

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Supporting school completion: Resources and case studies for schools, teachers and parents/carers

High school completion is an important determinant of success in students' transition to post-school education, training and employment. In Australia, socioeconomic status (SES) is a key factor in school completion. Schools, teachers and parents/carers all have a role to play in promoting high school completion, to give students a better chance at a successful transition to post-school life.



This resource accompanies the CESE Learning Curve *Supporting school completion: The importance of engagement and effective teaching* which explores various factors that have been found to impact high school completion among NSW students. This document is organised into two sections:

1. Practical **strategies** that schools, teachers and parents/carers can use to facilitate high school completion and post-school transition. These strategies are based on the data and research from the Learning Curve, and are supported by examples¹ of programs and initiatives used in NSW government secondary schools.
2. Four in-depth **case studies** from low-SES secondary schools in NSW with high levels of student transition to post-school education and training. The schools were selected because they demonstrate a high level of support for senior secondary students to complete Year 12 and pursue post-school pathways like university and vocational education and training (VET). In the NSW *Tell Them From Me*² survey, these schools' students reported having high university and TAFE aspirations, and scored highly on the socio-emotional and intellectual engagement measures of the survey. These case studies detail some of the programs and initiatives to which the schools attribute their positive results.

Some of the common themes that emerge from the four case studies are:

- Developing strong teacher-student relations in the years prior to students finishing high school is an important foundation for successful post-school transition
- Setting high expectations for all students fosters high aspirations and encourages students to work towards those aspirations
- Providing information and support to students and parents about post-school transition broadens their awareness of available options for post-school life
- Having dedicated resources within the school, through staff and/or 'drop-in' centres that students can draw on, improves students' chances of making a successful transition.



Acknowledgements

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) would like to thank the principals and school executives of the schools that took part in this research for sharing their time and insights with the *Tell Them From Me* team.

¹ These examples come from a series of in-depth interviews conducted with secondary school executives in 2017.

² Tell Them From Me is an online survey system that helps schools capture the views of students, teachers and parents on a number of measures, including student engagement, teaching practices and support for learning. The surveys are administered every year to NSW government schools that express an interest in participating.

Strategies that facilitate high school completion and post-school transition

What schools can do:

01

Help students to make concrete connections between school and post-school destinations, so that they see the value in completing school and put more effort into their learning. Research by Wang (2012) shows that the extent to which students value school can predict how likely they are to persist in their education, and the choices they make regarding post-school pathways. A practical way to help make those connections is to develop relationships with, and conduct visits to, post-school destinations like universities, TAFE and workplaces so that students can get first-hand impressions of what such pathways involve.

02

Have a staff member (or team) who is specifically dedicated to addressing transition-related matters, and who can provide students (and parents) with up-to-date information on the various post-school opportunities available.

Partnerships with business and mentoring organisations and universities can help schools support students' post-school aspirations:

"An organisation called Beacon helped us make stronger connections with business for running special programs, transition-type programs. They provided business mentors, particularly (for Years) 9 through to 11, to get kids focused on the world of work and making those connections between school and life after school. AIME (Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience) is connecting Aboriginal students to the University of Western Sydney and some mentors and that's to help them work towards opportunities post-school."

Colyton High School

Below, two school executives explain the importance and value of transition-focused personnel in their respective schools:

"We established a transition team. We found that kids were lacking in aspiration and the skills in setting clear goals and objectives, so we employed a careers advisor, and strengthened the transition team to help kids set their goals and be more aspirational and therefore make stronger links with their classes ..."

Colyton High School

"We have employed a transition coordinator and we actually increased that from 0.2 to 0.3 this year ... [to help students find] the most suitable career path."

East Hills Boys High School



03	Work in partnership with parents to support and guide the aspirations of students as they move through school, keeping them motivated and eager to complete school and take up post-school pathways. If parents understand the message schools are communicating to students about their aspirations, parents can reinforce that message at home. Events like parent information sessions and one-on-one meetings between parents and transition advisors are useful strategies for achieving this objective.
04	Cultivate a culture of high expectations of staff and students, by establishing and maintaining consistent policies, practice and expectations for student learning and behaviour. Having high expectations of students has been shown to improve their learning progress and engagement in school (CESE 2017) which, in turn, makes them more likely to complete school. The case studies included in this resource document show how a culture of high expectations creates a positive learning environment that encourages school completion.
05	Build a school-wide culture that promotes open communication between teachers and students, so that teachers get to know students individually and students see teachers as supportive of their learning and post-school aspirations. Schools should promote this open communication as early as possible, ideally in Year 7, to build positive communication practices between students and teaching staff that can be carried forward throughout school. Positive teacher-student relationships are a common theme across all four case studies included in this document.
06	Show students that success is not predetermined but rather earned through hard work. This can be achieved by calling upon past students who are now employed or undertaking further study, and other working professionals, to mentor current students and motivate them to complete school. A strategy like this is especially important for students from low-SES backgrounds, who often have a low estimation of their own ability and potential, and are therefore likely to be at risk of dropping out of school (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky 2009).
07	Create a system whereby teachers and relevant support staff collaborate to address students' learning and transition needs. This ensures that information relevant to students' learning, including risk factors for early school-leaving and their post-school aspirations, is centrally updated by staff members and can be accessed as needed by appropriate staff.

Events such as curriculum selection nights ensure that parents have, and understand, all the information they need to provide the best transition support to the students.

"We've got a curriculum selection night... We will make sure that we have a survey available for those parents when they come in, to ask them, 'Is this the best way we can do this process? How could we better inform you ...? Is [this] suitable information? So we try to improve (the transition programs) every time we do it (the survey)."

