

LEARNING JOURNEYS, ADVANCED PATHWAYS

Kingsgrove North High School

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

SUMMARY

In response to a breadth of abilities and interests among the students, the school has implemented a series of innovative projects that extend from Stage 4 to Stage 6 and provide students with multiple opportunities to stretch themselves and succeed.

DRIVERS

The school staff and community are leaving behind a focus on welfare issues and focusing now on creating a stable but exciting environment where young people can learn and develop options.

FEATURES

The Year 9 Learning Journey project is a way of showing to teachers, students and community members the work that students are doing in Year 9 and how well they are achieving at school.

With Year 10 students, the staff identified students who might obtain considerable value out of being part of the Advanced Careers Package in Year 11, and invited the parents in to talk to them in small groups about what it might mean.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- In developing initiatives, the staff ensure that student support, curriculum changes, professional learning and school structures are all connected so they underpin the initiative.
- There is a willingness in the staff to take on innovation and to see that it does make a difference for the students.

BENEFITS

- The biggest benefit is the growth in confidence in the students. The ones that have really taken up opportunities offered by the school are far more confident to take risks and are looking forward to the next step.

RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE

- The staff have asked themselves key questions: "We had to look at how do we manage kids effectively, how do we engage kids, what do we need to provide that will keep them connected to the school?"

Context for the innovation

Kingsgrove North High School is truly comprehensive co-educational high school, says principal Helen Wyatt, with a full range of students. "The school has very high performing kids, and lot of kids in the middle, including many who may want to go into trades or work, and others who are really not going to be engaged in school."

In response to this mixture of interests and abilities, the staff try to keep a balance so that, says Helen Wyatt, "they're meeting the needs of the high academic kids and meeting the needs of those kids who may otherwise have left school, but stay on until they find that it's not working for them".

The staff focus on a number of goals through each of the school stages. For instance, they identified a need to support students in their learning and provide them with focus and goals in Year 9. The resultant Year 9 Learning Journey project offers students an opportunity to reflect on what they had been doing in classes and in assignments and gives them an opportunity to present this to a panel of teachers, students and community members.

In Year 10, the staff try to target the needs of students and have them counselled by head teachers. A lot of schools do that too, acknowledges Helen Wyatt.

"But for a particular bunch of kids, we've been trying to direct them into our Advanced Career Package in Year 11, which we're trying to promote as something that's really desirable, and it's worked. I've now got more kids in that than I can accommodate. So, all of those students have a good sense of where they're headed: they're talked through what they might want to do before starting work, and what courses are going to help them get there."

Student support

The Year 9 Learning Journey project has an emphasis on improving student engagement in learning and promoting student achievement. It is also a way of showing to teachers, students and community members the work that students are doing in Year 9 and how well they are achieving at school.

With Year 10 students, the staff identified students who might obtain considerable value out of being part of the Advanced Careers Package in Year 11, and invited the parents in to talk to them in small groups about what it might mean. "We helped them to understand this given it's a non-ATAR HSC, but it's very much focusing on case management," says Helen Wyatt.

success story

Best practice

One example of best practice is the approach taken by the Stage 6 teacher who is teaching Work Studies but “keeping an eye on the kids, making sure that they’re turning up to TAFE, and that they are performing well in their other courses”. Helen Wyatt says that this case management approach is crucial.

“The students get the support they need because once you start doing all these innovative things and sending kids off to different parts of Sydney, having them leave school in the middle of the day on Tuesday, go out to work placement on the Thursday, often to do their work placement for their VET courses, they’re in and out of the school, then its really easy for them to fall beneath the radar. So they really do need to provide that strong support.”

Aiming higher

Students in the Year 9 Learning Journey program are aiming higher in their projects and in their various subjects as the work they have undertaken, they then present to the panels. Students are gaining skills in presenting themselves and their work to a panel and setting goals for the future. As a result, a sense of achievement pervades students, teachers and community members.

Benefits for the student and school community

The Year 9 Learning Journey project has increased community participation within the school and has helped in building networks with the local community, for example for arranging work experience. It has also aided in developing a good school image within the community.

One of the staff who sat on a panel said it was a pleasure for her to see students who sometimes struggled in classes present their learning to the panel and show enthusiasm for their work and achievements. She added that it was great to hear them talk about their goals and future directions. “It was inspiring to see them grow in confidence and be able to talk about themselves to a panel of teachers, students and community members.”

