NSW SCHOOL TO WORK PROGRAM
SCHOOL CASE STUDY

SCHOOL TO WORK MANAGEMENT TEAM

Strong leadership and a collaborative management style is the key to the successful implementation of the School to Work Program. It strengthens the ownership, commitment and responsibility across a number of staff including the careers adviser and program coordinator.

ORARA HIGH SCHOOL

Orara High School, located in the NSW North Coast Region at Coffs Harbour, is a comprehensive high school with a population of approximately 720 students. Supported by an experienced staff, the school is culturally diverse with a 12% aboriginal population, a growing ESL component and an established Support Unit catering for students with learning disabilities. The school is strongly represented in sport, VET & the performing arts. About 80 students complete the HSC each year which includes a group of strong academic performers.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

2001 The School to Work management team was formed. School to Work interviews were conducted for most Years 9 and 10 students and all students in Years 11 and 12.

2002 The introduction of School to Work Planning and the Employment Related Skills Logbooks to Years 9 and 10 by PDHPE and English subject areas commenced. Logbook were introduced into the Work Education course. 50 minute School to Work interviews for each Year 10 student with a trained Team member were commenced.

2003 Staff professional development with all vocational learning booklets commenced. The Year 10 interviews program was evaluated and improved. Students used their logbooks in Work Education. School to Work interviews were conducted for Years 11 and 12.

2004 The main focus was on Year 10 School to Work planning. The Careers Adviser conducted School to Work interviews with all Year 11 & 12 students. Training was held for volunteer staff from each faculty with vocational learning booklets and a mapping of vocational learning against the syllabus outcomes was conducted.

2005 This year the school has given a commitment to progress further work with all subject areas to embed vocational learning across the curriculum.

ESTABLISHING THE SCHOOL TO WORK MANAGEMENT TEAM

Data collected in 2000 for the Orara High School Action Research Project titled "Improving HSC Success", provided the following emerging trends:

- Most students were achieving HSC results in the middle to lower bands.
- A noticeable proportion of students moved from school to unskilled work without considering other workplace options.
- TAFE and private training providers were the preferred options for further education and training.
- Retention rates at the school were in decline due to expanding alternative educational options in the Coffs Harbour area.
- Research conducted by Monash University and the Australian National University at the time reported that on the North Coast 68% of children aged 0-15 years were living in poor families and in Coffs Harbour 33% of families were headed by a single parent. The majority of these single parents were women, of which 23% were in full time and 20% in part time employment. From this research it was evident that many children in the Coffs Harbour area were spending much of their first 15 years with no connection to the workforce.
At a similar time to the development of this project the school became aware of the features of the School to Work Program which had been designed to improve the employability of students. Orara High School introduced a professional development program for staff to develop strategies to improve HSC success for all students. What emerged as the foundation for this success was a need to provide students with the ability and confidence to construct and articulate the strong links between their schooling and the skills they require in the workplace.

SCHOOL TO WORK MANAGEMENT TEAM

In 2001 the School to Work Program was presented to staff by the Careers Adviser at the School Development day. This workshop outlined the purpose and principles of this initiative then interested staff were invited to form a School to Work management team to plan for implementation at Orara High School.

The inaugural School to Work management team consisted of 14 staff including executive members, Year Advisers, the Aboriginal Education Assistant, the learning support team, the Careers Adviser and PDHPE, TAS, Science, CAPA, English and HSIE teachers. The structure of this team has been consolidated over time and now, with such a solid representation of staff across the school, the strength of the team is not compromised if staff move in and out as their professional commitments change.

The team’s first task in 2001 was to identify students “at risk” of not completing their School Certificate and assist each student in the development of an action plan that identified realistic school to work options and established priorities and goals. Years 9 and 10 Year Advisers were invited to compile a list of students that would benefit from this initiative. Initial discussions with these students led to increased interest from other students who requested to be included in the interview program. The team willingly agreed to extend the program to embrace all interested students. Letters were sent out to inform parents and invite participation. A high percentage of Years 9 and 10 and all Year 11 students were interviewed by team members during Term 4 of that year.

To assist the Careers Adviser, a coordinator was selected and trained. Together, these two positions have provided the leadership for the School to Work Management Team. In 2002 a School Development Day workshop conducted by the Careers Adviser and coordinator was used as a vehicle to facilitate staff and student usage of the logbook. The purpose was to promote the logbook as a tool to improve the employability of students and for teachers to identify the teaching and learning strategies that provided opportunities for the transfer of skills from the classroom to the workplace.

The building of a strong, dynamic team has been secured through competent and dependable leadership, effective communication, active participation and food. In 2002 further attempts were made to improve student retention from Year 10 to 11 and to strengthen career planning support and improve subject selections. An intensive program of School to Work interviews for each Year 10 student was developed and supported by a 12 staff who initially undertook training to provide a one-to-one 50 minute School to Work planning interviews with students where a comprehensive action plan was developed. This program is in its third year and new team members have joined and been trained each year. Other staff support the program by...
releasing team members from class when required. A positive effect on student retention rates has been noted and students are demonstrating an improved awareness of further education and employment options.

Initially the PDHPE faculty agreed to introduce the School to Work planning logbooks to the Year 9 cohort and the English faculty to Year 10. The management team prepared a series of lessons for each cohort that utilised an activity-based program to familiarise students with the school to work process. Logbooks were later accessed and up-dated in Work Education classes.

In 2003 the management team agreed that it was important to consolidate logbook use across the Year 9 to12 cohorts. They decided that this would best be provided during the timetabled Work Education lessons in Years 9 and 10 however staff professional development was needed to implement cross-curriculum classroom usage. Training was provided to familiarise staff with the vocational learning booklets and to try to shift staff perceptions that School to Work planning was not extra work or an ‘add on’ but integral to the learning experiences already provided in classrooms that skilled students for the world of work.

THE MANAGEMENT TEAM TODAY

Management team meetings are conducted once per fortnight, an agenda is published and minutes recorded. Prior to the meeting every staff member receives a copy of the meeting date, time and agenda and this has persuaded several other staff to join the team. Workable timeframes are established for both the action on tasks and the reporting back to meetings. Members volunteer for tasks depending on their expertise, their role in the school and available time.

Successful communication in schools is always a challenge and personal contact has proven to be invaluable. The executive willingly participate in consultation and stay informed. To communicate with staff, students and parents, written communications are posted on the staff bulletin board, reported in the school newsletter and in letters to parents. Verbal up-dates are provided at staff meetings and student year assemblies and staff participate in workshops on School Development days.

In 2004 the team continued to address the ongoing needs and challenges. Should staff be responsible for student logbooks or should students be responsible for their own logbook? The debate continues with no workable resolution as yet. Successes are evident with career-oriented students accessing their logbooks independently and using them to up-date data and prepare resumes.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The management team will identify interested staff from each KLA and offer training and relief for planning days to consolidate School to Work planning across the curriculum. This is a major challenge because some staff are still reluctant to participate and although the team feels that staff must be allowed the professional independence to adopt the process into their teaching when personally ready, they believe that implementation can be accelerated if the process is modelled and promoted by a colleague. A training team will work with staff to assist them to effectively use the vocational learning booklets and map syllabus outcomes to vocational skills development.

The School to Work Program is highly valued at Orara High School because it has contributed significantly to an increase student retention to the senior school, fewer students leaving school without a considered career pathway plan to work, increased student participation in further education and training, a higher proportion of students participating in work placement programs and an increased understanding by students of how everyday learning links to workplace skill development.