

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CASE STUDY

## HURSTVILLE ADVENTIST SCHOOL



In 2013, Hurstville Adventist School was an established Kindergarten-Year 6 school aspiring to improve student outcomes. The desire was to develop innovative practice and use a strategic improvement plan that would move every student forward. The development of an improvement framework by the Adventist Schools<sup>1</sup> was starting the pointing for Hurstville's journey. This framework was a mechanism for driving professional conversations and using evidence-based practice to respond to points of need in student performance. Analysis of external and internal data added the evidence and direction needed. In addition to the framework, participation in funded programs<sup>1</sup> through AISNSW provided staff with specific experiences of improving student learning outcomes through structured programs.

*"... we make professional learning very intentional and very deep and by doing that, staff members really buy into what we are doing..."*

### BUILDING TEAMS TO LEAD AND EMBED IMPROVEMENT

Leadership of improvement came from senior leadership and through the staff. The vision was simple: to lift the performance of every student. To achieve the necessary improvement, capacity was built through two structures of that unified the small staff and developed specific improvement processes.

*"... to ensure that staff engage in school improvement it was crucial that staff were involved from the beginning in the data gathering and data analysis process..."*

Staff from across the school were encouraged to contribute to the development of strategies that would address priority areas. Teams, or guiding coalitions as they were called, took responsibility for one of the priority areas each and focused on providing professional learning and action plans for implementation of new programs and approaches. The guiding coalition teams unified the staff and fostered a strong sense of professional ownership across the school. The teams created a vertical model of collaboration and ensured annual improvement priorities would be implemented across the school and in ways that were appropriate to every class. These teams demonstrate that the strengths of a small school were agility and a capacity to include every voice.

Creating opportunity to develop collaborative, reflective professional practice was important. The guiding coalition teams provided strong direction in the priority areas but senior leadership also wanted to ensure staff were able to effectively implement their professional learning and improvement strategies within individual classroom contexts. This led to a second horizontal layer of collaboration through the creation of professional learning communities (PLC teams). These teams made it possible for staff to work closely with teachers in the same section of the school. The PLC teams share and refine new

### School Profile

- P-6, co-educational
- Established in 1935
- 200 students
- Metropolitan Sydney (NSW)

### Prominent features

- Fostering a shared vision
- Cultivating a culture of improvement

classroom practices that respond to the improvement priority areas for all the different ages of students.

The guiding coalitions and professional learning teams fostered a culture that enabled, authorised and inspired the teachers to act on behalf of all the students and to strive for innovation within their classrooms. The guiding coalition teams focused on annual initiatives and developed a shared understanding of "what this looks like in our school". PLC teams focused on what was practical and was needed to achieve improvement initiatives. Lighthouse classrooms were encouraged to pilot and share new practices. Collective improvement and innovation were key to the work of the professional learning community teams. All staff were provided with opportunities to access:

- student-focused, high impact practices
- continuous professional conversations with colleagues and leadership
- structured time for collaborating in professional learning teams
- peer observations and feedback.

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CLASSROOM?

In 2018 formative assessment with protocols for giving effective feedback was a key improvement initiative. This continues to be a focus in all classes, along with positive behaviour for learning, writing, science/technology and wellbeing. The guiding coalition teams continue to work on these from a whole school perspective, whilst the PLC teams focus on specific classroom implementation.

*“...professional community learning teams help to transfer professional learning through to classroom practice...”*

Early in the improvement journey, the school was involved in an externally funded literacy and numeracy project targeting K-2 students. When this project ended these priority areas of literacy and numeracy moved into a whole school improvement focus. Explicit instruction in these core areas is now being embedded beyond K-2 through the structured programs, drills and thinking routines. A new shared language of learning and positive behaviours for learning in classrooms is evident in the classrooms throughout the school.

#### WHERE TO NEXT?

Hurstville Adventist School has demonstrated the power of a small staff who developed great collective strength. Student progress and growth as learners is firmly at the centre the school's core work. The improvement processes and collaborative frameworks provided by the guiding coalitions and PLC teams ensure improvement is experienced across the entire school. It is also important to recognise that within the structured process there

is scope and encouragement for individual innovation by students and staff. The new culture of learning at Hurstville Adventist School has led to the expectation that all pedagogies and classroom programs will have demonstrated positive, measurable impact on student learning, will be actively shared with others, and that best practice becomes the common practice in all classrooms.



#### 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 2013-14 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. The school was also part of Quality Adventist Schools project that developed a framework for school review and improvement initiatives. Adventist Schools Australia supports 48 school campuses and 14,000 students across Australia.