—
Caringbah High School



What teachers can do:

01	Encourage students to stay motivated in their learning and complete school, by setting them tasks that are intellectually challenging and suited to their particular learning needs (Hattie 2009). Within the provision of regular syllabus content, teachers can differentiate teaching to meet the needs of students through: student groupings, structured activities and challenge-based opportunities.
02	Encourage students to select and study subjects that they find interesting so that they stay engaged in learning right through school, making them more likely to complete school.
03	Encourage students to have high expectations of themselves, by promoting personal goal setting, providing clear instruction, and giving explicit feedback (CESE 2017). Teachers' expectations have been shown to influence students' own expectations for success (Alexander, Entwisle & Horsey 1997) and their motivation to learn (Hanover research 2012).
04	Create a positive learning environment in the classroom, for instance, by establishing and maintaining clear expectations and rules for student behaviour. Student behaviour in classrooms has been shown to have a strong impact on student motivation and learning (McMahon & Wernsman 2009), which in turn affects their likelihood of completing school. Teachers can create well-managed classrooms by: promoting positive behaviour, developing structure and routines for the classroom, establishing and maintaining clear expectations and rules for student behaviour, and reinforcing appropriate behaviour (CESE 2017).
05	Get to know students at a personal level to better understand their cultures and interests, as well as any challenges they may be facing. This may be especially important for disadvantaged students who are often at greater risk of disengaging from or dropping out of school (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky 2009). The better teachers know their students, the more targeted their expectations for student academic success will be.
06	Get to know the individual aspirations of students to help them understand the various career options available to them, based on their identified interests, and what it takes to achieve their aspirations (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky 2009). This is a good way for teachers to demonstrate the value of completing school, by showing that it can set students up for future success.
07	Develop positive teacher-student relationships so that students feel able to openly discuss any concerns they may have about completing school and/or going on to post-school destinations. Informal conversations with students are a good starting point.



One school executive attributed the effectiveness of the school's transition program to how well prepared the students were for successfully completing school and being awarded the Higher School Certificate (HSC):

"I look at, say, the Year 10 students now, starting Year 11... they actually are well prepared now because of the things that we do during the second half of Year 10... we run a concentrated week at the end of the year where they look at a variety of things. That sets them up much more clearly and we're finding much less disruption to learning. There's a clear expectation of what it looks like to work towards the HSC, what the expectations are of teachers, and how they differ from what they may have had back in the previous stage. All of that is clarified for them and they know when they start that first lesson where they're going."

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Caringbah High School

What parents/carers can do:

01	Have regular conversations with students about their learning progress and post-school aspirations. This helps parents identify and address, early enough, any factors that might hinder students' desire or ability to complete school and follow their preferred post-school pathway. Parents should also seek guidance from their child's teachers/school about how to best support their child's aspirations.
02	Seek and clarify knowledge about which subjects their children could study in preparation for particular post-school pathways. If parents understand the alignment between particular subjects and students' aspirations, they can help guide students' subject selection.
03	Encourage students to value school by insisting on regular attendance. Of all the predictors of school completion discussed in the Learning Curve that accompanies this resource document, positive attendance showed the greatest increased likelihood of school completion (6 percentage points), when compared to a student with poor attendance.
04	Encourage students to put effort into their school work. Increased effort in school has been shown to decrease the likelihood of students dropping out of school (Fall & Roberts 2012).
05	Where appropriate, draw upon personal experience to educate students on the reality and requirements of parents' own career pathways. Research has shown that high school students tend to identify their parents as the role models to whom they look for setting career goals (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky 2009). This puts parents in a unique position to guide these aspirations.

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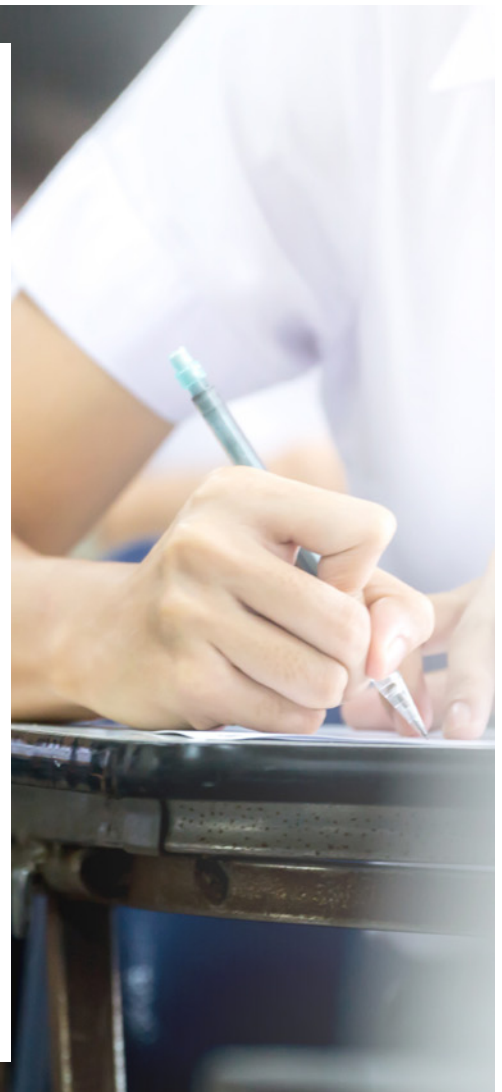
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Supporting high school completion and post-school transition – Sir Joseph Banks High School

Introduction

This case study describes how Sir Joseph Banks High School encourages its students to complete high school and pursue their preferred post-school pathways. In particular, it describes how an aspirational culture and support structures contribute to the school's success in facilitating post-school transitions.

