole-school issues.



# Chapter 3 - Summary





The case study schools are but a very small sample of schools in Australia that score in the bottom half of the ICSEA scale – a sample that has been selected because of the schools' exceptional work in lifting the levels of their students' academic engagement and achievement. Their successes have not come easily; collectively, the schools reflect the diversity and complexity of educational challenges within Australian schooling. The research team firmly believes, however, that other schools within the same band on the ICSEA scale can achieve similar improvements through the application of the same kinds of initiatives as those taken in the case study schools. These initiatives are therefore summarized below.

A key feature of the case study schools was the whole of school approach to student academic engagement that encompassed student learning, behaviour and well-being. Although excellent behaviour management practices were embedded in school processes they were not the platform on which student academic engagement initiatives were based. The focus in these schools was on fostering positive learning outcomes for all students. By taking this approach it reduced the likelihood that students could fall into patterns of unproductive learning behaviour. Overall, the response of these schools to their students was inclusive, proactive and preventative. In effect the schools created a safety net for students and prevented their learning needs from being overlooked.

The whole of school approach involved data collection across classes and year levels that was then used for regular review, planning and ongoing case management. Teachers shared information on students to build case management plans and assist students to develop personal learning trajectories for their time at school.

The driving force for this change at school level was the leadership of principals and their vision for a whole of school focus on productive learning behaviours. Leadership responsibilities were also well distributed among deputy, assistant or associate principals and other staff, and there was a strong emphasis on the professional development of staff to build their capacity to meet students' needs. This professional development was collegial, targeted, evidenced-based, and focused on skills for differentiated teaching.

School change at this level is not possible without external funding and support. While the schools' activities were aligned with the targets and initiatives of state and territory education departments, the case studies also demonstrate that schools need access to resources to develop and sustain new initiatives without impacting on the normal school budget. School leaders in the case study schools were proactive and strategic in accessing such resources in order to be able to take initiatives and build capacity in their schools.

However they also acknowledged that these resources and initiatives needed to be embedded in the learning culture of the school, and that this required investment in improving the capacity of teachers as well. This is especially the case given that the capacity for schools to sustain these new initiatives and the student academic engagement that flows from this is likely to be limited when current levels of special initiative funding are no longer available to these schools.

It is also important to note that the effort put in by teachers can take its toll. The literature clearly demonstrates that schools of high need are working at capacity and that high needs schools are more likely to have a higher rate of teacher attrition and loss of knowledge (Angus et al., 2007). In the case study schools class teachers were well-supported by other staff in the work of meeting the learning needs of their students, and they were further supported by other staff who were able to attend to students' social needs. Notwithstanding this, the teachers in the case study schools were often stretched to capacity. It needs to be recognized that schools will not be able to maintain a stable complement of staff, and the institutional knowledge and culture they carry with them, if demands on teachers are stretched beyond reasonable limits.

If like schools are to emulate the success of the case study schools, four areas in particular that warrant critical consideration are:

- Leadership
- teacher quality
- resources
- sustainability.

## 3.1 Leadership

The case studies have demonstrated the pivotal role of leadership in the necessary change processes to improve student academic engagement in low ICSEA schools. Despite the differences in student cohort, school context and culture, leadership needs to do the following:

- provide overall **strategic** and effective leadership
- pay vigilant attention to and **act upon student data**, both school or state-generated and NAPLAN
- institute well-coordinated **student case management** systems
- develop **whole of school reviewing and planning** mechanisms
- foster **strong community engagement**
- encourage innovation and **leadership in staff**
- mandate **targeted professional learning**
- develop **professional learning communities for teachers**
- target **recruitment of staff who are aligned with the school's goals**
- **access support** through district and jurisdictional offices
- strategically **target funding sources**.

## 3.2 Teacher Quality

Teacher quality reflects the presence of teacher skills and attitudes that encourage student participation and the development of competence. In low ICSEA schools it is essential that teachers develop the capacity to work in a respectful and inclusive ways with student and parent bodies. Schools need to build teacher capacity to use sophisticated data management and monitoring systems that enable them to support the development of appropriate student learning trajectories.

Teachers need a deep understanding of strategies for differentiated and explicit teaching, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Collegial relationships amongst teachers are essential to support their involvement in a whole of school approach to teaching and learning. Of equal importance is their capacity to share their teaching and learning responsibilities by working in teams focused on the individual needs of their students in relation to the learning needs of the wider school community. Teachers need to be able to take a broad perspective, beyond their classroom, when supporting the learning needs of students.

The case studies demonstrate that student centered learning communities require teachers to share responsibility for planning, for developing student centered pedagogy and for reviewing data to ensure that the learning trajectories of all students are maintained. This requires teachers to take on a professional learning journey in parallel with their students.

## 3.3 Resources

Resources are needed to continue to build the professional learning capacities of teachers and school leaders. The steps and processes involved in stimulating the necessary change processes and professional development are beyond the standard budget of most low ICSEA schools. The special programs developed by these schools to address the high level of student need required more intensive staffing, specialist knowledge, additional time for diagnostic assessment and the capacity to work with students using responsive pedagogical models. Teachers were only able to build their capacity to address their professional needs in these areas when their school leaders had been able to access funding through external sources and when they worked in partnerships with other agencies.

In order to enable teachers to develop the necessary sophisticated diagnostic and monitoring skills they must have access to valid and reliable measurement instruments that can be used across curriculum. Most teachers also require training in using of such instruments, in managing the data and in understanding its implications for learning. In addition, school leaders need to develop the capacity of school staff to work with a whole of school data management system to track students and to support regular, monthly reviews of student data.

The study identified a specific need for diagnostic tools for literacy and numeracy. This was a particular need in secondary schools where there is a dearth of any measurement tools for literacy and numeracy at national, jurisdictional or school levels. The lack of measurement tools impedes the capacity of teachers to monitor secondary students' learning in these areas across disciplines. Lack of shared knowledge about student literacy and numeracy needs across the curriculum impedes the capacity of secondary teachers to contribute to a whole of school approach to teaching and learning.

Examples of appropriate types of professional development in case study schools included:

- ICT knowledge for curriculum, flexible teaching and data management
- strategies to support use of higher order learning tasks
- SMART NAPLAN planning
- National Partnerships Leadership training
- literacy and numeracy professional learning with specialists and coaches
- case management writing
- culture and pastoral care sessions
- cultural awareness professional development
- the Positive Behavior for Learning (PBL) program
- the restorative justice approach to behaviour management
- the Dare to Lead program.

## 3.4 Sustainability


Successful schools have used external resources to build the capacity and quality of their teachers and leaders, and have embedded the initiatives within school practices. The case studies indicate that continued external funding to sustain the initiatives necessary to support the changes in student academic engagement is unlikely. Therefore it is critical for schools to find mechanisms to embed the changes within the capacity of staff and leaders to sustain the improved learning outcomes.

The research team holds some concerns about the capacity of schools to fully maintain the integrity of the initiatives over a period time. This poses a series of challenges for the schools. The first is the natural staff and leadership turnover and subsequent loss of commitment and the new knowledges that have developed with the support of external funding and expertise. The second is the uncertainty of the availability of external funding with changes in jurisdictional and national funding sources, and in their capacity to support the necessary initiatives. The third is the changing nature of challenges in low ICSEA schools that occur through changes in community needs and contexts. Schools such as these need ongoing and sustained support to address the natural cycles of change.



# Chapter 4 - Conclusions and Key Findings





This study examined a sample of low ICSEA schools from across Australia. It was conducted just three years after the Commonwealth Government established its 'Education Revolution' for Australian schools and established the Smarter Schools National Partnerships reform agenda. A review of the targets and initiatives that have been instituted by State and Territory Departments of Education was also undertaken to provide the broader contextual framework for the study. State and Territory Departments all require schools to monitor and report on aspects of student attendance, student performance and quality of schooling in line with the national agenda.

This study of the 12 low ICSEA schools from all Australian jurisdictions has provided examples of the response of schools to the new government agenda. The case study schools have all aligned school processes and targets with the new national goals. They have used a synergy of strategies through a whole of school approach to impact positively on outcomes for students. A case management approach has built a school culture based on the belief that all students could achieve and improve their behaviour and learning. This school culture reflected extensive use of data and shared information, and the monitoring of student learning trajectories has ensured that teachers are very aware when any one student underperforms.

## Key Findings

The six most important overall findings from the case study schools were as follows:

1. Each of the 12 schools demonstrated that their success in improving student academic engagement in schools was due to the **synergy of the special initiatives** they undertook. These initiatives were directly contributing to the successful implementation of the school plan.
2. Achieving such synergy is dependent on **insightful and effective school leadership** working to a distributed leadership model.
3. NAPLAN has made a major impact on improving engagement in these schools by drawing attention to the need to **monitor and review student performance and work** within evidenced base practice.
4. The National Partnership program has also had a major impact, assisting these schools to improve student academic engagement through **the development and implementation of targeted initiatives**.
5. All successful schools have used a whole of **school data management approach** to improve student performance in literacy, numeracy and productive behaviours and implemented effective case management practices to monitor the learning trajectories of students. The school response has been inclusive, proactive and focused on preventative measures, thus creating a safety net for students to ensure they were not overlooked by teachers.
6. There have been **common practices** in all successful schools across the areas of:
  - leadership
  - learning culture
  - curriculum and pedagogy
  - management of resources
  - community partnerships
  - collegial professional learning

Schools worked to embed these practices in their processes to ensure sustainability.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided for consideration at a national level:

### Recommendation 1:

Consideration is given as to whether further action is required at a national and jurisdictional level.

### Recommendation 2:

A link to the final report be uploaded onto relevant national and jurisdictional websites.



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# Appendices



# Appendix 1 – Case Study Reports

## Case Study Schools

Twelve case study schools were selected to illustrate the range of initiatives and strategies that were implemented by schools to improve the academic engagement of their students. These case studies are presented in the next section as exemplars of practice.

## Case study school index

### Case Study 1

- Secondary school
- School population 545
- Non-metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 2

- Secondary school
- School population 156
- Non metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 3

- Secondary school
- School population 998
- Metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 4

- Primary school
- School population 819
- Metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 5

- Secondary school
- School population 550
- Metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 6

- Primary school
- School population 129: 97% Aboriginal
- Non-metropolitan: very remote
- Public school

### Case Study 7

- Primary school
- School population 382
- Non metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 8

- Primary school
- School population 209
- Non-metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 9

- Secondary School
- School population 1191:97% LBOTE
- Metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 10

- Primary school
- School population 797:91% LBOTE
- Metropolitan
- Public school

### Case Study 11

- Primary school
- School population 145:98% LBOTE
- Metropolitan
- Catholic school

### Case Study 12

- Primary school
- School population
- Metropolitan
- Independent school

# Case Study 1:

## Non-Metropolitan Secondary School

- **Combined primary and secondary school**
- **School population 545**
- **Non-metropolitan**
- **Public school**

### Background

Case Study School 1 took a whole-community focus on engaging learners. This was a depressed rural community, with high unemployment, a high proportion of young single parents, and most parents in the school with limited educational qualifications. Thus students had few opportunities for apprenticeships or work. Five years ago, the school was faced with challenges in engaging students from the early years through to Year 10, most of whom had limited literacy and numeracy skills and were struggling with the curriculum. Although the professional staff was concerned with this situation, they rationalized that the poor student performance was an outcome of the socioeconomic background of the student body. The trigger for change was the 2005 National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results for the school, indicating the need for a radical change in the teaching and learning culture of the school, especially to improve literacy and numeracy levels for all students. Then the public release of data about poor NAPLAN performance in 2008 with the increased public accountability for learning outcomes, confirmed the need to develop strategic long-term plans to improve literacy for all years.

In response to these data, the principal developed a five-year strategic plan to take a whole-school approach to improving literacy. The new focus placed the students at the centre of the learning and drew on leadership and collaboration to improve teacher practice through a model of literacy leadership and community partnership. Feedback from student and parent surveys during and after the implementation of the five-year plan indicated satisfaction with the school culture. The school is a combined primary and secondary school and enrolls approximately 545 students aged from four years to 17 years. It has 12% Aboriginal and 2% first-language-other-than-English (LBOTE) students. The ICSEA is low at 937, a decrease of 53 points since 2009. The change in ICSEA is attributed to an increase in the bottom quartile and a decrease in the next three quarters. These changes are likely to be related to the combined effects of the

closing of local industries, the downturn in tourism due to the depressed economy in the area over the last decade, the gradual closure of local industries and businesses and the recent floods, all of which decimated the employment opportunities within the district. Most families in the intake area for this school are second and third generation unemployed. There was a high level of transience in the student body, largely attributed to the lack of employment and the seasonal nature of employment opportunities within the area.

The school structure comprised the following groupings:

- birth to four years
- kindergarten to Year 2
- Year 3 to Year 5
- Year 6 to Year 8 (middle school)
- Year 9 to Year 11 (senior school)

The senior school was in transition mode, adjusting to the new legislation on raising the school leaving age (the National Youth Participation Requirement). This legislation indicated the school's need to engage senior students in ongoing education or training. Prior to 2010, students seeking tertiary entrance requirements had to board and attend school at the nearest large city. Although boarding facilities were available for these students, the arrangement did not have a high rate of retention; many of these students became homesick or did not have the maturity to live independently.

The School Improvement report for 2007-2009 indicated concern about student attendance and retention. There had been little variation in the attendance record for the previous three years, and the 2010 data showed an attendance rate of 91%, indicating an improvement over the last five years. The school continued to work hard to improve this attendance rate through strengthening community partnerships and encouraging student and parent engagement in the school community. For some students within this depressed community, high levels of absenteeism had become an accepted pattern of behavior, and the lack of local employment and training opportunities for school leavers was an ongoing challenge.

A successful collaborative tender with a nearby district high school for Commonwealth funded trade and training centre is expected to assist the school in improving the retention of senior students in education and training. The Centre offered school certificate of education subjects (for successful completion of schooling), pre-tertiary subjects and VET, such as: automotive studies, IT, community services (aged care, youth, children's services), retail, hospitality, general construction, tourism, business workplace skills, and hairdressing.

The NAPLAN results for 2008-10 showed improvement across the school in most areas of literacy. Although the gains for reading and writing diminished in 2009, the 2010 data showed improvement in reading in Years 5, 7 and 9, and the results for Year 3 held firm from 2009. Further, results for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (including results for Aboriginal students) were above those of similar schools (with Year 5 results well above similar schools) and comparable with the national average. It seems reasonable to attribute the improvement in literacy across the school to the five-year leadership focus on literacy pedagogy.

This was a National Partnership school, which drew on resources and leadership in both the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socioeconomic Status School Communities and the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy programs. The school was also a member of the Federation of Schools project. Implicit within these national programs, and supported by state initiatives, was a comprehensive professional learning (PL) program that informed the changes made in school leadership for principals. This initiative allowed the principal of the school to take a data/research-informed perspective of change models, and to work with colleagues to explore potential leadership structures and change-management models. This research-rich PL model was then made available to the leadership team within the school and, through these pivotal team leaders, to the whole school staff. A key leadership change was to appoint a senior leader (equivalent to an assistant principal) for literacy pedagogy. This new leader was responsible for developing and implementing a collaborative team-teaching approach to data-informed teaching across the whole school. Thus the required changes in pedagogy were supported by:

- o appropriate PL opportunities for all staff
- o political awareness of available funding

- o aligned programs on a national, state and regional basis
- o networking with colleagues
- o drawing on community support, and
- o finessing school-based resources.

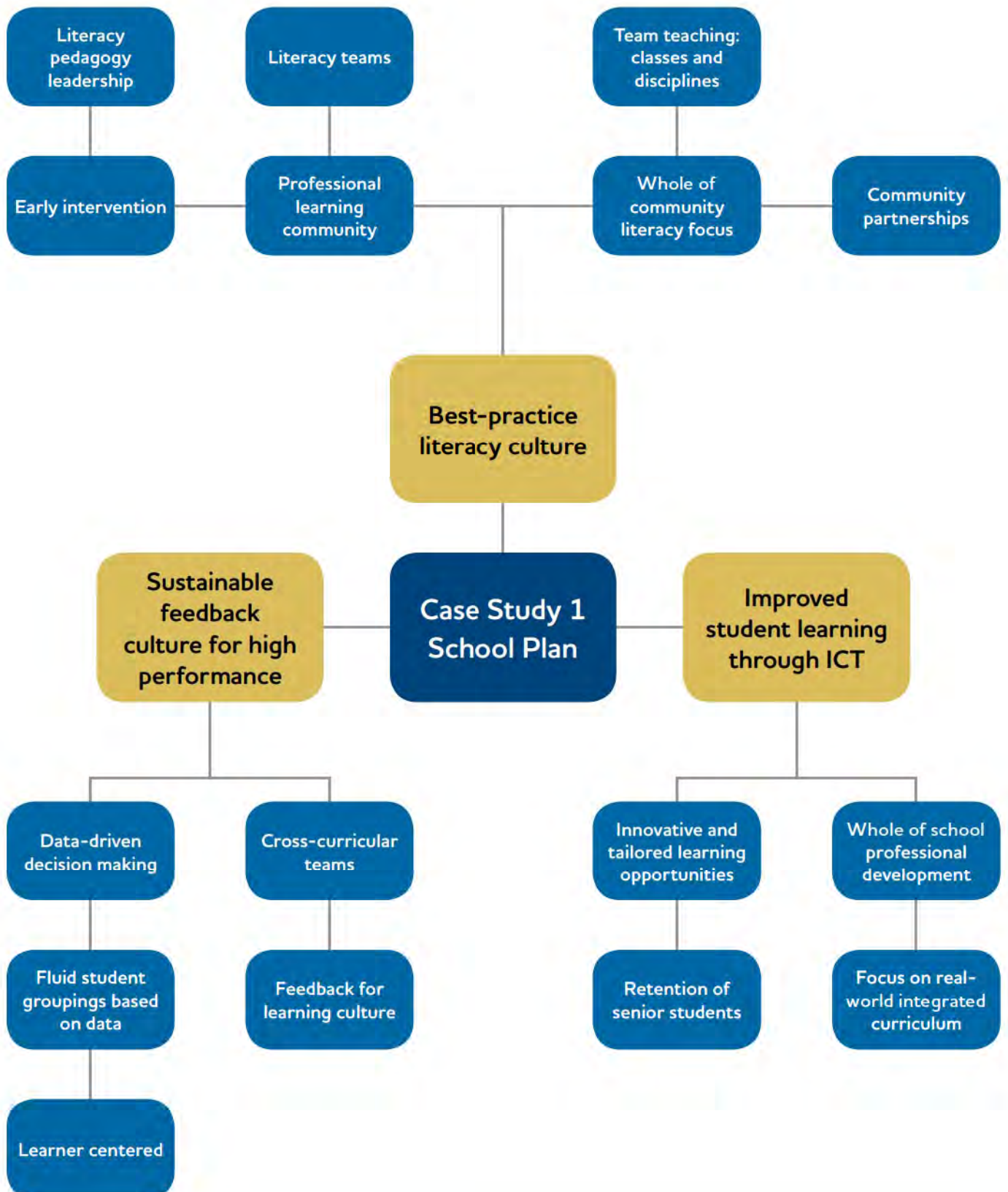
The focus on literacy was embedded within broad community partnerships that supported a comprehensive and inclusive community learning community. The goal was to improve literacy levels for students, based on improved student engagement with the school and the learning opportunities it provided. And the school recognized that the key to maximizing student engagement was parent and community engagement in the learning environment. Further, to maximize these learning opportunities for students, the learning and teaching needed to be informed by rigorous and regular data collection.

### Overall approach to engagement

The principal's understanding of the local context of the school and its stakeholders enabled him to align the school plan with the broader needs of the community. The plan adopted by this school created strong links between the school and the community, and by doing so engaged parents and their children from birth to post-secondary schooling. The school was proud of its capacity to meet individual learning needs within a safe and supportive school community

The rationale for the limited number of school goals in the School Improvement Plan was to harness maximum impact for staff PL. The message given was that good teachers could do better when their combined energies were focused in the same direction. The school plan articulated three key strategies that underpin the whole-school focus on improving student academic engagement: best practice literacy culture; sustainable feedback culture for high performance; improved student learning through ICT– as articulated in the synergy map presented on the opposite page.

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Best-practice literacy culture

The school focus for the last five years had been on developing a best-practice literacy culture, informed by research and embedded within a culture of data-informed decision making. Fundamental to the development of this culture was the need to improve teachers' capacity to work within such a culture. This best-practice literacy culture was supported by, and inclusive of, a strong professional learning community.

#### Structured whole-school literacy pedagogy leadership

As stated above, a senior leadership position (equivalent to an assistant principal) was created: a full-time literacy pedagogy leader. Resourcing of the position was through internal finessing of staffing, strategic use of the resources available through national and state programs, and school PL monies. This role involved:

- high-level, ongoing professional learning (for the leader)
- developing literacy teams within and across disciplines
- PL for all staff
- developing and monitoring a culture of data-informed tracking of student achievement and engagement

### Literacy Teams

Literacy teams worked in cycles of five weeks: four weeks of explicit teaching and one week for assessment and regrouping according to the data. Each team was mentored and supported by the literacy pedagogical leader. Membership of teams was non-negotiable. There was some resistance from staff, especially those in secondary disciplines not accustomed to explicit teaching of literacy, but the strong culture of PL within a professional learning community and data-informed team teaching overcame most resistance. The induction of new staff was a parallel challenge, but it was easier to absorb new staff into an existing culture than to change the culture for resistant staff.

The composition of the eight literacy teams was:

- two teachers
- two teacher aides
- children divided into eight groups to allow individual and explicit teaching

Individual learning goals were set for each child, and each change of grouping included a change of teacher for each cycle to ensure even the low achievers had a sense of changing groups to protect them from a sense of failure. Progress was made transparent to the children by sharing the learning goals and the diagnostic test outcomes with the children and their parents.

The literacy leadership structure, including the extra staff necessary for implementation of this strategy, was funded through a combination of resources available through programs such as Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar and Sustained Reading Program.

### Team Teaching Across and Within Disciplines

A leadership structure of dynamic and knowledgeable team leaders underpinned the whole-school teaching and learning structure.

The leadership structure comprised:

- the principal
- three assistant principals plus the literacy pedagogical leader
- four team leaders (core teams included up to five teachers) who took a leadership role with a sub-school group as well as a whole-school portfolio:
- K-Year 5 – with the engagement portfolio
- Years 6-10 – with the numeracy portfolio
- Years 9-12 – with the special needs portfolio
- portfolio for students with high needs
- portfolio for students with other needs (such as behaviour management)

## Professional Learning Community

The strategic development of a sophisticated suite of partnerships (educational, business, parent and professional) provided the school with an engaged and informed professional learning community:

- stakeholders in the community
- parents and ex-students
- networks with nearby secondary and primary schools
- national professional networks
- PL networks
- potential employers
- professional networks for the principal (e.g. Federation of Schools)
- universities and researchers

The school resourced these networks through membership in various state and national projects, and the goodwill of local community members. The Commonwealth funded trade and training centre allowed the opportunity for community members (especially those qualified in a trade) to undertake Certificate III and IV training and so became part of the teaching team within the new trade and training centre. An example of the targeted professional learning used to underpin the whole school literacy focus was the mandated First Steps Reading and Writing training for all K-8 teachers in the school. This training fell under the responsibility of the Literacy Pedagogical Leader.

## Community Partnerships

The school worked with the community to maximize student engagement and real-world learning opportunities. Consistent with the strategic access to resources outlined in other sections of this case study, National Partnerships funding was used as a resource. Community partnerships with Aboriginal community members were developed and sustained through the targeted assistance for Aboriginals, that included the Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) program. The school was also involved in the Dare to Lead program.

Other established community partnerships included:

- the local business community, who provided workplace learning opportunities and employment to school leavers whenever possible
- NEET Centre collaborators (teaching colleagues, community members and qualified tradesmen)
- community health professionals who supported the Launching into Learning initiative
- strong support from the parent association

## Early Intervention

The school established a Child and Family Centre on campus to cater for birth to four-year-old children. This initiative was resourced through the recent state-based Launching into Learning program, in partnership with the community. The Centre was established two years ago to build links with potential parents and students, and to develop early intervention literacy and school readiness strategies. The Smith Family 'Let's Read' program was used, along with shared information about nutrition and health. A trained early childhood teacher ran the program assisted by a teacher's aide. Children and mothers were invited to attend a 1.5-hour program each week of age-appropriate games and pre-reading activities. The following three groupings attended on separate days:

- birth – 18 months
- 18 months – three years
- pre-primary

Children about to commence school were encouraged to join in with the kindergarten group for a half day each week – initially with their parent present, later without. This transition to school was very successful both for engaging the parents (predominantly young single mothers) in the school community and for enhancing school readiness and identification of learning needs for the young children. Evidence of this success was the increased scores in the school readiness (Kindergarten) measures. Thus tracking mechanisms for data-informed decisions and feedback culture began three years before these children attended school full time.



The social support inherent in this program enhanced parent engagement with the school.

## Whole-Community Literacy Focus

A key strategy for improving student engagement was working with the whole community in partnerships and in learning opportunities. For example, the school offered 'catch-up' literacy to interested ex-students in conjunction with the new Trade and Training Centre.

## 2. Sustainable Feedback Culture for High Performance

The second of the three school goals was the development of a sustainable feedback culture to enable high performance. This required time, collegiality and PL for the whole staff. Development of this culture was aligned with the move to public accountability for learning through measures such as NAPLAN. Staff participation in this culture was non-negotiable but finessed through extensive team leadership and collaborative team building. The outcome of the past five years was a whole-school culture of data-driven decision making.

### Learner at the Centre

The feedback culture was rationalised on the premise that the learner is the centre of the school. Within the professional learning community underpinning this school, each student and each staff member was a critical learner – this being the strategic priority of developing a feedback culture for high performance in the environment. Developing a best-practice literacy culture was dependent on teachers having an informed position: through data on their students' and their own performance, and through quality research.

### Data-Driven Decision-Making

The comprehensive data sets monitored and collected by the school included data on learning, attendance, retention, destination after leaving the school, and behaviour management. Targets set for improving student performance in literacy and numeracy were achieved, as evidenced in the most recent NAPLAN data. Since the school did not have any Year 12 students who had sat tertiary entrance examinations, there was no Year 12 data. However, staff did track ex-students who left at the end of Year 10 to undertake tertiary entrance

studies at schools in larger, urban schools. These students were tracked throughout their time at the other school. However, the system-based tracking mechanisms did not fully represent students' level of engagement at the school, or reflect the problematic expectation for senior students to continue their education elsewhere. It was hoped that the new Trade and Training Centre would in part address the problem of low levels of school completions reflected in the system-level data.

Data and reports referred to (and evidenced) during the interview included:

- o school performance report for 2010
- o NAPLAN for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9
- o student retention data and school tracking data for Year 10 students who left for other learning opportunities
- o Kinder Check data
- o attendance data
- o behaviour management data
- o student attitudes to school
- o parent opinion survey
- o staff opinion survey

The data related to the real-time pre-post testing data used throughout the school was stored on the school data management system, but handled by staff at a year-group and team level. This allowed a centralized tracking system for each child at system, school and class levels.

### Feedback for learning culture

Significant collaborative work was undertaken by the leadership team with their staff to develop acceptance of the culture of feedback. Following Hattie (1990) the school collected and considered feedback for teaching and learning from:

- o teacher to teacher
- o teacher to student
- o student to student
- o student to teacher
- o parent to school

There was some resistance by staff to this feedback culture because it challenged their beliefs and philosophy of teaching. However, the focused professional learning and collegial teamwork to improve teacher pedagogy, along with the mandated culture within the school, eased most of this resistance.

### Fluid Groupings Based on Data

Throughout the school there was an established culture of fluid groupings based on data. This fluidity could be in four-week cycles, or in slightly longer cycles with older students. However, the framework remained the same: pre-testing, explicit teaching, formative feedback, post-testing, consideration of the data, regrouping of students according to the data. These flexible groupings allowed for individual needs to be catered for. With their individualized learning needs met, students were more comfortable with their learning environment and more engaged with their learning. The fluidity of groupings also induced fluidity for teachers, breaking down the previous culture of 'my students' in 'my class'. This enhanced the development of a whole-school culture.

### Cross-Curricular Teams

The structure of the team teaching for a particular unit of work was partly dependant on the student grouping and the team decision on the appropriate pedagogy for the learning. This could take the form of team teaching (with two or three teachers, a lead teacher and a support teacher) or small-group teaching (with one teacher per group). An outcome of the explicit teaching focus through data-informed grouping, combined with the use of integrated curriculum to provide authenticity to the learning product, was the development of cross-curricular teams – especially in secondary school, where the challenge to engage students was greatest.

## 3. Improved Student Learning Through ICT

The learning and teaching structures within the school required a secure and comprehensive digital data management system that was accessible to all staff. Various data forms were collected and considered in this data feedback culture, including video and audio data. Parallel to providing this data access, ICT was used to open the horizons of the students, who had limited opportunities for travel to capital cities around Australia.

### Focus on Real-World Integrated Curriculum

The purpose of teams was to develop, wherever possible, real-world learning products to better engage primary and secondary students in their learning. This focus on the real world was made possible through ICT products, such as student newsletters, Studies of Society and Environment research projects planning international connections, Solar Car challenges, Business Week, and a Careers Expo.

### Social Networking

Because the school was in such an isolated community, the intention was to draw on the social networking potential of ICT to build collaborative partnerships with other schools, students and curricula. Social networking functions provided opportunities for both staff and students. Staff used it to maintain professional networks, and students to follow through with their online teaching and learning and curriculum initiatives.

### Innovative and Tailored Learning Opportunities

The team structure within the school allowed great flexibility in teaching and learning (including time tabling), such that wherever possible curriculum was integrated across at least three learning areas. An outcome of this flexibility was increased intellectual rigour in curriculum; the team members were both supportive of each other and accountable to each other. Furthermore, the small group team structure provided more opportunities for strong relationships to build between students and staff, strengthening students' engagement with the school and increasing their retention. Through these relationships, the students' tailored learning needs were identified and activated, often through online learning opportunities. For example, in some primary school classes students rotated through a suite of targeted tasks that accommodated different learning styles, including ICT-supported activities.

Distance from other schools was not seen as a limiting factor in developing learning partnerships, with opportunities for collaborative and engaging activities with other schools enabled through Skype, video-conferencing, email and chat lines. Another example of tailoring of learning opportunities through ICT opportunities was the Future Pathways unit run for Year

10 students, in which they considered the alignment of their aspirations, academic record, interests, and opportunities available within the community.

## Whole-School PL

There was a strong emphasis in the school on collegial PL – for example to ensure that all staff had the necessary skills and confidence to participate in the complex digital data storage underpinning the feedback culture within the school. The ICT PL for staff was predominantly done onsite, with team and individual help targeted to the specific needs of the various teams. Leaders in the ICT and assessment portfolios within the school had opportunities for more specialised PL at system and district seminars. Online support was a critical element of the whole-school program for teachers.

## Retention of Senior Students

Providing curriculum and specialist teaching for the small number of students who remained at the school for Year 11 was a challenge within the staffing formula. Extended English and Mathematics and Science for Year 11 were built into current staffing resources, but resources for teaching any other subjects at Year 11 level were limited. However, access to real-time online teaching through ICT provided students with a range of subjects at the appropriate level. And the new Trade and Training Centre used technology appropriate to training for Certificate III and IV in several trades.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 1 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school used the following data sources for monitoring and planning:

- attendance, retention and destination data
- school performance report for 2010
- NAPLAN Years 3, 5, 7 and 9
- student retention data and school tracking data for Year 10 students who left for other learning opportunities
- Kinder Check data
- attendance data
- behaviour management data
- student attitudes to school
- parent opinion survey
- staff opinion survey

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

A senior leadership position for a full time literacy pedagogy leader was created to co-ordinate a whole of school literacy culture.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

Case management was evidenced at the teacher/student level, academic team level and the whole-school level. Leadership roles to support management at whole-school level included portfolio positions for student engagement, special needs, high level needs, and behaviour management. Responsibilities within these portfolio positions included managing a whole-school, evidence-based approach, and mentoring staff in appropriate case management approaches.

PL and performance management strategies ensured ongoing critical reflection on identification, management and monitoring strategies on a whole-school basis.

#### 4. Leadership

The school's strategic plan places the student at the centre of the learning. A distributed leadership model, with a clearly articulated focus on student learning and welfare, was established.

#### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

The feedback culture for high performance involved sophisticated use of school-wide data on students to target students' individual learning needs. Staff drew on school-wide data to allow students, parents and themselves to make evidence-based decisions about students' learning behaviours. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for decisions about their learning pathways.

#### 6. Whole-school approaches

The whole-school focus on developing a best-practice literacy culture was articulated in the School Plan and within a feedback culture. The whole-community approach to learning was acknowledged as the vehicle through which this outcome could be achieved, providing the basis for embedding the School Plan within the broader needs of the community. The school and community learning culture provided feedback for teaching and learning from:

- teacher to teacher
- teacher to student
- student to student
- student to teacher
- parent to school

#### 7. Home/school/community

The strategic development of a sophisticated suite of partnerships within the educational, business, parent and professional community connected the school into an engaged and informed professional learning community. (A list of elements of the extended professional learning community are provided in Engagement Initiative number 1).

#### 8. Resources

The school leadership team identified the need for information and strategies to support:

- summative practices
- diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy for students in secondary school
- sophisticated ICT pedagogical practices, especially for working with senior students
- working within cross-curricular and cross-year groupings
- developing a young adult learning environment for the senior students
- better identification and referral for productive and unproductive behaviours

#### 9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available

Valid and reliable diagnostic measures were needed for literacy and numeracy, attendance and retention, destination data, higher order learning, and critical thinking. These instruments were particularly required for measuring and monitoring academic achievement of secondary students.

#### 10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time

Comprehensive, individualized case-management practices allowed staff to make evidence-based decisions in monitoring academic engagement, vocational and aspiration alignment, and behaviour of each student. The open and comprehensive nature of the case study management, combined with the regular, cyclical nature of diagnostic assessment practices across the school, maximized the staff's identification and management of students 'at risk'.

## 11. Professional required for teachers and school leaders

To sustain the culture of achievement in the school community, staff were required to undertake development in

- o distributed and focused leadership within the school community
- o literacy and numeracy pedagogy
- o early intervention
- o use of ICT for monitoring student academic engagement
- o use of ICT to expand the life and learning experiences of senior students
- o developing and working within strategic community partnerships

## 12. Sustainability of initiatives

The key factors impacting on the sustainability of the initiatives undertaken within this school were:

- o the long-term, whole-school and community focus on engaging in learning to improve literacy across the community
- o the whole-school focus on the student at the centre of the learning
- o the embedded and distributed leadership culture drawing on the expertise of existing staff, and the targeted senior leadership position (literacy pedagogy leader) aligned with the school plan
- o the establishment of a professional learning community engaging staff in learning with their peers, through PL and community partnerships
- o the development of an ICT-supported data-feedback culture for high performance

The sustainability of the school initiatives was evident in data on attendance, retention, engagement, and academic achievement (NAPLAN literacy data).

## Conclusion

This case study is an example of a school that targeted the whole-of-life learning needs within its community to provide whole-community engagement in literacy learning. After a five-year strategic focus on structured literacy leadership in pedagogy and building strong community partnerships, the school's 2011 NAPLAN literacy data showed there had been an increase in achievement to parity with similar schools and the National data. A key strategy to improve the literacy levels across the school was the development of strong partnership links with the broader community, and enhanced engagement of families and their children in the local school.

# Case Study 2:

## Small Non-Metropolitan Secondary School

- **Secondary school**
- **School population 156**
- **Non metropolitan**
- **Public school**

### Background

Case Study 2 examines a small rural secondary school for students who are living in an isolated town and farming community. The school is the only secondary college in the shire, located 45 minutes away from a rural city with a university.

During the past seven years the school has focused on improving the outcomes for its students. School survey data in 2004 showed that student, parent and staff satisfaction were all below the state average, so a concerted effort was made to improve student and staff wellbeing, student citizenship, and student pathways beyond schooling. Senior people at the school believe these efforts have been successful in raising students' learning outcomes and creating a greater sense of purpose for the school. Selection processes for a new principal, assistant principal and other teaching staff during this time have focused on appointing people with the personal and professional attributes needed to support the school's agenda.

