Don Valley Primary School and the Wollombi Cluster

Who we are..........  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Primary School</th>
<th>Principal – Lesley Gunther</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52 students</td>
<td>Low EMA, LSG 1 school profile</td>
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<td>3.6 teachers</td>
<td>Students from the semi-rural community of Don Valley and surrounding area.</td>
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<td>3 SSOs</td>
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Where we started.......  

Like many small school principals, Lesley Gunther and the other small school principals in her cluster wondered how to approach Performance and Development Culture given that it seemed like a big task for small school principals.

The Wollombi cluster – consisting of ten small schools in the Yarra Valley – is an informal cluster based on school size. The principals chose to collaborate on a range of tasks and it was clear that working together towards accreditation would be the most effective approach.

The cluster decided that to assist them through the process, they would employ a mentor. They pooled their resources (each school receives $1400 upon registration) to release Sue Rathbone, Assistant Principal at Doncaster Gardens Primary School, to take on the role of mentor for the group. Doncaster Gardens is a larger primary school in the Eastern Region that had already been accredited.
What was the approach taken?

First, Sue Rathbone asked each of the ten schools in the cluster to complete some preliminary surveys and questionnaires to determine where each school, and the cluster as a whole, was placed in each of the five elements. This gave each school the chance to look at the process and policies that they already had in place, and assess where improvement was needed.

Sue then collated the results, which showed which schools might take the lead in each element from the Self-Assessment Framework.

Sue did some research of her own, including school visits, to learn how other small schools were approaching the process. She was then able to present to the group some specific findings that could be adopted.

The process was broken into parts and, keeping in mind the strengths of each school that were established in the preliminary stages, each school was able to focus on a specific area. The group used a series of folders – one for each element – and added to each folder as a task was completed.

A useful tool was the checklist developed by Lesley Gunther. This checklist outlined all of the required steps to reach the level of Performance and Development Culture required for accreditation. As a living document, it clearly illustrated which elements had been covered and which needed more work.

What has been achieved?

The school’s journey towards accreditation has given the school more focus so that all staff understand where they are headed and what the school priorities are. There is awareness among staff that Performance and Development Culture is ongoing and will involve continuous change, based on student data and observations.

The school has implemented a range of individual student programs to maximise student learning outcomes and staff feel they are catering far more effectively for their students’ needs.

Where to for Don Valley?

Don Valley Primary School, along with most of the other schools in the Wollombi cluster, will seek accreditation in Round 3 2007.