Background

Sir Joseph Banks High School (SJBHS) is a comprehensive secondary school located in south-west Sydney. It has 578 students, 2% of whom are Aboriginal and 88% of whom come from a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is 921 which is lower than the state average of 1000, indicating a higher than average level of disadvantage. Around 61% of students are in the bottom ICSEA quarter while 2% are in the top quarter, figures that have remained relatively consistent since 2013 (My School 2017).

The current principal of SJBHS, Murray Kitteringham, was a deputy principal at Chifley College before being appointed to his present role in 2015. When asked what he considers to be a 'successful transition', he described it as when 'every student that leaves ... here (SJBHS) has one foot into the future, and that is at the capacity that we believe matches their ability and skillset.' According to the school, every student who was on track to receive an ATAR in 2017 successfully received an offer from their university of choice.



Strategies that facilitate high school completion and post-school transition

Fostering an aspirational culture that leads to high expectations of students

SJBHS works especially hard to instil students with confidence in their own ability and potential so that they understand that no aspiration is beyond their reach, as long as they are willing to work towards realising those aspirations. The school achieves this objective by taking students on excursions to post-school destinations and inviting role models to mentor the students.

Visits to post-school destinations help raise the aspirations of SJBHS students

To prepare students for where their aspirations might take them, SJBHS regularly takes students on visits to university campuses and professional workplaces, from as early as Year 9 right through to Year 12. The school recently introduced blazers that the students wear on these outings, as a way to give students a sense of pride and belonging, so that they do not feel out of place in such environments. According to the principal, this change in clothing, though minor, has resulted in a noticeable positive shift in the students' self-perception and self-confidence. Students are encouraged to bring their parents along on some of these outings as a way to start the conversation about post-school aspirations and, hopefully, keep the conversation going at home.

The principal explained that this strategy of visiting post-school destinations serves the dual purpose of 'making it real in students' heads', and also showing parents that their children's aspirations are within reach. The school's transition advisor, Amaney Roumieh, added that these visits have also been a catalyst for parents coming into the school to discuss the post-school pathways that are available to their children. Such visits, and the ensuing discussions, have been instrumental in raising parents' expectations of SJBHS students, and helping parents better support their children's post-school aspirations.

Having access to relatable mentors helps students see that their aspirations are achievable

In addition to taking students out on day trips to university campuses and workplaces, SJBHS often invites business professionals from the Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) to visit the school as student mentors. The ABCN runs several programs in partnership with high schools to mentor and support students in their educational and employment aspirations (see Appendix for details of transition programs delivered at SJBHS). The principal explained that these ABCN mentoring sessions are 'often the first opportunity some of our Year 9 students actually get with a one-on-one adult in a suit to talk to and take interest in them.' This shows students that they can aspire to, and achieve, a successful business career if they so desire.



Students from local universities also visit SJBHS as mentors and tutors, to reinforce the idea that students can successfully pursue whatever their educational aspirations might be. Some of these university students are SJBHS alumni, so they also serve as success stories to inspire students to have high expectations of themselves and to work hard to realise them.

Creating a network of support structures that enables SJBHS to meet students' transition needs

The principal of SJBHS has a distributed approach to leadership which he describes as 'the antithesis of micromanagement', to give staff the autonomy to lead in various capacities, especially in the provision of quality learning, one of the school's strategic directions. In line with this, SJBHS staff work collaboratively to first understand the baseline learning capability of every student, before providing additional ongoing support to prepare students for post-school transition.



Learning-focused support prepares students for the academic aspects of post-school transition

Every student who arrives at Sir Joseph Banks High School, regardless of which year they enter, is given basic literacy and numeracy tests to determine where they fit on the literacy and numeracy learning continua³. This information is then mapped and put in a report that is given to teachers to help them better support students' particular learning needs in class. This pre-testing strategy has been the basis for the school's implementation of intervention programs that aim to bridge any identified learning gaps and ensure that by the time students finish Year 12, they are ready to make a successful post-school transition.

PowerUp is a literacy program that SJBHS developed and launched in 2017, by drawing upon John Hattie's Visible Learning⁴ strategy. The program was introduced to check that the school's assessment of students' abilities and their location on the literacy continuum, based on the pre-tests, aligns with NAPLAN standards. PowerUp sees students work closely with their teachers in 'learning partnerships', to identify the aspects of their learning that students need to work on.

Other support structures and staff at SJBHS specifically focus on the transition needs of students

Six years ago, SJBHS created a Learning and Transition Centre for senior students using some of its Priority Action Schools⁵ funding. This learning centre was specifically established to meet the post-school transition needs of Year 12 students, to support them in their readiness for post-school pathways. It has become a critical aspect of the school's efforts to prepare students for a successful post-school transition. Along with establishing the learning centre, SJBHS has also changed its practice so that instead of having 'free periods', Year 12 students who have dropped from 12 units to 10 units are required to go to the learning centre to have structured conversations with designated school staff about learning and/or transition-related matters.

In 2018, the strategic role of 'transition advisor' was created thanks to equity funding which SJBHS received under the Resource Allocation Model (RAM)⁶. This funding made it possible for the school to back-fill one head teacher's position so that she could concentrate on the 'transitions portfolio' and be specifically dedicated to meeting the post-school transition needs of the students. The transition advisor's role sits within a larger transition team that provides extra learning support and collaborates with other support teams within the school, such as the wellbeing team, whenever the need arises. Her specific role, however, is to work with each student to create a personalised plan that identifies their individual learning goals and strategies they might employ to help them succeed; she also provides advice relating to post-school opportunities. Students often seek advice relating to career pathways, university application procedures, early-entry programs, scholarship opportunities and workplace internships. The advisor continually reaches out to universities and various workplaces to gather information on these types of issues, so that she can provide students with the most up-to-date advice.