Changes made to improve the school climate and student engagement include:

- more attention to student transition into and out of school
- collection of data to aid student tracking
- individualised student learning pathways
- an increased focus on student citizenship

Relationships with small businesses and vocational education providers have been developed to provide better pathways for students in the senior years. For example, the school has provided more subject choices to students completing Year 12, and more support for students moving into employment, vocational and higher education. The leadership team now track the destination of every student leaving the school. Not surprisingly, these measures have increased parent satisfaction with the school over the past four years. The leadership team claims that "happy teachers make for happy students and happy parents".

Notwithstanding the improvements, the school faces several challenges in engaging students and increasing their commitment to schooling. It seems that the broader community has been more concerned with student pathways to employment than to further study. Location of a large state prison nearby has brought in families who are transitory, and who have presented with a range of difficulties. The small school size has limited capacity to provide choices for students – especially those wishing to complete Year 12.

A school-within-school focus has been used to support the needs of students in Years 7 – 9 and 10 – 12. Students moving into Year 7 have been provided with a transition program and a youth engagement program when they move into Years 8 and 9. All students in Years 10 – 12 have participated in a life development course linked to a program for Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs), the latter designed to assist students to make links between their study program and after-school goals. Students in Years 10 – 12 have been assisted with planning for employment, vocational and educational training, or completion of Year 12.

Year 12 students have been given the option of a combined certificate of education with integrated VET and VCAL units. They have also been able to access subjects that are not available at the school through a video conference link to a large regional school. And some students have been able to travel to, or in from, other schools to access specialist subjects for Year 12.

The school population is small (approximately 160), with only one Aboriginal and four percent LBOTE. The ICSEA was low at 969 and this dropped by 52 points to 1031, from 2009-2010. The change in the ICSEA was attributed to an increase in the bottom quartile and a decrease in the three upper quartiles. These changes were related to local economic factors, including the combined effects of drought, downturn in the rural economy and recent closure of a small industrial plant, which led to the loss of 30 families from the township. Fifty-five percent of students attending the school received education maintenance or youth allowance support and 32% were from single parent families.

The attendance rate for the school has been 91% over the past two years. The school has made efforts to reduce the absenteeism rate – and has succeeded with Year 10 students; however, a small number of students have had a high level of absenteeism and the school had

not been able to change their attendance pattern.

The NAPLAN results for 2008 – 2010 showed improvements for both Years 7 and 9 in all three areas, although the gains for writing diminished for 2009 – 2010 to slightly below the writing gains for like schools. Comparison of results for Years 7 – 9 suggest the gains have been maintained across year levels, and the result for reading has improved further.

## Overall approach to engagement

The school has developed a comprehensive student engagement policy. The Strategic Plans for 2008 – 2010 and for 2011 – 2014 have goals, actions and milestones focused on learning, engagement and wellbeing, and transitions. The synergy map of seven key areas of support that have been developed to link these school-engagement-related activities is presented on the next page:

## Description of Engagement Initiatives

### 1. Whole-School Focus

The school has focused on a values-based approach to student engagement and wellbeing. Activities and practices in the school have been aligned to provide support to students through transition periods, to build a sense of resilience and social responsibility, and to help students set and achieve goals for further employment, vocational training or higher education study.

#### Distributed Leadership

The leadership team has taken a supportive approach with staff, striving to concentrate on 'what is important' by articulating roles and avoiding duplication of staff functions. The assistant principal coordinates all student welfare issues and works with a team of support staff to address these issues. In this way classroom teachers are left free to focus on student learning. Staff satisfaction at the school has been high. Areas of responsibility were well defined and the lines of communication were clear. A school-within-school structure has been used to focus the school's initiatives on the needs of students as they move into Year 7, through Years 8 – 9, and into Years 10 – 12.

#### Student Engagement Policy

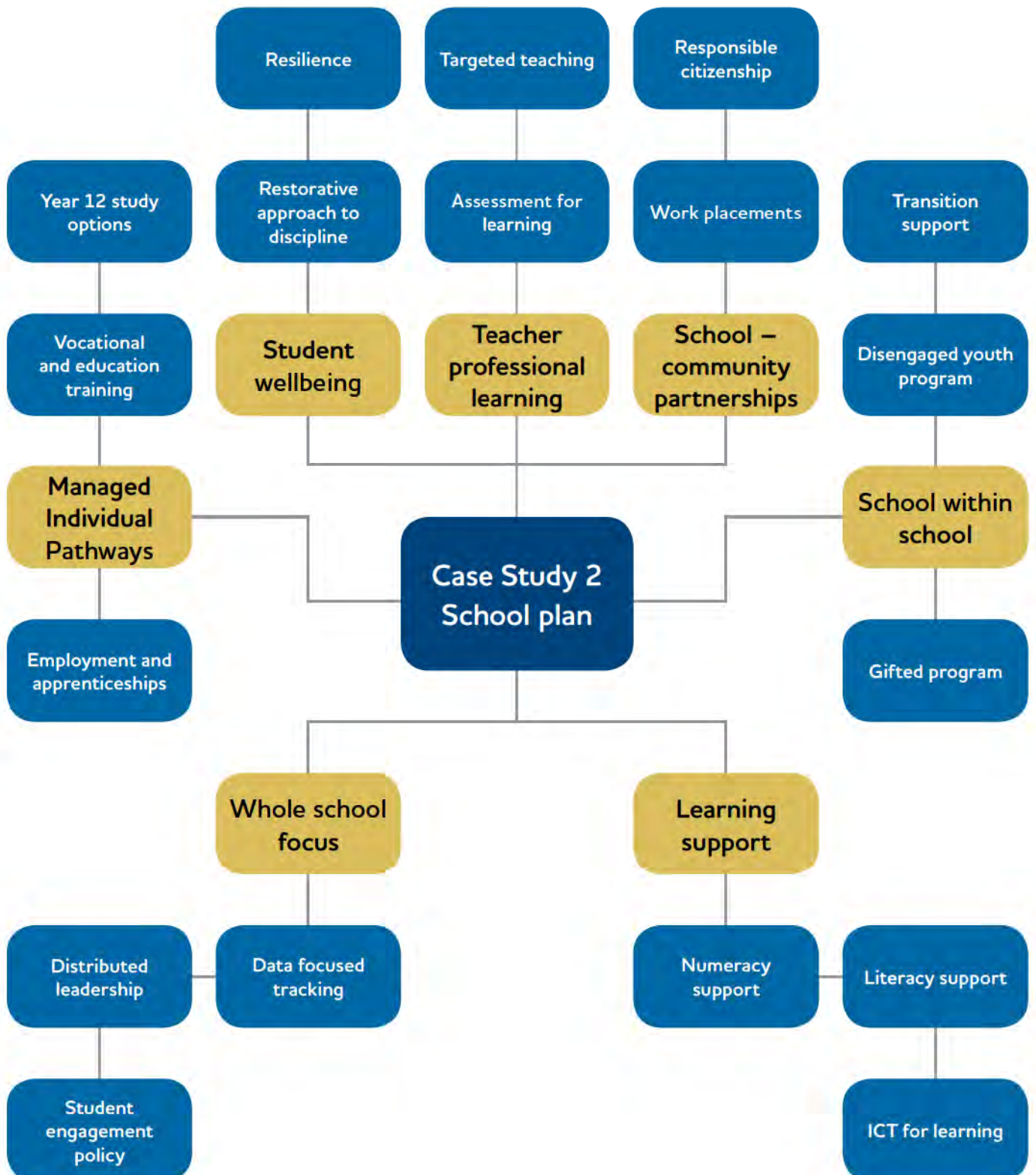
The whole-school approach to student needs has been developed through the school's Student Engagement Policy, which has emphasized resilience and citizenship. The assistant principal works closely with the school chaplain, school nurse, student wellbeing officer and three learning aides to provide support services to students.

#### Data-Focused Tracking

The school has collected various types of data to monitor the learning, destinations and outcomes of its students. Information has been collated on all students entering the school, and new students are tested to identify strengths and weaknesses. Improvements in student performance in mathematics and literacy have been targeted and the effectiveness of the school's strategy has been reflected in improved NAPLAN results and other school-based diagnostic data.

The school has also focused on improving outcomes at Year 12, with current data indicating that their results are similar to like schools. All students in the final stage of

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives





schooling, including those who have made plans to leave before completing Year 12, have been given counseling support to assist with their transition out of school. The assistant principal has kept track of the movements of students as they move into employment, or vocational education and training, or further study. Student exit data on those who left without completing Year 12 has shown that most students left to take up apprenticeships, traineeships, TAFE, or fulltime employment. A small number left due to family upheaval.

The relatively high number of students moving from school into employment and vocational study has caused some concern for the school because the state-based tracking data system has listed the school as having a low level of Year 12 completions. However, the school believes it has engaged students in making realistic life choices.

Whereas the data tracking for each of the sub-schools has been focused on student needs, there has been a whole-school focus on the use of data for the provision of learning support for literacy, mathematics and ICT. And a supporting whole-school focus on teacher professional learning has helped ensure consistency in approaches at different sub-school levels.

Data and reports used by the school include:

- o school performance data
- o student retention data
- o case reports on students exiting without completing Year 12
- o student absences
- o NAPLAN, Years 7 and 9
- o student attitudes to school
- o staff opinion survey
- o parent opinion survey
- o senior student choices, including VET and VCAL

## 2. Student Wellbeing

An active approach has been taken to promote student wellbeing. Problems arising with students have been viewed as issues to be managed, and the goal has always been a positive outcome for students.

### Restorative Approach to Discipline

A restorative approach to discipline matters has been adopted to foster a climate of social responsibility within the school and to strengthen relationships between students, staff, and members of the school community. The restorative process was initiated to strengthen the school's emphasis on personal responsibility for behavior. Staff have been encouraged to help students to take positive actions to redress the misdemeanors they have committed. A restorative approach also underpins the problem-solving approach that has been adopted for student welfare issues.

### Resilience

Resilience is seen to be linked with the restorative approach, and is a valued component of the school's engagement policy. The aim is to prepare students to be responsible citizens, who are engaged with their community and who have a positive attitude toward solving problems and future-planning. The problem-based approach has been adopted for other elements of the program, as an integral part of the academic program and as the foundation for behavior management through self-regulation and self-reflection. A slogan devised to build students' expectation to attend and be involved in the school is: "it's not ok to be away".

## 3. School-Within-School Focus

The school-within-school approach for students in Years 7 – 9 and 10 – 12 is designed to create a student-centered context for learning and student wellbeing. This includes supported transitions, youth engagement, extension programs, and study skills support. Vertical groupings within this structure allow students to access a broader range of subjects and to match their levels of interest and ability. And an education support officer has worked within the sub-school structures to provide additional support to students who have not reached their expected level of performance. A home room program has provided day-to-day support for student wellbeing. Each home room has been staffed with two teachers, chosen for their complementary skills and capacity to work together.

### Transition Support

Transition support has been provided to students entering Year 7, and there is close collaboration with the 11 feeder primary schools. This transition program has included opportunities for students (from different schools) to get to know each other and their new teachers. Information given by primary Year 6 teachers, such as academic achievement, NAPLAN scores, and social backgrounds has helped the secondary teachers to build student profiles and develop balanced class groupings.

Teachers have reviewed classes at the end of Year 7 and regrouped students for Year 8 if needed. As students moved into Years 9 and 10 they were guided in making study choices; at Year 9 they were helped to make choices for elective subjects, and by Year 10 to choose their Year 11 and 12 subjects. Year 10 to 12 students have also undertaken a life-skills course that has incorporated career counseling and a driver education program.

Thus the focus for the school has been to provide supported transitions throughout schooling with an emphasis on fluid, flexible and creative responses. A 'student at risk' program has also provided study skill support for students at each year level.

### Gifted Program

Gifted students are normally identified during Year 7 and linked to a regionally-based support program at the commencement of Year 8.

### Disengaged Youth Program

The school used a team approach to support students who are at risk of leaving school early. Alternative learning options and community-aided support are also provided to assist disengaged youth.

## 4. Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS)

Students from Year 10 onwards have been given a personalised management plan to address their personal preferences and needs. Students have been interviewed two to three times each year to help them work out their plan and to focus on subject choices as they move into the senior school years. The MIPS program has included consideration of student welfare needs, learning pathways, and the development of a personal exit plan for employment, vocational education and training, or higher education. The school has attempted to be as

flexible as possible and has included younger students in the MIPS support program when there have been State Ward issues and other severe family problems. The pathways that are managed through MIPS include:

- o transition into employment and apprenticeships
- o transition into vocational education and training
- o completion of Year 12

### Transition Into Employment

In some instances the school has negotiated transition to employment on a part-time basis. This has provided a useful exit pathway from school into employment for students with disabilities. And the time at school provides valuable continued support for students as they adjust to the new demands of work life.

### Transition to an Apprenticeship

A school-based apprenticeship program has been offered, with three days per week at school and two days in the work/training setting.

### Transition to Vocational Education

The regional education cluster has provided options for 25 vocational education courses and traineeship programs. Students have been supported to participate in these programs with one day per week in VET, one day per week in work placement, and three days per week at school.

### Year 12 Pathway to Further Study

The school has also offered a variety of subject options, such as a combination of Year 12 studies and vocational and education training. Combined options have enabled students to include vocational studies in their senior secondary certificate, making completion of Year 12 more attractive.

Year 12 subjects are offered at the school on a year-by-year basis to meet the individual needs of students. Subject options have also been negotiated with neighbouring schools. For example, in 2011 Year 12 students studied science, mathematics and history via video link, and biology students shared their class with students who travelled in from a town 35 minutes away.

## 5. Learning Support

Learning support has focused on a whole-school approach to:

- o literacy
- o numeracy
- o ICT for teaching

### Literacy Support

Literacy support has been coordinated by two literacy aides, with assistance from the librarian. The school has taken a long-term focus on writing skills, using targets and strategies that were adopted for the state's 2007-2010 and 2011-2014 reporting cycles. Funding for the two aides was provided by a local community agency. Students have been encouraged to take more responsibility for their reading and the school has implemented a daily reading time. The school has had a well-stocked library and students were supported by the librarian to select suitable books.

### Numeracy Support

The appointment of a numeracy coach, and the use of online tools provided by the directorate for assessment in mathematics, have made a positive impact on the school's capacity to support student learning in mathematics. Student's numeracy profiles have been monitored more closely to meet students' needs. This has helped to lift the tail of low performance. The results for the school have shown a positive trend, with a reduction in the numbers of students scoring at below-expected levels.

### ICT for Learning

ICT has been regard as being vital to the school and essential for students in this rural community. ICT processes to support learning have been integrated into studies at all levels. The school has adopted a whole-school approach to ICT learning and recently embarked on a laptop program for all students. It has employed a full-time technician to support this program, although this has been at a cost to other initiatives, and the school has had to reduce teaching load by increasing class size and reducing small group targeted program delivery to accommodate this change in the staff profile.

## 6. Teachers' professional learning

Teachers at the school have been engaged in a shared program of professional learning focused on links between learning, teaching and assessment. They have also used this shared professional learning strategy to explore the use of restorative approaches for managing discipline problems.

### Assessment for learning

Teachers' improved use of diagnostic assessment for identifying specific areas of need in student learning has helped them to use more explicit teaching practices and to develop a more differentiated curriculum. Teachers have become more confident in the use of assessment instruments and more able to interpret the results.

### Targeted teaching

Teachers have also become more confident in their ability to support individual student learning needs in vertically grouped classes. Gifted students have been supported at the school through video conferencing with a neighboring secondary school.

## 7. School-community partnerships

The school has had strong relationships with the community. For example, there has been a formal arrangement with the police for the 'Advance' program, as well as involvement by voluntary groups, such as Probis and senior citizens. Students have been encouraged to participate in regular activities with community groups and to view the activities as an opportunity for the students to "give back" to the wider community.

### Work placement

Work placement programs and exit planning for students wishing to move from school to employment are facilitated through the strong community connections that have been fostered by the school.

## Summary of Evidence from| Case Study 2 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school has used the following data sources for monitoring and planning:

- NAPLAN, Years 7
- school performance data for literacy and numeracy
- student survey data
- parent opinion survey
- staff opinion survey
- student absence data
- student retention data
- incoming Year 7 performance data
- student exit data for students leaving before completing Year 12
- managed individual plans for senior student choices, including vet and vocational data
- Year 12 completion data
- destination data for Year 12

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

The school has implemented a whole-school plan for literacy (writing) and numeracy and has continued to link targets from 2007-2010 with targets for the 2011-2014 cycle. Literacy support has been provided with funding from a local community service agency.

A numeracy coach has worked across the school to monitor and support student development. Online support tools provided by the state Department of Education have been used to support student learning.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

A whole-school approach has been adopted to support student welfare. The assistant principal has overall responsibility for student welfare in the school. Students belong to a home room that has two supportive teachers who work as a team to monitor and manage student issues.

Students have been supported to develop a personal plan for when they exit school. For example, they may attend school part-time as they take on work and vocational study commitments.

### 4. Leadership

The school leadership team has adopted a strategic focus to provide differentiated and integrated support for student learning, student wellbeing and student movement from school to work, vocational pathways or further study. The designated responsibility of the Assistant Principal and the support team for student wellbeing, welfare and learning has resulted in the development of an integrated approach to students.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

The school has taken a strategic focus on school-wide tracking of student progress, commencing with collection of data from feeder primary schools for incoming Year 7 students. The school has also worked to improve teacher capacity to use data and develop interventionist teaching strategies. To achieve this, staff have been engaged in a concerted program of shared teacher professional learning that has focused teachers' attention on the principles of learning and teaching and use of assessment to inform teaching practice.

### 6. Whole school approaches

The school-within-school and the whole-school approach has been adopted to support the different learning and welfare needs of students as they move through the lower, middle, and upper stages of secondary school. A restorative justice approach for discipline and a culture of community partnership has promoted a sense of good citizenship in the school. In addition a culture of learning has been developed through the systematic and school-wide use of student progress mapping. Literacy aides and a numeracy coach have provided targeted learning support to students. Current school based diagnostic data and NAPLAN data suggest the approach taken by this school has reduced the number of students performing below the benchmark for literacy and numeracy.

### **7. Links between home, school and community**

The school has developed strong community networks with local agencies, which have provided support for students seeking employment before completing Year 12. Liaisons with neighbouring schools and a TAFE institution have extended study options for students, such as a combined higher school certificate and vocational training options. Targeted support has been given to students deemed at risk of becoming disengaged and for transition to work is provided in some cases.

### **8. Resources**

Although school resources have been limited, local community agency funding has provided much-needed literacy coaching support to the school. Support for numeracy and some study options for Year 12 students have been accessed online. The school laptop program, implemented to improve the ICT capacity of school, has been achieved at the expense of reducing the number of teaching staff.

### **9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available**

The teaching staff have endeavoured to improve measures for tracking students' literacy and numeracy from the commencement of secondary schooling. However, more teacher-friendly diagnostic tools that link assessment to teaching strategies are needed.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement**

The school has used various data to monitor student progress, especially in the core areas of literacy and numeracy (see Engagement Initiative number 5). Student absenteeism is monitored, and welfare support is provided to students when needed. Senior students are given guidance to plan their destination after school.

### **11. Professional Learning for teachers and school leaders**

Although considerable professional learning for teacher and leaders underpinned the improvement in student academic engagement in this school, the leadership team acknowledged continued training support was needed by to help improve their work with students in the areas welfare, youth engagement and transitions in to work and learning. Staff at the school would benefit from a supporting youth skills training program. Likewise, the approach the school had developed for student learning support would be further improved if the school leaders and teachers had opportunities to improve their knowledge about the use of assessment and how assessment informs teachers about the use of teaching strategies, particularly literacy and numeracy.

## 12. Sustainability of initiatives

The sustainability of the initiatives implemented by this school have depended on:

- the development of a student engagement policy
- the appointment of a senior member of staff as the Student Welfare Coordinator
- clarity about roles and responsibilities for learning and welfare
- consistent monitoring of student progress, attendance and pathways for learning
- individually managed programs for students, with reflective counselled approaches
- maintenance of subject choices for students in an isolated community
- teacher professional learning focused on evidence-based teaching in core areas

Collection and shared use of data by staff has created common understandings about the needs of students. Staff support for each other through paired home room teachers and shared professional learning have created a collegial atmosphere for staff in the school.

## Conclusion

Case Study 2 is an example of a school that has developed a coherent and systematic program of support to students from the commencement of secondary schooling through to completion. A student engagement policy has been implemented to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. Targeted support has been provided for students' welfare and learning needs. A key element of the school's focus on engagement has been students' literacy and numeracy. There has been a strong focus on supporting students when leaving school. The school has achieved a cultural shift toward students' engagement and purpose for learning. Administrative organization and clarity about the roles and responsibility of staff for welfare and learning have created good lines of communication and goodwill among staff. The teachers feel they are able to spend more time on teaching and learning.

# Case Study 3:

## Large Metropolitan Secondary School

- **Secondary school**
- **School population 998**
- **Metropolitan**
- **Public school**

### Background

Case Study School 3 is an example of a troubled secondary school that has undertaken a program of self-renewal to improve student behavior and learning. The school serves an outer urban industrial area and has a relatively low ICSEA of 924, although this has risen by 27 points from 2009–2010 due to a decrease in the bottom quartile and a rise in each of the middle and upper quartiles. The school is rated at a high level of disadvantage and the student cohort comprises: 24% LBOTE, 9% Aboriginal, 5.6% disability/mild disability; 5% flexible learning options; 30.5% on the 'school card' family support scheme covering costs of school fees, and uniforms and books. The 998 students who attend this school are from 25 nationalities.

The school provides multiple pathways for students and it assists them to map a path through high school into employment, training and further education. The Year 8–10 curriculum provides an integrated learning approach through the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP). There are options and support for disengaged youth, with a Flexible Learning Option (FLO) program, and a Youth Opportunities Program offers support into employment. A Special Education Unit provides a comprehensive program for students with special needs at all levels. Final year students are supported to choose an option to complete Year 12 studies with a State Higher School Certificate of Education or, an International Baccalaureate, or to undertake Vocational Education and Training.

Prior to 2008, the expectations of the school community for student learning and achievement were very low. Students' aspirations for study or academic advancement were poor and they showed low motivation for learning. Parents held low regard for the school and there was very little engagement between the school and the broader community. The teachers accepted that they worked in a high-needs school, and they had adopted a view that teaching was more about addressing problems than about leading learning. There was limited turnover of staff at the school: the principal had been at the school

over 20 years, and most of the leadership team for more than 10 years. Thus the school appeared to be locked into a cycle of low expectations and low performance, with little to motivate staff to bring about change.

However, much has changed since 2008. Data on the outcomes of schooling, such as NAPLAN and increased Department of Education attention to the issues of quality learning and teaching have helped to motivate the staff to engage in a program of renewal. Armed with new knowledge from Department-sponsored professional learning sessions, the principal challenged the teachers at the school to consider the implications of research about brain development, higher order thinking skills and the role of personal responsibility in learning on their teaching. This created new perceptions about how learning and development occur, and it motivated teachers to reconsider the views they had held about the capacity of their students. The net effect was an acceptance of the concept of shared responsibility and accountability for learning and teaching, with students regarded as partners in learning and a new culture for learning and teaching that was more student focused.

At the time of reporting (late 2011), the school had changed student behavior and improved its culture of learning. Prior to 2008, students appeared to value school for a social purpose, rather than a place for learning. By contrast, in 2011 students attended classes, took more responsibility for their behavior in and around the school, and engaged with their teachers in tracking their own learning. The school was more orderly and misbehavior was less prevalent. In addition, the teachers, students and parents all felt more positive towards the school.

The turning point was a school-wide program that focused on:

- the development of Positive Behavior for Learning (PBL)
- the use of data to improve knowledge about students and their learning
- the maintenance of a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) for every student
- an improved approach to student welfare, including student attendance at a daily Care Group classroom with a regular Care Group teacher.

These initiatives have promoted the development of a school culture that, according to the principal, “is empowered to create successful learners”, with an expectation that every student can and should be successfully placed in higher or further education, training, employment, or community service – with a good prospect for further self-development and employment. The new school vision was to be supported by:

- shared values based on relationships, including respect, honesty, success and organization
- differentiated learning that accounts for the learning needs and motivations of students
- shared data to be used by teachers, students and parents to track student progress and behavior and assist students to develop and realise their goals

The use of evidence/data to track student learning outcomes has been pivotal in the achievement of the school’s vision. Inspired by the work of Hattie (2009), staff have accepted the view that feedback provides the single most effective tool for teachers in improving student outcomes. The students at this school became more aware of how to make judgments about their own learning and more able to take responsibility for the progress they made.

Buoyed by the change in school culture achieved over the past three years, in 2011 the school community adopted a revised three year Strategic Learning Directions plan, designed to develop the agenda for learning further. This agenda reflects four priorities.

1. achieve the highest possible educational outcomes and standards for all
2. provide and ensure positive values and approaches to learning
3. establish a clear focus on the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills
4. foster a world-class humanitarian standard in education.

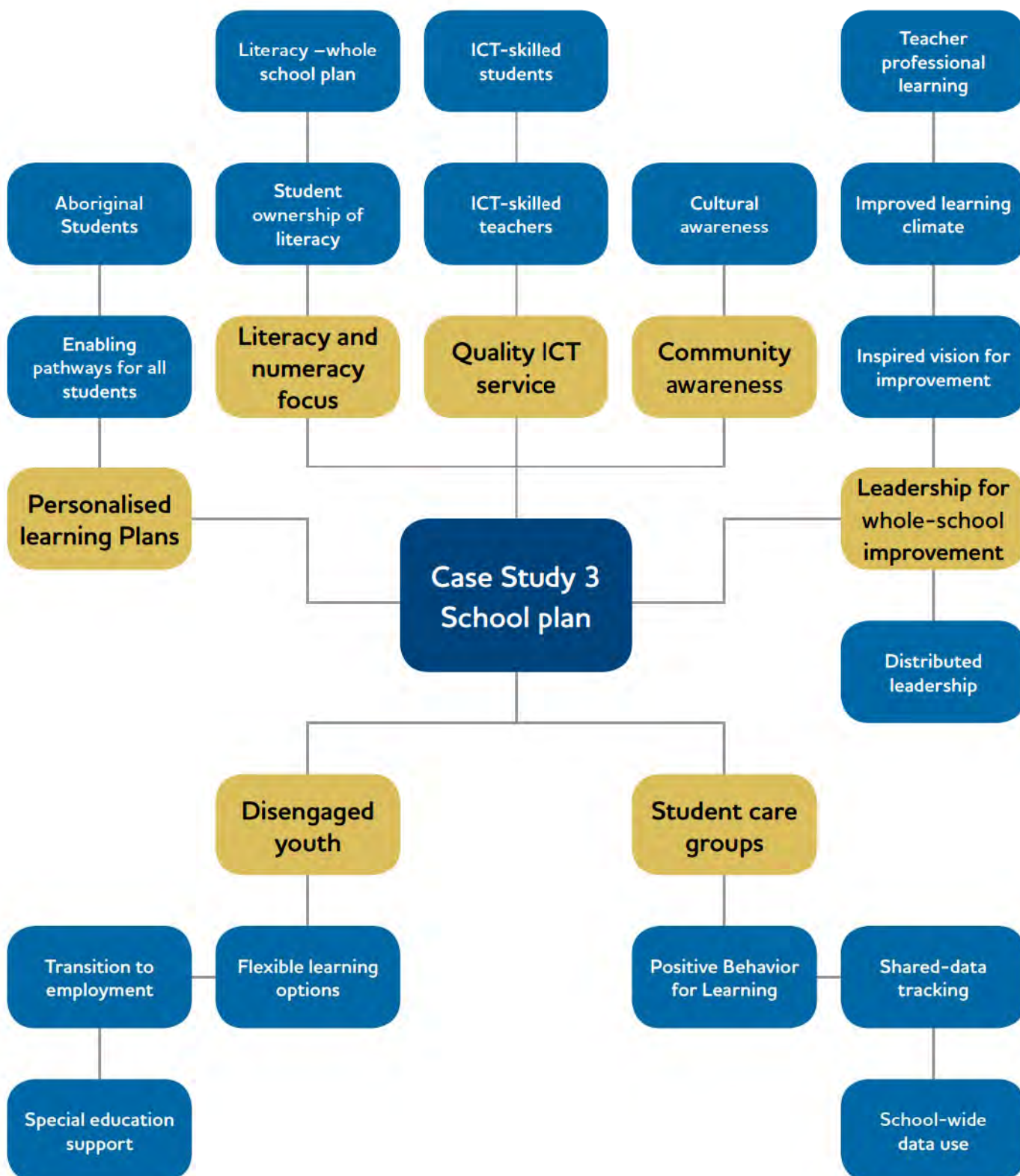
## Overall approach to engagement

The leadership team has accepted that engagement requires the efforts of the whole school community. As stated above, the school has revitalized its culture for learning through initiatives that have focused on building the capacity of students to engage in conversations about their behavior, their learning, and their goals for life. There has been a shift in emphasis from ‘them’ (the students) and ‘us’ (the teachers), towards ‘we’ who are working together, thus enabling students to take greater responsibility for their learning and future.

Staff were not invited to join the school leadership team in taking initiatives to support the achievement of the new school vision; they were required to be actively engaged. The initiatives supporting this renewed climate for student academic engagement are displayed in the synergy map presented on the next page:



## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Leadership for Whole-School Improvement

The school organization and leadership structure provided clear lines of accountability for the many administrative, technical, teaching and social welfare functions of the school and developed a coherent plan for school-improvement activities. The principal and an assistant principal have maintained oversight of the curriculum, staff responsibilities and student and staff wellbeing, and they have been assisted by a business manager and five assistant principals. The assistant principals have focused on:

- Curriculum: to manage the development of curriculum initiatives serving pathways through to Year 12 – including the IB Middle Years Program and the coordination of teacher mentoring and professional learning programs
- ICT: to develop and maintain the ICT infrastructure and to manage staff learning needs, data management and other ICT service and communication needs
- Special needs: the special needs unit operates as a school-within-school and the assistant principal has oversight of the curriculum, pedagogy, behavioral support services and outside agency support.
- Middle School (Years 8-10): to coordinate the middle school team including teachers and support service personnel who provide student support services (for transition into secondary school, the Middle Years Personal Learning Program, the Flexible Learning Options program, and Youth Opportunities)
- Senior School (Years 11-12): to manage the senior school team and senior students learning pathways through to employment, further vocational learning and university

### Vision for Improvement

The new vision – a school “empowered to create successful learners” – has generated the following priorities:

- evidence-based, differentiated teaching and learning strategies, with feedback and feed-forward strategies designed to inform students about their learning, including shared sessions with students and parents where students present data on their progress, behavior and learning plans
- a culture of Positive Behavior for Learning (PBL), with mutually respectful relationships between students, teachers and parents
- a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) for every student to help them identify and plan for their future goals and needs
- targeted intervention for students who achieve well below and well above benchmarks in the core areas of literacy and numeracy
- programs that promote:
  - intercultural awareness
  - positive environmental action
  - community participation
  - student leadership and personal development

### Improved Learning Climate

Teacher development has been pivotal in the development of the new school culture for learning. The goal to develop learners who can take responsibility for themselves has been a challenge for some teachers. Four areas of teacher knowledge were targeted for development:

1. curriculum and pedagogical knowledge – to support the development of more comprehensive literacy, numeracy and ICT skills for students
2. feedback and feed-forward assessment strategies – to assist teachers to share information with students about their progress

3. intervention strategies for students who are above and below the benchmarks – to improve literacy and numeracy comprehension of low performing students
4. pedagogical processes that foster higher order thinking skills – to promote students' problem solving and meta-cognitive capacity

#### Teacher Professional Learning Plans (PLP)

Teacher PLPs have been developed in response to a state-wide directive and implemented using line/performance management procedures. The teacher PLPs have been used to promote teachers' use of strategic classroom observations – whereby teacher A enlists the assistance of a 'critical colleague' (teacher B) to undertake planned observations on aspects of teacher A's teaching and teacher B gives feedback and engages with teacher A in a discussion about 'what happened' in the behavior observed. This process has been used in the whole-school literacy strategy and teachers have been encouraged to use it to improve their teaching in other subject areas.

## 2. Student Care Groups

Strategies for improved student engagement have been coordinated through a Care Group class. Every student has been placed in a Care Group class under the leadership of a Care Group teacher. Care Group teachers have been responsible for collating all the learning and behavioral data for their students and have assisted students to plan their future learning goals and implement the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) program.

#### PBL program

The PBL program was designed to teach students appropriate behaviours for a learning context, such as:

- o how to prepare for class
- o how to start class in an orderly manner
- o what constitutes reasonable use of mobile phones in the school environment
- o what is expected for attendance and daily routines

The impact of PBL on students' behavior was tracked from 2008 and the data have demonstrated a remarkable change in student misbehaviour. In 2008 the school-wide data indicated that 15% of students were identified as having high-risk behaviour disorders (i.e. requiring special individual intervention); a further 35% were identified as being in the category of at-risk behavioral intervention (i.e. requiring special group systems intervention); and only 50% of students were within the primary prevention level (i.e. able to be dealt with in a classroom setting).

By 2009, following the first year of the PBL program, only 6.6% remained at the high-risk level, 21.8% in the at-risk level, and 71.6% in the primary prevention level. In 2010 the proportions were: 2.3% high risk, 16.2% at risk, and 81.5% primary prevention. The figures for 2011 indicated even further improvement, with only one student remaining in the high-risk level. The shift in the school profile has also been reflected in the increased number of students identified for positive behavior referrals.

Data pertaining to student behavior and the PBL program have been linked to the Care Group reporting practices. This means that information about student behavior is included in regular roundtable discussions with parents. Teachers believe that the improvements in classroom behavior, and the open sharing of information about student behavior, have improved parent perceptions about the quality of the students, their learning, and the school. There is anecdotal evidence that parents have been commenting more positively about the capacity of students.

#### Shared Use of Data Tracking

Teachers have used data to monitor student performance at the individual, class and year levels, as well as across learning areas. In numerous forums teachers have engaged in discussions about the use of data to inform teaching and learning. Situations where teachers have shared data about students and their learning include:

- o learning community teams
- o care groups
- o curriculum meetings
- o year level groups/meetings

Data have been reviewed at regular intervals during the year. For example, at week 2 of each term Care Group teachers have collated and reviewed all data from the previous term for members of their group. A further 'snapshot' of the performance of each student has been compiled at week five of each term and shared by teachers, as noted above.

Care Group teachers have shared data about learning and behavior with students in their Care-Group class. And information is shared at an individual level as part of the students' PLP. The goal for Year 8 and 9 students has been to build their competence in the use of the data and help them develop an understanding about their learning and behavior. According to the principal, "If we can empower Year 8 and 9s, then by Year 10 and into Year 11 and 12 they will be able to understand and manage their own performance bands".

### School-Wide Data Use

The school has drawn on the following internal and external data sources to help monitor its activities:

- perception data (e.g. system-designed surveys of parents and students; school-designed surveys, such as the student reading preferences and practices survey, parent opinion survey, and other visitor feedback)
- demographic data (e.g. Year 7 intake, student numbers, census data, attendance, retention)
- learner achievement data (e.g. NAPLAN, IBMYP, systematic review of the previous term results at all levels in week 2 of each term, plus a week five snapshot data review of all performance data and behavioral indicators)
- student destination data (e.g. Year 12 completion data and progress into university, VET, employment)
- process data (e.g. audits, reports concerning policies and procedures, curriculum programs)

### 3. Students' Personalised Learning Plan (PLP)

One-to-one conversations between Care Group teachers and students have been used to review data, draw out implications, and firm up students' ideas about future personal learning goals. Each student has then shared these data with their parents in a round-table discussion that is attended by the Care Group teacher. The development of the PLP has provided a focus for continuous review of each student's overall performance. Students' grades and subsection scores in subject assessments, NAPLAN results and positive and negative behavioral indicators, including points for appropriate behavior and demerit points for misdemeanors, are all discussed and reviewed in the context of what the student would like to achieve.

Student PLPs have also been supplemented, when necessary, by one of the following targeted learning support programs:

- literacy
- numeracy
- ESL
- special education
- Indigenous education
- student welfare support

### Enabling Pathways for all Students

The school has provided a broad and flexible teaching and learning program to create a learning and exit pathway for every student. This begins with transition support for students commencing at Year 8. A designated Link Learning teacher collates background information on incoming students, with a review of NAPLAN and other information passed on by primary teachers. The Year 8 – 10 curriculum is based on the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP). The program and assessment are formally linked to the state curriculum standards and accountability framework to ensure there is continuity with the senior school study units. When approaching the senior school level, each student has a personalised pathway that includes options for completing the Higher School Certificate of Education, with Vocational Education and Training options that lead to university entrance, vocationally based VET programs, or employment.

