BALLARAT SPECIALIST SCHOOL

Special
Grampians

Objectives
- Employ more non-teaching staff in specialist and therapy areas
- Develop professional learning program to upskill and support all staff.

Classification
/ Rating
- Expanding workforce: paraprofessionals
- Building capacity: ES staff, paraprofessionals, teachers

Nature: Transformational
Stage: Implementing
Scope: All schools

Actions
- Trialed high ratios of staff to students and smarter use of time to create better ways of transitioning students from year to year via new processes and procedures, which are reflected in development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
- Adopted an internal Professional Development Fixture with up to seven workshops held every Monday afternoon across Terms 2 and 3.

Impact
- The new IEP processes involved more staff, more content and more onus on each individual’s development path. This includes: a more informal approach with parent/community involvement (barbeques, lunches, sharing meetings); an intense ‘getting to know you’ curriculum run in the first month of the school year; a link from the first month curriculum to IEP and goal writing; and development of a Next Steps process to ensure smoother transition between years for each student.
- The professional development workshops were run by the staff member(s) identified as having expertise in each task area. For the first time, the whole staff were involved in this professional development, including ES staff who had previously not been involved in such upskilling. Before the program each staff member rated themselves in 70 task areas and then developed their own professional development path according to areas they personally felt they wanted/needed to upskill in. Not all staff participated fully in the initiative.
- Feedback from all staff indicates a greater appreciation of the skills of others and the work of different sections of the school. Presentations from peers were valuable and relevant because they were within the school’s context. Interim Staff Opinion Survey data shows a slight increase in staff rating of the extent to which professional development planning takes into account individual needs and interests.
- In an organisation with more than 90 ES staff working across a wide range of general and specialist positions, the field trial created an atmosphere of more staff autonomy. This was achieved through upskilling ES staff and sharing skills, talents, knowledge and expertise in accordance with the specific task areas identified as vital to the day to day running of the school.

Future
- Introduce new transitioning process which put more staff time and effort into getting to know each student and their family on an intimate level prior to writing the student’s goals and IEP.
- Continue to grow the Professional Development Fixture, offering it in other specialised areas, and perhaps even on weekends and holiday periods (the concept of staff choosing their own path of knowledge growth will continue to be a feature of the school). Where relevant expertise does exist within staff ranks, the school will contract in support to help with the upskilling process.
- Restructure school in 2011 away from the traditional autonomous classroom structure and move to pods which enable easier sharing of human and physical resources.