

# **Negotiated School Review Report**

**Prepared for**  
**Little River Primary School**  
**Barwon South Western**  
**School Workforce Reform and School Improvement**  
**Division**  
**Department of Education & Early Childhood**  
**Development**  
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## **Table of Contents**

|            |   |           |
|------------|---|-----------|
| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Executive Summary</b> .....                          | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Aim / Purpose</b> .....                              | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Methodology</b> .....                                | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Discussion</b> .....                                 | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>5.0</b> | <b>Conclusions and recommendations for action</b> ..... | <b>11</b> |

## 1.0 Executive Summary

The purpose of this Negotiated Review is to extend the school in the area of learning and teaching particularly in the area of Mathematics. This Review was conducted in the context of the school performing above state level in the majority of areas however differentiation of the curriculum is not supported by the data. Our work on Inquiry Based Curriculum Topics across the whole school and the utilisation of the e5 instructional model is still in its early stages. We have considered the characteristics of effective mathematics teaching to improve pedagogy across the whole school. We see coaching of teachers as the foundation of our work in improving learning and teaching over the next four years.

We are accredited as having a Performance and Development culture and we continue our journey with instructional leadership and problems of practice. Currently the school has peer based visitations which will be further refined through the use of effective models. Learning walks have been initiated but are also in their initial stages. Further development and building of staff capacity will be enabled as staff come to manage their responsibilities within a shared distributive leadership model. We pose questions as to how distributive leadership looks as each member of our school supports sustained change, particularly where new pedagogical understandings are required.

As a school community we are fortunate to have a supportive parent body who are very involved in the day to day life of the school. Our challenge is to ensure that the parent community has many opportunities to have input into our journey of pedagogical improvement and become involved in the partnership of the education of their children.

Our extensive resources in ICT- including student and teacher tools and our inclusion in the 'netbook' trial this year have afforded the staff opportunities to become involved in 'anytime - anywhere' learning opportunities. With the impending inclusion of the ultranet to support teachers Little River Primary School is well placed to utilise this innovative tool but recognises the importance of Professional Learning to build the capacity of teachers in this area.

Lastly, we have the exciting opportunity of optimising the opportunities afforded to us by the new learning spaces. We need to consider ways in which our physical space and resources can support a constructivist view of learning for students and staff at Little River. During the next 6 months the school will have the addition of a multipurpose hall to extend our learning environment.

This document sets out our exciting agenda for continuous but well grounded and researched improvements for the coming four years. It is centred in learning from constructivist pedagogy and will be well supported through school based professional learning for staff. In addition we plan to utilise the new learning spaces our new facilities offer to support the innovative teaching practices that arise from this constructivist base.

## Definitions

Constructivist or Constructivism: is in essence the belief that learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so.: <http://www.educationau.edu.au/archives/cp/04c.htm>

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies which includes computers, scanners, printers, data loggers, digital cameras, interactive whiteboards etc...  
<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/ict/>

Inquiry learning: This approach is built upon the idea that students are actively involved in learning and continually reconstruct understandings in the light of experience. It encourages students to participate in active investigation, and to integrate, rather than separate knowledge, as they move from acquisition of facts to the development of deep understanding. <http://www.ltag.education.tas.gov.au/planning/models/inquirymodel.htm>

Instructional leadership “a style of leadership that promotes, celebrates and enhances the importance of teaching and learning and staff development.” “The purpose of instructional leadership is to help teachers create powerful cognitive and social tasks ... and teach their students to make productive use of them”  
<http://www.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/kpool-evidence-hopkins.pdf>

MYRAD: The Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project was commissioned by DE&T and was undertaken by the Centre for Applied Educational Research at The University of Melbourne. The project involved in-depth research and evidence driven whole-schools approach to improve student learning outcomes in the middle years (Years 5-9). <http://www.eduweb.vic.edu.au/mys/research/>

Throughlines: describe the most important understandings that students should develop through the inquiry units of work from Years P-6.  
<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/alps/tfu/info3b.cfm>

Pedagogy: “Function, work or art of a teacher; teaching; instruction”  
<http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning/literate-futures/glossary.html>

Victorian Essential Learning Standards or VELS is the state curriculum.  
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

## **2.0 Aim / Purpose**

The aim of this review was to challenge us as a school community to further extend the school in the area of teaching and learning, particularly Mathematics.

The Self Evaluation highlighted a growing understanding amongst the staff at Little River Primary School of the need to embrace a differentiated approach to learning and teaching. This change in pedagogical belief is at the centre of our journey. This has seen us willing to embrace an approach to Mathematical learning based on the characteristics of effective teaching to improve pedagogy across the school. Through the analysis of data trends, subsequent teacher discussion and the assistance of our Critical friend the school has prepared recommendations for the next 4 years.