In addition to the core curriculum, the school has built options for students through its sports program, a mathematics club, studies in robotics, regional VET options, a creative arts program, engineering, a gifted and talented program, and studies in ICT-technology and digital media. Zen classes have also been provided for Year 12 students.

### Aboriginal Student Support

Monitoring and mentoring support has been provided to Aboriginal students through the assistance of the Aboriginal Education Community Officer and the Aboriginal Education Teacher. Mentors from the local university also work with Aboriginal students. Student data have been collated and reviewed every five weeks to provide a program of formative developmental support to Australian Aboriginal students.

### Special Education Support

A special education facility has been operating for some time as a 'school within school'. It has been growing in size and an additional classroom was opened at the beginning of 2011. The growth is believed to be linked to the unit's reputation for excellence. The unit has also been credited with leading much of the change agenda in the school, particularly in the area of thinking skills.

The special education facility has comprised a team of five full-time teachers and 10 support staff who have used data to track student learning. The facility has also used the same PBL strategy to engage students in deeper understanding of their behavior at school, and help them understand their disability and the impact it has on their learning, social appearance and behavior. Like in the main school, there has been a shift in the attention of staff and students away from managing behavior problems towards learning.

Furthermore, data about learning and behavior have been collated and shared with students. In the words of the principal "We are now working with students to help them understand their disability in terms of how their brain works. Our goal is to help them manage their disability". Teachers have drawn on explicit teaching strategies and discussed processes and outcomes with students to help them engage in higher order thinking about their learning and progress. To quote the principal:

The idea is to use data to understand how students learn. Teaching in special education is not just about behavior management; it is engaging students in an understanding about their own learning. Students are part of the learning equation.

The Students with Disability program has been extended to provide a wider range of electives and subjects leading to employment. These have included agriculture and materials and business enterprise certificate options and a research project designed to promote the use of higher order thinking strategies.

## 4. Literacy and Numeracy in the Curriculum

The school has embarked on a program of development to increase the use of evidence-based approaches to monitor student skill levels in literacy and it is currently working to improve its capacity to monitor and intervene in numeracy development.

An important driver for the focus on improvements in literacy has come from the National NAPLAN data, which indicated that the school's performance was below expected levels and that a low percentage of students were achieving at the highest levels. Whereas the school Year 9 NAPLAN scores have improved, and are on par with comparison schools in reading and numeracy, there is still a large performance gap with state-level data. For example, the state Directorate has set the target for NAPLAN band 8 for Year 9 students, but this school has over 50% of its Year 9 students performing below band 7 for reading, 54% below band 7 in writing, 44.6% in grammar, and 34.1% in spelling.

The school has set a new goal: 25% of its students to achieve at or above the NAPLAN band levels for literacy set by the Directorate. However, a key challenge for teachers has been the limited amount of diagnostic information for them to make direct links between performance levels and instruction. Without this information, teachers feel limited in their capacity to differentiate instruction and to give high-quality feedback to students to help them with their learning.

## Whole-School Plan for Literacy

The school has endeavored to improve literacy outcomes through a whole-school plan to engage every student in a literacy 'journey'. The school plan includes:

- surveys of students:
  - views about literacy instruction at the school (which indicated that students wanted clearer feedback and guidance)
  - perceptions of the texts they liked and disliked (this information was used, with students' direct involvement, to guide the selection of texts for classroom libraries)
- a school review of literacy in the curriculum (a trusted senior teacher, was designated the Senior Literacy Coach and selected to lead the review)
- appointment of a literacy consultant to work with staff on building literacy capacity in different subject areas
- use of literacy data to map literacy achievements across the school, for example:
  - student reading logs
  - diagnostic data from WRAP
  - performance data using PAT-R
- early identification and support for commencing students performing below the benchmark in literacy and numeracy. (Student Support Officers (SSO) provide specialist literacy and numeracy support; the Year 8 Link Learning Teacher and the SSO team monitor progress)
- team-based PL to improve teachers' knowledge and skills about literacy in the secondary school curriculum. (This commenced with an analysis of WRAP and PAT-R literacy assessment instruments, which indicated teachers needed more information about literacy assessment and how it can be used to inform instructional practices; plans are underway to put the PAT-R online to improve availability of literacy assessments for all teachers in the

school, and WRAP data is to be added to the suite of data reviewed by Care Class teachers)

- reciprocal classroom observations with trusted colleagues (as outlined above) (these have commenced and are linked to line management processes to ensure all staff engage in the practice).
- a concept of 'tactical teaching' (explicit training and sharing of 'high yield' classroom practices have been developed and modeled to help teachers improve the quality of their teaching)

## Student Ownership of Literacy

The concept of improving partnerships with students has been extended to students having greater control over the literacy materials they use at school. For example, a reading preference survey was conducted with Year 8 and 9 students late in 2010 to find out what sorts of materials they would like to read and study. The survey coincided with closure of a large bookstore, which created an opportunity for the school to arrange with the store for classes of students to select and purchase \$50 worth of books per class. Preparation for this exercise included students discussing the findings of the survey. The books purchased were used to form class reading materials, with an entry placed inside the front cover to indicate who selected the book and why.

The book purchase activity created a minor storage problem for each classroom; however, this was soon solved through the purchase a set of IKEA bookshelves, which the students assembled.

## 5. Quality ICT Support

The school has had an ICT 'champion', who in the past 11 years has established a clear set of practices to reduce paperwork and increase online activities. The champion has also managed to secure funding for an ICT system that suits the needs of school management and the curriculum departments. The school now boasts a large band width, with an internet capability for 3-D, and a robotics program; the digital media teaching provides an option for a vocational certificate program in screen and media.

### **ICT-Skilled Teachers**

The school has been an ICT – focus school and a National Pilot School for the Digital Education Revolution project. The development of teacher capacity in ICT has focused on ensuring that staff were proficient and able to use ICT for administration in teaching and learning. All teaching staff were well resourced with iPads or notebooks, and cloud technology has been made available. A Learning Management System supported the organisation of curriculum materials, and students who were unable to attend school have been able to access their learning materials. Teachers have been able to access centralized data on student assessments to assist with personalized learning and other data-sharing activities.

### **ICT-skilled Students**

Student capacity for ICT has been developed through compulsory computing units in Years 8 and 9.

## **6. Community Awareness**

Community networks have been developed to encourage students to develop a positive attitude to learning and care for the environment. For example, in addition to the initiatives that have been described in the earlier sections, students have been encouraged to support each other in homework clubs in English and mathematics and to care for the school environment through using bins and returning waste for recycling. The evidence of a calm, clean and tidy school environment suggests these strategies were working.

### **Cultural Awareness**

The International Baccalaureate Curriculum and a cultural awareness program have been designed to help students develop knowledge about other communities and cultures, supported by four culture-specific language laboratories. The school has hosted international visitors from Japan and celebrated a number of cultural events. Involvement in community projects has also been supported through IB, the middle years program, and students compilation of a Community and Service journal with a personal workbook to record and reflect on their activity. A city-bound discovery program has been established with year 9 students to enable them to learn more about the city and its history.

The 90 Aboriginal students attending the school have been able to undertake an Indigenous language studies option as part of their study program.

## **7. Working with Disengaged Youth**

The following school initiatives, in conjunction with government and other community organizations, have supported student students who are not well integrated or showing signs of being disengaged: a school and community Indigenous program, a success camp, youth opportunities, Odyssey Program.

### **Flexible Learning Option**

The school has provided a community site for the Flexible Learning Option program that supports youth who have disengaged from school. This program provides the opportunity for students to re-engage in the learning environment from of campus, in a supported community location with ICT access.

### **Transition to Employment**

The school has established an employment service that provided career counseling, and assistance to students with portfolio presentations and preparation for interviews. And the career and transition officers have networked with outside agencies to negotiate workplace opportunities to assist students leaving school through a vocational pathway.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 3 Against the Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school used the following data sources for monitoring and planning:

- o attendance data
- o NAPLAN data from Year 7 for students entering Year 8 and Year 9
- o Year 7 – 8 transition data
- o PAT-R data for Year 8 students
- o student profile data detailing performance on ESL Scope and Scales, NEP and ATSI status, mathematics and English subject achievements
- o behavioural data – based on records of positive and negative referrals
- o stage 1 completion data
- o student retention and school tracking data for students who leave for work or other study
- o VET performance data
- o Year 12 completion data
- o students survey
- o parent opinion survey
- o staff opinion survey

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

A Senior Leading Literacy teacher was appointed from the teaching team to lead the review and development of a school-wide literacy improvement plan. This has led to an improved focus on comprehension and assessment, with more targeted support for students across all areas of the curriculum. Resources and instruments that have been sought and used include:

- o WRAP
- o PAT-R
- o survey of students' reading preferences

### 3. 'At risk' case management

A whole-school strategy was used to monitor students, mainly through students' membership in a Care Group class, which meets daily (with an assigned teacher). Care Group teachers collate and map data on students' behavior and performance, and the data are discussed with individual students to develop their PLPs and to share with parents at student-parent information sessions. Data are also reviewed regularly at week two each term and for the mid-term 'snapshot' at week five. An early intervention support process has been instituted to identify and manage students who have not been achieving their potential; they have been reviewed more regularly. All teachers have had access to central files through an ICT-supported data share file.

### 4. Leadership

The school has developed a strategic plan focused on empowering students as learners. A distributed leadership model, with clear focus on all elements of learning and student welfare needs, has been established. And professional learning and performance management strategies have been aimed at aligning teacher practice with the goals of the school. Evidence has been used to determine how well the school was meeting its objectives.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

The school has had a strong commitment to evidence-based practice for all school processes. All participants in the learning process were engaged in the use and review of data. Teachers shared data on student learning and behavior regularly and systematically. Students were mentored to use information about their learning and behavior to help develop their PLPs and to share their goals with their parents. Staff with leadership roles have used data to monitor year levels, discipline areas, and the whole school.

### 6. Whole-school approaches

The whole-school strategic plan has been focused on empowering students through the development of positive attitudes to learning and behavior. This has been articulated through the school improvement plan and the development of a strong feedback culture.



## 7. Links between home, school and community

Strong partnerships between the home and school have been developed through the round table process, where students lead discussions with their parents about their achievement, behavior and future goals. Links to the community have been developed through a community awareness program and through links to external agencies to support student wellbeing and employment opportunities.

## 8. Resources

The data showed that although this school had improved student academic engagement, on-going and improved implementation of the strategies would benefit from information and strategies to support:

- o summative assessment practices
- o diagnostic assessment of secondary literacy and numeracy across the discipline subject areas
- o strategies to improve comprehension literacy and numeracy through the discipline content areas
- o strategies to promote the development of student higher order thinking processes
- o improved strategies to support the identification and referral of students demonstrating positive and negative behaviors

## 9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available

The school needs access to valid and diagnostic measures for literacy and numeracy that can be used to support differentiated pedagogical approaches across the discipline-specific teaching areas. Instruments to support analysis of higher order thinking and meta-cognition are also needed to help teachers plan and implement more targeted teaching interventions.

## 10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time

The school has developed school-wide case management practice for all students. Staff have regularly reviewed data to help them make evidence-based decisions about students' academic advancement, behavior management, and learning plans and goals beyond schooling. Information has been shared across staff areas through the school data base. The cycles of review of data, combined with the focus on achievement and behavior and personalized goal setting, have ensured that every student has a profile within the school community. And these processes have assisted in the identification and management of students at risk.

## 11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders

To continue the school vision for empowering students, further development for current and new staff is needed in the areas of:

- o summative assessment practices that are focused on supporting learning processes
- o skills in differentiated teaching
- o literacy and numeracy assessment and teaching strategies across the secondary school curriculum
- o strategies that support the development of higher order thinking processes
- o strategies that help teachers to maintain a balance between positive and negative referrals for behavior
- o strategies for use in teacher professional learning to support the implementation of effective peer-mediated observation and feedback processes

## 12. Sustainability of initiatives

The key factors impacting on the sustainability of initiatives undertaken to improve school culture for learning are:

- the whole-school focus on the vision to empower students through improved behavior and learning
- the distributed leadership culture that has ensured a comprehensive school management plan for learning and behavior across the whole school
- teachers' capacity to form partnerships with students and make them the focus of the learning process.
- the improved information for students about their learning, behavior and PLPs, which has enabled them to share their learning, behavior and future goals with parents.
- the extensive use of ICT for data management to provide teacher with immediate access to data and to support teachers' use of data across the school
- the regular cycle of monitoring at individual and whole-class levels

## Conclusion

This is a case study of a secondary school that has sought to develop a culture to create empowered students. The focus on partnerships with students, and the shared use of data between teachers, students and parents, have revitalised the school community in the relatively short period of three years. Extensive mapping of student progress, the use of ICT to support access to data, and the focus on evidence-led learning and teaching for all students have been essential elements of this program of change. Teacher professional learning support, with a focus on high-yield teaching processes, has also been an important element of the school improvement plan. However, the school reports a need for more support to help teachers develop deeper links between assessment and targeted teaching, such as diagnostic assessments of students and more targeted intervention strategies.

# Case Study 4:

## Large Metropolitan Primary School

- **Primary school**
- **School population 819**
- **Metropolitan**
- **Public school**

### Background

Case Study School 4, in an outer metropolitan suburb, was established in 1997 to cater for a large influx of migrants from various cultures.

Although the school did not have a student engagement problem, its demographics from the outset suggested that it needed to be vigilant, with careful planning and preventative action. For example, the catchment area had many dislocated families from a diverse cultural mix arriving in the community with little extended family support. Fourteen years later (2011), approximately one third of the enrolled families were new migrants, including a small number of refugee families (10); another small cohort of families was associated with air force training at a nearby airstrip. In addition there was a new trend towards fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers from the mining industry moving into the community. The number of FIFO families was not known, but the principal was aware of family relationship issues for this cohort that impinge upon student learning. He counseled around four FIFO families every term.

The principal set the school up and had remained there throughout its 14 years, steering it through major changes as enrolments continued to increase (330 in 1997, 700 in 2000, and 897 in 2011). However, this substantial enrolment increase had not been entirely due to population increase within the suburb. Due to the school's strong reputation and community interface, it attracted a large number of students from neighbouring suburbs. In 2011 the school 70 staff: 48 teachers and 22 education assistants.

Although the school's ICSEA was low (1050), most parents were employed in 'blue collar' jobs; and most held mortgages or had high quality rental accommodation. What made student engagement a challenge for this school was the low level of English literacy in the homes. The associate principal (early years) found that reading, writing and talking were not strong in most homes and many children could not say certain sounds of the English language when they arrived at school.

Despite this situation, attendance ratings at the school over the past three years had been above the state average (94% in 2008, 94% in 2009, and 95% in 2010). Its NAPLAN scores had also been good.

The principal perceived that the school had never had an engagement problem because, as indicated above, steps had been taken early in its history, followed by progressive changes as required. The case study school presented with high student engagement indicated by good attendance, standard of behaviour, supportive and innovative school/community culture and good academic and extra curricula performance levels. The school had made every effort to present positive images to visitors; for example, the on-hold music for incoming telephone calls to the school was students singing, with intermittent professional voiceovers outlining the school's three basic beliefs and latest achievements. The street corner outside the school had a large sign which invited visitors to grasp the learning challenge by joining the school community. The atmosphere in the school was one of orderliness, with students who apparently tried to perform to their best and enjoyed being noticed by the attentive staff. The above-mentioned attendance and NAPLAN results reflected these observations.

In addition, the school maintained a high profile within local and state communities. It held at least three major community events each year to showcase its students' learning in its specialist areas: the school Art and Craft Show, which raised around \$60,000 per annum for the school; the high performance of the school choir at a system level music concert; the ANZAC service, which was run by the students and always received accolades, reportedly bringing VIP guests to tears; and the school sports day. All four sub-schools participated in these events as a whole-school activity.

## Developing the school's focus:

When the principal opened the school in 1997, he established the school's goals, structure and culture. In his words, the first task had been to study the existing demographics and try to 'crystal ball gaze' – to imagine and foresee the future needs of the school population. At that time he stipulated three pedagogic beliefs about student learning:

- children need the support of their chronological peers
- children need the stimulation and challenge of their academic peers
- success breeds success.

Since 1997, the principal has led the school through major structural and operational changes in response to rapid growth and the national curriculum. The school began with multi-age classes but had to revert to single year classes in 2008 in preparation for the forthcoming national curriculum, and the necessary review of existing practices and school policies. The one policy retained was the student care and support policy, detailed later in this case study.

Another significant change had been the restructuring of the school into sub-schools. In 2008, in order to maintain the school's positive culture in face of rapid growth in numbers, the school moved to a schools-within-school structure: a kindergarten – Year 1 junior sub-school, a Year 2 – 4 middle sub-school, and a Year 5 – 7 senior sub-school. This was extended to a four-school structure in 2011.

Central to these successful changes has been the school leadership approach. The school leadership team comprised the principal and four associate principals. Each sub-school was run by its own Associate Principal (termed Deputy Principal or Assistant Principal in other schools) with the principal overseeing the whole school. The associate principals did not receive salary supplementation for this extra responsibility, but they did gain leadership experience substantially beyond what they would gain as a deputy.

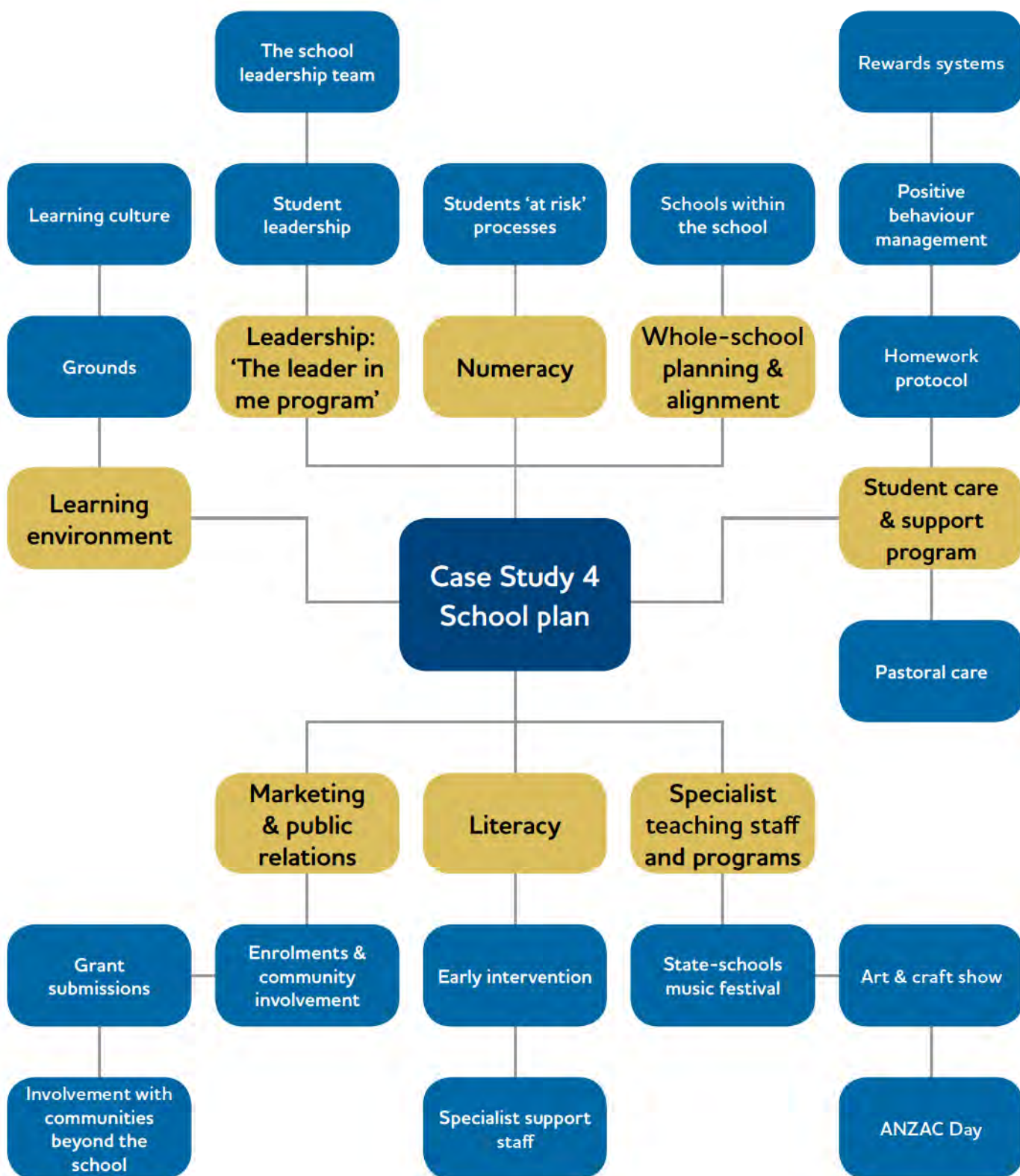
The principal encouraged leadership in staff, the school community and its students, based on 'the leader in me' concept (Covey, 2008), described further below. And he encouraged innovation, especially if it complied with the school's beliefs and plan and was viable.

A prime example of innovation in the school was the appointment of a full-time marketing/public relations officer, who helped staff to present and promote their innovations. The principal and Marketing Manager reported that teaching staff liked coming to work each day, the staff turnover was low, and staff wanted to stay at the school. These observations were supported by the latest (2009) staff participation survey results.

## Overall approach to engagement

The principal and the two associate principals interviewed emphasised that the school's high engagement level relied not on one or two major initiatives but on staff implementation of initiatives that worked synergistically to keep students engaged. This synergy of initiatives is displayed on the opposite page.

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

The eight linked initiatives in figure 1, designed to implement the school plan in a synergistic fashion, are described below.

### 1. Whole-School Planning and Alignment

The planning process took place via regular meetings of sub-school teams, year level teams across the sub-schools, and whole-school curriculum committees, and it culminated at the end-of-school-year planning day. Although all staff participated in the planning process, key players were the principal, the four associate principals, the team leaders from the sub-schools and year-level teachers.

Planning decisions were based on an extensive data set, including:

- o attendance
- o student performance scores (school-based, state and national)
- o parent exit surveys
- o student at educational risk (SAER) data
- o student case management records
- o satisfaction surveys of staff and parents

### Schools-Within-School Structure

As mentioned above, in 2008, due to the school's expanding population, the decision was made to implement a schools-within-school structure. In order to maintain a strong sense of school unity, each class was paired with a 'buddy class' in another sub-school. School assemblies were timetabled to bring 'buddy classes' together; half of the school assembled one week and the other half the next week.

It was believed by those interviewed that the success of the afore-mentioned three basic beliefs in the school's first eight years was dependent on a carefully nurtured supportive school and school-community culture; therefore, when the sub-schools structure was introduced it was accompanied by a community-centred learning focus, in keeping with Wenger's (1998) 'communities of practice'. Amongst other things, this meant that staff were recruited for their collaborative skills and dispositions and were instructed that they needed to develop a good rapport with each other and

with the parents/carers to create a sense of community. For example, each teacher was expected to make meaningful personal contact with each parent in first term and work towards rapport at every opportunity. This was one of the teachers' performance management targets. The principal was confident that this philosophy was working:

We have had a few parents come here with reputations for violence in other schools, yet they co-operate beautifully with us; for example, a father of a new family previously had a 'premise order' against him, meaning he was not allowed to enter school grounds. And yet his child's teacher brought him into class to talk about his family connection with an historical hero, and he has been totally cooperative ever since (Principal, 2011).

### 2. Marketing and Public Relations

As stated above, the school employed a full-time marketing/public relations officer, whose role included:

- o producing the fortnightly newsletter
- o establishing and maintaining an up-to-date web site
- o promoting the school's policies, procedures and achievements
- o producing publications
- o planning and conducting the enrolment process
- o producing the telephone on-hold message
- o helping staff to plan and market school events and programs
- o planning and/or helping produce grant applications
- o seeking sponsorship from partners
- o promoting the role of marketer within other state schools through presentations at the Education Department's request.

The Marketing Manager (MM) explained the rationale for her position in the following way: "People shop around for schools and often children get to choose. We want our school to be the school of choice. We want to stand out."

Evidence of the success of this role included:

- the extra student numbers
- successful grant applications
- high enrolments in the early intervention programs promoted by the MM during enrolment
- the high parent uptake of the school diary
- the strong community participation and parent support for the school.

The MM saw the biggest challenge in her job:

is raising and maintaining staff awareness that the reason we have big student numbers is because we market – and we deliver what we offer. Private schools have done this for years but it is still rather new in the state schools. (MM, 2011).

### 3. Learning Culture

As mentioned above, the major contribution to the positive learning culture was the student support and care program.

Another important contributor was the innovative grounds program, which provided students with environmental education and an alternative space for teachers to conduct classes on any subject. It also brought the local and university community into the school through volunteering and partnering, and it provided opportunities for student leadership through clubs and activities. Examples were:

- the 'Frog bog', a frog and lizard friendly habitat that was constructed from a marshy drain site under the supervision of a parent who is an environmental scientist
- structured, attractive playground equipment and areas designed to match specific age groups – provided through the recent federal government stimulus grant, funds from the school's annual art and craft show and the help of the local regional council, plus parent volunteers, staff, students and university students
- vegetable gardens – an ongoing part of the school grounds for several years

- solar panels funded from the school's community art show, supplemented by the Federal Government

### 4. School Leadership Approach

Leadership was a prominent feature of this school, emanating from the principal who strongly believed that everyone could and should be a leader. School leadership occurred via the school leadership team. Community leadership took the form of the school council, the Parents and Citizens Committee (P & C) and parent – teacher innovations such as occurred with the 'frog bog' grounds initiative, and the Art and Craft Show. Leadership occurred through participation in sub-school committees, curriculum leadership for specialist staff, coordinating across sub-schools as year teachers, community participation and partnering and through innovations. The role of the school leadership team and the students in leadership are explained in detail below.

The school leadership team comprised the principal and four associate principals. Each sub-school was run by its own associate principal, with the principal overseeing the whole school. The associate principals also assumed responsibility for one of the following major aspect of the whole school: curriculum, student services, operations, and early years.

Student leadership was formalized with students' roles in Years 6 - 7 as councillors, ambassadors and faction sports captains. Students were selected by a merit-based application in writing and an interview. All students in Year 7 could nominate to be a councillor. Once councillors had been selected, a similar process was used to elect faction sport captains and then ambassadors. Ambassadors were trained to mentor younger students with social or emotional problems throughout the school.

This application selection process was instituted in 2011 in response to student/staff/parent concerns over equity issues. The decision was arrived at through a series of meetings between the leadership team and students and presented to the P & C and School Council for approval.

#### Whole-School Literacy Program

In 2009, National Partnership Funding (\$217,000 over three years) was used to release staff from teaching to

develop the Whole-School Literacy Plan, and fund a literacy specialist teacher who was provided with specific training by the state Department of Education.

The literacy focus began with phonics and spelling, was extended to the use of a literacy block and guided reading, and was to be extended to writing in 2012. The program involved all students in Years K – 7, and specific attention was given to students identified as not reaching their full potential. These students were monitored using a case management approach in line with NAPLAN achievement bands.

The literacy specialist teacher worked closely with teachers in the classroom to model best practice. She was supported by an associate principal with a literacy specialist background who had been seconded to the school. Professional learning was provided to staff in key areas of the Literacy Plan – letters and sounds, words (their way), and First Steps Reading, with professional learning on First Steps Writing planned for 2012. The associate principal (curriculum) commented on the outcomes of the program:

NAPLAN, SAER, EARS – data from 2011 are not yet available and 2010 data were collected too early to accurately reflect impact of changes. We expect 2011 and, more importantly, 2012 data to show the impact of changes.

## 5. Whole-School Numeracy Program

This was led by a specialist teacher funded by SSPRA. The specialist numeracy teacher worked with the staff planning group initially to establish the whole-school numeracy plan and then worked with teachers in the classroom to develop effective practice and use the Maths Monitoring Tool and First Steps resources. This program had been available to all K-3 classes for some years and was extended to Years 4 – 7 in 2010/11. Students identified as not reaching their full potential were monitored using a case-management approach, with aims linked to NAPLAN achievement bands.

## 6. Student Care and Support Program

In the Principal's words, "This program has a positive focus. You get noticed if you're good". It is the one policy that has been retained over the school's 14 years, although it has been substantially reviewed in recent years. The review involved resetting the school's

standards and reputation in both behaviour and learning outcomes. The Principal stated:

A lot of students were coming here from various schools and we needed to set our standards, follow up on them and enforce them. This meant staff had to take ownership of the standards policy, deal with matters when they came across them and, when necessary, send offenders to an associate principal or, if severe, to the principal. This created high pressure on staff for the first term while standards were getting established.

In addition, year teachers moderate to maintain academic standards within each school and also across year levels to ensure consistency of progression. These teachers are provided with relief teachers to free them up to do the moderating.

Thus the program had five components: students at risk, homework protocol, school diary, positive behaviour management including rewards systems, and pastoral care.

### Students 'At Risk'

Class teachers, parents, the school psychologist and/or speech therapist identified these students. Each teacher had her/his own file of students and used system level data from the SAER tests to plan appropriate interventions and track progress within each term and across the years of schooling. These data were collated at school level and also contributed to the annual planning and reporting.

In 2006, when speech was identified as an area of weakness across the school, the School funded its own half-time speech therapist. The school continued to employ the therapist with the help of funds from a government learning support co-ordination grant (\$10,000 per year) and by partnering with a local university. The therapist assessed students at the school, with a special focus on kindergarten and pre-primary students, and worked with staff to plan appropriate interventions. She also helped students, where needed, to be fast-tracked to the local language development centre (otherwise the waiting time could be 12 months). In the partnership with a local university in the speech program, university students attended one day per week to work with the therapist and the university paid for the therapist's salary on this day. The Associate Principal (early years) who instigated this innovation commented:



Part of my role was dedicated to special needs – I saw the sense in collaborating with a specialist to ‘up-skill’ teachers. It takes a lot of extra time to coordinate but working alongside the specialist with this problem is like heaven – so many problems are addressed and I feel like I’ve won lotto!

Later, in 2009, the same Associate Principal acquired funding within the school’s National Partnership Grant (\$240,000 over two years) to provide professional learning for staff on writing case-management plans. This funding provided relief teachers and one-on-one mentoring by the associate principal and education department staff. The associate principal who ran this program explained that the challenges to be overcome in establishing these two initiatives to reduce students at risk were:

... partnering/seeking funds, the need for regular coaching due to staff changeover for leave etc and also, the high changeover of associate principals – we have had 10 people in the three associate principal positions in seven years, due to them taking up acting promotional positions in other schools. Time to inform/convince new associate principals is short in supply.

### **Homework Protocol**

The school used a homework grid designed to cater for all pre-primary – Year 2 (optional) and Years 4 – 7 students and focused on engaging families in learning. This was available on the school website and issued in hard copy fortnightly. The homework grid provided 10 activities: one from each learning area, a parent choice, a teacher choice, and daily reading and spelling practice. Years 3 – 7 were expected to complete 5 out of 10 activities each fortnight. Teachers marked the homework.

The associate principal (student services) designed the homework grid and teachers monitored it through use of the school diary. The homework grid required ongoing communication with staff and parents to maintain focus on the driving force – to encourage families to work with their students. The associate principal reported that it was running very well, with high student, teacher and family participation. This initiative supported all other school initiatives because it focused on all learning areas.

### **School Diary**

As mentioned above, the school diary worked in conjunction with the homework grid. The diary was designed specifically for the school in 2010 by the school MM and continued in 2011. The diary provided space for: reading and spelling homework; communication with parents; homework grid completion; newsletters for families; assembly stars awarded; Spine Tingler reading challenges and rewards; dates of key events in school calendar; and key policy and procedural information for parents. The diary was purchased by the parents and, by 2012, would be entirely self-funded.

### **Positive Behaviour Management**

The school had a whole-school behaviour management plan, including consequences, rewards and incentives. The reward scheme included recognition for individual achievement through awards and, for contributing to a team, through faction cards. An elaboration of each follows.

The ‘assembly star’ awards scheme was conducted via a stamp on hand and a diary entry that showed date and reason for the award. It was run by the associate principal (student service) and was followed closely by the Principal who commented: “It is amazing to see how keen the Year 7 students (boys and girls) are about this. It is cool to be seen as doing well.”

It was a challenge at first to elicit staff support and commitment for the policy. But by 2011 the staff, students and parents supported it because it had created a positive culture of achievement; students liked getting acknowledged for being well behaved and doing well; and teachers liked it because it enabled them to spend more of their time on teaching.

Factions ran across the schools-within-school structure. Faction reward cards were given for positive behaviour/performance at each weekly assembly, and individuals could use their faction cards as tickets in a free lunch raffle. At the end of term the winning faction had an extended recess time. Both the assembly star awards and the faction card holders were published each week on the school website and in the fortnightly newsletter.

The school intervened early to create a positive learning culture, through five key initiatives:

- the speech therapy
- baby story time and rhyme time
- kindergarten screening
- the PALS program
- a special enrolment process.

The speech therapy initiative is described above (under 'students at risk'). Each of the other four initiatives is described briefly below.

The baby story time and rhyme time program was run by the school librarian and an education assistant, under the guidance of the MM and associate principal (early years). Children under two years of age could attend the school on one morning each week, with a parent/carer, for a rhymes and stories session delivered specifically to the needs of the age group. The attendance records showed that 40 families had registered, with 15-20 families who attended on any given week. The associate principal said the main challenge in setting up the program was to win the school librarian's support and confidence that toddlers could be contained within the school environment. This was done by taking the school librarian to visit the local library, where the program had been inaugurated (but could not be continued), and acquiring large cushions for the toddlers to sit on while they listened/participated in stories.

Kindergarten screening was started in 2009; it entailed the school nurse screening all kindergarten students on sight, hearing, physical development, cognitive development and perceptual skills. The school has used the screening data to intervene on health concerns, such as speech and hence the school's decision to continue employment of a speech therapist. In 2011 results indicated the need to achieve higher levels in mathematics and literacy for Years 1 and 2, which led to applying for and receiving a National Partnership Funding grant create whole-school programs in literacy and numeracy. The associate principal described the biggest challenge for kindergarten screening as the constant need to juggle for funding: "When the nurse funding was cut, we had to approach and lobby the Minister of Education to retrieve it – she made a school visit with six colleagues from the Education Department."

The PALS program began in 2006 with a federal Family Partnerships grant of \$10,000 and in 2011 80 families were enrolled. The program involves parents and their young child/children aged between three and six years coming to the school on Wednesday afternoons to participate in activities to reduce problem behaviour and increase social skills. Each parent/care giver is given a file outlining child development stages and each child receives a gift on her/his birthday. The education assistant who ran the program was a school parent and a previous participant; she organised the weekly activities and connected with parents to help them to fit in and connect with the community.

What has made the enrolment process at this school special is that parents enrol their children through the marketing office. The MM welcomes parents and informs them about the school's family facilities, services and opportunities to connect with teachers and other parents.

### **Pastoral Care**

As expressed by the associate principal (student services), the overall effect of the student support and care program was to: "Provide a scaffold and support for behaviour management and thus allow teachers to focus on teaching." Parents were linked into pastoral care through the enrolment process and its associated early intervention programs, as well as through the school diary and homework program. And parents were introduced to the teachers through the school's requirement for all teachers to make meaningful contact early in the year with each family in their class.

## **7. Specialist Teachers, Programs and Events**

The school had four specialist curriculum programs: art, physical education, music and French, culminating each year in a whole-school event. The students worked in year levels and then performed as a whole at the event. Perhaps the most notable of these events was the annual community art show, run in partnership with the local council. Students exhibited alongside accomplished local artists and both donated proceedings from their sales. This event had become well-known in the region and contributed substantial funds to the school.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 4 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school's student care and support policy focused on the positive: "you get noticed if you're good". It set the school's high reputation, attracted students from nearby schools to enrol there, as reflected in its high enrolment. Standards in performance and behaviour were maintained through twice yearly review and whole-school planning meetings. The learning culture was focused on community-centred learning within each sub-school, across the sub-schools, between school and family and between the school and the local and regional communities.

