



Tamworth, Australia

St Edward's Primary School

How personal learning plans can help disadvantaged students beat the odds



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Overcoming
Adversity



TEMPLETON WORLD
CHARITY FOUNDATION



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES**



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Introduction

St Edward's has a focus on developing the whole child. It provides its students with a range of cultural opportunities, particularly for its Indigenous students, who are encouraged to share and celebrate their culture with the support of its Aboriginal Education Assistants. The school became concerned by its low ICSEA score, which measures socioeconomic advantage, and came up with extensive and highly detailed Personal Learning Plans (PLPs). The PLPs armed teachers with the data to track and support student progress, providing tailored instruction for their students and monitoring their growth.



Profile:



Country:
Australia



Region:
Tamworth



School type:
Private school



Location area:
Rural



Student population:
501 to 1000



Prize Category:
Overcoming Adversity

“Without quality teachers, you don’t have quality learning. The teachers themselves were able to be creative and choose something that was going to meet their particular needs, and ensure that we will have something that will create strong growth outcomes for students.”

– Dr Jake Madden, Principal of St Edward's Primary School



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

St. Edward's School is located in Hillvue, South Tamworth, and is one of 24 schools in the Armidale Diocese. It has a student population of 531 – 47% male and 53% female – spread across two campuses. In a private Catholic institution, 16% of students are from Indigenous communities. The school is located in a neighbourhood that faces several socio-economic challenges ranging from poor access to health to a high crime rate. Despite these setbacks, the school has defied low expectations and has significantly boosted student attainment in recent years.

Historically, the area in which St. Edward's School is situated has statistically struggled to retain students and has

underperformed academically. According to the Bureau of Statistics, data for Hillvue demonstrates that of people aged 15 and over, 12.3% reported having completed Year 12 as their highest level of educational attainment, 21.3% had completed a Certificate III or IV and 9.2% had completed an Advanced Diploma or Diploma. In addition, approximately 67% of the school population's families come from low-income backgrounds. This has presented substantial challenges to the school's ability to deal with issues students may encounter on a regular basis such as a potential lack of safe and supportive spaces in their homes.



The school also contends with a lack of financial resources and limited physical facilities that sometimes impact its day-to-day operations, from hosting whole staff meetings to cross-year initiatives and support. This has been compounded by the struggles

experienced by the student demographic who are not only exposed to increasing crime and drug rates in the area but lack pre-school qualifications and poorer health outcomes.



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

While St Edward's falls into the category of socio-economic disadvantage it has produced significantly different results than was expected of a school situated within the area.

St Edward's has a long-term connection with the local community and has committed to the distribution of targeted teacher resources to support not only the academic pursuits of its students but also their interpersonal interactions. Knowing that educational attainment is an important predictor of a person's future employment, income, health and welfare prospects, St Edward's has invested heavily in the initial assessment, data collection and analysis as a vehicle for determining the use of targeted instructional programmes across the school.

The consistent use of PLPs has produced significant positive outcomes in changing students' behaviour in regard to their own learning. As students become more aware of the learning process and the expectations around lesson delivery (i.e learning intentions, success criteria, etc), they gain control over their learning. The main metacognitive activities used at St Edward's include teaching the students how to plan to approach learning tasks, how to evaluate their progress, and within the literacy block, how to monitor comprehension, using consistent language around expectations and fostering calm classrooms that promote great teaching and learning.

At St Edward's every teacher has a professional growth plan which pushes them to be better tomorrow than they were yesterday. The provision of ongoing staff training and development has reduced the gaps in teachers' knowledge



and has allowed them to become multi-skilled, thereby improving the delivery of learning to students. Staff were also provided with a series of workshops (technology, curriculum and assessments) to help ensure minimal disruption to learning during the lockdown. These initial workshops were adapted to be incorporated into the school's educational model when students returned.

In studying data from various sources, the school leadership spearheaded PLPs to encourage the use and interpretation of data. It initiated collaborative discussion sessions among teachers about data use and student achievement, which helped teachers provide instruction for students about how students can use their own achievement data to set and monitor their educational goals.

Knowing that parental involvement can have a huge impact on a child's performance at school, a concerted effort saw the school extend its reach to parents to support the learning process during COVID. From the introduction of targeted software, an increase in courtesy phone calls, and the regular monitoring of students online, the practices developed during the lockdown continued once the students returned. Most importantly, parents began to request the continuation of these engagement practices.





OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The school has raised student attainment levels significantly through a variety of targeted and intentional teaching strategies. Some of the highest growth in student outcomes has been within its indigenous student population and students on PLPs.