The principal described the establishment of the Learning and Transition Centre, and the transition advisor's role, as 'a stroke of genius' given how much students value and utilise this support. The one-on-one rapport students have developed over time with the transition advisor, even before she took on the role, has been critical to her ability to provide guidance and advice that is specifically tailored to each student's aspiration and capabilities.

³ In 2018, the literacy and numeracy continua was replaced by the national literacy and numeracy progressions, under the NSW Department of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

⁴ Visible Learning is a strategy that aims to help teachers become evaluators of their own teaching, by seeing learning through the eyes of students, and helping students become their own teachers so they 'know what to do when they don't know what to do' (see <https://visible-learning.org/2017/08/podcast-with-john-hattie/>).

⁵ Priority Action Schools was part of the NSW Priority Schools Program that provided support to government schools serving the highest densities of low-SES families in New South Wales. As part of the program, schools were provided with funding, staffing supplementation and consultancy support. The funding schools received as part of this program is now being largely administered through the Resource Allocation Model (see below).

⁶ The Resource Allocation Model was developed to ensure a fair, efficient and transparent allocation of the state public education budget for every school in New South Wales. It consists of three components: targeted funding, equity loadings and base school allocation.

Supporting high school completion and post-school transition – Birrong Girls High School

Introduction

This case study describes how Birrong Girls High School encourages its students to complete high school and pursue their preferred post-school pathway. In particular, it describes how an aspirational culture and support structures contribute to the school's success in facilitating post-school transitions.

Background

Birrong Girls High School is a secondary school located in south-west Sydney. It has 807 students, 94% of whom come from a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is 952 which is lower than the state average of 1000, indicating a higher than average level of disadvantage. Around 52% of students are in the bottom ICSEA quarter while 6% are in the top quarter, figures that have remained relatively consistent since 2013 (My School 2017). The recently retired principal of Birrong Girls High School, Margaret Fletcher, was a deputy principal at the school for 13 years before being appointed as principal in 2015. Her idea of a successful post-school transition comes down to three questions: 'Have students selected the course that's appropriate to them? Are they happy in the course? Are they achieving in the course?' For her, it is all about course completion and long-term satisfaction.

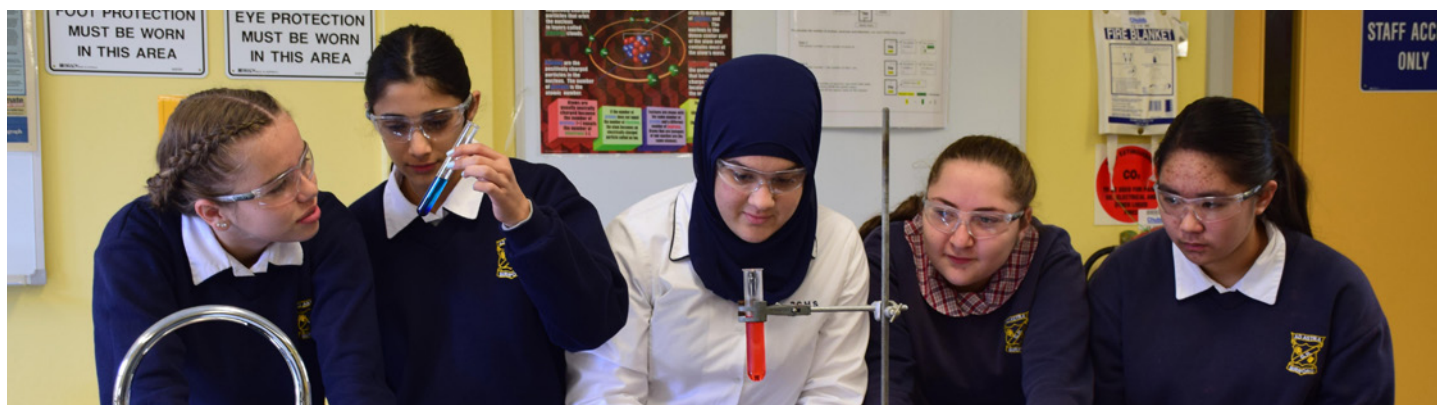
Strategies that facilitate high school completion and post-school transition

Fostering high aspirations to drive successful post-school transitions

Birrong Girls High School motto – Ad astra (to the stars) – captures the school's unrelenting focus on raising students' aspirations and helping them achieve those aspirations. As part of this focus, the school takes students on visits to post-school destinations such as universities and workplaces, and organises visits/talks by role models with similar backgrounds to the students.

Visits to post-school destinations help raise students' sense of belonging

From Year 8, students at Birrong Girls High School are taken on day trips to university campuses and professional workplaces where they meet and interact with people who share their interests. These visits are a way for the school to give students 'a genuine interaction with the real world' so that they are better equipped to handle the realities of post-school life. By 'demystifying' universities and workplaces in this way, the school aims to increase students' sense of belonging in such environments. The principal explained that because some of the students come from families where no one might have attended university or worked in executive positions, it is often left up to the school to nurture such aspirations in the students. It is a responsibility that the school takes very seriously by giving students opportunities to get firsthand impressions of what it would be like to pursue a university degree and/or work in a professional capacity.