The student care and support policy was supported by seven evidence-based practices that created a positive learning culture: the process for helping students at risk, homework protocol, school diary, positive behaviour management including rewards systems, pastoral care, the school grounds, and student leadership.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

The school's pedagogic framework was based on community-centred learning, early intervention programs for kindergarten and pre-schoolers and frequent monitoring and reporting of progress throughout all years. This included a comprehensive and well-used case-management system that set targets from the NAPLAN results. This framework drove the pedagogy through determining priority curriculum areas and teaching approaches to be used and/or developed (e.g. literacy and numeracy through their respective First Steps programs).

The current curriculum focus on literacy and numeracy had been boosted by the large National Partnership grant that enabled specialist literacy and numeracy teacher/leaders and extensive staff training. The performance evidence of this was expected in 2012 – 2014 NAPLAN results.

The four specialist curriculum programs: art, French, music and physical education, appeared to bring the four sub-schools together and raise the school's morale and its profile in the local, regional and state communities.

Of the three disadvantaged groups targeted in this research project – compliant and disengaged boys,

Aboriginal students and early years students – only early years had received significant attention at this school, through its intervention programs. The school had only one Aboriginal student. And the only specific initiative for boys was to procure more 'boy-friendly' books for the library.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

Students 'at risk' were supported and tracked through early intervention programs, early screening programs, system level SAER surveys, case management plans and NAPLAN testing to monitor ongoing performance.

Progress was monitored at the individual, class and whole-school level through year-level team meetings, reviewed by the associate principal (early years), and a whole-school SAER progress report was reviewed by all staff each term. An example of the individual case management report for one class for 2010 showed:

- Whether a student at risk in one year continued to be at risk in the next year; for example, one class showed that none of the five students at risk in 2008 were at risk in 2009 and that four other students became at risk in 2009 and one further student was identified as likely to become at risk in the next year – 2011.
- Whether any students exceeded their expected target levels: the 2010 class sample showed that with extra help two students exceeded their target expectations, achieving level 6 in place of 5 and level 7 in place of six, respectively.

Other programs and strategies to support the positive learning culture of the school, all of which have been described in earlier sub-sections above, are:

- the homework protocol
- the school diary
- the Positive behaviour management program
- pastoral care

#### 4. Leadership

Leadership was central to the school's success and was characterised by:

- o vision: The principal's early visions and basics pedagogic beliefs drove the school's philosophy; in more recent years this vision was extended through his belief that everybody could and should be a leader in some way.
- o goal setting: goals had been set through whole-school planning and in response to carefully planned monitoring and resulting evidence
- o leadership approaches: the leadership approach was distributed, collaborative leadership across the school and community; examples are the successful switch from multi-aged classes to year-level classes in 2008 and to the sub-schools structure
- o roles: the primary role was the principal's, who oversaw the whole school and positioned it within the community; also vitally important is the leadership team comprised of the principal and four associate principals who each ran a sub-school as well as led a major area of the school's operations; other roles were the year-level teachers who monitored and reported performance to maintain standards and the curriculum leaders who provided professional learning for their teacher colleagues; the parents also instigated initiatives within the school and the students led in roles as councillors, ambassadors and faction leaders
- o practices: practices integral to such leadership were staff recruitment for collaborative leadership and innovation, capacity building, encouraging innovation and leadership in staff and in students, succession planning through giving responsibility to the four associate principals, and aligning practices to purpose through the school planning and review process

#### 5. Evidence-based policies to increase engagement

Because the school worked to an integrated and regularly reviewed plan, all of its policies served to produce student engagement. The evidence in this report suggests that the most influential of these policies were the school's comprehensive student care and support policy and its community-centred learning policy.

#### 6. Whole school approaches

The school was structured as four sub-schools to cater for high/increasing enrolments and to maintain the positive learning culture that was driven by the school strategic plan. The strategic and operational plans were formulated via a whole-school planning day, incorporating input from year-level and student-at-risk monitoring each term, annual reviews of each school and specific operational teams, as well as the whole-school annual report and review. In addition, the embedded, regular interaction across the sub-schools maintained a strong sense of school belonging, which was enhanced by whole-school events run by the specialist curriculum programs.

#### 7. Links between home, school and local community

Home-school partnerships was a notable strength at this school, as evidenced in its:

- o enrolment process, early intervention literacy programs, and the speech therapy program
- o homework grid and school diary, which contributed to community-centred learning
- o community events profiling school curricula achievements at local, regional and state levels
- o marketing within and beyond the school and its community
- o fund raising and grant submissions that were a constant activity in the school.

#### 8. Resources

As reported by the associate principal (early years), the MM and the principal, the school depended on extra funds raised through grants and fundraising events. Other resources, such as expertise and training, were accessed for no expense through collaborative partnerships with home and community.

### **9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available**

No performance measures were reported by the school as in need of development for sharing within school networks.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement over time**

Reports of all performance data (early years screening, SAER survey, school literacy and numeracy assessments and NAPLAN scores) were used in year-level meetings each term and in the annual review and planning day to identify achievements against performance targets in the School Operational Plan. The school's own case-management process, described under the Student Care Program was evidenced in the class performance report.

### **11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders**

In 2011 the two major professional learning initiatives were cooperative learning via the First Steps Maths and First Steps Reading programs, and writing and reporting of case-management plans for students at risk. Professional learning was planned for 2012 for First Steps Writing. Teachers and school leaders also received intensive learning in writing and reporting of case-management plans, which had been funded by the National Partnerships grant for 2009 – 2012.

### **12. Sustainability of initiatives**

Innovations are vulnerable in any organisation and many schools are not able to sustain their successful innovations. In this school, the reasons why so many innovations had been sustained and/or adapted over time were:

- decision making was evidence based
- innovations could only be approved if they were aligned to the school plan
- innovations were marketed within the school, to the state Education Department, and to the community
- the planning process involved the whole school
- the distributed leadership approach assisted with succession planning (although the frequent promotion of associate principals out of the school did lessen this effect)
- the school was responsive to changes in the community as well as state and nation
- fundraising and submitting grant applications was a constant activity
- staff were committed
- initiatives in developing and using school grounds reinforced positive learning culture and cemented school-community relations

## **Conclusion**

Case study 4 stood out as a very successful school despite its 'at-risk' factors. The school's early preventative action avoided disengagement and it has continued to actively promote engagement.

Given the nation's plans to rapidly increase migration, in particular to the mining states, this school's demographic scenario is likely to be faced by many other Australian school principals. Much could be learned from this school, with its strong alignment between its management, beliefs, policies, plans and leadership.

# Case Study 5: Metropolitan Secondary School

- **Secondary school**
- **School population 550**
- **Metropolitan**
- **Public school**

## Background

Case Study School 5 had a long history of innovation and was known as a 'lighthouse' school for its extra support to students and its high achievements. Strengths in leadership and innovation were common features of the principals recruited to the school.

This is a metropolitan senior high school, catering for 550 students in Years 8 – 12. The school has a diverse cultural mix, with 79% of students classified as LBOTE, and 11 % Aboriginals students. Collectively, students spoke 27 languages from 50 cultures. The ICSEA is low at 887, a decrease of 27 since 2009. The change in ICSEA is attributed to an increase in the bottom quartile and a decrease in the next two quartiles, reflecting the constantly changing demographics within the catchment area.

The priorities identified by the school for 2011 were: improvements in literacy, behaviour and attendance, and to have all students graduating from Year 12.

In 2011 the school had two deputy principals and a principal, who worked within four key areas of school operations:

- curriculum improvement
- student services
- learning technologies
- community engagement

In 2003 the school restructured, creating a middle and senior school to reduce bullying and enable teachers to better focus on the social and learning needs of the specific age groups.

The school's Education Support Inclusive Learning Centre (ESILC) supported students with disabilities that rendered them unable to engage in mainstream education. The emphasis of the centre was on supporting student achievement and transition to work, and in 2011 a new trades centre opened at the school for students pursuing vocational education and training (VET) certificates.

Pastoral care was very strong in this school. Students knew that they were being watched over by teachers and each other, and that teachers engaged with their families.

Significant achievements of the school were:

- rising attendance figures (from 83% in 2009 to 87% in 2010)
- improved 2010 NAPLAN results: students in one out of the four literacy areas had achieved over one standard deviation higher than similar schools, and in numeracy nearly two standard deviations above similar schools
- significant improvement in Year 12 graduation rate (from 89% in 2009 – 54 students eligible to 97% in 2010 – 62 students eligible)
- in 2010 60% of Year 12 students had achieved direct entry to university, portfolio entry, or Certificate 11 VET level
- Independent Public School status late in 2011 (giving it more independence and further opportunity to develop connections with the community)

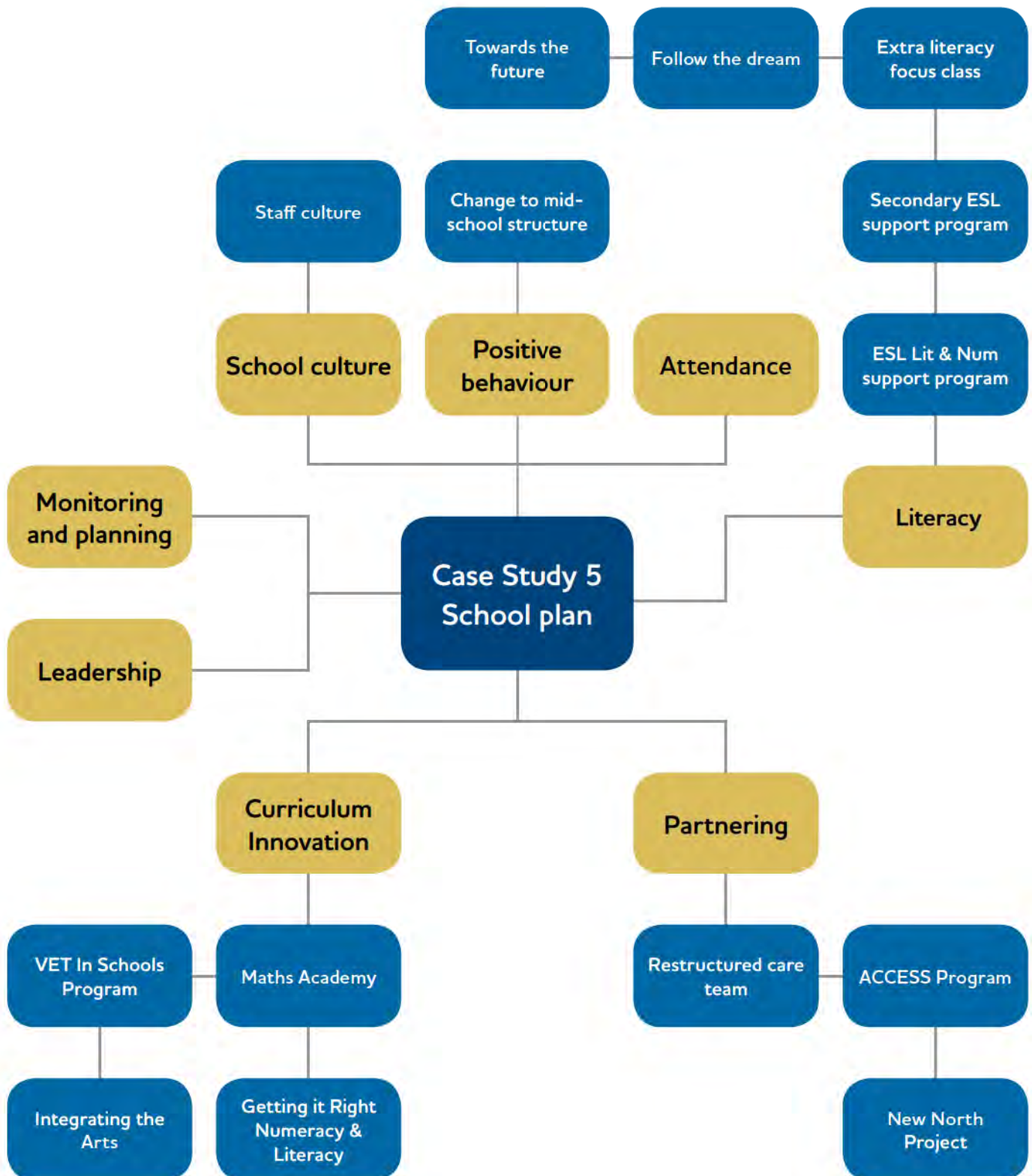
## Overall Approach to Engagement

The approach to engagement in Case Study School 5 was an holistic one, responding to changing student needs with new initiatives and programs. All staff interviewed were adamant that the school's success with student engagement was due to the synergy and special initiatives in the school culture. They saw the culture as a caring one, with good communication amongst staff, and encouragement to innovate. The Principal explained:

There is a lot of overlap between our programs/projects. Teachers and education assistants are very aware of the programs and of the students in them. The kids know the support people as well; we have good community communication and spirit.

The synergistic map on the opposite page identifies eight key engagement initiatives and their offshoots.

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

The eight key initiatives implemented at this school are explained below.

### 1. Literacy

The school literacy focus incorporated five initiatives: the literacy and numeracy combined approach; the secondary ESL support program; the Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success program; the Towards the Future program; and, the extra literacy focus class. These are explained below.

#### Literacy and Numeracy Combined Approach

The combined literacy and numeracy program was designed to support students from low socioeconomic status families. On entering Year 8, students were screened for literacy and numeracy on the basis of their primary school NAPLAN results, and low performing students went into the program. The program provided for:

- ESL small-group learning, with an education assistant to give them extra help in English;
- one-on-one class withdrawal for low performing students to improve their basic literacy skills;
- one-on-one support within the classroom for Australian Aboriginal students

The school supported the literacy and numeracy program in several ways: extra staff, including a GIRL (Getting It Right Literacy) coordinator and GIRN (Getting It Right Numeracy) coordinator; an ESL coordinator; and an ATAS (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academic Support) coordinator – all supporting the literacy and numeracy targets of the school. These features, along with technology support, para-professional support staff and PD on literacy teaching including hands-on leadership from the principal, ensured strong support for the program. And two staff meetings per term were devoted to professional learning in this area. The program received National Partnership funding and school support program resource allocation (SSPRA) funding from the state Education Department.

#### Secondary ESL Support Program

Starting in 2009, this after-school ESL support tutor scheme was for Years 8 – 12 students to prepare them for language-based courses in Years 11 and 12. The program was targeted for students from a refugee background and for those identified in NAPLAN data from primary school as being below the benchmark. Parents/carers were required to attend an initial meeting to ensure they understood and supported the expectations. The tutors were para-professional staff funded from SSPRA. The assessment data indicated the success of this program through an improvement in student literacy in 2010 and 2011.

#### Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success

This was a Federal Government initiative to enhance literacy development for Year 12 Australian Aboriginal students. It ran from 2006 to 2010, and due to its success in this school, the coordinator adapted and continued the program in 2010 as the Towards the Future project (see below).

#### Towards the Future Program

This was transformed into a numeracy and literacy after-school tutoring program, and extended to include Year 8 – 12 migrant and refugee students as well as Aboriginal students. The program also aimed to provide career education, and students were assisted to prepare a documented plan in which they set out their goals and targets in literacy/numeracy and career options. Parents were expected to support their children's learning in the program, and some parents joined the reference group. The program's annual review report claimed marked improvement in literacy and numeracy performance by the Towards the Future students in the first two semesters. And because of its success in 2010, the school drew from the National Partnership funding, mentioned above, to continue the program in 2011.

#### Extra Literacy Focus Class

Primary school NAPLAN results were used to determine which students should attend the extra literacy focus class in Years 8 and 9. These students received remedial tuition from an English teacher and one-on-one help from an education assistant during the class. The assessment data indicated the success of this program through an improvement in student literacy in 2010 and 2011.



## 2. Positive Behaviour

In their 2009 review of the Behaviour Management System (BMS), the school staff decided that the system needed a more positive focus. According to the school web page, the new BMS:

... aims to develop positive, cooperative relationships between teachers and students, and concepts of self-worth, self-discipline and respect for others. Respect, responsibility and doing your best ... are essential to maintaining a pleasant learning environment.

The focus of the new system was on recognising and rewarding positive behaviour, with the following objectives:

- o students to know and observe school rules
- o staff to strive to acknowledge four positive student behaviours for every negative behaviour that needed to be addressed
- o staff to send more gold letters (commendations) to parents and fewer blue letters (concerns)

Whereas there were no data available on improvements at the time of the study, the students were reportedly responding favourably to the increase in rewards and awards which, in the words of one of the deputies, was "creating quite a buzz".

## 3. Attendance

Attendance was also reviewed in 2009, on the requirement of the state Education Department for schools to set and achieve attendance targets. Staff identified some problems with the old system; so, to facilitate consistency as well as good behaviour between the two sub-schools, they decided to adopt a whole-school approach including strategies to encourage good attendance. In February 2010, the school introduced the following whole-school actions:

- o set annual attendance targets for the school
- o record daily attendances as fractions of the day rather than as a whole or half day
- o call homes each day to report non-attendance of Year 11 and 12 students, logging the calls into the SIS (Safe Inclusive

School) system

- o report repeated home calls to the referrals officer in the regional education office
- o review attendance figures in team leaders' meetings each fortnight and pass on any improvements or negative trends to the deputy principal for action
- o reward students with 100% attendance with an invitation to lunch with the Principal, deputy principals, year leaders and the chaplain
- o conduct a raffle each term for those with over 90% attendance, with the prize an ipod
- o put regular articles about attendance in the school newsletter

This initiative had a positive effect on parents, leading to increased student attendance and a reduction in calls home.

## 4. School Culture

### Learning Culture

The focus in this school was on achieving and, as stated above, the new BMS system deliberately emphasised respect, responsibility and doing your best. The District director heralded the success of the school's culture via the annual school review, and sent staff from other schools to see it in action.

According to those interviewed, this culture emanated from the leadership and quality of staff, who were innovative and had a pastoral care focus. 'Doing your best' was one of the school's three core values, and pastoral care was one of the three principles underpinning the core values in the school plan. Staff were recruited for their ability to teach innovatively and for their caring attitude and good interaction with students.

A deputy principal who had been at the school for 19 yrs described the school culture in the following way:

People are encouraged to innovate here and it has been so for at least 19 yrs – the principals are recruited by type. We have a low staff turnover and a 'family thing' happening here. Unusually there are no subject cliques in our staff room. Rather, there is a good atmosphere and a well-used pool table that creates a lot of banter.

This is galvanised in Friday afternoon drinks. And it is evident in the nurturing program we run for teaching practice students. Staff give them extra time, effort, caring support and treat them as members of staff.

### **Change to School Structure**

In 2003 the school established a senior and middle school structure to facilitate pastoral care and improve the learning culture. The smaller student cohorts aided programs to minimise bullying and promote multiculturalism.

### **Collaboration**

The school's project coordinator commented, "It is impossible to operate alone here, everybody knows what is going on and this is achieved by communication, communication, communication."

### **Interrelationship Between Projects**

It was very noticeable in this school that the various initiatives to address needs were knitted together well, and students did not get confused by the profusion of activity. Keeping staff and students well informed was a priority.

### **Catering for a Wide Range of Needs**

The school needed to cater for students with learning disabilities, and those from ESL, refugee, Australian Indigenous and low socioeconomic backgrounds. This wide range was catered for through special literacy and numeracy programs, ESILC, the revamped attendance program, the revamped BMS, and the new academic/trades streams and trades centre, ensuring that all students were facilitated to succeed. In addition, the recent Federal Government initiative for computers in schools had the school anticipating a major upgrade during 2011.

## **5. Monitoring and Planning Across the school**

Monitoring, reporting and planning was conducted in various ways and made maximum use of the school committees and meeting schedules. Staff were given time to regularly review and plan from performance data.

Regularly used forms of data were:

- NAPLAN
- school-based literacy and numeracy results
- school-based subject specific results
- case-management reports
- parent, student and teacher surveys
- the five-yearly year report on graduations
- ATAR and TAFE results
- student participation and retention rates
- student intention and destination surveys
- student attendance and suspension rates

Student performance data in all subjects, plus their attendance and behavior, were reported at regular meetings to enable any issues to be acted upon, as outlined under 'Leadership' below. Needs were identified in fortnightly operations meetings and in line with the school plan. The Projects Manager commented: "Needs drive change in this school, and change has to fit in with our priorities, existing programs and school plan. That's why we collaborate so much – we cannot work alone in this school."

The principal took every opportunity to review data and bring it out for teachers to reconsider. He commented: "Otherwise we would be constantly monitoring and assume a lot without actually knowing the facts."

## **6. Curriculum Innovation**

The school constantly monitored and reviewed its curricula in response to fast-changing demographics and the demands of state and national policies. Innovation was a way of life for staff in this school. The following examples will be elaborated below: the Maths Academy and summer school, adapting the GIRL and GIRN programs, the ACCESS program, the VET in Schools program, the New North initiative, the restructured CARE program, and the integrated arts program.

### **Maths Academy Including Summer School for Maths Extension Students**

The Mathematics Academy, encompassing the summer school and additional mathematics support programs, was designed to maximise opportunities for students in Year 10, 11 and 12 who showed potential in Maths and to help them improve their exam scores. Approximately 16 students attended the first summer school in 2009. The school funded it, and it was run by teaching staff who volunteered their time in the summer holidays. The assessment data indicated the success of this program through an improvement in student engagement in numeracy in 2011.

### **Getting it Right Literacy (GIRL) and Getting it Right Numeracy (GIRN)**

programs were initiated and funded by the state Education Department to improve literacy and numeracy performance in primary and secondary schools. A specialist teacher was appointed to coordinate all professional learning for teachers within this school, and GIRL and GIRN teachers within the school were appointed to coordinate and lead the two programs across the school.

### **ACCESS Program**

This was an on-campus literacy and numeracy program for Year 11 and 12 students who had shown limited engagement in Year 10. The program, which began in 2007, has addressed both academic and social needs, enabling these students to complete their mainstream education and/or prepare for work readiness, with two days per week spent in workplace learning under the guidance of the youth worker, teacher, and VET coordinator. The ACCESS program has also served as a bridging program for TAFE, enabling students to achieve a TAFE certificate of competence in literacy and numeracy, articulating to TAFE courses.

Considerable resources have been allocated to this program, including two youth workers, one full-time teacher and five other key support staff: the school nurse, psychologist, chaplain, team leaders, cultural officer. The staff have played an intensive pastoral care role supporting the students in the workplace through regular onsite visits. Funds for ACCESS have come from the SSPRA, the Education Engagement Training and Participation fund, and from the school. The deputy principal in charge stated that enrolments and attendance figures for ACCESS have been high, reflecting its popularity.

### **VET in Schools Program**

This is a new workplace learning support program for Year 11-12 students, endorsed by the state Education Department. It began in 2010, due to the low completion rate of the Workplace Learning course and students not achieving Certificate Trade qualifications. The VET in Schools program was funded for four years through National Partnership funds, with the goal of raising the completion rate for Certificate II qualifications from 10% to 40%. Key initiatives in the program have been to appoint:

1. a vocational trainer to assist teachers through a work readiness program and support students by visits/contact at the worksite
2. a VET Coordinator to oversee initiatives, freeing up teachers from dealing with the accountability processes associated with coordination work

The program was funded through the school's SSPRA grant and National Partnership funding. The course completion data indicated the success of this program through course completion improvement in 2010.

### **Integrated Arts Program**

The school's dance program, which has been operating for 25 years, was an example of an innovation that has been sustained and become distinctive. Starting in the 1980s, the dance program has provided students with a sense of pride in themselves and in their school; it has also developed positive attitudes towards body maintenance and physical exercise – attributes especially critical for students who have not been able to achieve well academically. In 2010 the school moved to integrate the arts, through collaborative inputs by media, technology, visual arts, drama and dance, to showcase arts performance at school assemblies and community events.

## **7. Partnering**

In 2010 a school partnerships coordinator was appointed for two days per week to manage the partnerships already in existence at the school and to develop new partnerships. A brief description of three examples of the school's partnership initiatives follows:

### Curriculum Program

This is an initiative endorsed by the state Education Department to increase curriculum accessibility for Year 11-12 university-bound students in schools with insufficient numbers of students and specialist staff to run particular courses. Starting in 2009, the program was a collaboration of five geographically linked senior high schools. This school offered seven courses within this program: specialist maths, history, psychology, drama, politics and law, biology, and integrated science.

This partnership initiative involved extension preparation, including consultation with staff, community and the District Office; students needed an altered timetable to attend 'away courses'; and the teachers involved had to undertake professional learning. The program was funded partially from the state Education Department, and the remainder came from the schools' SSPRA fund. The success of this program was evidenced through an improvement in senior student subject selection in 2010 and 2011.

### Restructured Care Program

The school had a sophisticated pastoral care system, with five key objectives:

1. a system where students feel valued and respected
2. a system to promote communication between teaching staff and support staff
3. a safe working environment for students and staff
4. staff who are valued, respected and supported
5. promotion to the community that the school was safe and inclusive

However, the pastoral care team recognized that the program had shortcomings and decided that the only way the necessary services could be met was by forming partnerships with outside agencies that were directly connected with youth services. With SSPRA funding in 2010, the team set about developing a better communication model between all parties to service the needs of students and to feedback information to staff.

Most agencies have expressed willingness to participate in the restructured care program, provided the school shows interest and good faith in the youth services concerned. The outcomes of this new innovation were not yet available at the time of data collection (2011), but were expected by 2012.

### The ACCESS and VET in Schools Programs

These are described under curriculum innovation above and are other prime examples of the school's aptitude for productive partnering.

## 8. Leadership

Leadership was an obvious strength in the school, in the form of:

- the leadership team
- the principal's up-front pedagogic leadership
- encouragement and support for staff to be vigilant and innovative in response to changing student needs.

Each of these is outlined below.

### The Leadership Team

The school executive comprised the principal and two deputy principals, who were also members of the 15-member School Management Group which met weekly. The role of the School Management Group was to provide directions in all facets of school management. Other key leadership groups were the Middle School and Senior School Operations Committees, which met weekly and set the agenda for the fortnightly Directions Committee meetings.

The role of the Directions Committee was to set directions for the school in:

- curriculum
- BMIS
- pastoral care
- SAER
- attendance
- case management
- transition
- dress code
- staff support

Outcomes of these meetings and other matters were reported to the School Council, comprising staff, student and community members and serving to oversee school objectives and priorities, financial arrangements, school performance, codes of conduct and policy implementation. Other committees were: Finance, Social, Care, Literacy, Numeracy, Towards the Future, and Workplace advisory committees. These were supported by regular middle school meetings and senior school meetings. This distributed leadership model was characterized by the active care of leadership committees and the synchronicity of meetings and agenda items so that problems and successes at the teaching 'coalface' and community were reported and acted upon.

### Principal's Up-Front Leadership in Pedagogy

The principal's style of leading staff in pedagogic practice stemmed from his own passion for, and developed expertise in, teaching. This style is demonstrated by these practices:

- o observing in a classroom for an hour each week, visiting all teachers within the year – followed by feedback via email to the teacher observed, indicating positive aspects and inviting the teacher to seek further feedback in discussion (the latter, which was voluntary, had a 50% up-take)
- o showcasing in staff meetings leading pedagogy being carried out by teachers in the school
- o leading data analysis on aspects of school performance
- o leading literacy initiatives, such as introducing journal writing across the school, using wiki to increase literacy, and exploring the effect of online learning on literacy

### Encouragement and Support for Staff to be Vigilant and Innovative

The active committee system described above was the vehicle through which staff aired their observations and shared their ideas to resolve problems. The school's long history of innovation and the current executive's actions and expectations are testaments of this encouragement and support for staff.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 5 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

Monitoring and planning took place at classroom, school-wide, district, state and national levels. Classroom monitoring predominantly involved teacher-designed classroom performance tests, diagnostic tests and observations about students' outcomes. School-wide monitoring included NAPLAN testing, school-based literacy and numeracy results, school-based, subject-specific results, case reports, parent, student and teacher surveys, annual Year 12 completion rates, a five-yearly year report on Year 12 graduations, ATAR and TAFE results, student participation and retention rates, student intention and destination surveys, student attendance and suspension rates.

The school contributed to district and national monitoring of NAPLAN scores, attendance data and behavioural data. In addition, the school shared performance data from the New North Education curriculum project with the other four partnering schools in the district. State monitoring and planning took the form of setting attendance targets – adjusted to ICSEA data, monitoring data on completion and behavior, and academic performance according to NAPLAN scores. It also planned from these data in setting the staff profile.

Staff were given designated time to regularly review and plan from performance data at year levels and at the whole-school level. For example, four pupil-free days per year were devoted to reviewing performance measures in literacy.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

The school took a unique combined approach to targeting literacy and numeracy through its five integrated programs, described above, that catered for all age groups and learning levels targeting students with special needs, such as ESL, Aboriginal, low-achieving, high achieving (maths) and trades-oriented students.

As mentioned above, regular and substantial periods of time were devoted to reviewing performance measures in literacy.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

Case management was a strength of this school, wherein case reports were regularly reviewed through the comprehensive committee system, ensuring that students received the help they needed. This, in conjunction with the pastoral care system, created a strong safety net for students in the school. The recently initiated restructured care program aims to extend this safety net via partnerships within the wider community.

### 4. Leadership

Leadership was another strength in this school where the model was one of distributed leadership, in conjunction with the principal actively leading in pedagogy and actively encouraging and supporting staff to innovate as needs arose.

Another noticeable aspect of leadership was that of aligning curriculum initiatives to the school plan. This alignment was intended to get the greatest value from the funds available by overlapping and integrating programs, and it certainly benefitted from staff collaboration, communication and partnering with other schools and agencies. Moreover, leadership stemmed from vigilant monitoring and feedback of performance data to frequently review and update programs and initiatives.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

As already mentioned, all practices and programs in this school had clearly arisen from needs that had been identified in its extensive monitoring and review system. The practices/programs were all clearly implementing the school plan and relevant school policies, and were regularly reviewed, adapted or concluded according to the ongoing performance evidence.

### 6. Whole school approaches

Prominent whole – school approaches were:

- the schools-within-school structure
- the school committee structure
- the timely scheduling of meetings to enable maximum use of information in decision making
- the BMS
- the pastoral care plan.

A key factor in the success of the approaches was the collaborative school culture. Two comments from staff: "You can't work alone in this school", and, "We have a low staff turnover – its hard work here but nobody wants to leave", support the researcher's observations on school visits.

### 7. Links between home, school and community

The school's relationship with the families in its communities is a strong one, evidenced by the number of parents who walk through the school door and the ease with which they do so. This relationship was supported by the regular community newsletters and home visits and the fact that parents wanted their children to attend this school. The many after-hours learning programs for students, which were all well attended, were dependent on two conditions: 1) signed parental support and commitment for the program's participation requirements 2) student commitment to meet the requirements.

Parents also participated on reference groups for innovative school programs and on the school council. Furthermore, while the school had a high attendance rate, its attendance policy required staff to contact families regularly. Staff usually found that parents were cooperative upon contact and staff welcomed the prospect of wider contact with the community services agencies, which is inherent in the new restructured care plan.

### 8. Resources

Writing grant applications was a regular activity for many staff at the school. As the principal commented, "Projects and special funding make a huge difference and we could not operate without them." This school made particularly good use of funds by integrating and dovetailing projects to fit the school plan and each other.

Most of the grant funds were spent on employing extra specialist staff, such as a youth worker, trades trainer, education assistants and Aboriginal Islander education officers.

When funding for successful projects ran out, further funding was sought. Where no further funding could be found, every effort was made to subsume the costs into the school budget. Partnering in a new district initiative had also provided extra resources for the students by increasing their range of subject choice.

### **9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available**

The school was not engaged in developing any academic performance measures.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time**

The school's five-year completion report showed performance over this time span.

### **11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders**

Professional learning was targeted to the school's initiatives, such as with whole-school training in the new BMS system, which was staggered over three years to ensure all staff would be trained within budget.

### **12. Sustainability of initiatives**

This school had an admirable record of sustainable innovations, secured by careful monitoring, reviewing and alignment to the school plan. The regular funding submissions also helped as has had the distributed leadership model and staff culture.

## **Conclusion**

Case study school No.5 implemented a large number of initiatives to achieve high engagement for a school with its demographics. What stood out was the synergistic way in which the initiatives aligned to and implemented the school plan. The factors that enabled this to happen were: the appointment of innovative and collaborative school principals, the school's initiative to seek innovative and committed teachers who especially cared about their students, the distributed school leadership style, the constant monitoring and reviewing of performance data, and effective grant submission.

# Case Study 6: Small Non-Metropolitan Primary School (very remote)

- o **Primary school**
- o **School population**  
**129: 97% Aboriginal**
- o **Non-metropolitan: very remote**
- o **Public school**

## Background

Case Study School 6 served the children from five very remote communities. The school enrolled 129 students, with 97% of the student population from Aboriginal families. The gross ICSEA for the school was very low at 675, with an increase of 60 since 2009. However, the ICSEA level was below the data reporting threshold, so NAPLAN data for Years 3 and 5 were not available. Year 7 NAPLAN data showed a significant increase in reading from 2008 (well below) to 2010 (above similar schools). Numeracy data showed the Year 7s were holding at comparable levels to similar schools. Although the 2010 data for Year 7s were still well below the Australian average, the improvement since 2008 was significant. The non-Aboriginal staff at the school comprised first and second year teachers, and the literacy and numeracy coordinators, who were experienced teachers.

The school had a transient student population, with up to 20% of the students moving from the school at some point, but most of these students eventually returned to the school. For most students, English was a second language and was generally not spoken at home. The school spent as much time as possible linking literacy to other school activities.

## Approach to Engagement

The school had a clear goal to improve the learning outcomes of all students. By maintaining district-focused data profiles for each student, the school sought to have little loss of learning and assessment time for those students who were transient. The principal's position was that if a student attended school for at least 60% of the time, then she/he should be showing improvement in learning outcomes. There was a tone in the school of striving for improvement and the principal asserted "everyone is working to make the school better."

The principal recognised that, because of the school's remote location, it did not always attract the best teachers in the state. However, he was able draw on funding to employ the school's two deputy principals as coordinators for literacy and numeracy respectively. In this way, the inexperienced teachers received expert support for their literacy and numeracy teaching; therefore, according to the principal, all teachers would be able to engage students and meet their learning needs.

Two of the school's four graduate teachers had also been given leadership responsibilities: one for organizing sport within the school, which included engaging visiting coaches to provide tuition in football, rugby and netball skills; the other had responsibility for managing the library and its resources.

All activities in the school's operations had clear links to engaging students in the learning process and also, as much as possible, to engaging their families. The school had a calm and happy tone and there was a positive rapport between teachers and students. The synergistic map below identifies seven key engagement initiatives and their offshoots.



## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Attendance

The school considered attendance to be the foundation for learning and had the following strategies to encourage and improve attendance:

- an awards system for classrooms; the class with the highest attendance each week received a trophy and a box of popcorn, which students were permitted to eat while watching a reward movie on DVD
- at daily assemblies, the principal encouraged students to maintain their attendance at school and reminded them of the rewards for attending
- certificates were presented to students achieving a high level of school attendance
- classes had charts displaying individual students' attendance

The school wanted parents to be accountable for the education of their children. The principal told parents not to accept the excuse that their child does not want to attend school. Neither did the school accept the excuse that parents could not send their children to school due to a lack of food or clothing, because the school would provide this support.

The school worked hard to encourage phone contact from parents when children were absent. For example, families were provided with a fridge magnet showing the school's phone number, and parents were encouraged to obtain medical certificates if their children were sick. The principal's message to the community was that he expected of them the same level of responsibility as from a non-Aboriginal community. The principal believed there had been a huge improvement in the level of accountability as a result of these efforts. The attendance continued to fluctuate, but the level of explained absences had increased from zero to 60% of all absences.

#### Attendance Officer

The school had appointed as its attendance officer a lady from the community who had a bus licence and worked in the school. On Tuesdays and Thursday she conducted community visits to the homes of children

who had been absent for two to three consecutive days. The attendance officer tried to ascertain reasons for students' non-attendance and kept a record of what parents said. She encouraged the parents to send their children back to school. According to the Principal, visits from the attendance officer generally had an immediate response and students were back at school the following day.

#### Case Management

The school used a case management approach for students whose attendance was below 50%, inviting parents in for discussions about how to improve the attendance. The school had referred two students, whose attendance was significantly low and showed no improvement, to a government child protection agency.