Sustainable benefits

The Year 9 Learning Journey project is just one of a sequence of interconnected innovations at the school, adding to the sustainability of the benefits. Other innovations are outlined in the interview with Helen Wyatt. The Year 9 project has had a positive impact on the school: students expect that this is something they need to plan for and set goals for and teachers and community members are very supportive of the program. One staff member commented that “the program has now become an integral part of the school”.

Looking at the raised school leaving age and those students that have done the Advanced Career Package program in Year 11 this year, they’re doing Work Studies in that program, and none of them want to drop it. They say it’s the best thing that they’ve ever done, and the experiences they’ve had have been so positive that they’re the first to tell you it’s been really good.

To have those kids get up on course information night and tell everyone there about what they’ve got out of it and how they’ve even got jobs out of it, was fantastic.

Helen Wyatt, Principal



In the Stage 6, we're running a wide range of courses. We have the high academic performers choosing a range of courses, but we've also got these targeted kids who really don't want to sit in classes listening to teachers or feeling pushed to do maths, and previously they were doing courses that were inappropriate for them. They'd start, they'd disrupt and then we'd have a problem on our hands. So, these are courses that are far more practical: it's the VET courses and the TVET courses, and we also run Work Studies. Work Studies is a really great course because it helps the kids think about their own personal goals, and they meet people who tell their story, and they make contacts and they get certificates.

How can the best practice you've just described assist in the achievement of any of the goals of aiming high, supporting strongly, strengthening connections?

We have high aims for our kids' literacy and numeracy. In Stage 5 and 6, with The Learning Journey and the course selection, they're really thinking about their learning and where that's going to lead them beyond school. So, they're trying to make those connections and what is built into that is having high expectations of themselves. It's very much built into the language of how we manage all of that.

We give them curriculum that is going to engage them so that they want to achieve highly. So, it's appropriate for them. That's why the curriculum aspect is really important.

If we look at supporting strongly, the one thing that we learnt in trying to turn the school around was that relationships are everything. If the kids felt they had connections at the school, and that they were treated fairly and trusted, and we have high expectations of behaviour, and we put the responsibility on the kids, then they're going to be more likely to be engaged at school.

A lot of the students are doing work-related courses. They're in the work place as well as in school, and the teacher and the careers adviser are really working closely with local careers organisations that keep them connected as well. So, we're trying to make learning real for them and that's only possible if you've got the connections in the community.

What management of the innovation is required to ensure success?

To succeed it has to be within our management plan: whatever we're doing has to be there as a priority, and everyone has to understand we're doing that as a priority, so people don't go, "Oh, what's she doing? Why is she getting that time off?" Then people can see that it links into our overall goals and where we're going.

We're trying to spread the ownership of it, trying to use a team approach, so that there isn't just one person who's managing it, but that it's spread across a few people. We want them to feel that they are accountable, and that they have to report back through the management plan, through the annual school report, to me, to the executive, about what they're doing and why they're doing it.

How has the innovation resolved in benefits for the student and/or the community?

I can see a lot of confidence in the kids. Not all of them: some of them are tricky, but the ones that have really taken it on are far more confident to take risks and they're looking forward to the next step. I really do see that confidence in the kids. The school community speak really highly of our kids.

How are you ensuring the benefits for the student are sustainable?

It's very hard to ensure that but we are spreading the responsibility for it and not just relying on one person to be a key element of it. But it is hard. And we're not getting any additional funding for staffing for this, we're actually using our allocated staffing and it does take resources: the case management aspect does take a lot of time. So, we'll just keep throwing our staffing at it to the extent that we can, and we do ride on the back of an awful lot of staff goodwill. And that's how schools always operate. But we hope it's sustainable. It's in our plan.

What do you think are the main factors that have brought about your success?

I think it's the willingness of the staff to take on innovation and to see that it does make a difference for our kids. They really do want make a difference. The debates we have around here are not about "I don't want to do that". It's more like "I just don't want my kids missing lessons because I really don't want them to miss out". People very much want the students to succeed. And we have very few people on staff who don't pull their weight. Most people put in more than they're asked to do.

Is there anything I haven't asked about that you'd like to add?

Just jumping back to the critical success factors, and using management speak, we have alignment across the school: we have our differences, we have our debates, and it's not an easy school by any means. But going back to the wanting the best for the kids, I think that is what is behind the alignment. People are prepared to cooperate. We have a pretty flat leadership structure and people feel that they can come in and whinge or come in with a great idea and that they'll be heard, and that things will be acted on. When they believe that they'll be followed through, they're prepared to give what they can. It comes back to having leadership across the school.

it's the willingness of the staff to take on innovation and to see that it does make a difference for our kids