Role-modelling helps reinforce the school's message about students' potential

Staff at Birrong Girls High School are very conscious of how important strong female role models can be in shaping the aspirations of young women. For that reason, not only do the female teachers serve as role models to students who aspire to be teachers themselves, but the school also invites female (and male) professionals to mentor and inspire students. During the school's weekly formal assemblies, there is often a role model who has been invited by the school to give a motivational talk to inspire the students to reach 'to the stars'. Also, part of the school prefects' role is to give presentations at the weekly assemblies on aspirational women who lived, or are living, inspirational lives that the students can learn from. These might be physicists, astronauts, or inspiring everyday women. The idea of these talks, as the principal explained, is to show the students that 'you don't have to be from a particular background ... to live a wonderful, fulfilling life that others want to emulate.' Through the talks and visits by mentors, the school shows students that there are many more opportunities available to them than they may have previously considered.



Establishing support structures that target multiple aspects of students' post-school transition

Birrong Girls High School has a number of support structures and staff dedicated to meeting the post-school transition needs of students. It provides support before and after students have made their decision about which post-school pathway they want to pursue. In some cases, the school continues to provide support to students even after they have graduated from high school and followed their chosen post-school pathways.

Career lessons help students choose the post-school destination that is right for them

From Year 7, Birrong Girls High School students begin taking career lessons at school and continue these lessons right through to Year 10. The school aims to get students to start thinking, as soon as they begin high school, about what they would like to do after school, what goals they have for their future, and what they need to do to achieve those goals. The principal stressed that the idea of these lessons is not to commit students to any post-school pathway but, rather, to get the conversation started early. She described the process as a 'road map' where students start off with a sense of the general direction they want to go in, but know that their journey and/or their destination may change before they get to Year 12.

Work Readiness Days give students experiential accounts of post-school pathways

Work Readiness Days are events where past Birrong Girls High School students come back to the school to talk to the current students about their post-school journey and their career. These talks are usually targeted at senior students in Years 11 and 12, and aim to give students a first-person account of what to expect of particular post-school pathways, in terms of challenges and rewards. The talks help to demystify particular post-school pathways in such a way that students can feel more confident about their choice of post-school destination. This type of experience-sharing also gives the current students something to aspire to, since the ex-students are often successful professionals with similar backgrounds to the students. It shows the students that they can also achieve post-school success if they work hard, a sentiment that the school communicates to the students daily.

A transition officer is specifically dedicated to meeting students' post-school transition needs

The role of the transition officer is integral to Birrong Girls High School's efforts to facilitate successful post-school transitions. With the help of the year advisors and career advisor, who know students' interests and capabilities, the transition officer identifies and matches post-school opportunities with students' individual aspirations. The principal explained that the role of the transition officer is especially important at Birrong Girls High School because some families are apprehensive about their daughters going from a single-sex to a co-ed environment. This can make parents disinclined to allow their children to pursue particular post-school pathways like universities and TAFE. In such circumstances, the transition officer works closely with the student's family to alleviate any concerns they might have about the post-school opportunities presented to their daughters. Working one-on-one with students and families in this way enables the transition officer to develop trusting relationships that make it possible for her to tailor support to students' individual needs. After the students graduate from high school and take up their chosen post-school pathway, the transition officer follows up with them every fortnight for a month to see how they are faring.

A homework centre gives students additional learning support prior to transition

Along with the other support Birrong Girls High School provides to ensure students have a successful post-school transition, the school also uses some of its RAM funding to run a homework centre that provides extra academic support for students who need it. The homework centre operates four days a week after school, for two hours, and is staffed by rotating pairs of teachers with varying knowledge and skills – English, science, maths, social science etc. Since the students know which teachers will be in the centre on any given day, they opt in to attend the homework centre, with parental consent, and get additional support in particular subject areas. This year has seen a rise in the number of students who access the homework centre, with over 50 students on some days, so the school is now considering bringing in an extra teacher to meet the demand for the service. The principal stated that the homework centre is a service that is valued by both students and parents, and it is integral to the school's efforts to ensure students are fully prepared for post-school transition.

Supporting high school completion and post-school transition – Canowindra High School

Introduction

This case study describes how Canowindra High School encourages its students to complete high school and pursue their preferred post-school pathway. In particular, it describes how a supportive culture, emphasis on skill development and increased awareness of post-school opportunities all contribute to the school's success in facilitating post-school transitions.

Background

Canowindra High School is a comprehensive secondary school located in central-west New South Wales. It has 246 students, 11% of whom are Aboriginal and 3% of whom come from a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is 944 which is lower than the state average of 1000, indicating a higher than average level of disadvantage. Around 48% of students are in the bottom ICSEA quarter while 6% are in the top quarter, figures that have remained relatively consistent since 2013 (My School 2017). The current principal of Canowindra High School, Neryle Smurthwaite, taught at Parkes High School for eight years before being appointed to her present role six years ago. Her idea of a successful transition is when students leave school with the skillset they need to go into the world and achieve what they want to achieve, whether in university, TAFE or employment, and they are happy.





Strategies that facilitate high school completion and post-school transition

Promoting a supportive school culture that creates valuable trusting relationships

Staff at Canowindra High School are driven by a shared motivation to develop well-rounded students who are fully supported to pursue their post-school aspirations. Using the popular saying, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, the principal stated that every staff member considers it their personal responsibility, in partnership with parents and the community, to assure the future of every student.