### 2. Kindergarten

Because the Kindergarten children were bused in from the local communities, their program was run for three full days each week rather than five half days. The children were very focused on Mondays but they showed tiredness on Tuesdays and Wednesday afternoons. Therefore, the teacher modified the program, incorporating quiet activities and those targeting fine motor skills in the afternoons. The attendance was high in the kindergarten, with 16/17 out of 20 children attending on a regular basis. The class consisted of 16 four-year-olds and the four oldest three-year-olds; the latter were to repeat Kindergarten the following year as four-year-olds.

#### Birth to Three-Year-Olds

In 2011, on Thursdays the kindergarten teacher visited one or two of the closest local communities to conduct the zero to three-year-old program. The program was intended to be for children and their parents, but parents did not always accompany the children. At each session the attendance varied from two to nine children and zero to five parents. In 2011, the initial aim had been to conduct the zero to three-year-old program on school premises on a non-Kindergarten day (when the teacher was available); however, transport was a barrier because of concerns about the use of baby capsules on the bus. Since parents had indicated their keenness for the program, the teacher decided to take the program to the community; she took drawing and painting materials, puzzles, games, toys, and playdough with her and set

everything up on a mat with cushions in an outside area. She involved the children in activities, including songs and dances; and because it was outside, other people in the community could see what she was doing. At the end of each session, the teacher left community flyers and signs up in the community advertising the next week's session. Only one of the parents had commented favourably on the program, but the teacher had received positive feedback from other agencies in the community and she was keen to continue the program in 2012.

### 3. Numeracy

A Getting it Right Numeracy coordinator had been attached to the school since the beginning of 2011, funded through National Partnerships. In addition to working with teachers in the school, and with teachers in other parts of the district, the coordinator was one of the two deputy principals. The coordinator had been a Getting it Right teacher since 2003 and had significant experience in conducting PL to teachers.

Approximately one hour each day was devoted to the Aboriginal Numeracy Strategy. This strategy was being used by some, but not all, schools in the area as a means of providing some commonality of approach between schools, thereby addressing the needs of transient students.

In 2011, the numeracy coordinator met with every teacher in the school every week to oversee planning and improvement of their mathematical knowledge. In addition, the coordinator worked in classrooms with students, sometimes conducting demonstration lessons and sometimes collecting data. The coordinator also delivered First Steps mathematics PL in after-school sessions to teachers within the school and in the district.

The school had implemented a monitoring tool, passed on by the Curriculum Directorate of the state Education Department, to record data gathered through diagnostic tests, test items, and classroom observation.

The coordinator believed that the students were making progress, but they needed a lot of practice and time to develop the concepts. They also had limited everyday experiences in which mathematics was applicable. The coordinator viewed teachers' inexperience in teaching mathematics as another factor to be overcome. The coordinator encouraged the teachers to make more

visual displays of mathematical items in classrooms and to concentrate more on the teaching of basic facts.

### 4. Whole-School Routines

The school had several whole-school routines to provide structure and a safe environment for students. Each school day commenced with an assembly in which the Principal provided reminders to students, such as the afore-mentioned matter of attendance, and offered verbal rewards and encouragement. A whole-school fitness program in year-level groups followed. Friday afternoons each week were Fun Fridays, where the students were organised in multi-aged groups to participate in games-related or fun learning activities.

### 5. Literacy

Literacy was a fundamental component of the school's timetable, and it had several strategies in place to support its teaching. The school's timetable had a literacy block at the commencement of the school day and some of the teachers were using First Steps strategies in the classroom.

#### Literacy Coordinator

The literacy coordinator position (.6 FTE), undertaken by the other Deputy Principal, was paid for through state grant funding. The role entailed time spent planning with teachers and time spent working in classrooms with students. At the time of the case study visit, the coordinator had only been in the school since April, so had only been in operation for a term and a half. As mentioned above, most of the teachers in the school had had limited teaching experience and so needed a lot of guidance. In addition to the time they spent each week with the coordinator, teachers collaborated with each other during early close time on Monday afternoons for planning, assessment and curriculum development.

#### Reading

The school had an approach to reading that incorporated the following strategies:

- o a Books in Homes program (funded by National Partnerships), which enabled students to borrow books to take home and read in English

- o certificates were awarded at assemblies to students who had read 10 books, 20 books and so on
- o a Book Club scheme was developed in the school, whereby parents could purchase books for their children to read
- o the school celebrated Book Week through such activities as dressing up as a favourite book character

And the school timetabled two mandatory reading sessions each day:

1. after a food break, everyone participated in the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) session, reading silently for 15-20 minutes, plus another silent reading session of 15-20 minutes during the day after another food break
2. as part of classroom literacy sessions, there was a conversational reading activity that involved teachers reading to students, or students reading to the teacher or to another student.

### Aboriginal Literacy Strategy (ALS)

The aim of the ALS was to provide a common approach in the district so that if students moved between schools they would be familiar with the structure and there would be no loss of learning time. This was a highly structured approach to the teaching of Australian English, with routines that were modelled by the teacher.

### District Literacy Profile

As stated above, most schools in the district used a profile to record the literacy levels of all students, comprising these measures:

- o ESL levels
- o concepts of print scores from the Marie Clay assessment tool
- o phonological awareness scores
- o alphabet recognition abilities
- o graphophonic recognition
- o Magic 100 words score
- o PM Benchmark levels for literacy
- o Attendance

Data for pre-primary to Year 3 concentrated more on book and print awareness and PM benchmark levels. In Years 4 – 7, students' grammar and punctuation were monitored. Teachers collected work samples throughout the year and conducted their own classroom-based assessments as well as the items recorded on the literacy profiles. The profile was proving to be effective in the school because it provided a guide to teachers about students' abilities and helped them with planning. The profile was also used to determine whether students' literacy levels and test scores had improved. The school looked for progress in every student.

### Scripture

The community had a strong desire to see scripture taught in the school. In supporting this proposal, the principal negotiated with the community to have the scripture taught in a way that linked it to literacy and to the teaching of values. The initial scripture teaching was done by community members; however, their attendance was sporadic and their religious focus was controversial. Two members of the teaching staff, who were church attendees, have taken up the program and apparently the community is supportive of their approach.

### Aboriginal Languages

The school taught the two most predominant languages spoken by the five local Aboriginal communities to all students from pre-primary to Year 7. The two language teachers were AIEOs who worked in the classrooms. Both had been trained to teach the two languages offered at the school, and each Friday they spent time with the literacy coordinator who tutored them on planning and delivery of the next week's lessons. The languages were taught in the afternoons and the teachers used hands-on activities where possible, concentrating on oral rather than written language. The principal wanted the language teachers to feel valued and provided them with their own language studies room, resources and photocopier.

### Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEOs)

There were six AIEOs in the school who provided literacy support for students in most classrooms.

Individual learning plans: All classroom teachers had individual learning plans in place for low-achieving or 'at risk' students in literacy. Teachers worked together throughout the year to align and share these plans.

## 6. Pastoral Care

The principal stated, "We're not a welfare school but we care about the students' welfare." He valued the pastoral care nature of teachers' work and stressed that teachers needed to find out why students were not progressing and do something about it.

### Behaviour

The school had a behaviour management plan that was based on the principles of restorative justice and personal accountability, and involved students accepting responsibility for, and the consequences of, their behaviour. The plan consisted of:

- o teachers managing low-level incidents of inappropriate behavior in the classroom
- o accessing buddy classrooms if the behaviours continued, and
- o finally, in the event of further inappropriate behavior or severe behaviour, referring to the principal.

Students were asked to complete reflection sheets on their inappropriate behaviour, and to indicate how they would behave in the future. The school people thought the plan was effective, evidenced by the few withdrawals or suspensions. Any incidents of teasing or bullying were dealt with immediately.

### Lunches

The school did not operate a breakfast program, but it provided breakfast to students in need. The school had implemented a lunch system, whereby children's lunches could be paid through parents' Centrelink payments. Ninety percent of the students received lunches through this system.

## 7. The Community

As stated above, the school served the children from five local communities. Since most of the students lived in the largest one, which was located closest to the school, the word community was typically associated with this town. However, the school recognised the importance of maintaining supportive links with all five communities.

### Agreement

The school-community partnership was an informal 'agreement', which from the school's viewpoint meant that teachers would do as much as they could but they had no control over what the parents would do. The principal envisaged publishing the agreement as a poster that could be displayed to the community and eventually 'signed off' after negotiation about what activities the school and the community would work on together.

Part of the agreement from the locals' viewpoint was the need for teachers to have cultural awareness about the local communities. In 2011 this PL involved an informal meeting at the river between teachers and elders for a yarn about the local culture, followed by a 'getting to know you' gathering. During NAIDOC Week there was input from the community. There was always very strong attendance by parents at sports events held by the school. There had been some preliminary discussions between the school and the community regarding having movie nights at the school, but this had not commenced by the time of the visit.

### Empowerment

The principal was keen to have local people employed at the school. For example, the school was paying for a young man to attend driver training so he could obtain a drivers licence and be appointed full time to the school. Two ladies from the communities were paid to come in each day to help with lunches. The principal expected high standards of all the students; and, from the principal's perspective, many more parents were becoming empowered to support their children.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 6 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school monitored literacy and numeracy using student profiles and a district-wide monitoring tool to maintain a comprehensive record of every student's standard of literacy. Because the profiles could be passed on from school to school, students did not need to be continually assessed at each new school, and students' needs could be addressed as soon as they began at a new school.

In 2011 the school had begun collecting quality data through diagnostic tests, classroom tests and observations about students' outcomes in aspects of numeracy. Classroom-based data supported teachers' planning of lessons. The constant monitoring of students' attendance enabled the school to put procedures in place, with the attendance officer following up student absences with parents. In instances where students' attendance had remained a concern, the school sought intervention from an outside agency.

## 2. Literacy and numeracy

As outlined above, the school had clear processes in place to address the literacy and numeracy needs of all students and to increase engagement. Whereas the school had a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy via the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy, it also sought to promote literacy through other strategies, such as rewarding students for engaging in reading.

## 3. 'At risk' case management

The school had a case management process that addressed attendance and learning issues. The school's zero to three-year-old program was a means of engaging young children in early education and sought to guard against potential 'at riskness' for them when they enrolled in full-time schooling.

## 4. Leadership

The principal had set a standard of high achievement in the school and had put teachers in positions of curriculum and operational leadership. The principal had also made clear to the community the school's position about welfare school, and had taken steps to empower the community with regards to supporting their children's education.

The two experienced teachers, who also occupied deputy principal positions, coordinated the school's key focus areas of literacy and numeracy and worked with teachers and students to implement programs of good practice and ensure that data were collected to monitor student progress.

## 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

Those interviewed believed the school was implementing policies that supported the engagement of Aboriginal students.

## 6. Whole-school approaches

The use of whole-school approaches in this school was an effective means of providing structure and scaffolding for all students to enhance learning and promote engagement.

The school timetable ensured that all students and teachers followed the same pattern each day from the assembly and fitness sessions at the commencement of the day through to the designated literacy, numeracy and cross-curricular blocks of teaching time. This included district approaches designed to meet the needs of transient students and overcome the disengagement they might encounter with unfamiliar school routines.

## 7. Links between home, school and community

The school had several mechanisms in place to link the school with home and with the community:

- the attendance officer provided a vital link between the school and the home in order to follow up on student absences
- the school's informal agreement with the community was a means of forging links with the community and working together on key activities such as cultural awareness and NAIDOC Week
- the teaching of Indigenous language and scripture arose from links between school and community and was a response to the community's request for this to be included in the school's timetable
- the zero to three-year-old program made links between school, home and community and was visible because it was conducted in the local community

## 8. Resources

The school had used most of its funding to purchase human resources in the form of teacher time, ensuring the provision of the numeracy coordinator, the literacy coordinator and a support teacher who worked in classrooms with students. Some funding had also been used to purchase literacy resources.

### **9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available**

The district-wide literacy monitoring tool was available to all other schools in the district. students.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time**

As noted in point 9 above, schools need reliable and valid assessments to track learning needs as students move between schools.

### **11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders**

The numeracy coordinator was a trained Getting it Right teacher, with experience in the delivery of First Steps mathematics PD. This coordinator provided training to teachers in after-school sessions and support during school time.

The literacy coordinator had some training in the delivery of First Steps literacy PD, but was yet to formally deliver this to the teachers.

The Aboriginal languages teachers had undergone training in the delivery of language lessons and continued to be supported in the school with planning and lesson delivery by the literacy coordinator.

The classroom teachers were first and second year teachers who were striving to attain quality classroom practice with pedagogical support from the literacy and numeracy coordinators.

### **12. Sustainability**

Some of the processes, such as the school's behavior management policy and its timetable structure, were embedded in the school's operation. They supported the work of teachers and student engagement.

The tenure of the literacy and numeracy coordinators could not be sustained in the school without funding.

## **Conclusion**

Case Study School 6 appeared to be a successful very remote school that had support from its community. Its success lay in constantly striving for improved student outcomes, and in supporting the teachers with specialist and support staff. The school sent clear messages to students and parents about the importance of students attending school each day and behaving appropriately. Rewards to students for attendance and effort may have further reinforced their engagement.

# Case Study 7: Non-Metropolitan Primary School

- **Primary school**
- **School population 382**
- **Non-metropolitan**
- **Public school**

## Background

Case Study School 7 had been working on using evidence to guide their school planning and classroom teaching since late 2008, when the principal and teachers were surprised with the school's comparatively poor NAPLAN results. Up until this time, the staff believed that the students were achieving as well as could be expected. The results were particularly disappointing because the school had implemented an improvement plan in 2005 for learning and teaching, using guidelines and assessments provided by the state Directorate. In 2009, the principal (who had been at the school for nine years) and staff agreed it was time to make "a shift in focus from what teachers teach to how they teach it".

The changes that occurred in response to this "shift" included

- the new Federal Government Partnerships initiatives
- state Department of Education action
- regional support
- principal development
- teacher development
- student development
- parent engagement

In essence, the Partnerships funding enabled additional support to the school, the state Education Department provided them with a targeted program of PL, and follow-up support was available through the regional office. The principal revised the professional support program for staff and challenged the teachers to establish a new model for teaching that was based on the use of evidence. The Federal Partnerships funding that was made available in 2009 was used to provide additional practical assistance to the school through the appointment of a regional literacy coach for 2 days/week.

The PL program that was provided by the Directorate focused on how to engage teachers in the use of evidence in teaching and learning. This had included an emphasis on the use of shared professional learning involving classroom observations. Staff agreed to adopt this strategy and to use it to focus their attention on improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes at the school. This created a whole-school focus on evidence-led practice and teacher professional learning. Additional school-based professional support was made available to staff through the appointment of the literacy coach who was employed full time by the region and who came to the school 2 days/week to work with the teachers for 2009 and 2010. A numeracy coach was also appointed in 2010.

Teachers at the school have developed strategies to establish stronger links between teaching and assessment. A strategic planning and review cycle informed by evidence has been adopted. This has involved the use of shared professional observations that have focused on the use of assessment for teaching purposes. During 2011, the teachers implemented a more formal moderation process to further refine their skills in using assessment to guide teaching.

This primary school was located in small a farming community township, with a population of 380 students. The students were predominantly monolingual, with only 1% LBOTE and 14% (40) Aboriginal students. The ICSEA for the school was low at 960 and had been constant for the past two years. NAPLAN data from 2008 – 2010 for Year 3 and 5 showed improvement across all three domains. Results for Year 7 have held steady for reading and numeracy and improved in writing.

## Overall approach to engagement

The plan of action adopted by this school created a strong link between assessment and planning for learning. These links have been fostered through: improved knowledge of diagnostic assessment strategies, a professional learning program using observation of teaching, and whole-school collection and moderation of data on student learning. Students at the school were invited to be participants in the assessment process and were given guidelines on how to request feedback on their learning. The seven key engagement initiatives through which teachers at this school changed their practice are depicted in the synergy map on the next page.



## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Whole-School Strategic Plan

As stated above, a plan for whole-school intervention had been developed at the school in 2005 in response to state Education Departmental initiatives. However, the 2008 NAPLAN data had indicated the need for a shift in pedagogy.

#### Vision for evidence-based practice

The disappointing NAPLAN data, regional directives, and feedback from the principal about evidence-based practice in teaching stimulated a series of frank and open discussions between staff at the school. The principal contributed information from workshops she had attended, including the work of Hattie (2009), which helped to inspire staff to reconsider how they were using evidence in teaching and learning. A whole-school vision for a school-wide pedagogy was developed, framed by the VIEWS concept, as follows:

- validity: focused, purposeful and explicit teaching and assessment
- individuality: observation, reflection, and planning for individual needs
- excellence: challenging, achievable expectation for all
- worth: recognition, celebration, acknowledgement and promotion of individual talents and skills
- sustainability: shared responsibility for quality teaching, learning and assessment.

The school commenced a plan of action that included building an expert teaching team who could:

- use effective teaching practices
- draw on data to plan differentiated teaching approaches
- use classroom resources to support the delivery of a high-quality curriculum
- create a culture of learning for all participants in the school

#### Curriculum Audit

A curriculum audit was commenced in 2008/09 to improve alignment of teaching within year levels and across levels 1-6. Particular emphasis was given to the literacy, numeracy and science curriculum and the learning expectations for each class. The audit confirmed that a more targeted approach to literacy and numeracy across the school would help avoid gaps in expectations for learning that occurred when students progressed to the next year of schooling. This audit has now been extended to include developmental elements of the new national curriculum.

#### Link to Student Behavior

The vision for a stronger culture of learning emphasised students as participants in learning rather than as recipients of curriculum content. The teachers looked for ways to include students more and to invite them to reflect on and give feedback about their learning. Learning feedback sheets were developed for students to use and these were found to stimulate student interest in reviews of their own learning. Student satisfaction surveys have since been regarded as providing only one of a range of data sources about students as participants at school

### 2. Teacher Professional Learning

As mentioned above, a literacy coach was appointed in 2009. The school also employed an additional reading coach from 2008-2010 and a mathematics coach during 2010. The national Partnerships funded literacy coach spent two days/week at the school from 2009, guiding teachers to change their focus from student learning outcomes to how students learn. This change has helped teachers to work together and to face some of their anxiety/fears following the publication of the 2008 NAPLAN results. Regional support has continued to provide support for teacher professional learning during 2011, enabling teachers, during pupil-free days, to attend programs on literacy and numeracy assessment and teaching.

#### Literacy Coach

The literacy coach engaged staff in a program of learning on the use of assessment instruments and the interpretation of data. The coach conducted classroom observations to provide each teacher with personalized feedback on how assessment could be used to inform her/his teaching. Whereas teachers found this process to

be very confronting at first, their anxiety was tempered by the coach's approach, which focused on how students learn, rather than on their teaching approach. The support team for literacy also included a writing coach, who worked with teachers and students in the school for one day/week from 2008-10. An additional intensive teaching support teacher helped to expand the support team in 2011, providing intensive teaching support to children who were performing below expected targets, particularly those in the P-1 level.

### Numeracy Coach

The appointment of a Principal Project Officer (PPO) for mathematics in 2010 gave staff an opportunity to focus their learning on numeracy development and assessment. The PPO helped teachers to identify gaps in student numeracy learning. Teachers reported that this was the first time they had been able to "analyze cold hard facts" about numeracy and to be involved in "turn-around conversations" to refocus on how to shift students' numeracy learning trajectories to a more positive direction while analyzing data about the classes they taught.

### Shared Observations

The use of observations on teaching created a culture of shared professional learning at the school, in which teaching practice has become more aligned with the whole-school strategy for improving learning; and the use of targeted teaching and evidence about learning have been central to this development. The whole-school approach has also led to the development of shared data among teachers, and the centralized repository – referred to as "one-school data" – is used regularly for the moderation of assessment. Further details of this are provided in point 5 below.

## 3. Literacy

The whole-school approach to literacy prompted a review in 2009 of teaching strategies, resources, assessment instruments and pedagogy. The teaching and learning cycle, emphasizing Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model of explicit process and task-oriented teaching and feedback, was adopted. This model is focused on the impact of feedback on teaching, learning and achievement.

### Resources

The school has purchased resources to suit literacy assessment and reporting of particular school levels. For example, the Jolly phonics program has been purchased following a review of 2010 data that found a weakness in the decoding skills of students in the infants program. Other programs and instruments purchased or accessed by the school include the Progressive Assessment Tests in Reading (PAT-R) and the SRA Corrective Reading Program (for upper primary levels)

### Strategies to Link Learning and Assessment

As indicated above, the teachers at this school have focused on developing a strategic approach to ensuring that all students are equipped with comprehensive literacy skills. This includes improving teachers' capacity to give instant corrections to student bookwork.

### Daily Tasks

Daily tasks, such as the use of daily guided reading sheets, have been used to give students regular reading experiences and feedback. The whole-school approach to reading included a daily school-wide reading session, with cross-age student groups of like ability.

### Regular Skills Assessments

Teachers' knowledge about students and the progress they are making is informed through the whole-school approach to assessment. The school conducts the following assessments of literacy skills:

- spelling age assessments, using the South Australian Spelling Test (three times per year)
- reading age assessments (three times per year)
- comprehension assessment (four times per year)
- progressive Assessment Test for Reading (PAT-R)

## 4. Numeracy

Although the whole-school approach to numeracy has not been as advanced as for literacy, a program of review and redevelopment is well underway. This includes the appointment of the PPO (Mathematics) who has assisted with the development of evidence-based practices.

## Resources

The school has started to improve the availability of diagnostic tools and teaching support for mathematics teaching. For example, staff have started to assess mathematics performance using the PAT–M diagnostic reports.

## Strategic Links Between Numeracy Teaching and Assessment Strategies

Numeracy instruction practice at the school has been developed to maximize support and intervention. Teacher practice at the school is focused on creating links between assessment, feedback and improved learning outcomes for students.

## Weekly Mathematics Practices

A weekly mathematics task has been used to reinforce student interest in, and achievement of, mathematical skills.

## 5. One-school Data

This is the term adopted by staff to refer to the centralized collection and storage of students' performance data. Diagnostic and other data were collated by the leadership team for analysis and review, and teachers were encouraged to develop competence in using it for various purposes. Data collected for external reporting to the state directorate were also included in one-school. The state-based assessments included data collected to monitor literacy and numeracy achievements of students across the first three years of schooling and data for primary English, mathematics and science achievement.

### Effect size Analyses

Effect size data were used to help gauge the effectiveness of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning approaches.

### Profiling – Looking for Bottlenecks

Reviews of the data were used to profile patterns of achievement to help identify classes and levels where progress appeared to have slowed down. Moderation helped identify the nature of the problem, the contributing factors, and their implications for teaching at the school.

## 6. Student and Family Participation

The school placed an emphasis on student resilience and each week all teachers conducted the "You can do it!" social and emotional learning program aimed at promoting student achievement and well-being to build students' confidence, persistence, relationships and emotional resilience. This was supported by a responsible student behavioral plan based on whole of school expectations and encouraging productive behaviours.

### Postcards

Commendation award postcards were sent to children's homes to ensure parents were aware of progress children made at school.

### Student Self-Records

Teacher-prepared student records were shared with students to help them track their improvements in learning.

### Student Request for Feedback

Students were encouraged to request feedback sheets, as a way of helping students become more active participants in the feedback processes in the learning, teaching and assessment cycle.

## 7. Quality School Environment

The school provided a rich support program, with computers, swimming, and music, including a string ensemble, choirs, and concert band. Students were encouraged to engage in competitions for English, writing, mathematics, science and spelling and the school openly celebrated students' achievements. Some of these activities were conducted in partnership with the local secondary school.

The school's physical environment had recently been upgraded through the Building Education Revolution project, which provided a new super senior (primary) centre with laptop facilities as well as specialist English, mathematics and science learning areas.

## Care Teams

In addition to the focused learning support, the school had the following support services:

- o a part-time special needs teacher
- o teacher aide support and access to a regionally supported guidance officer, behavior officer and Flexible Learning Unit.

The supporting care team members worked with parents to develop and review Individual Education Plans for students with special needs.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 7 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

Monitoring and planning were conducted using a whole-school approach. Data were used extensively to inform teaching. Monitoring occurred at an individual level through the analysis of student learning need and at whole-school level through the analysis of trends and effect sizes for classes and year levels. Collaborative interrogation of the data has been used to identify areas for improvement and this has led to changes in student groupings, curriculum design and finding resources to support teaching and learning.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

Effective learning and teaching has been a concern for all teaching staff. Detailed assessments and individual and whole-school profiling have been used to refine teaching for literacy and numeracy.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

Case management was built into the whole-school plan through the development of learning profiles of students and the use of targeted teaching approaches. Intensive support was provided to students with special needs and students performing below benchmarks

### 4. Leadership

The principal engaged staff in a problem-solving exercise to improve the quality teaching and learning provided to students. New information was shared with staff and they were encouraged to discuss implications for their teaching. The principal was active in obtaining resources for the school from federal and state funding initiatives.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

The school has focused on the need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. The development of a centralized data repository, called "one school data", provided a key resource for teachers and promoted the use of evidence-based teaching practice in the school.

### 6. Whole-school approaches

Whole-school approaches were apparent at all stages of the change agenda and contributed to the development of an agreed vision (through VIEWS), collective problem solving and one-school data collection. Shared staff professional learning created an environment for deep learning, and continued openness and frankness among staff helped them overcome anxieties they faced in sharing teaching and data with colleagues, including with the literacy and numeracy coaches, who were appointed to provide additional resources to the school.

### 7. Links between home, school and community

Home –school links were fostered and the school encouraged parents to celebrate student achievements through parent evenings, assemblies, and performances in the community

### 8. Resources

National Partnerships funding and state directorate initiatives and support were essential to the success of reforms in this school – in particular, the specialist staff who assisted the teachers to use and interpret data from diagnostic testing instruments for mathematics and literacy.

### 9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available

The school has profiled data to assist with the identification of learning processes that cause difficulties in literacy, but there is an identified need for more diagnostic measures that are linked to teaching strategies. Teachers and leaders identified a need for reliable and valid measures for both literacy and numeracy for critical aspects of learning across the primary school years.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time**

The whole-school approach to data collection and the moderation through the use of "one-school data" have provided class and year level profiles of student learning. This has enabled teachers to identify bottlenecks to learning. There was evidence in this school that provision of assessment instruments to help teachers to diagnose and monitor key stages in literacy and numeracy more systematically, would improve teacher capacity in the use of assessment for learning.

### **11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders**

Leaders identified a need for teacher professional support to help them develop evidence-based practice in literacy and numeracy. This would enable teachers to effectively engage in whole-school and in-class support activities.

### **12. Sustainability of initiatives**

The school has developed a whole-school approach to student learning, with initiatives embedded in classroom and whole of school practice. The factors that contribute to the sustainability of these initiatives are:

- quality leadership
- targeted professional learning about teaching, learning and assessment
- specialist support from literacy and numeracy coaches
- access to quality assessment instruments
- individual student assessment
- whole-school data repository
- whole-school data use to identify "bottlenecks"

## **Conclusion**

Case Study School 7 is a school that has responded to national and state requirements for increased accountability. Prior to 2009 the school had a strong culture of caring for students, but it had not shown satisfactory student performance standards. The driving force for change came from poor NAPLAN results, external forces and a desire to improve the quality of teaching. The principal used new information to challenge the staff to use evidence to guide their teaching practice. The principal and teachers have used PL resources, made available through national funding and the state directorate, to support this new phase of development. The program of PL has helped teachers to learn how to use data on student learning to inform their teaching. These data analysis practices were now evident in the expected culture within the school.

# Case Study 8:

## Non-Metropolitan Primary School

- **Primary school**
- **School population 209, 63% Aboriginal**
- **Non-metropolitan**
- **Public school**

### Background

Case Study School 8 had a population of 209 students, of whom 63% were Aboriginals, and 4% met the LBOTE criteria. The ICSEA was low at 724, a decrease of 32 points since 2009. The school had been seeking a higher level of engagement from its students over the past five years. In doing so, it had implemented several initiatives to address student learning, for which they attracted funding; in some instances they were approached by their local area education office or by various branches of the state's Education Department. These initiatives had varying degrees of success, but the school ultimately realised that the programs had not been as effective or sustainable as anticipated. Staff decided the school culture would benefit from a consistent approach and a high level of stability, so they cut down on the number of programs offered and concentrated on implementing very select programs.

During the past 10 years, there was also a mutual realisation by the school and community that to improve student engagement they needed to work together and support each other. This realization had developed slowly, but the evidence of an improved and mutual partnership between school and home was considered by staff as the foundation upon which the school could work to increase its engagement with families.

Fortunately, the school had a stable staff: many of the teachers and support staff had worked in the school for more than 10 years. The principal considered the quality of teaching staff to be very high and thought they were committed to further engaging students in learning. As a consequence of the length of time they had worked in the school, the teachers felt a strong connection to the children and their families. The staff did include some new teachers, who were mentored by the assistant principal.

### Overall approach to engagement

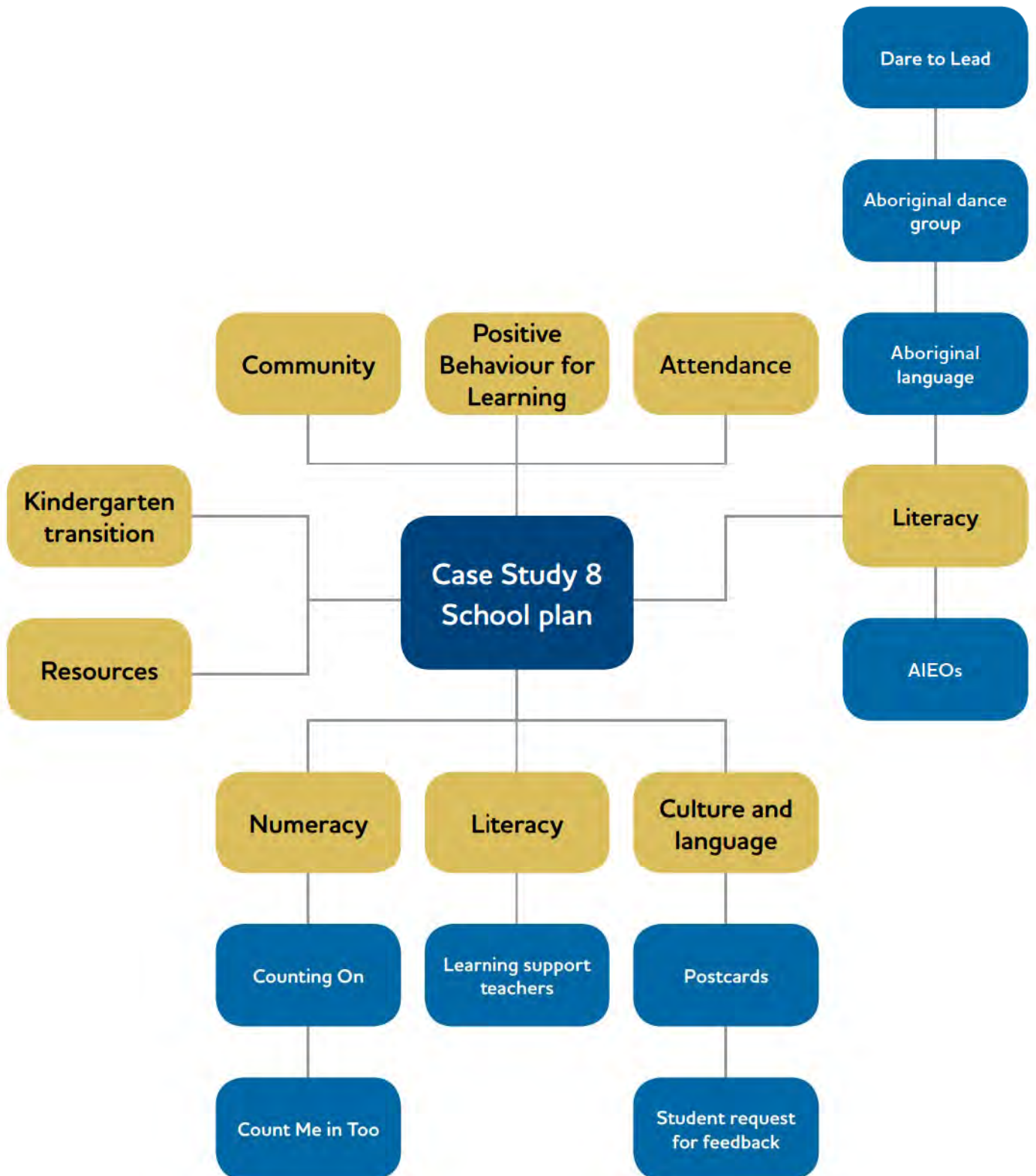
The greatest growth of student engagement had occurred in the past five years under the direction of the principal, who had been the catalyst for changing the school's approach and focusing on growth in student outcomes. The beliefs that drove the change in the school were twofold

1. nothing changed unless it was supported by data
2. (in the words of the Principal) "everything we do should contribute to student engagement."

However, at the beginning of 2011, as stated above, the school decided to pare back and concentrate on a few select programs that had proven to be successful and to provide long-term benefits. The staff aimed to implement each project such that it was not dependent on any one teacher who may leave the school. The school had moved away from its focus on welfare to learning, in particular with building self-efficacy in the children through selective implementation of programs.

The following synergy map reflects the school's profile and engagement performance

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives





## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Positive behaviour for learning

Staff and community members considered behavior to be a huge problem prior to the school's implementation of its Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) program in 2008.

The PBL program was now in its fifth year and was considered to be one of the most important initiatives operating in the school. Initially there was a need for funded professional development for teachers, but by 2011 the program had become part of expected teacher practices within the school. The principal took a distributed leadership approach to embedding the program into classroom practice over this period, and the program was now considered sustainable. The community had adopted the slogan 'our school, our job, and our community' in 2009, and fully supported the change.

Data for the last few years showed that suspensions had decreased and the program was having a positive impact. This was primarily due to the consistent and whole-school approach that was being used, with teachers, students and parents holding a shared understanding of the school goals and ethos. The program operated on the basis that each week an agreed behaviour became the school focus for student learning; for example 'how to walk into a classroom'. Then, the following week all students practised that behaviour and were rewarded for displaying appropriate behaviour.

The management of behaviour across the school involved shared expectations and consistent responses to student behaviour. The school had taken the implementation process slowly over the last five years. In 2010, funding enabled the assistant principal to be out of class to support behaviour management. As a result of this strategic action, by 2011 all student behaviour, including classroom incidents and incidents that occurred around the school, was monitored. The school undertook examination of behaviour referral data fortnightly through a PBL meeting in which teachers identified problem areas. Data might indicate that there had been more referrals during the second half of lunchtime or more referrals for inappropriate behaviour entering classrooms. When this was identified, strategies were put in place to address and improve the behaviours. In 2011, Year 2 had most referrals but that had declined by

the end of the year. The PBL program had been focused on acknowledging students' productive behaviours.

Teachers believed that learning had improved as a consequence of improved behaviour. No funding, other than that used in 2010, had been required to support the PBL program and the school's aim was for the program to be sustainable without funding.

### 2. Attendance

The school had a dogged approach to following up non-attendance and late arrivals at school and this had a huge impact on student engagement in learning. By establishing new patterns of regular engagement in the school learning environment, the academic engagement of these students also improved. Teacher observations, records and student assessment data provided evidence to show this improvement in academic engagement. The program was referred to as Late Arrivals Intervention Program (LIPS); it was overseen by the assistant principal, with the following school-wide strategies:

- students were rewarded through stickers for early arrival at school
- letters were sent home to parents when students arrived at school late
- teachers made phone calls home to parents if students had been absent for two days
- the Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) followed up further non-attendance and sometimes collected children from home and transported them to school

The AIEOs were also able to identify if there were other problems hindering children's attendance, such as lack of food or suitable footwear, and could facilitate the school providing resources for them. The school offered a breakfast club, lunches and uniforms to anyone needing them. Late attendance had decreased markedly in the past few years since the program had been operating. Data on attendance was maintained and monitored constantly.

### 3. Culture and language

The school valued inclusivity and recognition of Indigenous culture, wanting the children to know who they were and to be proud of themselves. The school had built the understandings of staff about cultural protocols through the support of community members and the AIEO. All the children are now proud of their work and keen to show off their accomplishments. Overall, there has been a big increase in student confidence that has come about from all of the programs operating in the school.

#### Aboriginal language

The assistant principal who had TAFE accreditation in language teaching, and was supported in language classes by an AIEO taught the language in Years K-2. There was currently no capacity to extend this focus on Aboriginal language beyond Year 2, along with an appreciation of the need to focus on building students' English language skills.