Our evaluation reviewed the changes to the staff and the school structures designed to support the change in learning and teaching practices. Currently we operate with five learning and teaching areas, each capably led by a teacher who in turn is an active member of the whole school Professional Learning Team (PLT). Various teachers are involved in programs that ensure they are connected to all students across the school. This recognition that children need to be connected and have positive relationships is based on research and is supported by our student attitudes survey. Our challenge is to develop a culture which values all teachers as leaders, all of whom have additional responsibilities in supporting the learning of all students in our care and in aligning school goals and targets to improve student learning.

Resourcing a constructivist view of learning provides its own challenges. The new facilities have the flexibility required for learning now and in the future however further work is needed to support the school community to address some of the critical issues related to teaching and learning spaces for constructivist pedagogy.

Our review highlighted the need to further develop our performance and development culture to sustain instructional leadership, one which values in house professional learning and builds reflective teacher practices that sustains learning for deeper understanding by students, teachers and parents.

## **3.0 Methodology**

The School Council recruited a critical friend and negotiated a review timeline for action. Engagement was through interviews and meetings. The review team comprised of the Principal, Glen Lauder, Judy Hall, Carlee Begg, Tricia Salau and the School Council President. As part of the review all school report data was examined with the key stakeholders and our critical friend. In addition the critical friend met with stakeholders to obtain qualitative data to further examine the school culture including performance and development and learning and teaching.

For this task the school allocated \$10,000 in the budget for Accountability to cover time release to ensure key stakeholder participation and the employment of the critical friend.

A number of forums were held by the teachers to ensure community contributions were sought to seek input and directions for the future. The forums were held in each of the key areas; Student Learning, Student Wellbeing and Student Pathways and Transitions. The Leadership team also ensured student input through student forums held at the school during lunch time to maximize participation.

## **4.0 Findings**

### **Staff as Learners**

It is important to ensure sustained improvement and development of reflective practice is embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning. It was determined that an alternative model of professional learning needed to be put in place. Joyce and Showers (1980) in their study on effective professional development models determined that professional development taking place within the workplace had a much greater affect in terms of sustained change than did models which relied heavily on individuals going out to professional learning activities. Therefore the school will utilise the coaching model. This will be balanced with DEECD initiatives and imperatives.

With this in mind the school will contract the services of Andrea Hillbrick (a highly respected educator) to lead the school through a journey of change and the development of a constructivist learning and teaching framework as the learning and teaching coach. Firstly as a Mathematics coach looking at the characteristics of effective mathematics teaching to improve pedagogy across the whole school. We envisage a

continuing relationship (if available) in order to support sustained change within the school with a view to moving towards coaching in the areas of Literacy and Inquiry. There is recognition that our results show children at this school are achieving at and beyond benchmarks, with this in mind it is imperative that we focus our energies on delivering a curriculum that challenges all students, is inclusive of student voice and provides stimulus for further learning. Therefore a recommendation must be to ...***ensure Little River Primary School curriculum encompasses student voice and provides rich authentic tasks enabling students to achieve aspirational goals.***

The staff at Little River are currently a well regarded and motivated group of professionals. Challenging their perspectives on teaching and learning has caused some to feel unsettled. These feelings are evident in recent staff surveys which point towards some staff feeling a lack of participative decision making, empathy and morale while others feel quite differently. The leadership team provide on-going forums for open and explicit feedback on changes occurring in the school and related staff welfare, including more recently a Staff Welfare Policy. Inevitably change creates areas of concern which may need to be addressed on more than one level.

In any institution undergoing change, there will always be resistance and sometimes even an attempt to block change, even if not patently aware of these behaviours. However for most staff the change will not come quickly enough. Theron and Westhuizen (1996) contended that the challenge for the leadership team in this school is one of a balancing act where explicit and implicit choices need to be made in respect of the tempo and planning that underpin the changes. Little River needs to continue its progressive reform, mindful of inclusion of all staff through the leadership and meeting structures in place.

It is acknowledged that any form of change takes time if it is to be implemented and effective. The staff at Little River Primary School are prepared to make changes to teaching practice, particularly with the adoption of an Inquiry approach to teaching and learning and the e5 instructional model. Our recommendation is that.... ***the school seek to continue with the work on development of common constructivist pedagogical understandings that will underpin the work done in Inquiry Learning and utilising the e5 instructional model.***

## **Leadership for Learning**

Linda Lambert (2005) in a study of leadership in schools suggested that there are typically three phases of leadership development: instructive, transitional and high capacity. If we at Little River are representative of her findings (with the inclusion of a Leading Teacher in 2009) then we would be included in the instructive phase. This phase involves the establishment of school organisational structures such as norms, teams and shared expectations. Further, Lambert suggests that it is the Principal's role during this phase, to start conversations, challenge assumptions, and teach about beliefs and new practices that ultimately become "woven into the fabric of the school". This description reflects many elements of our own journey as we challenged assumptions and move forward in our new learning environments.