Mentoring and ongoing support helps prepare students for post-school transition

For the last six years, Canowindra High School has been offering Year 12 students the opportunity to be mentored by a teacher of their choice. Teachers are asked to self-nominate if they would like to be student mentors; students are then given their choice of one of the teachers who self-nominated. The frequency and timing of meetings between mentor and student is left entirely up to the pair, so that the service remains flexible and responsive to the students’ needs and schedule. According to the principal, mentoring has been one of the most valued ways by which students get one-on-one support prior to post-school transition, in both academic and non-academic matters. It has also been a useful way by which the teachers (mentors) identify students’ particular capabilities and aspirations, so that the school can better tailor the guidance and support it provides.

Around the same time that the mentoring program was introduced, Canowindra High School replaced the free periods in Year 12 students’ timetables with fully supervised ‘study periods’. During study periods, students either continue studying in a designated quiet space, or they can choose to meet with their year advisor, teacher-mentor, or careers advisor. The aim of the study periods is to ensure that students

fully utilise every support available at the school so they are well-prepared for, and well-informed about, post-school opportunities. In addition to the support provided during study periods, year advisors hold weekly ‘year meetings’ with their year groups; a head teacher and another staff member are also usually in attendance. These meetings, which run for 20 minutes every Wednesday, were introduced to offer students an ongoing forum where they can discuss any issues or concerns relating to their learning and/or post-school aspirations.

Staff collaboration ensures a well-rounded provision of support for post-school transition

Canowindra High School does not have a ‘transitions officer’ as some other schools do. Rather, the school has a number of staff members who work together, through their various positions, to identify and support students’ post-school aspirations. The careers advisor runs a ‘careers program’ for Years 9 and 10 students which explores the knowledge and skill requirements of various post-school pathways and careers. She is also responsible for developing relationships with post-school destinations like universities, TAFE and potential employers like the Australian Defence Force. These relationships have proven useful for giving students a preview of what these pathways might entail, to help the students make well-informed decisions about their post-school destination.

Year advisors support the careers advisor’s role by using the weekly interaction with students at year meetings to identify students’ individual capabilities and aspirations, so that support and advice can be specifically tailored to suit each student. Classroom teachers, for their part, are regularly engaging students in discussions about what their transition plans are, and checking how much students know about the opportunities available to them. These three roles – careers advisor, year advisors and teachers – work together to drive the school’s transition efforts. The collaboration is made more effective by the school’s small size, which allows for greater and more personalised interaction between staff and students.

Focusing on skill development to target the non-academic requirements of post-school life

Canowindra High School recognises that there are certain non-academic skills, such as self-direction, perseverance and time management, that students need to succeed in future occupations. Two programs – a work-readiness program and the Duke of Edinburgh program (see Appendix) – were specifically introduced to help drive the school's focus on students' skill development.

Work-readiness program helps students develop employability skills

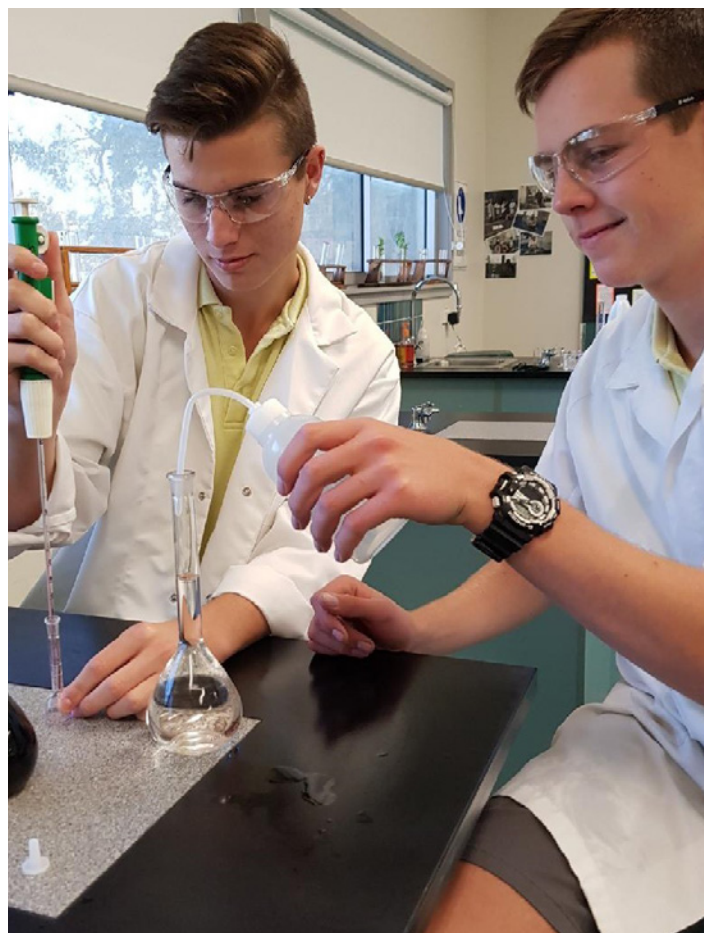
In 2016, Canowindra High School introduced a work-readiness component into the Years 7-10 curricula to help students develop 'the skills and the practices that are required to be able to leave school work-ready.' The idea for this program came about during the development of the school's 2015-2017 school plan, when it became apparent to staff that students were not leaving school with all the employability skills they would require. In response, the principal gave some staff members time off to create a program that would address the skill development needs of the school, drawing on similar programs elsewhere, and in consultation with parents and students. The program has now been running for three years and has proven to be invaluable in helping students develop skills that will be required in whatever post-school destination they choose. This year, the Year 7 work-readiness program specifically focussed on making students 'tech-ready', that is, preparing students for the largely technology-dependent future ahead of them. The program runs in conjunction with, rather than as a replacement for, the mandatory technology classes that are part of the Years 7 and 8 curricula.