#### Aboriginal dance group

There were two Aboriginal dance groups in the school: a K-2 group; and an upper primary girls group. In 2010 there was also a boys group. Supportive Aboriginal community members who gave their time with no expectation of payment conducted the dance groups. The dance group performed at school and community gatherings.

#### Dare to Lead

The Dare to Lead program had been operating in the school for many years and functioned as an adult group for teachers, AIEOs and members of the community who had an interest in educational matters. In 2011, four teachers in the group attended local PL workshops and another teacher presented at a state-wide workshop to enhance their own and their colleagues' professional knowledge and to celebrate the successful implementation of this program in the school.

#### Aboriginal Islander Education Officers

The school had two AIEOs who had strong links with the community and supported the school's attendance and PBL priorities. In addition, the AIEOs spent some time in classrooms supporting students with learning programs.

### 4. Literacy

The Reading to Learn (RTL) program, for Years 1 to 6, was built on an accelerated learning program that had been in place in the school for several years prior to RTL's implementation in 2010. RTL was a structured program that enabled students to work at their ability level and it incorporated scaffolding. Teacher observations and records, as well as student assessment data has proven the program's success in keeping students engaged. In 2010, funding allowed the assistant principal to work with all teachers in implementing RTL strategies as part of her portfolio.

In 2010 all teachers targeted writing and this was still a focus in 2011. The school had observed very good results for Aboriginal children in reading and writing, with successful 2011 NAPLAN data in writing, and maintained results for reading. The school had also gathered classroom data such as teacher observations and records that indicated improvements in student academic engagement.

In classrooms, most teachers conducted some testing of aspects of literacy, with instruments such as the Waddington Spelling test. A range of tests was used by the teachers for diagnostic information to identify areas of need.

At the beginning of each year, the teachers gave standardised tests to diagnose students' learning needs. The school had high expectations about learning, and set targets based on NAPLAN because they were the guidelines for the school's funding accountabilities. However, the school emphasised growth more than actual achievements.

#### Learning support teachers

In 2011 National Partnerships funding allowed for a learning support teacher to be allocated to each class. These teachers provided teacher support primarily in literacy and numeracy, but also supported the school's PBL program. The support included modeled lessons, help with planning, developing appropriate learning tasks and curriculum.

## 5. Numeracy

In the last two years the school had been concentrating upon increasing hands-on activities in numeracy, through the Count Me In Too and Counting On programs (see descriptions below).

In 2010, the students were assessed using Newman's Error Analysis in multiplication and division, which entailed the students verbalising their approaches to solving problems. This assessment helped teachers to plan programs and set ability groups.

Tubs of games had been made up and were available in each classroom; however, teachers needed PL on how to use the equipment and what mathematical language was to be used.

### Count Me in Too

This was a program that targeted early numeracy for infants. It included strategies for hands-on numeracy and basic number work. The children were tested to determine what knowledge and skills they had and were then put into levels. They were tested every five weeks to determine their progress and to identify their ongoing learning needs. The program had proven to be effective in developing young children's numeracy skills.

### Counting On

This was a program aimed at improving numeracy for middle primary students. It was implemented in the school in 2010 but hadn't really progressed since then due to a lack of staff with sufficient expertise to ensure its continuation. In 2011 the school had targeted the need for teacher professional development in this area.

## 6. Kindergarten transition

With the school's efforts to engage the community, there had been a shift to focus on the needs of children from birth to five years of age. The school had high expectations of achieving improved school readiness outcomes in this group; however, there were some community barriers, such as lack of food for morning and afternoon snacks and other resources such as a dedicated learning space and staff.

The kindergarten transition program grew out of an earlier partnership in which the adjacent pre-school had worked in with the school. The new program involved bringing children into the pre-school during term 4 for two days per week, and was then extended to commencing in term 3. Children in the community generally had little prior experience with education, so this program prepared them for kindergarten and familiarized them with the school environment. Transition also enabled the teachers to determine the needs of the children and, if necessary, put programs in place for them when they commenced kindergarten the following year. The program had been successful insofar as attendance was increasing – from two groups of 15 children in 2010 to two groups of 20 children in 2011.

In 2010, a mobile pre-school service commenced on the school grounds, which was aimed at children who were not attending pre-school and would be commencing kindergarten the following year. It began operating for two days per week but was then increased to three days per week and serviced 25 children. The mobile service had links to medical services and a paediatrician through the family community centre located on the school grounds. This was an important link with the community because the centre was frequented by mothers in the mothers' group.

## 7. Community

Over the last five to 10 years, the school had sought to develop its partnership with families because of the belief that the way to further children's educational progress was to fully understand what families wanted for their children and work with them towards those goals.

To promote communication with families, the school held barbecues on school premises as well as out in the community, where teachers talked to parents about programs happening in the school. This had proved to be very effective with gaining support for programs such as PBL.

Each year, the school also allocated an entire week in which teachers were released from classes to talk with parents about individual learning programs for particular students. In 2010, 85% of parents were involved in either face-to-face interviews or phone interviews.

## 8. Resources

There were interactive whiteboards in every classroom as well as a computer lab and a trolley of 30 laptops. Some literacy and numeracy resources had been provided by funding, but the most significant resource had been that of human time. Targeted and strategic funding allowed the assistant principal to be released from the teaching component of the leadership role and focus her leadership expertise in a range of ways. For example, funding in 2010 enabled the assistant principal to be released from the classroom to concentrate solely on student behaviour and welfare. In 2011, the strategic target for funding enabled the employment of learning support teachers in every classroom. Some were Aboriginals and some were non-Aboriginals. Funding in past years had also provided for PL of staff and community in PBL, literacy and numeracy.

This funding had enabled the school to tackle 'big things,' but its ultimate aim had been sustainability of initiatives. By engaging teachers and community in key engagement initiatives such as the PBL and cultural competence, the school aimed to embed practice so that if funding ceased, the programs could continue. All teachers had PL in mathematics through both online and face-to-face modes, focusing on good pedagogy. In 2011, all teachers participated in a weekend of PL in literacy and numeracy, which focused on new literacy and numeracy developmental continua in preparation for the implementation of the National Curriculum. As a consequence of the PL, teachers adapted their programming and assessment procedures and indicated that they were keen for more information.

## Summary of evidence from Case Study 8 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school used the following mechanisms to monitor student outcomes and to plan for improvement:

- clear policies and practices to monitor behavior and attendance (as described above)
- literacy and numeracy planning carried out at classroom level, after testing at the beginning of each year
- NAPLAN results to provide information about student outcomes, but were not necessarily used for planning purposes.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

The focus in 2011 had been upon a structured literacy program, with scaffolding, that enabled students to work at their ability level.

The school's numeracy focus was upon the Count Me in Too program, which had a hands-on emphasis as a means of engaging children with numeracy concepts. The testing of children to determine their numeracy knowledge helped identify a starting level of activity, and periodic testing then monitored and assessed their progress.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

Classroom teachers handled the management of students considered to be at risk through individual learning plans. The school provided time during the school year for teachers to meet with parents to discuss individual plans.

The inclusion of learning support teachers in all classrooms in 2011 was designed to provide increased attention to students who were considered to be at risk.

### 4. Leadership

While the school staff believed that the successful implementation of many of the school's initiatives had been a team approach, some acknowledged that the principal was a catalyst for change and had guided the school to concentrate on only a few key initiatives to support and enhance student engagement.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

As stated many times in this study, the school had reduced its programs to concentrate on student attendance, PBL, kindergarten transition, and Reading to Learn, which were proving to be successful.

### 6. Whole-school approaches

The school had taken a proactive whole-school approach in two key learning initiatives: appropriate behaviour and Reading to Learn program (details above).

### 7. Links between home, school and community

The school had several activities to link the school with home and community:

- o informal meetings over barbecues to discuss the work of the school and change to policies
- o the teaching of a local language, and the inclusion of Indigenous dance and Dare to Lead meetings, which showed that the school valued and supported the inclusion of cultural activities important to the local community
- o The kindergarten transition program and the mobile pre-school service engaged children in the early years; these programs were supported by the family community centre located on the school grounds

### 8. Resources

The school considered it had made its greatest gains in enhancing student engagement through the following strategic use of human resources:

- o the funding of the assistant principal in 2010 to fully progress the implementation of the Positive Behaviour for Learning program
- o the use of funding to provide learning support teachers in classrooms in 2011, which enabled the implementation of the Reading to Learn program (without further funding)
- o the interactive whiteboards, computer lab and portable trolley of laptops, which were being used successfully to support learning in classrooms.

### 9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available

No consideration had been given to making any performance measures developed at a school level available to other schools.

### 10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time

The school regarded NAPLAN results as a measure of improvement in student outcomes over time. Otherwise, the school's literacy and numeracy data were generally classroom based and used as a means of planning programs according to students' needs.

### 11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders

Because of the importance it placed on the PBL program, the school had ensured that all teachers had PL in the approach.

All teachers had PL in literacy and numeracy in 2011 in preparation for the implementation of the National Curriculum.

There was evidence to indicate that teachers required PL in some areas of the teaching of mathematics.

### 12. Sustainability

The school was mindful of the need for sustainability with the initiatives it implemented, and considered that funding in the short-term should be directed towards sustainability in the long-term.

The PBL initiative was fully implemented and had required little financial support. At the time of the case study, it was embedded in the school's operations and was sustainable. The Reading to Learn literacy program was moving towards sustainability through its whole-school approach. The kindergarten transition program had developed support through increased attendance and appeared to be sustainable. Similarly, the once mobile pre-school service was now permanent and this program appeared to be sustainable and providing engagement opportunities for young children.

With regard to the physical information technology resources of interactive whiteboards, computers in the computer lab and laptops, the school considered these to be one-off purchases.

## Conclusion

Case Study School 8 appeared to be a successful school that had taken a proactive approach to furthering student engagement in learning. Through concentrating on a few whole-school programs and embedding them fully, the school sought sustainability of approaches despite any turnover of staff. Its focus upon the examination of data to measure growth reflected its intention to constantly work on improving the outcomes of its students.

# Case Study 9:

## Large Metropolitan Secondary School

- **Secondary school**
- **School population 1191, 97% LBOTE**
- **Metropolitan**
- **Public school**

### Background

Case Study School 9 had a long history of focusing on student engagement in learning. The current principal, who had been leading the school for ten years, followed the high standards of the previous principal and maintained the perspective that interruptions to teaching and learning should be kept to a minimum. This ethos was strongly supported by the school's two deputy principals and 12 faculty area head teachers.

This is a large metropolitan secondary school, which at the time of the case study visit (in 2011) enrolled 1191 students. The majority of the students at the school (97%) met the LBOTE criteria, with a high proportion of families from Chinese and Vietnamese background. The ICSEA was low at 922, a drop of 28 points since 2009. The change in ICSEA was attributed to a decrease in the bottom two quartiles and a slight increase in the top two quartiles. The staffing was very stable and many teachers had worked in the school for over 10 years, some even more than 15 years. All teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to the school and to the students.

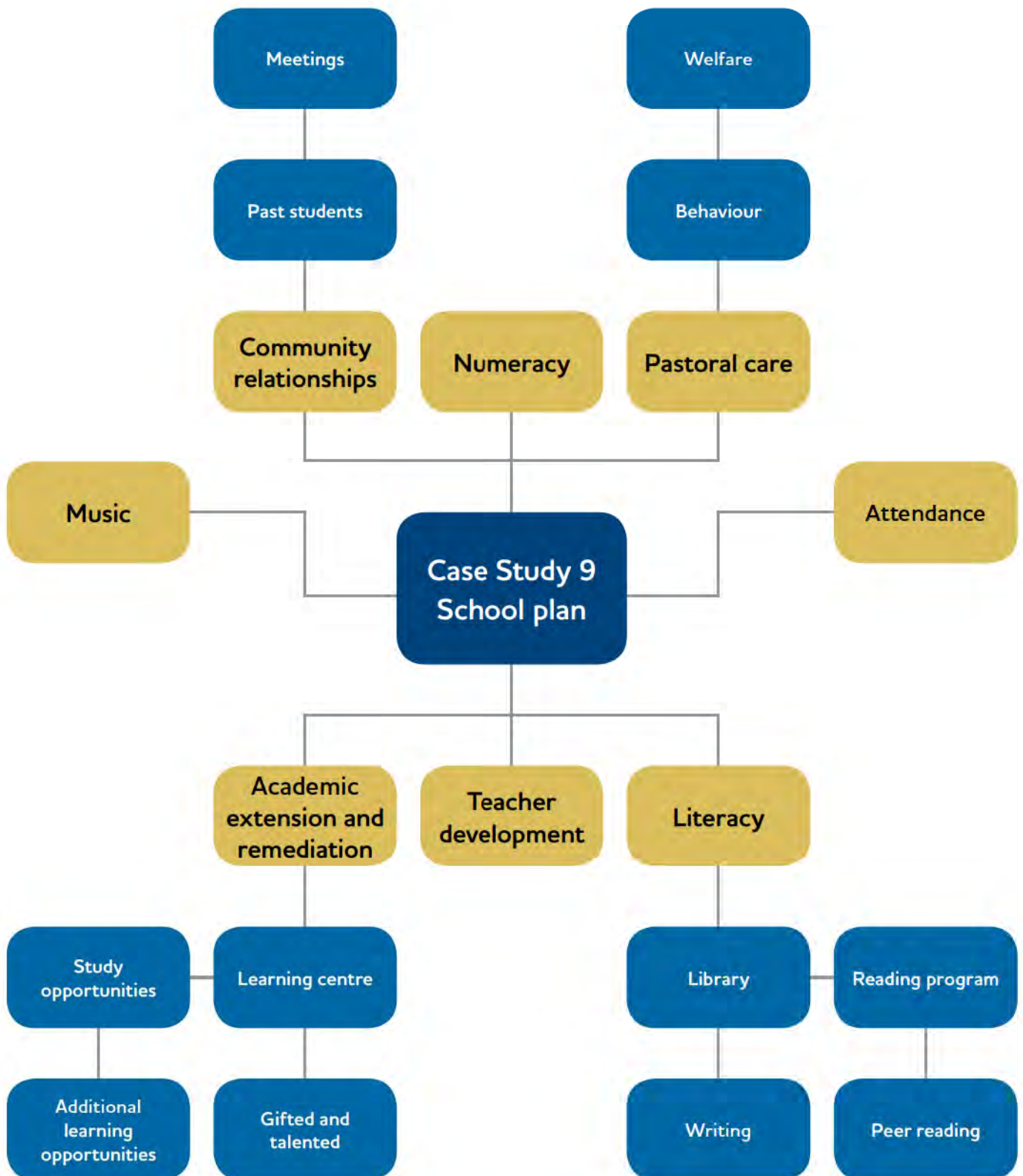
The work in the school was results-driven, with a strong focus on achieving positive outcomes for all students. This ethos was strongly supported and matched by the parents who had high expectations for their children. There was enormous pressure from many parents for their children to achieve university entrance and study to become doctors or lawyers, occupations they held in high esteem. Students undertook a great deal of tutoring outside of school hours, with the express aim of improving their school results.

The school had a strong emphasis on pastoral care and supported the welfare and engagement in learning of every student. There was an enormous amount of goodwill on the part of teachers towards students and many of the teachers devoted time after school to helping students with their studies.

There was a clear focus upon good quality teaching in all classrooms in the school, a direction set by the principal and reinforced by all senior staff. In addition, there was a focus on accountability of outcomes. The belief in the school was that, when lessons are interesting, well planned and focused on meeting the ability levels of the students, students will be engaged. According to one of the deputy principals, who had observed 30 teachers across most faculties during the year, the quality of teaching staff was very high, as was the quality of curriculum delivery. Excursions were scrutinized closely and questioned as to their relevance to the teaching and learning program. As mentioned above, interruptions to the daily timetable of teaching and learning were kept to a bare minimum. There were strong collegial networks within the school and teachers used common programming approaches and similar resources.

The synergy map on the next page identifies eight key engagement initiatives and their offshoots.

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives





## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Pastoral Care

There was a strong emphasis on pastoral care in the school and all teachers were mindful of students' welfare and very supportive of them. The school had one full-time counsellor position shared by three people.

#### Behaviour

The school had a student behaviour management policy, with explicit guidelines on what constituted inappropriate behaviours and their consequences. The policy stipulated clearly what misbehaviours were to be managed by teachers and deputy principals. There was consistency in every classroom, and students expected fairness. For swearing, there was always a suspension. For fighting, there was always a suspension, with the latter applied more strictly. The 5% level of suspensions was considered to be minor.

#### Welfare

The school code was based on rights, responsibilities and fairness. There were structures in place to support welfare matters. For each year group there were year advisors and assistant year advisors and these teachers had a totally non-disciplinary role. Year advisors followed the students through the school from year to year in order to maintain strong pastoral care links. Their role was to liaise with parents, if necessary, to ensure that any issues impacting upon students' learning could be managed. Deputy principals also had responsibilities for year levels and followed students through the school. Teachers in the school had a lot of goodwill and went out of their way to follow up or work on welfare issues for the students. The school's emphasis on welfare was exemplified by its motto, 'we care.'

There was also a needy students' scheme whereby uniforms, excursions and stationery could be paid for. The community highly supported the wearing of uniforms. A few years ago the students had significant input into a uniform change. An active Student Council was in place, with representation from all year levels, which provided valuable input into school operations. The Council conducted assemblies and presentations and had a leadership role in the school.

### Secondary Transition

The school had partnerships with the three primary schools in the catchment area. For the purpose of transition to secondary school, students from these schools came to the school at separate times during term 4 (for one day a week for five weeks) to help familiarize them with the secondary environment.

### 2. Literacy

At the beginning of 2011, the school timetabled three periods a week of literacy for students in Years 7 and 8, two periods more than in the previous two years. The literacy period consisted only of reading and writing. In addition to the literacy programs outlined below, the school held an annual Literacy Week, with activities such as spelling bees, movie reviews, read-a-thons and poster competitions. The school encouraged and rewarded participation in these events with generous prizes.

The school had a Literacy Committee, with staff representatives from every subject faculty, which met once per month. The teacher was employed through National Partnership to manage the school's teacher PL program, (outlined below in point 5), and this person also coordinated the school's literacy program. In 2011, the school was trialing a cross-curricular approach to reading and writing, with topics such as 'let's write a sentence' and 'let's write a paragraph'. Students' oral language was generally good but their written language was not good, so the school had been concentrating on writing. The development of the literacy program had been based on weaknesses identified through NAPLAN. In previous years, teachers received PL from a primary school principal on strategies for engaging students in reading and writing, and many of the teachers still used some of those strategies (more on PL under #5 below).

#### Peer Reading

Year 7 student peer reading took place at the commencement of each day; the students were partnered with Year 10 students – to help them with pronunciation and meaning of words, if necessary. Peer reading operated for 10-15 minutes and involved oral reading only. The activity was reported anecdotally to be effective.

### Writing

Each year, the school organized an incursion/performance that was linked to a writing task. The school paid for Years 7, 8 and 9 students to attend an incursion or performance, which formed the stimulus for a writing activity. At the conclusion of the performance, teachers set the writing task for students to complete during class time. An ex-head teacher marked the task, which gave credibility to the assessment process and selection of prize winners, and feedback was given to teachers about the areas of weakness in student writing.

### Library

The 'What's cool for boys' and 'What's cool for girls' was a strategy used in the library to encourage reading. A wide selection of books was made available based on what boys and girls generally found interesting. Students chose and read books from those provided and prizes were awarded to those who read the most books.

### Reading Program

The reading program had been operating for many years in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10. In 2011, the school was trialing a withdrawal program for low-ability Year 8 students nominated by secondary teachers. The program involved students having two 15-minute one-on-one sessions with a teachers' aide and some group work. The school used PSP funds to employ four teacher aides to work with about 40 students. A diagnostic test was conducted in term 1 to establish students' areas of need and the test was repeated in term 3 to assess improvement in outcomes. Initial reluctance from some teachers to release students for this program was overcome when improvement was observed.

One teachers' aide, funded through PSP, provided support for students in Year 9 and 10 classes and was also available to help students with reading at lunchtimes. The latter was a popular strategy because it enabled students to help themselves. After-school tuition was also available on request.

## 3. Music

In the past, little had been done in the school to develop music. But in the past five years, the school had employed peripatetic teachers to provide students with more one-on-one attention. The students responded enthusiastically to this method of teaching music. Parents paid for their children to be involved in the instrumental

music program. And since the school was in a low socioeconomic area, it paid the instrumental music fees for students whose families were unable to do so. It was thought that the music program had helped to improve students' university entrance exam results, and parents valued their children being able to learn an instrument. There were 60–80 students from Years 7 to 12 enrolled in instrumental music, and 26 students enrolled in Year 11 senior secondary music. The students performed at whole-school assemblies, interschool festivals and competitions which allowed them to demonstrate their skills and abilities. Some students had gone on to music studies after finishing school, as was the case for five out of 20 students in 2009.

## 4. Attendance

The school did not have a high absentee rate, but it had a clear process to deal with absences. A school attendance officer was employed for the equivalent of 0.6 FTE to make contact with parents and follow up any unexplained absences. On the day of absence, a phone call was made to parents and further phone calls if absences were prolonged. Letters were sent home to parents to follow up any unexplained absences. Thus the school set a standard of demanding that students come to school, which the community fully supported. The school encouraged students and parents to make medical and other appointments outside of school time so that learning time was not disrupted, and this was generally acceded to by the parent body.

## 5. Teacher Development

In 2011 National Partnerships funding provided for an experienced teacher to manage PL to improve the quality of teaching and, thereby, the quality of student engagement. In 2011 teachers' teaching commitments were reduced by one period per week, and the school employed three teachers (using National Partnerships funds) to cover the relief required while teachers attended PL sessions. Most teachers at the school were interested in participating, and the school was to evaluate the success of the PL support at the end of the year.

Teachers were required to take their laptops to the PL sessions, since many of the sessions were on technology, such as the use of the Studywiz virtual learning package, the use of SMART NAPLAN data to identify students' strengths and weaknesses; and strategies for teaching students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The

school planned to use further PL time to address literacy teaching issues. Early impacts of the initiative were:

- an increase in the use of technology in lessons
- some teachers had implement different strategies in the classroom
- teachers took the time to reflect on their teaching practice and to plan for improvement

In 2011 National Partnerships funds were also used to release learning area faculty head teachers from classes (for two periods each week) to work with teachers on planning, team teaching and improving teaching delivery. This had also proved to be effective, especially in persuading teachers to try new ways of teaching. The program would continue in 2012.

The PL Committee consisted of approximately 10 teachers and learning area faculty head teachers, who had planned the PL program for the year. The committee met once per month to monitor and review the program.

## 6. Academic Extension and Remediation

The school aimed to improve the learning outcomes of all students. As outlined above, it had programs to address students' weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. It also provided opportunities for students to seek help with learning and study, and programs to meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

### Learning Centre

The centre was a half-sized room at the back of the school, housed with computers at one end and desks at the other, with a staff member on hand to help students. Teachers could send up to 6 students to the room at any time, providing she/he booked them in beforehand to allow the learning centre teacher time to prepare appropriate learning tasks.

### Study Opportunities

Study opportunities were available for Year 12 students before and after school, as well as during holidays. Grant funding was used, subsidized by school funding, to pay for staffing. In the past few years, there had been funding available to the school for end-of-secondary-

school examination tutorials. The school also operated an after-school study centre from 3.15 pm to 4.30 pm two days per week, with a minimum of three teachers present, including an English and a mathematics teacher. Student attendance was consistently strong at each study session. At the end of 2010, 70% of Year12 students gained university entry. The school kept in touch with past students and claimed that almost all past students were engaged in education, training or employment.

### Gifted and Talented

An accelerated learning path was available for the most academically capable Year 7 students. The program targeted stage 4 outcomes in Year 7, and stage 5 outcomes in Year 8. The program entailed an entirely self-directed student project nominated by the selected students. Students set out their research question and undertook the work. Subjects selected had to include English, history and one other subject.

The school also operated a high achievers elective in Years 9 and 10. Teachers nominated Year 8 students for entry into the elective, and examined NAPLAN results and school reports to make the selection. The program, which aimed to target stage 6 outcomes in Year10, was very student centered, geared to students' career destinations and interests. There was flexibility and negotiation between teachers who were very supportive of gifted and talented students. For example, in 2011, the gifted and talented students requested an off-line subject on the timetable grid so they could study more.

### Additional Learning Opportunities

School leaders have encouraged teachers to concentrate on the syllabus but occasionally step outside its boundaries. Cross-faculty activities were encouraged, supported by some small grants to the school. For the past 20 years the school had conducted excursions to Canberra for civics work and in 2011 a group of history students travelled to Europe to study history in context, as they had done in previous years. Opportunities were given for students to enter competitions, such as the Australian Mathematics Competition, Australian English Competition, Chemistry Quiz, and Web Awards Competition. Certificates of high distinction, distinction and credit had been awarded to students from the school for their results.

## 7. Community Relationships

The school was well regarded by the community and parents were keen to send their children to the school because of its reputation for high achievement. To compare this school's reputation to that of a neighbouring secondary school with a similar catchment area: Case Study School 9 currently had requests for 2012 places, while the neighbouring school had requests for only 140. The school published a fortnightly newsletter that was also posted on the school website. The hard copy was given out in roll call to students and read through with them by teachers. This helped address literacy learning needs and enabled students to talk with their parents about what was happening in the school. To assist with school-parent communications, when translation/interpretation was required, the school had employed a Chinese and a Vietnamese speaker.

### Meetings

The school held community meetings in the evenings, with typically over 100 parents attending. Dinner was usually provided by the hospitality students, and there was always an agenda with targeted topics appropriate for year levels. The Chinese and Vietnamese speaking aides were always present at these evenings. The school also conducted about five formal assemblies each year to which some parents attended. The Year 10 and 12 assemblies were especially well attended.

### Past Students

The school had strong links with previous students. Many ex-students came back to the school to visit and were warmly welcomed. Many students also returned to the school to attend staff retirements.

## 8. Numeracy

The school's numeracy program had been operating since 1999 and was embedded in the school plan. It was PSP funded and the school received four years funding at a time. The program had an emphasis on basic skills and numeracy across the curriculum, and there was some withdrawal – for example, a teachers' aide withdrew students from Year 7 classes and worked one on one with them.

All students completed tests after Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics so that classes could be streamed into mostly homogeneous ability groups. From the tests, 40 students from Year 7 were selected for the numeracy program, which was designed to improve their basic numeracy skills. Improved student outcomes were clearly targeted and the school awarded prizes such as merit certificates, lollies and trophies to students for demonstration of progress. The school had an emphasis on rewards and gave out iPods and vouchers in other learning areas for improved progress. If students were not participating satisfactorily, or not completing homework required, the teachers' aide made contact with parents.

The program was definitely effective because NAPLAN data indicated that there were no students below the Year 7 benchmarks. The school could see the rewards from the funds spent on the program and there was a very positive attitude from the students involved. The school had a Numeracy Committee, with staff representatives from every subject faculty, which met every month.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 9 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school configured its classes in Year 7 according to tests completed at the end of Year 6. Selection of students for the Year 7 numeracy program was done according to the same tests, and one-on-one teaching ensued to address students' needs. The teachers' aide and classroom teachers then monitored students' progress. Likewise students for the Year 8 reading program were identified through a diagnostic test carried out at the beginning of the year.

In 2011, teachers were using SMART NAPLAN data to identify areas of strength and weakness. Teachers had undertaken PL to provide them with expertise to interpret and make use of the data for planning. Through teaching to the point of need, students' learning was enhanced.

## 2. Literacy and numeracy

As described above, the school had the following actions/strategies for literacy and numeracy, some based on withdrawal and some on inclusion:

- o increase in number of periods devoted to literacy from one to three
- o a withdrawal strategy for Year 8 students to improve their reading skills
- o students in Years 9 and 10 receiving development of their reading skills through in-class attention from an aide
- o peer reading for Year 7 students
- o encouragement of reading through the library
- o annual school writing competition

The school's numeracy program was fully embedded in its operations and targeted Year 7 students in particular – as mentioned above.

## 3. 'At risk' case management

The school had various mechanisms to address 'at risk' students. Regarding welfare, the school had year advisors and assistant year advisors for all year levels to address pastoral care and welfare issues only. These members of staff were a point of contact for students for any issues that affected their engagement with learning.

## 4. Leadership

The school's principal had set a clear direction and ethos for the school and this was strongly supported by the deputy principals and faculty area head teachers. In 2011 the head teachers had been given increased opportunities to provide pedagogical support to teachers. In addition to curriculum leadership from head teachers of faculty areas, the school also had a pastoral care structure as described above.

## 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

Most of the school's initiatives were couched in evidence-based practice and were known to support engagement. The school's behaviour management policy was based on fairness, with clearly articulated expected behaviours and consequences for students who displayed inappropriate behaviours.

The school's 2011 PL initiative was aimed at continued support for teachers' professional growth. Having PL sessions during school time, and on a weekly basis, ensured that strategies could be implemented within the classroom and followed up on.

The Year 7 literacy and numeracy programs were further manifestations of evidence-based practice.

## 6. Whole-school approaches

The school's motto 'we care' reflected its management of all pastoral care matters, including attendance and behaviour, as described in detail above.

In 2011 the school adopted a whole-school approach to the PL of teachers, including the appointment of an experienced teacher to manage the initiative, and the appointment of relief teachers to cover classroom teachers attending PL sessions.

## 7. Links between home, school and community

The school had strong support from parents in the community who wanted their children to succeed academically and expected the school to uphold high standards. The school encouraged parents to attend meetings scheduled throughout the year, providing a catered dinner at each of the meetings. To further support parents and forge school-home links, the school had two aides on staff to provide interpretation/translation in Chinese and Vietnamese.

## 8. Resources

Funding afforded to the school had been spent primarily on human resources and teacher time to enable some key initiatives to occur. Funding supported an extensive PL program and extra time for faculty head teachers to meet with teachers to work on planning and lesson delivery.

Teacher aide time enabled withdrawal programs, plus the school's learning centre and its study centre.

## 9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available

No consideration had been given to making any performance measures developed at a school level available to other schools.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time**

The school plan outlined all targets for literacy and numeracy based on NAPLAN benchmarks and results provided clear evidence of the success of its initiatives. In addition, the school monitored the success of students undertaking end of secondary school exams and the completion of VET studies. In other areas, classroom teachers monitored student progress and engagement.

### **11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders**

As mentioned several times, in 2011 the school embarked on a full-scale approach to PL for all teachers, plus the release of faculty area head teachers to work with teachers in their subject areas. The school recognised that teachers may need further PL in the teaching of literacy.

### **12. Sustainability**

The school's attendance and behavior management policies were fully embedded in the school's operations and were clearly sustainable. While the school had invested a great deal of funding in its PL initiatives, it viewed this capacity building as working towards sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

Case Study School 9 was a very successful school that was fully supported by its community. Its success lay in having strong structures to support the pastoral care of all students and a caring teaching staff who demonstrated a great deal of goodwill. The school had several initiatives to address the needs of students, such as learning weaknesses, gifted and talented students, and an appetite for learning. The school's learning and study centres contributed to the strong and supportive learning environment. PL delivered in 2011 further sought to enhance and raise the quality of pedagogy and student learning.

# Case Study 10: Large Metropolitan Primary School

- o **Primary school**
- o **School population 797, 91% LBOTE**
- o **Metropolitan**
- o **Public school**

## Background

Case Study School 10 had a very high level of student engagement, especially in academic learning, and this was strongly supported by the community. Parents in the predominantly Vietnamese community had very high expectations for their children and tended to put pressure on their children to succeed academically. Many of the parents were highly educated and sought the same levels of education for their children. The students at the school generally wanted to learn and wanted to achieve high standards. The school had an outstanding rate of student attendance, very little problem behavior and no suspensions. This climate enabled the teachers to fully engage students in learning. In the past, the parent body had emphasised only the academic aspect of education, as reflected in their children doing well in tests and exams. But in the last five to ten years the school staff had worked hard to persuade parents that children also needed to be involved in other aspects of the school curriculum.

This primary school enrolled 797 students, most of whom (91%) were classified as LBOTE students. The ICSEA for the school was low at 979, an increase of 19 since 2009. The change in the ICSEA was attributed to an increase in the two top quartiles as well as in the bottom quartile.

The school operated an academic extension (otherwise called challenge) program for which students in Years 5 and 6 had to apply for entry and undergo a placement test. Acceptance into the program was highly sought after. In 2011, 62 students from the school undertook the placement test compared to only four or five students from other primary schools in the area. There was a belief by the community that students in the program were high achievers.

In many academic areas the school was a high performer, but it maintained a focus on improvement. The principal embedded school policies and practices, to develop a school culture with high expectations for performance and behaviour of all students. According to the Principal, "If we are really doing well, then we've got to do better."

There was a strong focus on communication within the school. The leadership team had an executive meeting each Monday and staff meetings were held every Monday afternoon. The principal conducted a formal communication meeting every Monday morning to provide staff with information of events planned for the week. In addition to this, year-level meetings for teachers occurred each week, and learning-area meetings were held monthly.

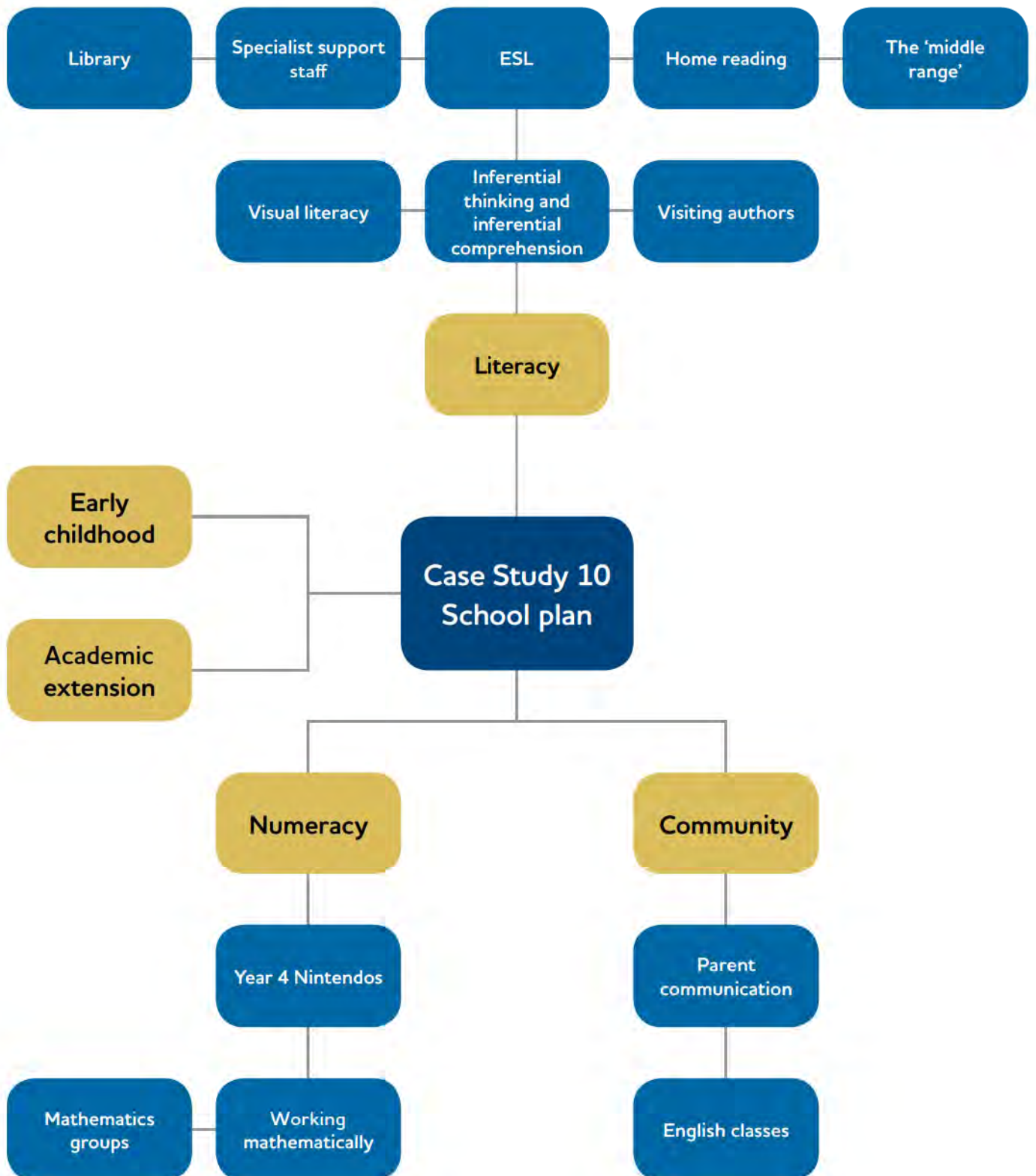
## Approach to Engagement

The school's executive team managed the engagement of students by providing a variety of programs and experiences to support their overall development. Whereas literacy and numeracy were the cornerstones of the school's operations, the Principal believed that the school's work was also about developing a 'well-rounded child.' For that reason, the school encouraged and provided opportunities for the students to become involved in sport and the arts, as well as other pursuits that were not strictly part of the academic curriculum.

