

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CASE STUDY

## EMMANUEL ANGLICAN COLLEGE



Emmanuel Anglican College's school improvement journey started with two years of thorough data analysis, research and professional learning. Staff capacity was systematically developed, while the team leading improvement clarified the first key target areas and turned what they had learnt about their students into plans for action. Many decisions were made in the early stages to create time and opportunity for professional learning and collaboration for the creation of new programs that focused on the improvement targets. The principal was specific about the need for a framework that would provide structure for delivering specific improvement initiatives, and this also involved establishing a close connection between improvement targets and the college's strategic plan.

### DEVELOPING A TEAM AND A PROCESS TO LEAD IMPROVEMENT

In the first few years, the college was participating in a structured program<sup>1</sup> with access to external expertise, but leadership was always focused on developing internal improvement capacity and enabling staff agency within the college. Sustainability was achieved through the development of a School Improvement Team (SIT) and the process by which the team led improvement throughout the college.

The SIT has evolved into a participatory model of distributed leadership and collaborative expertise. Inclusion of class teachers not currently in formal leadership roles was a deliberate decision on the part of the principal. The aim was to ensure an egalitarian process led by a body that represented multiple voices and could be sustained for the long-term. The unique role and profile of this team nurtured the growth of deep professional respect between the K-6 and 7-12 sections of the college.

*“We had a myriad of things we wanted to do and we needed a framework to tie it down into some kind of format that everyone could share.”*



### School Profile

- K-12, co-educational
- Established in 1998
- 680 students
- Regional New South Wales

### Prominent features

- Designing and implementing improvement strategy
- Effective school leadership
- Specifying desired outcome improvements

The college has also evolved an improvement process that is key to their success of scaling their improvement strategies. Progression from one improvement project to the next is guided by a process that follows three stages that could be described as research, contextualise and scale. Once the SIT has identified the target areas the following process follows:

- Assemble research demonstrating evidence-based best practice in these areas;
- Improvement target(s) and research are presented to the whole staff through professional learning;
- The new practices are broad at this point and are explored as they apply to the whole school;
- Teachers apply and test new pedagogy and promising practices in the classroom;
- Staff scale and contextualise the initiatives to specific areas of the curriculum and with different cohorts of students;
- Staff measure impact on student growth and the target areas.

The final stage of the improvement process is a phase of informed adjustment and consolidation, led by middle leadership, who at this point take over leadership of the improvement initiatives. It is during this stage that new practices are refined and embedded. This is done through ongoing professional learning, departmental collaboration, classroom observations and individual staff learning goals.

It is important to note each cycle of improvement planning and implementation builds on previous cycles. The improvement process at Emmanuel Anglican College is carefully structured and managed by the SIT, who lead the implementation of plans term by term and review progress. This team also provides a double feedback loop through their close working relationship with leadership and classroom teachers. The team leads implementation and collects feedback and evaluates impact. Senior leadership continues to carry the responsibility of forecasting future improvement areas and strategic planning.

*“Success is a great breeder of interest and the staff can see that there’s been explicit, real and meaningful changes in the students’ performance.”*

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CLASSROOM, AS A RESULT OF THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS?

In 2015, two targets were identified: literacy (writing) and formative assessment. Both were targets for the entire school but the improvement process allowed for different approaches in different contexts. Staff were challenged to address the goal of providing structured, explicit teaching in the area of writing, regardless of subject area. Further investigation of formative assessment led to exploration of assessment for learning and as learning, feedback, differentiated curriculum and the impact of explicit literacy strategies on students’ capacity to tackle assessments.

*“What I’ve seen is staff becoming really empowered to drive education forward!”*

A third target area was launched in 2017 and involved the introduction of a thinking curriculum and practices based on mindset research. Improvement strategies were introduced across the College.

*“...sharing the voice and opinions of staff is really important when you’re trying to get ownership of a school improvement initiative.”*

### WHERE TO NEXT?

The college is ready to embark on a new cycle of planning, and the next improvement area will focus on building teacher confidence in using data to inform their practice. The School Improvement Team will continue to play an important role in sharpening this focus. The college’s experience highlighted the role this team plays in developing strategic professional learning to equip staff to identify key targets in the area of student performance and growth. Emmanuel Anglican College is now confident that an analytical approach to data enables the desired growth in student performance across the college.

### Thinking further

What aspects of this school’s story resonate with you?

What actions might this story prompt for you?

There are five case studies in this school improvement series. What themes or practices emerge that might be relevant in your school context?



1. From 2016-2017 the school participated in a Commonwealth Government funded program which enabled access to AISNSW consultancy support and funds for teacher release to engage with school improvement initiatives.