Raising students' awareness of post-school opportunities to open up more pathway options

According to the principal, some of the students at Canowindra High School come from families where there may not be anyone with firsthand experience of post-school destinations like universities. This can make it difficult for these families to foster such aspirations in students. The school therefore takes a prominent role in nurturing and supporting the post-school aspirations of the students, some of whom may otherwise not be aware of the many post-school opportunities available to them. The parent/student information evenings held at the school, and student excursions to post-school destinations, have been particularly useful for raising and supporting the aspirations of the students.

Parent/student information evenings give parents the tools to support students' aspirations

Once a year, in Term 3, Canowindra High School invites parents to an information evening that aims to provide them with the information they need to support their children in subject selection and post-school aspirations. These information sessions are targeted at Year 8 and Year 10 students, and their parents, as a way of motivating students to be more engaged in their learning and to study subjects that they find interesting and relevant for their post-school aspirations. The sessions are also an important way for Canowindra High School to partner with parents in supporting students' learning and post-school



aspirations, by giving parents the tools they need to have those conversations with their children. During the information evenings, parents are encouraged to seek out faculty staff to talk about subject choices and related career options.

Excursions to post-school destinations give students a welcome preview of various pathways

The vision statement of Canowindra High School – 'small school, big opportunities' – underpins the school's efforts to show students the multitude of opportunities and pathways available to them after school. In Years 11 and 12, Canowindra High School students are given the opportunity to visit university campuses to gain some insight into university life. Year 11 students attend an open day event at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, while Year 12 students attend a similar event at the University of Wollongong. The principal stated that early exposure to post-school pathways is a key instrument that the school uses to help students make well-informed decisions about what pathway to follow after school. At Canowindra High School this exposure does not always take the form of students going to university campuses or other post-school destinations; sometimes representatives of those pathways visit the school to talk to the students. For example, the Australian Defence Force often comes to Canowindra High School to run workshops and give talks to the students, to highlight the merits of joining the Defence Force after school. Universities also visit the school to give students a glimpse of what university is like, what courses are available and what the entrance requirements are.

Supporting high school completion and post-school transition – Temora High School



Introduction

This case study describes how Temora High School encourages its students to complete high school and pursue their preferred post-school pathway. In particular, it describes how exposure to post-school destinations, mentoring support and a suite of programs all contribute to the school's success in facilitating post-school transitions.

Background

Temora High School is a co-educational secondary school located in the Northern Riverina region of New South Wales. It has 334 students, 5% of whom are Aboriginal and 3% of whom come from a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is 949 which is lower than the state average of 1000, indicating a higher than average level of disadvantage. Around 48% of students are in the bottom ICSEA quarter while 3% are in the top quarter, figures that have remained relatively consistent since 2014

(My School 2017). The current principal of Temora High School, Patrick Nethery, was principal of Tullibigeal Central School for three years before being appointed to his present role 10 years ago. His idea of a successful transition is when students feel 'comfortable and safe, as well as challenged and engaged in whatever they have chosen to do. They should feel equipped to deal with the environment they have chosen to be in.'

Strategies that facilitate high school completion and post-school transition

Exposing students to post-school destinations so they are better prepared for later transition

Temora High School makes a concerted effort to ensure that students are comfortable with the idea of post-school transition well before they are at the point of making that transition. The students are taken on excursions to cities which past students have chosen as their preferred post-school destination. Also, representatives of institutions and potential employers, and past students who are now employed or undertaking further study, are often invited to run workshops at the school.



Visits to post-school destinations help students feel comfortable about post-school transition

Every year, students in Years 10, 11 and 12 go on excursions to cities and universities within relatively close proximity of their school, to familiarise themselves with different environments. Participation in these excursions is based on expressions of interest from the students, most of whom are on an ATAR pathway. Drawing from personal experience with his own children, the principal stated that it is important to help students feel at ease about moving away from home to a larger setting, and these visits have become a powerful means of doing so. He also stressed that although the excursions usually involve a visit to the university in these cities, the trip is about more than just making students familiar with a university setting; it is also about getting students comfortable in the broader context of an unfamiliar city.

The cities that Temora High School students visit are Wollongong, Wagga Wagga and Canberra. The trip to Wollongong is usually reserved for Year 12 students and lasts for two days, during which time students attend the University of Wollongong Discovery Day event before taking time to explore the city. The one-day trip to Wagga Wagga, on the other hand, is open to Years 10, 11 and 12 students and typically coincides with a careers expo run at Charles Sturt University. Also a one-day trip, the visit to Canberra is usually taken by Year 10 students as part of a program called 'Aspire', run by the University of Canberra, which aims to raise students' post-school aspirations. Temora High School considers these visits to be an essential factor in ensuring successful post-school transitions.

Guest workshops help demystify particular post-school pathways

In addition to having students from Temora High School visit their campus, universities also run workshops at the school. For example, the University of Canberra and Charles Sturt University run workshops at Temora High School that aim to raise students' post-school aspirations and highlight the merits of a university post-school pathway. The local TAFE also runs information sessions at the school to give students insight into what that pathway entails. As the principal explained, some of the parents of Temora High School students work at TAFE so students (and their parents) tend to see a VET pathway as a 'not-so-foreign' choice of post-school destination. The school also runs some programs in partnership with TAFE (e.g. YES program) which also makes TAFE more familiar to the students than some other post-school destinations. The Australian Defence Force visits Temora High School once a year to give talks to students who might be interested in that pathway after school. Past students who joined the Defence Force are often invited along on these visits, to give firsthand accounts of their experiences.