The school conducted assemblies every morning in the primary section (Years 3-6), which enabled children to be immediately recognised and acknowledged for any achievement. And there were weekly or fortnightly assemblies for other sections of the school, where merit certificates were issued.

The synergistic map on the opposite page identifies five key engagement initiatives and their offshoots.

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives





## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Literacy

The school had several strategies to address various aspects of literacy, the most predominant being a focus on inferential thinking and inferential comprehension. Some of the strategies targeted the whole school, others targeted smaller groups and individuals. Details on these strategies follow.

#### Inferential Thinking and Inferential Comprehension

It was apparent from basic skills testing conducted in previous years that the students had a weakness with inferential thinking (i.e. drawing reasonable conclusions from evidence). This observation had been reinforced through NAPLAN testing. Many of the parents recognized that weakness with inferential thinking was a cultural issue, because in their culture they tended to think of things as 'right or wrong'. When students were asked questions such as "How did you get that answer?" they had difficulty responding.

The school had worked on inferential thinking for several years. In 2009, the school spent Priority Schools Project (PSP) money on engaging a facilitator, an expert in inferential thinking, to conduct workshops and demonstration lessons on inferential comprehension. Funds were also spent releasing teachers from the classroom to work with the facilitator on developing classroom activities. As an outcome of that PL, an Inferential Thinking committee was established in 2010. In 2011 the school was using a deputy principal, together with National Partnerships and PSP funds, to advance the teaching of inferential thinking and inferential comprehension. The emphasis in 2011 was on teachers making connections between inferential thinking and other learning areas.

In 2011 the school purchased the Springboard into Comprehension program that involved a prescriptive way of teaching. The Springboard program looked at classroom practice and the way that teachers talk to students. The program was based on a diagnostic test and a tracking system for students' results. As further diagnostic tests were done, improvements could be monitored.

One of the deputy principals had conducted demonstration lessons on the program and worked with teachers on collaborative planning. At the time of the case study visit, the school was collecting anecdotal data from teachers and students to supplement the test data. All of the teachers of Years K – 6 were adapting the process to their classroom programs. Although implementation was still in its early stages in 2011, there were signs that the students were making progress. The principal expected that the teaching of inferential thinking/comprehension would probably take about four to five years to become embedded in the school teaching and learning culture and for the school to see improved outcomes.

The Springboard program expected teachers to come up with inferential thinking questions for the classroom. But for it to run effectively, it was necessary to use a whole-school approach for consistent use of a common language and a common structure. In the past, the school had used inferential thinking variously, but in 2011 the decision was made to narrow the use of the program to a single approach. The difference with this focused approach compared to other strategies used previously in the school was the prescriptive implementation pitched at a higher level.

The school had some changeover of staff in 2011, resulting in several new teachers, some of whom wanted to be involved in the Inferential Thinking committee. The intention was that at the beginning of 2012 the school would review and update the inferential thinking program with staff.

#### ESL

In the past, the ESL support teacher worked with the two year groups who needed the most support. In 2011 the school restructured the program and targeted students in the junior grades. The school had also given time to enable teachers and the ESL teacher to work together.

#### Visual Literacy

The school noticed from 2010 NAPLAN data that students weren't interpreting pictures and visual texts well. The school linked this to a need for art appreciation and used PSP funds to purchase artwork for each classroom to examine and discuss. Teachers were also using the artwork for developing students' skills in speaking and listening, writing, grammar and spelling.

### Visiting Authors

The school had four authors visit the school each year, which had the impact of encouraging students to read more from those authors.

### Specialist Support Staff

The deputy principal, who had significant input into the implementation of the inferential thinking strategy, also oversaw the literacy program, working with teachers on demonstration lessons and other forms of PL. In addition, the school had a literacy/numeracy support teacher, funded through National Partnerships, to work with students in classrooms.

### Home Reading

All K – 2 classrooms had a wide variety of books, which students could take home. PSP money was used to purchase the initial set of books, and two benevolent parents provided the money to purchase additional books.

### Library

The library was well patronised by students, and teachers made constant use of library resources to support classroom programs and conduct lessons in the library. Two of the librarians had been on staff for many years. A benevolent parent had provided the funds for purchasing more resources for the library.

### The 'Middle Range'

The school had successfully focused on extension and remediation of students and was now looking at middle-of-the-range students in bands 3-5 of Year 3 NAPLAN results.

From Year 3 NAPLAN results in 2010 the school identified the following breakdown:

Band 6 and above	Middle bands 3-5	Bottom bands 1-2
Up to 50%	Up to 50% of the population	15-20%

It had taken a random sample of 25 Year 4 students, examined their IQs and used a Wyatt test as a means of predicting their results in each subject area. The school aimed to see whether the students' results in the 2012 NAPLAN Year 5 tests would be significantly higher or lower than that predicted. The school was still in its very early days with this project; however the 'middle range' group was considered to be worthy of further investigation with regards to student engagement.

## 2. Numeracy

To address student numeracy, the school had three major projects in place:

1. the Year 4 Nintendos project
2. approaches to working mathematically
3. the size of mathematics groups.

### Year 4 Nintendos Project

One of the deputy principals thought that with numeracy the school needed to 'think outside the square' and develop students' numeracy skills that would benefit them in the future. The Year 3 NAPLAN results over the past two years had showed a downward trend, particularly with boys' results. The deputy principal had been to a network meeting and learnt that another school had worked in partnership with a local university and had achieved outstanding results from a program in which students had used Nintendos to develop their number facts. The reason for using the Nintendos was that they were self-motivating and individually based. In order to implement this same strategy, in 2011 the case study school spent \$20,000 of PSP funds on Nintendos to set up the program, which would continue to be used in 2012.

Year 4 students began the Nintendo program in term 2 of 2011; they worked for 15 minutes per day on skills and practice. They took a pre-test on students' skills and thoughts on mathematics and a post-test later in the year to compare results and identify any improvements. As there were noticeable improvements in students' skills at this stage, the school planned to model the program with parents at a parent evening later in the year. The teachers were enthusiastic about using them; two of the younger teachers found the program particularly appealing. The school planned to examine the Year 5 NAPLAN data in 2012 for indicators of improvement.

### Working Mathematically

'Working mathematically' became a focus of the school across Years 3-6. Using Newman's Error Analysis to collect data about students' mathematical thinking, teachers found that students had a weakness in comprehending and inferring meaning from mathematics word problems. It was realized that the inferential thinking work being done in literacy would also help students to work mathematically.

### Size of Mathematics Groups

Students in Years 3, 4, 5, and 6 were streamed into ability groups for mathematics. In 2010 PSP and National Partnerships funding was used to employ extra teachers to work with Year levels 3-6 for five days a week so that instruction groups could be smaller. In 2011 something similar was done for K-2, with great success.

## 3. Academic Extension

The school streamed off the top students into two academic extension classes that paralleled the other students in each Year levels 5 and 6. There was an academic extension class of 15 Year 5/6 students, which was the most sought-after class in the area because the students in showed marked improvement in their numeracy and literacy assessment and capacity for inferential thinking.

As stated above, the school valued the notion of a 'well-rounded child', and this had been a major focus of the school-parent communication strategy across all year levels. Teachers had also taken a key role in encouraging the concept with parents by explaining to them that students also needed to be involved in the broader school curriculum, not just the academic curriculum.

## 4. Early Childhood

The Best Start Program was conducted at the school through the Early Childhood Directorate based on literacy and numeracy expectations of students by the time they completed kindergarten. Teachers assessed students in the first few weeks of kindergarten to determine where students were placed on a literacy and numeracy continuum and thus their ability grouping. The Directorate then provided teachers with learning programs for all students based on their assessed needs. Teachers received two days of PL to familiarise themselves with the program and the assessment component. The school used PSP funding to release teachers from class for this purpose.

## 5. The Community

The school had an 'open door' policy and very good parent attendance at open evenings.

### Parent Communication

In recent years, the school had worked very hard on welcoming and communicating with parents. Parents were really responsive to parent evenings, held to keep parents informed about curriculum initiatives and other issues, and the attendance at them was very strong. For example, the school held a parent evening to discuss the Year 4 Nintendo project early in 2011. Ten years ago the school had only two Asian parents attend parent evenings and in 2011 over 100 Asian parents attended, as well as many non-Asian parents. The school translated its newsletter and other messages into Vietnamese and Chinese for parents and posted these on the school website for ease of parent access. In 2011 the school used PSP funds to develop a high-quality school magazine for bi-annual distribution to the parent body and to begin publication in 2012.

### English Classes

The school had two Vietnamese and two Chinese teachers on staff and provided an English class in a social environment for parents on Fridays. This class was well attended, with up to 56 parents at one stage; but paradoxically the success of the class was measured by its decrease in numbers. Through the class, parents had become more confident English speakers had gained either employment or enrollment in TAFE classes to further their education.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 10 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school had a comprehensive approach to monitoring student progress and implementing programs based on student data. For example, staff used NAPLAN data to identify weaknesses in Year 3 numeracy, giving rise to the Year 4 Nintendo project. Since the Nintendo project was proving to be highly engaging with students, improvement was expected in 2012 Year 5 NAPLAN results. The school's literacy focus on inferential thinking and comprehension had also arisen from identified weaknesses in students' outcomes.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

Significant National Partnerships and PSP funds had enabled the school to implement whole-school approaches in literacy and numeracy, such as the inferential thinking and comprehension initiative, and the reduction in group size for mathematics

### 3. 'At risk' case management

The school used case management of students to meet learning needs and avoid disengagement. For example, employing an ESL teacher in the junior years was designed to enhance the engagement of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. And the school's current examination of 'middle range' students in Year 4, was based on a concern that these students may not be having their learning needs met.

### 4. Leadership

The principal set a standard of high achievement in the school that was fully supported by the community. Two deputy principals and four assistant principals, considered by the Principal as outstanding teachers, provided a strong leadership base. The school's key initiative of inferential thinking and comprehension was led by a deputy principal who provided PL and support to all teachers.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

The school had implemented two initiatives that were evidence-based:

4. the Springboard into Comprehension program
5. the Year 4 Nintendos initiative
6. Whole-school approaches

As stated above, the inferential thinking and comprehension initiative became a whole-school approach in 2011. Visual literacy was also a whole-school undertaking, supported by physical resources that teachers were able to access and use in the classroom.

### 7. Links between home, school and community

There was a strong culture in the school of striving for success and achievement, which was fully supported by the community. Parents supported the school in implementing any programs they thought would result in academic achievement for their children. The school had used a variety of strategies to engage parents, including translation of the school newsletter into Chinese and Vietnamese and establishing an English class for parents each Friday on school premises. The school had also established a website and published its newsletter online. In 2012 a magazine would be published twice and distributed free to all parents.

### 8. Resources

Resources provided through National Partnerships and PSP funding had enabled key literacy, numeracy and community partnership projects. Technology, such as the Nintendos and interactive whiteboards in every classroom, had added to student engagement. In addition, the provision of human resources to reduce the size of the school's mathematics groups enhanced student academic engagement.

### 9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available

No consideration had been given to making any performance measures developed at a school level available to other schools.

# Case Study 11: Small Catholic Metropolitan Primary School

## 10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time

The school's planning and foci for improvement were based upon data. The principal believed there was room for improvement and that data would show the way for it.

## 11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders

The school's major literacy focus in inferential thinking and comprehension had required PL for teachers. National Partnerships funds had been used for this purpose, and would be used in 2012 to provide training for new teachers to the school.

## 12. Sustainability

The school was mindful of the need for sustainability with projects and viewed whole-school approaches as the means to embed practice. The school had made large purchases to enable projects to commence, such as in the Nintendos and visual literacy activities, but these resources could be used for many years with no further expense.

## Conclusion

Case Study School 10 was apparently a very successful school that was fully supported by its community. Its success lay in constantly striving for improvement based on data that identified areas of perceived weakness. The school was managed by high quality administrators, most of whom were positive teaching role models.

- **Primary school**
- **School population 145, 98% LBOTE**
- **Metropolitan**
- **Catholic school**

## Background

Case Study School 11 was an inner city Catholic primary school. Geographically, the school was considered to be the backyard of 'the estate', a colloquial term describing a set of four high-rise flats in close proximity to each other and the school. The school catered for students from preparatory to Year 6 and 96% of its population lived in the flats. The school was multi-racial, with most students coming from an Asian or African background. The school was multi-racial with most students coming from an Asian or African background. The school enrolled 145 students, with 98% of the student population meeting the LBOTE criteria. The gross ICSEA for the school was very low at 886, a decrease of 40 since 2009 due to a significant decrease in the top quartile and a rise in each of the middle and bottom quartiles. 2010 NAPLAN data for Years 3 and 5 showed significant shifts in scores for literacy and numeracy.

Less than half of the adults living in the flats had functional English and 86% of the adults were on a benefits pension. Very few of the adults were employed and of those who were, most earned an annual salary of less than \$30,000. There were issues of gambling, drug use and drug trafficking amongst some of the Asian adult population. From 2006, large groups of African refugees began to live in the flats.

Until 2008 the residents within the catchment area of the school were very compliant with Australian customs and practices, but this changed dramatically with an influx of new African refugees. At the beginning 2009, African refugees comprised 17% of the school's population, but by the end of 2009 this figure was up to 35%, which had a significant impact on the school. The more recent African children were predominantly from single parent families who had experienced trauma. These families included many small children and babies, and were part of a significant group from refugee camps recently resettled in Australia. The largely south Sudanese people had an oral-based language, with little writing.

The school population had always had a multi-racial student intake and been able to accommodate new students. However, the new African students were more challenging, with less compliance and more physical violence in dealing with disputes. This was considered by staff as the outcome of trauma they had experienced before coming to Australia. The challenging behavior manifested as students fighting in classrooms and on the school grounds, and occasionally mothers fighting amongst themselves on the school grounds. Most of the new students enrolled in the school in 2009 were between Years 3 and 6, with little schooling and little, if any, English.

Prior to 2010, the principal used a directed leadership model, with no distributed leadership action. At the beginning of 2010, the principal appointed two staff members to take up coordinator positions early in 2011, to broaden the leadership team. The principal anticipated that the four-yearly review that occurred midway in 2011 would provide the school with a licence for change. Throughout 2011, the principal engaged an external consultant to guide the leadership team in capacity building and problem solving.

Many of teachers had worked at the school for a long time, were reluctant to change their pedagogy, and had low expectations of the students.

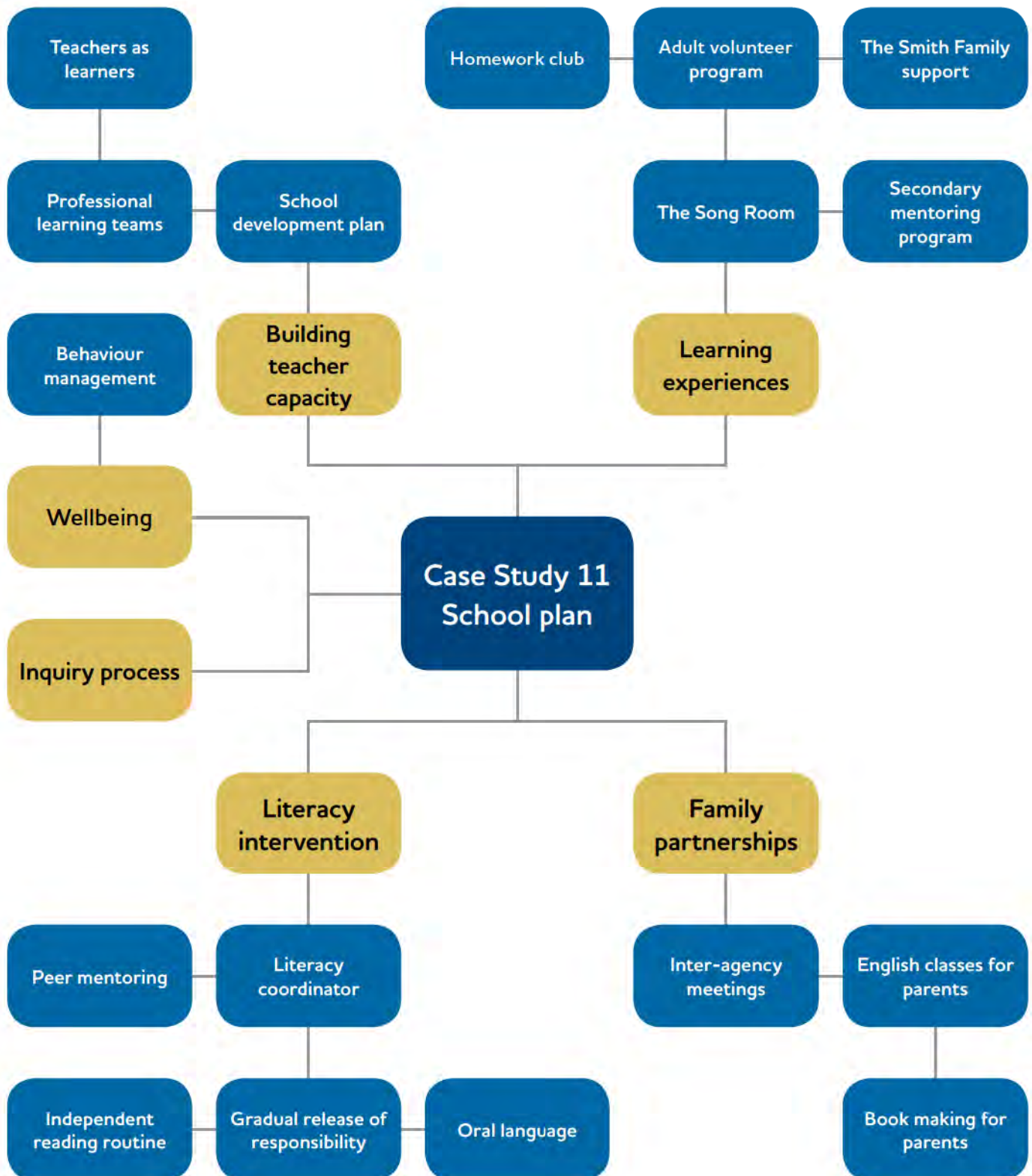
## Approach to engagement

In the past the school had a strong connection with its community and attempted to maintain contact with agencies in the immediate environment to garner support for parents and children. Staff from the school met every four to six weeks with agencies, such as Community Police and Maternal and Child Health Care to share information. And the school aimed to provide as many different learning experiences for its students as possible through its connections with these outside agencies.

The school acknowledged that it would continue to draw its student intake from the flats, where the current families were unlikely to move because few had jobs (to enable them financially to move to a better location); nor did they have the necessary level of functional English to enable them to gain employment. The families tended to remain in their language groups and visit doctors and dentists who spoke their language. The school recognised that to make any progress with engaging children in education, they needed to engage the parents in helping to provide a foundation for learning.

The synergistic map on the opposite page identifies six key engagement initiatives and their offshoots.

## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives

### 1. Family Partnerships

The school viewed the development of family partnerships as the foundation for engaging students in learning, working on the principle that a supportive relationship with the parent group would benefit the children. In 2010 the school employed a full-time family partnerships coordinator through National Partnerships funding to work with families on early intervention strategies (details below), recognising that the current toddlers in the flats would soon become part of the student body. Therefore, the school had the philosophy that family engagement and student engagement were closely entwined.

#### Inter-Agency Meetings

In 2009, the school found it difficult to place boundaries on the students' behaviour while at school, and considered that across the 'estate' the children's behaviour was 'out of control'. At the end of 2009, several community agencies in the local vicinity met for a crisis meeting to address the issue of local families' parenting. The perception was that the African families, in particular, had limited strategies for managing their children's behaviour in the new environment.

The school was a crucial part of inter-agency meetings held every four to six weeks for the participants to discuss and try to develop strategies for addressing local family issues. The principal, who was highly trusted by the families in the area, attended the inter-agency meetings along with the school's family partnerships coordinator. Through their participation in these meetings, the two school people were able to contribute to joint planning and, incidentally, become better informed about what was available and thereby more able to put families in touch with the relevant agencies for help.

The school acknowledged that the development of such an embedded network of support was necessarily a slow process. On the one hand, there was recognition from the school that some agencies were providing advice that was not necessarily culturally informed. On the other hand, the networking at meetings provided the school with the opportunity to develop partnerships with other agencies to support the implementation of school-based strategies to engage parents in the learning process (more on these below).

#### English Classes for Parents

For some years the Smith Family had conducted the 'Each one, teach one' program with adults, providing one-to-one language instruction and support for parents with limited English language. In the past the program had involved tutors going to the adults' homes for one and a half hours each week to work on oral language. But in the new, less stable, situation, the principal thought this might be problematic and made available a room at the school for this purpose (more on the Smith Family below).

#### Book Writing for Parents

By 2011, many of the children at the school had had no kindergarten or pre-primary experience. With their broken educational experience, most parents knew little about how to engage their children in learning. In 2010, the school partnered with a local family and child support agency and a book publishing company to engage local mothers and their children in writing a book. The project, which was conducted by the publishing company and attended by the school's family partnerships coordinator, involved about 10 mothers each writing a small book that would be suitable for reading to their children at home.

However, the goal was not so much the end product but the process of read, sing talk and play between mothers and their children as they developed the book. As it happened, the books were produced, but the school found that after several weeks the mothers were placing their children in childcare and attending the sessions alone, thus defeating the school's main purpose. Understandably, the mothers enjoyed the company of other adults and the break from their children because they usually lived an isolated existence in the flats.

Learning from its experience, the school implemented the strategy again in 2011 with modifications that increased engagement. In 2011 the family relationship, coordinator worked side by side with the mothers and also facilitated some strategies that helped engage the adults with each other. This project was considered to be more successful because mothers were attending and bringing their children with them to the sessions. There were plans for the project to be continued in 2012.



## 2. Literacy Intervention

Upon examination of 2009 NAPLAN results, the principal observed that half of the students who had been in the school since preparatory year had made little progress in literacy, and the literacy levels of some students had declined. The principal argued that the lack of progress was a result of what “the school was doing or was not doing.” For example, the principal thought most teachers were not using test results in a diagnostic capacity for planning programs of work, and were using test instruments that were not aligned to work carried out in their classrooms (therefore, not a reliable indicator of achievement).

The principal approached the jurisdiction’s state education office with concerns and sought advice. As a result, the school was provided with some literacy support through National Partnerships funds and, using further National Partnerships funds, the principal appointed a member of staff to the position of literacy coordinator (LC). Furthermore, in order to support the necessary changes in the teaching and learning culture within the school, the principal mandated implementation of the Fullan & Scott (2009) strategy of ‘Ready, fire, aim’ (identify a need, take action, test and measure the impact, articulate the outcome and identify further needs). In early 2010, staff were informed of the seriousness of the literacy problem and of the critical need for whole-school literacy intervention. (For more details on the school’s reform measures, see the sub-sections below on ‘literacy coordinator’, ‘building teacher capacity’, ‘school development plan’ and ‘teacher as learner’ below.)

### Literacy Coordinator (LC)

As mentioned above, a staff member was appointed as the LC at the beginning of 2011 as part of the principal’s strategy to improve both teacher pedagogy and literacy outcomes. The role of the LC included:

- o developing a consistent P-6 approach
- o building teacher capacity to improve student outcomes
- o engaging teachers in reflective teaching, professional dialogues, and collaborative planning

The LC employed a curriculum development approach with teachers, commencing with key questions to be answered regarding work in classrooms, such as: What are you doing? How is it going? How do you know? These focus questions underpinned an explicit approach to teaching literacy strategies linked with associated data indicating their impact on outcomes. The curriculum development approach was adopted at a whole-class level as well as at an individual student level. For example, in reading, the teachers were asked to design an action plan for each student: what they wanted the student to stop doing and what they wanted the student to start doing, and to implement strategies to effect this change. Running records were used to collect data to monitor change and teachers claimed there were improvements.

By 2011, feedback from teachers to the principal in performance management meetings indicated that they had become more strategic planners, had changed their approaches in the classroom, and felt more supported. And observational data collected by the LC when working in classrooms indicated that teachers had made changes to their pedagogy. In 2011 the Test of Reading Comprehension (TORCH) school data indicated a slight improvement in outcomes for some students. And 2011 NAPLAN data indicated that students’ inferring skills were at a good level, which may have been reflective of the explicit teaching of inferring skills that had taken place in term 2. However, student results overall had not shown much progress in 2011, so it was thought that the shift in teacher pedagogy in classrooms needed more time to have an impact.

### Peer Mentoring

A key strategy employed by the LC involved peer mentoring and a ‘train the trainer’ strategy. This was accomplished by the LC targeting some willing teachers to implement particular strategies in the classroom, followed by the LC working with those teachers to develop their expertise with the strategies, and then those teachers modeling the strategies to other teachers, supported by release time to cover classes while the modeling was going on. A review of the implementation strategies was undertaken at later Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings, involving all teachers.

### **'Gradual Release of Responsibility' Model**

Both the LC and the TLC (TLC), who was appointed in mid-2011 introduced the 'gradual release of responsibility' model in their work with teachers. This involved the slogan and process of 'I do, we do, you do', commencing with the two PLT leaders modeling literacy strategies to teachers in classrooms, followed by the two coordinators team teaching with classroom teachers, and modeling it with students. Finally, the teachers used the strategies in classrooms by themselves. At the end of this process, the teachers were asked to reflect on the process and the outcomes.

### **Oral Language**

The PLT leaders (i.e. the LC and TLC) also identified the need to change 'controlling' teacher talk that prevented students from participating. The LC planned to implement sentence starters in 2012 as a means of improving students' conversational language, and plans were in place to support teachers teaching students to use correct English structures when speaking.

### **Independent reading routine (IRR)**

The PLT leaders had observed that students in classrooms were not engaging in reading, in a context where teachers were predominantly teaching to the whole class, and worksheets formed the basis of literacy lessons. To overcome this practice, the PLT leaders implemented the IRR initiative in all Year 3-6 classrooms at the beginning of term 3 in 2011. This initiative was designed to encourage students' deep thinking and comprehension of books. It commenced with both PLT leaders modelling a single comprehension strategy in classrooms to teachers. All teachers then implemented that strategy in their classrooms. This was followed by the PLT leaders introducing a further four comprehension strategies with teachers, and each teacher then taking responsibility for implementing these comprehension strategies in their classrooms. In order for teachers to share knowledge, PLT leaders released teachers to watch strategies being used by peers. Teacher observations, records and diagnostic testing data indicated that the observation activity was successful and would be repeated in 2012.

In conjunction with the IRR initiative, PLT leaders implemented weekly conference meetings based on student journals in which students reflected on the books they had read. PLT leaders modeled ways for

teachers to respond to the students' journal entries and how to conduct conference meetings. Anecdotal feedback from teachers and students indicated that this initiative was working.

## **3. Inquiry Process**

The TLC had responsibility for improving teacher pedagogy and for implementing a whole-school, inquiry-based approach to learning with students, which was to be strongly linked to student engagement. Teachers were timetabled to meet weekly with the TLC or the LC and were working towards what the principal referred to as a 'culture of learning.'

The TLC worked with teachers to develop units in inquiry in the learning areas of science and society and environment studies through topics such as environmental sustainability. This work involved professional reading, professional discussions about linking inquiry to the students, and modeling skills and processes. Work samples were collected at the end of every learning cycle/topic throughout the year to provide some baseline data and the TLC conducted student surveys at the end of 2011 with targeted questions to provide further baseline data for comparison with 2012 data.

## **4. Building Teacher Capacity**

The majority of staff had worked at the school for a long time, some for 20 years or more. As outlined above, as a consequence of examining the school's 2009 NAPLAN results, the principal determined in 2010 that change was needed in a number of areas. Some of the measures initiated by the principal, LC and TLC have been described above; others follow in this section and in subsequent sections.

### **School Development Plan**

The school underwent its four-yearly review in June 2011, which involved a school self-reflection, parent reflection, and student input, with all data examined by an external reviewer as well as the school's leadership team. Whereas the principal had made changes to the leadership team earlier in 2011 through the appointment of the TLC, she saw the review as providing the catalyst for further change. The teacher component of the 2011 feedback surveys, reflecting on the 2010 school culture, indicated that teachers believed they had no voice in the school, reflecting the directed leadership approach taken by the principal. Teacher data also indicated that they

held low expectations of the students and had the belief that students were not motivated to learn. Paradoxically, student and parent data indicated the opposite: that students were motivated to attend school and to learn. An important outcome of the school review has been the development of a whole-school vision and ethos.

### **Professional Learning Teams**

The role/function of the PLT have been described above.

### **Teachers as Learners**

As stated above, the principal's actions, commencing in 2010, have targeted changes to the culture within the school, focusing on improved pedagogy and student outcomes. The appointments of the LC and the TLC have been instrumental in improving pedagogy through a 'teachers as learners' meta-cognitive approach.

Prior to 2011, teachers were reluctant to contribute, reluctant to collaborate, and reluctant to change. In 2011 the LC and TLC implemented strategies to encourage teachers to contribute in PLT meetings and to make changes in their classrooms. In these meetings, the LC and TLC used ice-breakers and paired discussions to encourage teachers conversation; they also modeled strategies, and modeled language for teachers. The coordinator established an environment of working 'with' teachers, working with students in classrooms, and modeling strategies to teachers. To enhance this new pedagogical culture, the two coordinators established a repertoire of questions for teachers to ask about the impact of their teaching to improve student outcomes.

## **5. Learning Experiences**

As indicated above, from 2010 many of the students in the school have had limited life experiences in Australia beyond living in a flat and playing in the park. The school believed that the broadening of learning experiences would provide students with knowledge upon which further learning could be built.

### **The Song Room**

The Song Room is a philanthropic organisation that offers music and arts programs to disadvantaged schools, especially those with recent refugees. In 2007, the principal attended a Song Room concert conducted by another school and approached the organisation to

enquire whether her school could be involved. In 2008 a Song Room project in which a visiting teacher taught song and choir was implemented for all students in Years 3 to 6. In 2009 there was another program, which included experimental percussion, singing and drumming; and in 2010 the program involved singing and dance.

Furthermore, in 2010 the Song Room organization approached the principal to offer a pilot instrumental program, which in 2011 resulted in every child in Years 4 to 6 learning to play the violin or cello. The students received two lessons in school time per week and two practice sessions after school each week. Students learned to play the instruments based on memory, not reading music, and it was expected that many of the students would continue with the instruments in secondary school.

And there is more: the Song Room had links with one of the city's universities and since 2008 has arranged for musicians from the university to perform lunchtime concerts for the students. Over the four years of involvement with the Song Room, students at the school have been given experiences with the arts that they had previously not encountered. This program has increased students' appreciation of the arts, along with learning how to be members of an audience. Teachers have explicitly taught the students how to behave as an audience and the students have practised these skills during the performances held at the school.

### **Secondary Mentoring Program**

In 2008, one of the city's large independent secondary schools approached the school to offer a mentoring program, which entailed Year 9 students meeting with mentees at a Breakfast Club twice per week (held on the 'estate'), and then working with them in classrooms for two hours each week. The secondary students' brief was to build a relationship with and help primary students with their literacy learning. The program had been in operation for four years and diagnostic and formative assessment data indicated that it was working effectively. The program has provided the primary students with additional academic help as well as exposing them to good role models.

### **Adult Volunteer Program**

The school has had connections with the Ardoch Youth Foundation, providing adult volunteers to help disadvantaged people and build connections between

community and school. The adult volunteers were provided with training during 2010 before becoming involved with the students. In developing relationships between the students and the adult volunteers, the school has included the volunteers on some of its big excursions into the community during 2010 and 2011.

Through its connections with Ardoch, the school also made connections with a large computing company, who since 2010 provided students in Years 5 and 6 with computing buddies in the workplace. Structured writing of letters to their computing buddies provided the students with authentic literacy opportunities. The relationships were enriched with visits by the employees to the school to meet the students and reciprocal visits by the students to their buddies' workplace. This further exposed students to people in the community.

#### **The Homework Club**

The homework club had been operating at the school since 2001. A nun initiated the club, supported by some Vietnamese mothers who felt they were unable to help their children with homework. In 2001 the club catered for 18 students, and by 2011 it catered for 140 students from two primary schools, mostly from this school. The club operated in the local community hall as well as in the school hall. The Smith Family Foundation provided tutors for the club, together with a local university that required its third year pre-service B Ed students to undertake some form of community service. This resulted in school students receiving one-on-one help from a university student or Smith tutor one afternoon per week. The school considered that the homework club added value to the students' academic progress, and that real learning took place, even though this had not shown up in student test results. In 2010, the school won a \$50,000 Impact Award and an additional \$50,000 state award from the National Australia Bank for its work in the homework club. These financial prizes enabled the school to pay for the homework club coordinators' time at each of the sites.

#### **Smith Family Support**

The Smith Family Foundation support has been mentioned twice above. The Foundation also provided scholarships to financially support students from primary school to university, and tutoring for students in Year 3 and 4; the latter entailed a tutor chatting over the phone with each student about a book they had both read.

## **6. Wellbeing**

The school was mindful that many of its students had experienced trauma and was planning to implement the following two programs in 2012 to address students' social and emotional wellbeing:

1. an early intervention program under the auspices of one of the city's children's hospitals to manage disruptive and antisocial behaviour in children from preparatory to Year 2
2. the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) program as a means of reducing aggressive behaviour

#### **Behaviour Management**

In 2011 the school had a new behaviour management plan founded on transparency of language used to describe expected, productive behaviours, and teacher response to these and unproductive behaviours. Prior to the influx of the African students, the school had an effective policy and process in place but felt this plan needed to be modified to meet the needs of current students. The principal's concern was that students did not understand and were not receiving appropriate consequences for their behaviour; therefore, in 2011 she introduced a tracking sheet in all classrooms, which was a means of identifying which student behaviours occurred, what consequences were applied, and the extent to which behaviour impacted on teaching time. In addition, all teachers had to undertake two sessions of PL in behaviour management. Apparently the tracking sheet had resulted in fewer students being sent to the principal, reflecting improved management of student behaviour in classrooms.

## Summary of Evidence from Case Study 11 Against Project Goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

Monitoring of results had generally occurred through the examination of NAPLAN results. As described above in some detail, the 2009 NAPLAN literacy results had a profound effect on the school's decision to make improvements, beginning in 2010.

Then in 2011 the four-yearly school review occurred, with input from teachers, parents, and students. Facilitated by an external reviewer, the review provided 'a line in the sand' for the school's next four-yearly plan. Coupled with this was the engagement of an external consultant to facilitate capacity building within the leadership team.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

The school had taken several initiatives to address literacy strategies. Those described above include:

- the appointment of a LC in 2010
- literacy intervention in 2011, based on Michael Fullan's 'Ready, fire, aim'
- regular meetings between teachers and the LC for PL purposes
- strategies that addressed the teaching of reading
- strategies based on the 'gradual release of responsibility' model and peer mentoring
- curriculum development to improve students' learning behaviour
- the Independent Reading Routine, implemented in Year 3–6 classrooms

Early feedback, observational data and some TORCH data indicated a limited impact of the literacy intervention on teacher pedagogy and student outcomes. It was anticipated that the school would not show definite improvements through data until 2012.

The school had no numeracy initiatives in place in 2011 and was not anticipating implementing any change in numeracy until the literacy intervention had been embedded.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

The school had some mechanisms for individual 'at risk' case management. And with respect to students generally, two members of the school had participated in inter-agency meetings every four to six weeks, which assisted in determining which agency was best placed to provide particular forms of help to parents and children.

As stated above, the school had two programs planned for implementation in 2012 to address students' social and emotional wellbeing.

### 4. Leadership

Prior to 2010, the principal believed that staff lacked the capacity to enact the change needed to improve student outcomes. In 2010 she began to implement processes that expanded the school's leadership – all of which have been described in some detail above.