In the transitional phase, Lambert (2005) argues, that the Principal may gradually let go control of the innovation, releasing that control to the teacher leaders. Coaching and continued conversations conducted within an atmosphere of trust and safety is the key here. As a school we expect to move towards this transitional phase over the next 18 months. Finally in the 'high capacity' phase, teachers at all levels play an even greater role in leadership – there is co-participation rather than dominance of the Principal as leader and teachers share responsibility for the effectiveness of the school.

Thus, if our challenge in teaching and learning is the adoption of a common pedagogical belief based on constructivism that can become part of the fabric of our school, then a recommendation must be ***that the school seek to develop a performance and development culture that sustains instructional leadership, values in-house professional learning and builds reflective teacher practices that uphold learning for deeper understanding.***

A critical question may be: How do we change the emphasis in teaching and learning from one where the question is one of 'what will I teach', to one where the question is 'what will the learner learn'?

## **The building blocks of Literacy and Numeracy**

Having decided to adopt a constructivist view of learning, a further recommendation will be to investigate ways in which constructivist pedagogy can underpin learning in Literacy and Numeracy.

### **Literacy**

It is acknowledged that consistent results above both State and Like School groups have been achieved during the past Strategic Plan. It is also recognised that considerable work has been undertaken within the English domain. It is recommended that we

***continue to engage in strategies to improve our teaching in writing ensuring that both the surface and the deeper aspects of writing are investigated.***

Student achievements in reading continue to be above both State and Like School group mean scores, particularly our Early Years data. This data source however points to readability of texts and our staff has highlighted a need to address reading comprehension as an area requiring additional professional development. A recommendation for the coming four years would be ***to address the area of teaching comprehension and assisting staff to develop a constructivist approach to this area of the reading dimension.***

### **Numeracy**

Our Numeracy results have not been as strong. Investigations have pointed to two areas that could be focus issues for the next four years.

- ***Consistency of assessment, particularly in Years 3/4***
- ***Greater emphasis on constructivist approaches in the teaching of mathematics and embrace an approach to Mathematical learning based on the characteristics of effective teaching to improve pedagogy across the school.***

### **Student Wellbeing**

Our past charter had a priority in Student Wellbeing to enhance levels of student engagement, particularly for grades 5 and 6. Whilst acknowledging that our greatest welfare challenges have been in this cohort there is a sense that we need to continue our strong efforts in this area.

Our past two student surveys indicate that our school environment is considered safe when compared to state wide means. The school has worked hard to review both policy and procedures in behaviour management and welfare. As noted in our self evaluation, we have embedded the use of restorative practices which has ensured greater consistency in terms of behaviour management and wider welfare issues. One issue that has caused undue stress on our resources has been the lack of social work support for the past the inclusion in BSW has seen a definite improvement in this area.

We have recognised a need to improve parent education of the partnership between home and school to ensure all student learning needs are met. There is a need to involve the parents in all levels of management of student welfare.

While there is a perception that the school yard is safe, the student surveys indicate a lack of connection with teachers and with the school. Over the past three years students in years five and six, indicate a perception that teachers are not helpful and responsive to their needs. Through the POLT surveys students are being encouraged to say what learning and teaching they find most effective. This first hand data is valuable information for the school as it works towards providing the learning environment conducive to the needs of young and adolescent learners.

Given our student survey results and anecdotal evidence of strong needs in this area our goal for this area will be to... ***enhance students' sense of belonging and worth and encourage them to become socially responsible by providing them with a safe, friendly and cooperative school environment.***

Wolk (2003) argues that

...democratic classrooms are constructivist and generative. They nurture the creation of knowledge as opposed to the mere memorisation of knowledge. Democratic classrooms honour the knowledge and experiences that students bring to school and advocate learning as a social act; they de-emphasise the memorisation of endless facts that will soon be forgotten.

We aim to create classrooms that support 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners. Our own students tell us that learning must be relevant and for now, not for someone's idea of what might be needed sometime in the future. Negotiated curriculum allows students to create their own knowledge, we honour them for what they already know and we help them make connections that allow them to make sense of the world in which they live.

Wolk (2003) noted that what is essential in building critical classroom is relationships between teachers and students. Teachers need to "...allow students to see them as people with emotions, opinions and lives outside of school".. to develop relationships that can sustain the 'creative tension' that is produced in any learning situation as we move from known to unknown.