The teachers, armed and prepared with the data that tracked student progress, provided tailored instruction for their students and monitored their growth. Over time, teachers were able to push students closer to achieving their educational goals. During COVID, the school continued with this model with a few tweaks – teachers would check in on students through phone calls and online monitoring. The school touts the leadership team as one of the main driving forces behind its success. Members of the faculty worked to ensure that

a strong improvement agenda for the school was implemented, grounded in evidence from research and practice and couched in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy. Teachers provided explicit and clear school-wide targets for students to improve on.



Given its data-centric approach, the process of building and implementing the school's annual improvement plan ensures a strong focus on teaching and learning. St Edward's has established school policies, structures and events that have had a positive impact on setting an expectation of collaborative partnerships. Those key practices include welcome nights, school newsletter communication, and regular school events to provide opportunities for

parents and educators to gather, communicate and collaborate. It invites both parents and staff to engage in professional development events and evening seminars. This reinforces the message that the school is working in partnership with key stakeholders like parents to support the educational experiences of all students. There was also a focus on the emotional and mental welfare of students themselves as explained by Lucy Rosser, a former counsellor at St Edward's Primary School: "staff regularly made use of calm corners, emotions, and worked collaboratively with students and support staff to create individual classroom strategy plans for students whenever needed".



Key Steps



ENCOURAGE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

From sport, music and drama to personal development and community service programs, St Edward's School's students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities during their time at school. Some popular activities include the Brekky Club, Gardening Club, Student Book Club, and a sports coach delivering a variety of sports including gymnastics, tennis and netball, Mini Vinnies, and Chess Club.



CASE STUDY MANAGEMENT PROJECT

The initiation of the Case Study Management project was the key catalyst for introducing and driving a number of educational programmes across the school. Case Management

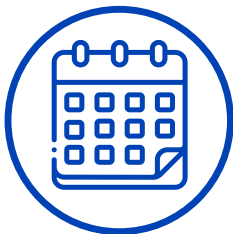


involved a systematic analysis of the many data sets within the school. Focusing on a “closing the gap” mindset, discussion in the regular case management meetings guided by the 2020 annual improvement plan saw the development of The Oral Language Initiative. Through the case, management meetings and analysing of the literacy data, a targeted Oral Language programme was developed. More precise data around the three components of oral language (i.e. phonological, semantics and syntactic) enabled a more concerted focus on the literacy blocks.



SCHOOL FINANCES

Critical to the school’s educational mission, the school focused on dedicating financial resources and effectively managing funds in order to directly impact and enable student achievement.



TIME

Gathering the school’s stakeholders together through targeted meetings and workshops through a forward planning schedule saw increased



growth in attendance. Staff gatherings, P&F meetings, and PD workshops had a clear agenda provided well ahead of time to enable the wider school community to plan ahead and ensured faculty got the response they needed to implement the school's expertise.



COMMUNICATION

While in the typical school day there is limited opportunity for communication, the improved practices to collaborate with members of the community have included regular surveys (parents, staff & students), parent telephone conversations, receptionist courtesy calls to families, and regular announcements via the school's LMS Compass.

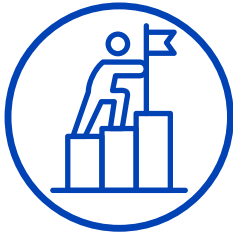


CREATING A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

St Edward's established school policies, structures and events that have had a positive impact on setting an expectation of collaborative partnerships. Key practices used include welcome nights, school



newsletter communication, and regular school events to provide opportunities for parents and educators to gather, communicate and collaborate.



ENCOURAGING AMBITIOUS GOALS

Encouraging ambitious goals to challenge teachers to come up with new ideas to solve student learning issues. The use of the new learning spaces forced teachers to reorient their teaching practice to support the personalisation of learning and the de-privatisation of teaching.



Advice and Guidance

A welcoming and friendly school environment is essential in setting the context for positive participation. Student outcomes should be at the forefront of every decision. These decisions can only be made after a thoughtful review of a school's own improvement plan and an analysis of data gathered on students' progress. Teachers are also an important aspect in developing and implementing the school's learning agenda and there should be consistent and clear communication between members of staff, parents and students to ensure PLPs succeed in reaching good academic outcomes.

More information

 <https://stedwardstamworth.catholic.edu.au/>

 [St Edward's Primary Tamworth](#)

Read more about their work on this document: T4 Education Award Supplementary Document
Learn more about the Learning Symposium hosted by the school in 2022

Learn more about their work by watching their event at 2022's T4 World Education Week: watch here