In addition to the appointment of coordinator positions, the principal engaged an external consultant in 2011 to work with the leadership team on building its capacity to lead and enact change as well as to problem-solve school issues.

### 5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies

The initiatives and policies undertaken in the school during 2010 and 2011 were sparked by poor NAPLAN results in 2009.

### 6. Whole school approaches

The school had initiated several whole-school approaches to address various issues. The literacy intervention in place since 2010 was a direct response to the school's 2009 NAPLAN results, seeking to improve literacy outcomes. The appointment of a LC, to work with all teachers, was an initiative to provide PL to all teachers in developing a literacy approach and improved pedagogy across the school. The appointment in 2011 of the TLC also contributed to whole-school approaches with the inquiry process.

The establishment of a school development plan with a whole-school vision and ethos has allowed input from teachers, parents and students.

The homework club conducted after school, secondary student mentoring, and school's participation in an adult volunteer program were mechanisms for students' engagement through interactions with mentors, role models and volunteers.

### **7. Links between home, school and community**

The family partnerships coordinator, funded through National Partnerships, managed the links between the school and community. The school has developed strong links with community agencies as a result of the principal and family partnerships coordinator meeting with representatives from other community agencies every four to six weeks to share knowledge about the needs of families and, where appropriate, to direct families to agencies that could provide them with support.

The school has had several strategies to address the needs of parents:

- o providing the room for the Smith Family Foundation to conduct oral English classes for adults through the 'Each One, Teach One' program
- o the book writing program for parents in conjunction with a local agency and a book publishing company
- o the Song Room projects, which have been in place since 2008
- o two volunteer programs conducted in the school that link students to secondary role models and adults
- o the homework club that has been operating for 10 years.

### **8. Resources**

The school used most of its funding to provide human resources. National Partnerships money funded the three coordinator roles, which have had direct impact on student outcomes: the family partnerships coordinator, the LC, and the TLC. For some small projects carried out in the school, the school used its own funds, or other smaller amounts of National Partnerships money. Where possible, though, the school attempted to partner with local agencies to minimise the resource impact on the school. Many of the school/community initiatives in place were provided at no cost through the benevolence of foundations such as Ardoch, the Smith Family, and other volunteer groups.

### **9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available**

No consideration had been given to making any performance measures developed at a school level available to other schools.

### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time**

The school was in the process of developing various mechanisms for monitoring the improvement of student outcomes and engagement. The LC used TORCH comprehension data to monitor the progress of some students and develop small-scale action plans for individual students. Observational data in 2011 provided feedback on student and teacher progress. Work samples also provided the basis for some analyses of student progress in literacy and inquiry during 2011 and would be used as baseline data for comparison with 2012 data.

# Case Study 12: Small Independent Metropolitan School

## 11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders

The principal's perspective – that the quality of teacher pedagogy in the school was low – led to the appointment of two coordinators: a LC; and a TLC. Training for teachers was undertaken through weekly professional team meetings with the two coordinators, as well as through side-by-side modeling of quality teaching strategies in classrooms through team teaching and modelled lessons. Since the beginning of 2011, the principal believed that there had been improvement in pedagogy; however, no large-scale improvement was yet visible in student outcomes. The leadership team considered that improvement in outcomes may not be realised until 2012. Further PL of teaching staff would continue in 2012.

## 12. Sustainability

The school invested its funding to work towards the sustainability of classroom approaches. The large investment of money to fund coordinators was a means of working with teachers to enhance their teaching strategies. The coordinators' approach to peer mentoring and working side-by-side with teachers was a mechanism designed to create a culture of collaboration and sharing that was sustainable, even if funding was no longer available to support coordinators' positions.

Long-term relationships with outside agencies and organizations, such as the Smith Family Foundation, have provided benefits for the students at no cost to the school.

## Conclusion

Case Study School 11 has a strong connection with its community. Its relationship with community agencies has enabled it to implement a diversity of initiatives that have furthered the engagement of students and families with school and with learning. A leadership team with diverse expertise has sought to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers by implementing strategies to improve teacher pedagogy that ultimately will improve the outcomes for students.

- **Primary school**
- **School Population 140**
- **Metropolitan**
- **Independent school**

## Background

Case Study School No 12 was a small denominational independent school with 140 primary school aged children from Reception through to Year 7. The school was situated in a low socio-economic outer suburban area and it had an ICESA value of 934 in 2009, rising slightly to 943 in 2010 due to small decreases in the bottom and middle quarters and a small increase in the top quarter. The school operated six classrooms with two combined grades at all levels, except for one grade. Its population included 14 % LBOTE and 2% Aboriginal students and four students receiving funding for mild or moderate disability. A high proportion of students were from single parent families. Transience was high and this resulted in a number of new entrants each year being identified with significant gaps in learning.

NAPLAN data demonstrated high scores for reading, with all years above similar schools for 2008. Further rises for reading were reported for Years 3 and 7 against similar schools in 2010, although Year 5 dropped a little and was at par. In 2010, writing skills were at par and numeracy scores were above similar schools for all three year levels of assessment.

The school was committed to a low fee structure to support access for all families. While the income generated from school fees covered basic costs for teaching staff and resources, there was little left over to support the development of school-wide initiatives. Consequently, additional staffing to support new initiatives depended on external funding or on the willingness of teachers to devote time and energy that went beyond normal expectations. Teachers also put in extra time to support the extracurricular sports and music program. In the words of a member of the school's leadership team "money and time are always an issue".

The school leadership team, comprising the principal and two senior teachers, focused on developing the school's capacity to provide high quality and individualised teaching. They were proactive in accessing external resources to support teacher development and to provide

additional specialist teacher support for literacy and numeracy and special needs education. The school had received National Partnerships funding over the past two years and this had been used to refine and redevelop the school-wide numeracy program in order to provide more targeted teaching for all students. The school had also been successful in obtaining Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN) and Building Capacities funding to provide additional staffing support to students who had special needs or were identified as being 'at risk' and in need of targeted intervention for literacy and numeracy. Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding had provided the school with a much needed ICT facility.

In addition, leadership team had accessed a range of other resources to improve the school's learning management system, teachers' capacity to map student learning, and teachers' knowledge of new curriculum initiatives. Examples included school access to:

- o ACARA's website service SCOOTLE
- o the state Independent school association's online support service for the school curriculum and associated data management services
- o NAPLAN data and analysis.

This small leadership team of three was, however, challenged by the short-term funding and accountability cycles that restricted their efforts to establish school-wide planning and sustain initiatives from year to year. The National Partnerships funding in 2010, which was initially awarded for two years with the possibility of an extension for a further year, was a welcome exception. At the time of the interview there was great relief that this source of funding had recently been approved to continue through 2012 and there was a further possibility of another year of funding in 2013. For this leadership team it meant "that we can now plan ahead".

## Overall approach to engagement

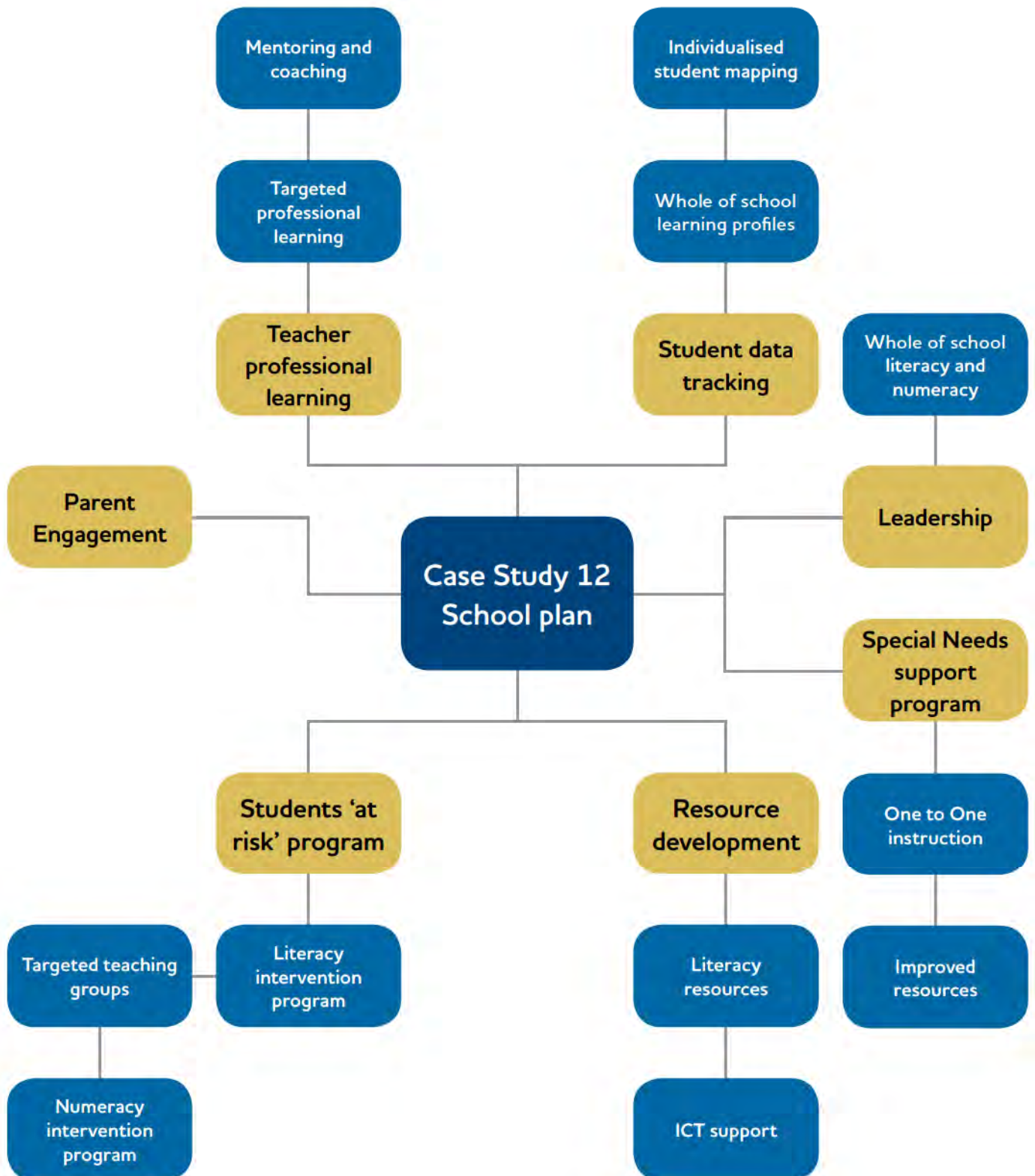
The two senior teachers coordinated the school teaching team and oversaw the development and implementation of initiatives in the school. They used an annual planning cycle to help manage the year-to-year uncertainties arising from changes in staffing and external funding sources.

The school had a well-established culture of using data to track student development, and there was a strong focus on addressing the individual learning needs of students. A school-wide testing and reporting program had been in operation for the past 15 years and all teachers had access to documentation about the development and achievements of all students at the school.

The synergy map below identifies seven key engagement activities implemented by the leadership team to build the school's capacity to practise data-informed teaching.



## Synergy of Linked Initiatives



## Engagement Initiatives in Detail

### 1. Leadership

The leadership team had a well-established plan for whole of school support for literacy and numeracy, and had refined this over many years. This included processes to support data-informed teaching, through a strong testing regime and the development of planned learning support that focused on:

- small group teaching for guided reading, spelling and numeracy groups
- in-class support for teachers
- individual learning plans for students with high level support needs.

The leadership team responded positively to the arrival of NAPLAN data, and this prompted a further review of the school's overall approach to literacy and numeracy support for students. The NAPLAN data and analysis complemented the information previously collated from the school-wide testing program for literacy and numeracy. In particular, the leadership team found that this additional source of data helped them to make an objective judgement about the standard of performance of their students, and to more reliably identify their learning strengths and needs.

Consequently, the NAPLAN data was presented to staff as part of a proposal to further improve the whole of school intervention strategy using more targeted teaching. The leadership team encouraged staff to engage in discussions about the data to help "develop a shared understanding of the situation we were in", and to garner the commitment of all teachers to engage with the school's agenda to improve its capacity to meet the needs of all students.

The external funding sources enabled the school to employ specialist teachers for numeracy, literacy and educational support. The specialist teachers were deployed to work individually with classroom teachers to help them to more closely examine the needs of particular students. The specialists also provided one-to-one teaching support for students identified as 'at risk'.

### A whole of School Approach to Literacy and Numeracy

National Partnerships funding, which was accessed through the state-based independent school association and LNLSN funding, provided resources for the school to improve its program of support for literacy and numeracy. For example, the National Partnerships grant enabled the school to increase the numeracy specialist teacher support time to 0.6 EFT. This additional specialist support helped teachers to use data to devise differentiated numeracy teaching, commencing with a project focused on the numeracy needs of a cohort of Year 2 and 3 students, with a planned extension across other year levels. At the time of the interview considerable progress had been made across Years 1-3, with further work planned for the upper years.

The Year 2 and 3 numeracy project helped teachers to improve their capacity for critical analysis of data for numeracy assessment, and to plan teaching strategies that reflected individual student needs. Early years teachers adapted this work to their classrooms using data collated from the early years numeracy interview with each student. The specialist numeracy teacher helped to analyse the data and to identify Growth Points, which determined what students needed to learn next. This led teachers to view intervention less as remedial and more in terms of building positive cycles of success. At the time of the interview, the school had received notification that the National Partnerships funding had been increased and extended to 2012. The leadership team were relieved that they had the support they needed to continue to improve the whole of school intervention strategy for numeracy.

## 2. Student Data Tracking

The school had an established program for collecting data on student learning. There were, for example, spreadsheets covering the past 15 years with data on the literacy and numeracy learning profiles of students, with the last 10 years available in digital form. Student profiles included information from:

- Neil analysis
- PAT-R
- PAT-M
- Waddington's comprehension
- Westword spelling
- School entry assessment
- Phonemic awareness
- Early years numeracy interview.

Data from these instruments were shared by teachers in staff meetings at the commencement of each year, particularly focusing on the progress made by each student. More recently NAPLAN data were added to the data collated by the school.

### Whole of School Learning Profiles

School based test results were collated for all students at all year levels. Results for Years 3, 5 and 7 were further collated on a shared spreadsheet with NAPLAN data for comparison. Early years numeracy interview data were also collated and analysed for students in Years 1 to 3. The data were used to help identify gaps in student learning and to indicate teaching needs.

More recently, teachers at the school developed a rubric designed to help identify what children were able to do. This work grew out of the numeracy intervention revision project in Years 2 and 3, which had focused teachers' attention on ways to create a more positive climate for learning, developing a more deliberate focus on what the children were able to do and "what they were ready to learn next".

### Individualised Student Mapping

The data from individual NAPLAN and school-based test scores were collated and analysed to map individual student needs as they moved from year to year. Relevant classroom teachers were provided with student folders that contained:

- copies of NAPLAN results and associated NAPLAN support strategies
- individual student NAPLAN results (for students in Years 3, 5 and 7), which were plotted together with school-based test results and updated to indicate changes and further inform teaching strategies
- information from any external assessments of students
- where relevant, early years numeracy interview data.

## 3. Student 'At Risk' Program

Individualised literacy and numeracy intervention programs were implemented for students who had been identified as being at risk of not achieving the national minimal standard for literacy and numeracy.

The student at risk program was supported using LNSLN grant funding. This provided a salary equivalent to 0.1 EFT each for the numeracy and special education support teachers. These two specialist teachers provided direct one-to-one support teaching, and additional assistance and mentoring to classroom teachers.

### Literacy Intervention program

Data from the school-wide testing program for literacy was pooled with NAPLAN data (for Years 3, 5 and 7) to identify:

- students at risk of falling below the national minimum literacy standard who would benefit from one-to-one teaching support using a targeted withdrawal program
- students in Years 3, 4 and 5 who would benefit from targeted small group teaching sessions for guided reading, spelling and grammar.

Teachers accessed the Smart Data Tool and other resources to help develop more differentiated literacy teaching in their classrooms. The specialist literacy teacher also compiled a folder for each teacher with teaching resources that related to the identified low scoring areas (i.e., areas with less than 50% accuracy). These folders also provided a resource for collaborative planning sessions between classroom and specialist teachers.

Additional in-class support was developed through a professional support program for teachers and this focused on strategies to support differentiated teaching.

#### **Numeracy Intervention program**

The identification and support program for students who were deemed to be at risk of numeracy failure was conducted in the same manner as the program described above for literacy. For example, the school wide and NAPLAN testing was used to identify:

- students at risk of falling below the national minimum numeracy standard who would benefit from one-to-one teaching support in a targeted withdrawal program
- children in the first year of school lacking basic numeracy skills who would benefit from a learning assistance program to build basic skill development.

### **4. Special needs support program**

#### **One-to-one instruction**

Students with severe disabilities were supported in class with a School Support Officer (SSO) who worked with students on a one-to-one basis to deliver an individualised learning plan.

#### **Improved resources**

The LNSLN funds also supported the purchase of resources for literacy, numeracy and special needs education.

### **5. Teacher professional development**

The teacher development program was supported by the specialist literacy and numeracy teachers, who worked alongside classroom teachers to build their confidence in using assessment information to plan and implement more effective teaching strategies. Specialist teachers met with classroom teachers to analyse NAPLAN and other data and to help them to use evidence to plan and implement teaching strategies that addressed particular student needs. After an initial period to build classroom teachers' confidence, regular monthly meetings were scheduled to reinforce their use of a more analytical and reflective approach in planning, teaching and assessment. Numerous incidental meetings also occurred during intervening periods.

#### **Targeted professional development**

Teacher professional development was guided by the Australian curriculum. For example, the mathematics specialists helped teachers to access the mathematics curriculum on-line, and to develop proficiency strands within units of work in order to "focus on how to give learning intention".

#### **Mentoring and coaching**

The program of support included mediated teaching by the specialist teachers who mentored and coached individual teachers to build their capacity. These specialist teachers encouraged teachers to take responsibility for their students rather than expecting the specialists to come in and "fix things" for students.

#### **Professional learning**

A series of regular school-wide staff meetings provided a forum for additional professional learning for staff. These meetings were opportunities for teachers to discuss data and teaching responses, and helped to build a shared climate of reflection, planning and review. The leadership team was focused on "getting teachers on board, owning the data and using it to plan for individual student needs".

Funding was used to release teachers from classroom duties to attend external professional learning programs for literacy and numeracy.

## 6. Resource Development

Teacher access to additional resources was important for the whole of school strategy. Additional funds were used to improve the quality of literacy materials and ICT capacity in the school.

### Literacy Resources

In addition to the focus on teacher quality and differentiated teaching, the leadership team used additional funding from a Building Capacity grant (\$6000) to purchase teaching materials for classroom teachers. The resources purchased with this money were:

- o spelling books – for students in Years 1 to 6, to ensure that a consistent approach was adopted across all levels
- o grammar books – for students in Years 3, 4 and 5, to improve grammar instruction at these levels
- o interactive reading resources – for students from Reception through to Year 2 to improve their engagement in reading.

### ICT development

BER funding provided the school with a new Mac computer suite. Interactive white boards were also placed in most classrooms to improve the use of ICT and multimedia in teaching. Workshops assisted staff to access information and curriculum support from the web and to improve their confidence in using web-based resources.

## 7. Parent engagement

As part of the National Partnership work the school set out to improve parent engagement. Parent involvement had been low for some time and it had generally been accepted that this was largely a social issue related to parents' limited free time. Staff were encouraged to brainstorm this issue to open up possibilities for sharing more information about children's learning with parents. This resulted in ideas for displays, articles and information in the newsletter, and coffee mornings with staff presentations to parents on curriculum developments at the school. Plans were underway to follow this work up further in 2012 and to conduct a parent survey.

## Summary of evidence from Case Study 12 against project goals

### 1. Monitoring and planning

The school had an established record for data collection about student learning, and used a wide range of data to provide information about student learning at all year levels. Teachers used information from a number of assessment instruments to help monitor and plan for student learning. Small group and individual teaching plans were developed in response to data. The NAPLAN data provided an additional nationally comparative measure against which student progress could be assessed. The NAPLAN analysis also provided an additional impetus for teachers to develop a more differentiated approach to teaching.

The school identified a need for a "good and easy to manage data base for all students... to make recording of results and analysing them easier", and also to help reduce the time teachers need for monitoring and planning.

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

Literacy and numeracy were targeted for assessment and for differentiated teaching. Small group teaching strategies were adopted to facilitate focused teaching across the whole school, and individualised teaching approaches were adopted for students found to be 'at risk'. Teaching specialists provided guidance and resources to build the capacity of classroom teachers to address the needs of different teaching groups.

### 3. 'At risk' case management

Data were used to identify all students at risk of not achieving the national minimal standard of literacy and numeracy. Students who were 'at risk' were given more one-to-one attention, with additional specialist teacher support in the classroom. Teachers at the school were also becoming more focused on working to address student strengths in learning, in addition to weaknesses. Students classified as being 'at risk' were also challenged and supported in the classroom using differentiated teaching and small targeted teaching groups.

#### **4. Leadership**

The leadership team was proactive in accessing all possible forms of support for the school, including funding, specialist teacher support and teaching resources. The two lead teachers were also instrumental in leading staff development, and in maintaining and enriching a whole of school approach toward the use of data to guide teaching practice.

#### **5. Evidence-based practices relating to policies**

The school used evidence-based practice to inform its teaching. There was an identified need for improved testing to more directly link assessment for literacy and numeracy to teaching strategies. The school drew on information from a range of assessment instruments to help inform teaching, but it was noted that, although “we can compare one test with another, it is a bit like comparing oranges and apples because we are assessing different skills”. Teachers were able to benefit from access to improved instruments linked to the learning continua for literacy and numeracy.

#### **6. Whole school approaches**

A strong whole of school culture existed for evidence-led teaching using a cyclic approach to link assessment, teaching and learning for literacy and numeracy. The school was committed to using differentiated teaching practices designed to target student learning needs. The essential element for the success of this school was to have “every staff member being on board with the objective of using effective teaching strategies”.

#### **7. Links between home, school and community**

The school’s evidence-led culture was being further developed to improve the quality of information about children’s learning that was being shared with parents. This was part of an overall effort to improve links between home and school, and other measures included the sharing of more detailed information with parents and carers through student reports, talks about student learning and articles in the school newspaper. The collection of survey data from parents and carers was planned to further develop the school’s engagement with its community.

#### **8. Resources**

National Partnerships, LNLSN, Building Capacity and the BER have all provided essential resources for the school. The leadership team commented that without these sources of funding the school would not have been able to provide the staffing or resources needed to support its intervention programs for literacy and numeracy. The additional funding has been used to provide specialist teachers for literacy and numeracy support, including in-class support for teachers, additional resources for teaching and assessment, an ICT facility in the school and additional ICT hardware to enable teachers to implement ICT-mediated learning experiences in classrooms.

The leadership team was challenged by the uncertainty inherent in the funding processes that had provided the school with its much needed resources. More certain and longer funding periods were seen as essential. In the words of this school’s leaders “it takes a minimum of five years for new ideas to be incorporated into a school. If we are serious about improving student outcomes we need to have the time to implement changes properly”.

#### **9. Academic performance measures to be developed and made available**

The school has made extensive use of instruments to measure student performance in literacy and numeracy. The NAPLAN assessments and analyses have enhanced the capacity of teachers to use assessment measures to inform their teaching practice. As indicated in point 5 above, there appears to be a need for more instruments that are designed to link assessment to teaching processes, from the early school years through to the final year of primary school. The teachers in this school mapped student progress from year to year using a number of different instruments, but further instruments to support mapping of student literacy and numeracy across the curriculum would help to improve student tracking.

#### **10. Tools to monitor student engagement changes over time**

This case study demonstrates the need for tools to monitor student academic engagement over time. As noted in the point above the teachers at this school commence their assessment and tracking of student literacy and numeracy on entry from preschool. However, the range of instruments used, do not provide a continuum of student assessment that could feed directly

into teaching strategies. A continuous assessment regime that commences from student entry to primary school and tracks learning through to the final year of primary school is needed to ensure teachers have adequate evidence to monitor learning and to plan teaching responses to students' changing needs.

### **11. Professional Learning required for teachers and school leaders**

The leadership team was adept at making submissions to build the funding and resource base of the school, and as a result, the teachers benefited from having access to specialist literacy and numeracy teachers. The experience reported for this school highlights the need for a vigilant school leadership team that is aware of the current policies for school funding and is able to put in timely and successful funding applications. School leaders also need to be able to develop a coherent vision for the use of new resources, so as to ensure teachers are able to deliver differentiated teaching that meets the needs of all students in the school.

### **12. Sustainability**

The vigilant and proactive leadership team has been able to build on the school's initiatives by accessing the external funding and resources needed to support the cycle of assessment and targeted teaching. Improved teacher knowledge about the use of data has been pivotal in building the whole of school strategy. NAPLAN data and analysis have also provided a reliable and comparative source of information to help teachers to assess how well students are performing, and to identify the strategies needed to help them make further progress. Sustainability of this school's approach to student academic engagement rests on the continued provision of resources and funding and the maintenance of a whole of school data management system to support the use of differentiated teaching. The high turnover of students creates a demand on teacher time and expertise, to continually assess and monitor teaching needs.

## **Conclusion**

Case Study School 12 presents a small low-fee, low-ICSEA independent denominational school that has made a difference to student learning outcomes. The school had already developed a comprehensive support program for literacy and numeracy based on evidence-informed teaching. National initiative funding, including National Partnerships funding, has provided support to refine this work. Without external sources of funding and resources the school's capacity to continue to improve teacher knowledge about evidence-led and differentiated teaching would be seriously hampered.

Case Study School 12 operates a whole of school data system to assist teachers to monitor student learning throughout the school year, and as students move across year levels. All of the initiatives for special needs, teacher professional development, specialist literacy and numeracy support depend on staffing and resources that are beyond the school's core budget.

# Appendix 2 - Case Study Proforma

## Improving Student Academic Engagement

The form will collect descriptive information from schools or classrooms about initiatives\* that have been implemented to improve student engagement\*\* and learning.

\* Initiative refers to projects or activities that have been developed by the school to improve student engagement and learning

\*\* Engagement is defined as the product of teacher actions that encourage participation and the development of competence and student disposition related to attention, emotions and cognitive investment.

Background Information	
1. School Name	
2. School Type	School system and year levels provided by the school
3. School Postcode	
4. Contact Person	First Name, Last Name, Position Title
5. Contact Email	Email Address
6. List of initiatives that are considered to contribute to student academic engagement	List the program of initiatives being reported for this project
7. Link to Website/URL	Website for particular initiatives or for school
8. Date each initiative started	Month and year each initiative began
9. Date each initiative ended or will end	Month and year initiatives ended /or will end. If there is no projected end date indicate initiatives are ongoing
Project Support	
10. Have any initiatives been funded?	Details of source of any special funding
11. What was the amount of the grants received?	Approximate dollar total
12. Have any initiatives been supported by an external organization?	Details of support given
Details of Initiatives	
13. Brief description of initiatives	Brief description of each initiative, with an outline of the key area/s of focus. Why is each initiative important? Why is each initiative important?
14. Indicate if specific learning areas addressed:	Indication of any special curricular foci
15. Grades impacted	Grade levels being impacted by each initiative
16. Demographics of students	Details of age range, gender and proportions, evidence of learning need, SES, ethnicity and language backgrounds of students
Planning and Implementation	
17. Setting and strongest driving force/s	Location of the school: urban, rural, or suburban Local community issues Other issues
18. Biggest planning challenges and how they were overcome	What were the biggest planning challenges? What happened that was compelling? What was the source/s of tension or catalyst for change? How were particular planning issues and challenges overcome?
19. Biggest implementation challenges and how they were overcome	What were the biggest implementation challenges and how did you overcome these challenges?
20. Biggest challenge regarding the balance of initiatives in the school	What were the biggest challenges in achieving a set of initiatives that suit the needs of the school?



<b>Evaluating Effectiveness</b>	
21. How many teachers were directly involved in each initiative, and what role(s) did they play?	Details of the number of teachers directly involved what they did and what they achieved
22. How have these initiatives impacted on teachers that were indirectly involved?	How have initiatives impacted on teachers who were not directly involved in their development and implementation?
23. Describe how each initiative supported effective teaching approaches.	Details of how each initiative affected the students and other participants How did each initiative support effective teaching approaches which impacted students?
24. What sources of information or instruments were used to collect data?	How was data collected? What methods/techniques? How administered/carried out? Was data used to map individual student needs from year to year – and if so how?
25. What data analysis has been planned?	How will/was the data be analysed to form findings? How were the findings used in the development of initiatives at the school?
26. What gains in student achievement have occurred and how have you measured them?	Were there any student achievement gains? Other outcomes? How were these measured?
27. Is there any other data that supports the conclusions about project impact?	What differences are attributed to the initiatives? Are there other data to demonstrate the impact of any of the initiatives? What is the value of sharing this information?
28. What are the essential conditions necessary for the success of the initiatives?	What were the essential conditions leading to the success of each initiative?
<b>Making Improvements</b>	
29. What recommendations would be made for changes in the implementation of initiatives in the future?	Implementation changes
30. How might the evaluation of the impact the initiatives be improved?	Evaluation changes
<b>Sharing the Benefits</b>	
31. Dissemination of program impact	How has information about the program of initiatives been shared? (i.e., newsletters, reports, etc.) or are there plans to share information about this impact?
32. Recommendations for other schools	What recommendations might be made for other schools that might be interested in replicating this program of initiatives?
33. Are there any leadership documents that promote the program of initiatives that can be shared with others? If so, please post to your website and indicate here the names of those documents (e.g., sample letters, talking points, presentations, etc.)	List of documents or any website address where information about any of the initiatives have been posted.

Adapted from the Effective Projects Case Study Interim Report form 2010 devised by the Office of Educational Technology (OET) at the New Hampshire Department of Education

<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/56761572/Effective-Programs-Case-Study-Te>

# Appendix 3 - Interview Questions for Key Senior Officer / Manager

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1. How do you define student academic engagement in your jurisdiction?
2. What are your current targets for improving student academic engagement in your jurisdiction?
3. How do you support achievement of these targets?
4. What policies are you using for reporting these requirements? How effective have they been?
5. Are there any mandated initiatives in place?
6. How have these initiatives impacted on the learning frameworks in your jurisdiction?
7. From your experience, what advice would you give other directorates for improving student academic engagement?



# Appendix 4a - National Partnership Programs

To support attainment of the goals and outcomes of the National Education Agreement, COAG instituted several National Partnership Programs. These have agendas that directly relate to student academic engagement, and they include:

## Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs)

The SSNP provides a series of programs with joint funding through Commonwealth and state/territory governments to:

- improve teacher quality
- improve literacy and numeracy
- support disadvantaged students by strengthening the capacity and resilience of disadvantaged school communities.

The Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality recognises teacher quality as the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement. This initiative is designed to drive and reward systemic reforms to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in Australian schools. This Partnership initiative has focused on attracting and retaining quality teachers, and on professional development and support for principals.

The other two SSNPs are targeted to areas of need and reach one quarter of Australia's schools. One is the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy, which has focused attention on the key areas of consistent, quality teaching capacity, strong school leadership and the effective use of student performance information to deliver sustained improvements in students' literacy and numeracy performance.

The other is the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socio-economic Status (SES) School Communities, which has been designed to tackle entrenched disadvantage and improve student engagement, well-being and educational outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal students, those from non-English-speaking backgrounds and students with disabilities. Strategies have been focused on improving the quality of teachers, increasing the flexibility of schools' operations, diversifying learning pathways for students and encouraging better connections with families and the local communities.

The National Partnership for Youth Attainment and Transitions initiative has been designed to operate across a range of service providers and to engage schools in partnerships that maximise high school students'

engagement, attainment and successful transitions through mechanisms that include mentoring, multiple learning pathways, and career development. The Commonwealth also directs resources to this partnership initiative via its Youth Connections and School Business Community Partnership Brokers programs, in order to target young people most at risk of disengaging from school due to personal factors that affect attendance, behaviour and academic achievement. This involves Youth Connections providers in the short-term case management of a Re-engagement Plan developed with each participating young person. Under the School Business Community Partnership Brokers program, high schools may also be beneficiaries of brokered partnerships between schools, businesses, families and community groups, in order to support student engagement and improve education and transition outcomes.

In 2010, all Australian governments agreed to implement the National Youth Participation Requirement to ensure young people were engaged in 'earning or learning'. Legislative amendments now require all young people to participate in schooling (or an approved equivalent) to Year 10, and to remain in full-time (at least 25 hours per week) education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, up to aged 17.

The Commonwealth has funded major infrastructure developments in schools and trade training centres to support the national reform agenda. Selected schools have obtained tenders through the Building the Education Revolution program and successful secondary schools have been able to access the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program through which they establish or upgrade facilities for vocational education. The Commonwealth's Digital Education Revolution has also provided school access to funds through the National Secondary School Computer Fund and the Information and Communication Technology Innovation Fund. The former is designed to improve schools' ICT infrastructure and high school computer-to-student ratios, while the latter has targeted teacher professional development to improve innovative leadership and ICT teaching capacity in schools. While these initiatives have been primarily designed to improve national educational goals through the expansion of pathways into vocational education and improved access to digital resources, they have also created more opportunities for students to remain engaged in learning throughout their secondary school years.

# Appendix 4b - National Reform of Indigenous Education

Policies for the national agenda for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been developed to reflect the goals of the Melbourne Declaration and the National Partnerships educational reform agenda, and to be consistent with COAG's broader approach to address Indigenous disadvantage.

The Commonwealth and each state and territory government has developed an agreement for an Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plan. This features a service delivery strategy for urban and rural locations, engagement and partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations, and agreed accountability and outcome measures that include annual reporting.

Key initiatives that have been developed are:

## The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)

National policy in education for Aboriginals has been guided by 21 goals of the AEP that have been grouped into four major themes. These are:

- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making
- equality of access to education services
- equality of educational participation
- equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

## The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) – Closing the Gap

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement, which was developed by COAG in 2008 to 'close the gap' between Indigenous people and other Australians, targets seven objectives for integrated action, with Schooling being one of the objectives. Particular COAG objectives have been designed to progress the AEP policy goals for participation and equitable educational outcomes. All Australian governments have agreed to targets for halving the gap between Aboriginal students and their peers. This includes specific targets for reading, writing and numeracy achievement by 2018, and attainment rates for Year 12 or equivalent by 2020.

## The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP)

'Halving the gap' targets are being progressed through combined education reform and Indigenous reform agendas. An integrated action plan involving national, systemic and local levels, in rural and urban areas, has been developed by MCEECDYA with 55 coordinated actions to be addressed across the three levels. Non-government education providers have joined with governments to achieve the targets outlined in the ATSIEAP. ATSIEAP comprises six evidence-based priority domains that are designed to accelerate national schooling, early childhood and youth outcomes, and these are:

- readiness for school
- engagement and connections
- attendance
- literacy and numeracy
- leadership, quality teaching and workforce development and
- pathways to real post-school options.

It was agreed in this Plan to identify a key group of schools called 'Focus Schools'. 'Focus Schools' are those schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the greatest need and where effort should be focused to make the greatest difference.

## Expansion of intensive literacy and numeracy programs

Intensive approaches to literacy and numeracy that have proven successful with Aboriginal students have been developed to provide additional support. These approaches have included strategies that:

- support school leaders to create high expectations and build community engagement
- support teachers to deliver culturally inclusive literacy and numeracy education
- emphasize the use of Individual Learning Plans for every Aboriginal student in every year of schooling up to Year 10.

## Sporting Chance Program (SCP)

This program has been targeted to students deemed at risk of disengaging from school. The SCP consists of education engagement strategies for both primary and secondary school Aboriginal students in Years 5 to 9 or who are in transition between primary and secondary school. The program goals have been designed to improve students' attendance, achievement, and attitude to and engagement with school, and to encourage more parental and community involvement with school.

## Indigenous Youth Leadership program

Means-tested scholarships have been made available to disadvantaged youth of high potential from largely non-urban locations to help them gain access to high performing high schools and to complete Year 12.

## The Indigenous Education Ambassadors program and the Community Festivals for Education Engagement program

These two programs have been developed to promote awareness of the importance of education amongst Aboriginal communities. The programs provide information about the importance of regular attendance and the role of the community and parents in supporting students to develop positive attitudes, aspirations and lifestyle choices oriented towards completing school and achieving educational success.

## The Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) program

This program has been designed to enhance Aboriginal parental engagement with schools and education providers and with their children's education at home.

## Notes

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