A recommendation is that all school staff focus on learning about the needs of the middle years learning area This would: **focus on high expectations, provide a learning environment designed for adolescents and follow teaching and learning practices based on a constructivist pedagogy rich in technology.**

## **Learning Environments for learning anytime - anywhere**

As mentioned earlier in this section, the buildings lend themselves to learning based on constructivist pedagogy. Research indicates that small school size. Enhances learning opportunities for children. While one of the prime motivators appears to be safety (Klonsky, 2002; Raywid, 2002), there is additional evidence, such as an increased “sense of belonging and confidence” (McGoogan, 2002) for students in smaller learning environments. There is overwhelming support of the schools practice of small class sizes and maximum use of resources for teaching staff to ensure targeted support of the learning needs of students.

The challenge is to now utilise the environment that reflects our pedagogical beliefs where knowledge is constructed and not taught, and to accommodate the many different learning styles that predominate within a community of students. We will now need to move to utilise the flexibility of design and optimum the use of space within our new environment. We also know that the four walls that bounded learning have long since been breached through instantaneous digital connections that can be achieved with any place in the world at any time.

Learning is not defined by knowledge that exists now. Learning does not only take place inside classrooms. Learning can occur in small or large groups, alone or in pairs and our building design takes this into account. Learning is rarely done in isolation nor does it finish when primary or secondary school ends. This means that a community needs access to part or all of the learning spaces that are created so that lifelong learning can be demonstrated. The flexible spaces in our building allow performances of learning stemming from Inquiry Units of work. This style of learning is to be encouraged and supported through professional learning.

## **5.0 Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Student learning Goals**

- Ensure Little River Primary School curriculum encompasses student voice and provides rich authentic tasks enabling students to achieve aspirational goals.
- To develop learners who will use their skills and knowledge particularly of themselves as learners and apply their deep understandings to the world around them.
- Raise the level of comprehension instruction (teacher capacity) across all areas of the curriculum.
- Build teacher capacity based on the premise of continuous learning for all members of the school community
- *To challenge our students to demonstrate and reflect on their learning with the increased use of ICT.*

### **Student Engagement and Wellbeing Goals**

- To enhance students' sense of belonging and worth and encourage them to become socially responsible by providing them with a safe, friendly and cooperative school environment.
- To develop a shared understanding of high expectations, engagement and metacognition across all domains of student learning.
- Further enhance the parent/school partnership to include levels of responsibility for all stakeholders.
- Complete the Student Engagement Policy in line with DEECD policy and guidelines
- To improve student connectedness to teachers particularly in Years 5-6.

### **Student Pathways and Transitions**

- To develop fully a comprehensive transition policy to assist with families entering and leaving the school.
- To develop an effective transition program for students moving from years 6-7.

### **Key Improvement strategies**

| <i>Effective Schools</i>                           | <i>Key Improvement Strategies</i>  |
|--|--|
| <i>Focus on teaching and learning</i>              | <i>That the school seek to continue with the work on development of common constructivist pedagogical understandings that will underpin the work done in Inquiry Learning and utilise the e5 instructional model.<br/>Continue to enhance learning through the use of ICT and the ultranet.</i>  |
| <i>Purposeful teaching</i>                         | <i>Continue to engage a Teaching and Learning Coach to improve our teaching of mathematics to improve pedagogy across the whole school.<br/>Continue to develop school-based professional learning programs that support improved teaching of student reading comprehension skills.<br/>Continue to develop constructivist teaching and learning strategies in mathematics through the increased use of concrete teaching materials and digital technologies.<br/>Teaching team gain greater consistency of assessment, particularly in years 3 and 5.</i> |
| <i>Professional leadership</i>                     | <i>Continue to develop a performance and development culture that sustains instructional and distributed leadership, values in house professional learning and builds reflective teacher practices that uphold learning for deeper understanding.</i>  |
| <i>Stimulating and secure learning environment</i> | <i>Utilise the facilities that support communities of learners particularly in the middle years. This includes flexible learning spaces and an environmentally sustainable infrastructure that supports a constructivist based learning environment. The middle years will embed the findings of the MYRAD research, inclusive of learning styles and be a technological rich environment.</i>   |

**Targets** [note the specific cohorts will be listed in the strategic plan]

- To improve student achievement in Mathematics p-6
- To improve the results of the 2008 student attitudes to school survey connectedness to teachers measure by 2013
- To create collective understandings of high expectations metacognition and engagement

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## 7.0 Review Signatures

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Principal:

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Carol-anne Glynne                      Date: \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

School Council President