Cultivating a supportive culture to give students confidence about the future

Temora High School has a dedicated careers advisor who works with students, individually and collectively, to support their post-school aspirations. To support her efforts, there are mentoring arrangements that help students gain confidence in approaching post-school transition.

Mentoring opportunities help students develop useful skills for post-school life

In Year 10, Temora High School students are given the opportunity to mentor primary and/or junior high school students, and so develop leadership skills and other non-academic skills that will prove useful in life after school. The Year 10 students help younger students in learning areas such as literacy, comprehension and numeracy, with supervision from a teacher, and they help coach primary school athletics and swimming carnivals. Temora Shire Council and other local businesses also present students with further opportunities to develop and hone employability skills, for example, through the 'gap year program' which they offer. This differs from a typical gap year in that students do traineeships in these organisations instead of travelling or just taking a break from schooling. They gain valuable work experience as a result.

Staff mentors give students personalised support in their post-school aspirations

In Years 11 and 12, students are divided into groups of five and assigned a mentor, who might be a school executive or a teacher, so that they have a point of contact for any post-school concerns they might have. The process for assigning students to a staff mentor begins with staff members self-nominating to become a mentor, and identifying students they would like to mentor. Students are then invited to pick a staff member, from those who self-nominated, who they would like to be mentored by. Once both parties have made their choices, the careers advisor matches mentors to students. This mentoring setup has been particularly important for helping the school provide more targeted support and guidance to students in the lead up to post-school transition.

Delivering a suite of programs that target multiple aspects of students' post-school transition

Failsafe

This is a 'guided and compulsory study' program that was introduced in Temora High School to encourage senior students (Years 11 and 12) to maximise their HSC preparation during school hours, with support from teachers. The program sees students who have 'free periods' compulsorily attend the library to continue studying. Staff members are on hand in the library to offer additional learning support, should the students need it.

HSC Hub

In partnership with a company called Atomi, Temora High School runs a series of videos (called the HSC Hub) on various HSC curriculum areas, delivered by students who recently excelled in the HSC. The idea of these videos is to show students that they can also excel in the HSC if they work hard. As part of the HSC Hub, students preview upcoming course content, revise work that has already been covered in class, and also extend their knowledge of course content. The HSC Hub aligns seamlessly with Failsafe, meaning that both programs can be done at the same time. The impact of the HSC Hub videos on students is deepened by the fact that the speakers are recent high school graduates, so students find them more relatable and are more likely to take their advice.

YES Program

In partnership with the local TAFE, Temora High School offers students the opportunity to do some TAFE courses that aim to teach skills that will make them 'work ready'. This program specifically targets students in Year 10 who are at risk of becoming disengaged from school, and seeks to help students understand the wealth of possibilities available to them after school. Examples of courses offered as part of the YES program include hair and make-up; children's services; welding; and automotive classes. This program has been particularly important for reengaging Temora High School students who might otherwise have completely disengaged from school and learning.

Temora High School and Beyond

This is an initiative that Temora High School introduced to highlight the successes of the school's alumni, to motivate students to aim high and work hard to achieve their aspirations. As part of the program, alumni who are successfully living their post-school aspirations are invited to interact with the students and share their personal experiences. Visiting alumni have included a paediatrician and an orthopaedic surgeon from Sydney, both of whom are well respected and successful in their fields.

Trade skills centre

This government initiative was initially introduced so that students could develop some trade skills before they leave school. The program was later terminated by the federal government but Temora High School benefited by having a centre built and furnished prior to the program's termination. The trade skills centre is now an important means by which the school helps students develop skills that they might find useful for later employment, such as in construction and metal works. Both of these skill areas are of high relevance to the local agribusiness and engineering industries.

Appendix

Partnerships that help schools deliver transition-focused programs

University of New South Wales (UNSW)

UNSW runs an outreach program called **Aspire** that seeks to raise the aspirations of high school students in communities where the number of students who go on to university is often low. Birrong Girls High School is one of the partner schools involved in the program, and has been for a number of years. In 2017, for instance, Year 10 students from Birrong Girls High School participated in a workshop held at UNSW which explored the various careers that particular degrees can lead to. As part of the workshop, experienced practitioners from a range of professions, and UNSW students, work alongside the high school students to identify the degrees that best suit particular interests. The 'Aspire' program has been particularly valuable for Birrong Girls High School because its aims align with the school's goal of facilitating post-school transitions through increased student aspirations.

University of Technology Sydney (UTS)

The **Sky High** program, run by the University of Technology Sydney, is targeted at Year 8 and Year 9 students in low socioeconomic areas. It aims to inspire students to complete school and think positively about future possibilities, by increasing students' awareness of career pathways and how to achieve post-school aspirations. As part of the program, Sir Joseph Banks High School students are taken on excursions to places of educational, occupational, social and/or cultural interest. Students also attend workshops and discussion groups that are run by the Sky High program in-school or at the university campus.

Birrong Girls High School also partners with UTS in a **summer school** program that is aimed at students who have just completed Year 10 and are moving on to Year 11. The intensive two-week program occurs during the Christmas holidays and offers students the opportunity to attend university classes in a range of subject areas of their choice. The idea behind the program is to give high school students firsthand experience of a university environment, by letting them study on campus with university staff and students. For Birrong Girls High School students, it means that they get to see what their future might look like if they choose to follow a university post-school pathway. It is all about helping the students make better-informed decisions regarding their post-school destination. Following the summer school, and throughout Years 11 and 12, UTS invites the students back for a series of workshops and events on topics such as improving academic skills and making informed career choices.

Western Sydney University

SJBHS runs two programs in partnership with Western Sydney University – **Pasifika Achievement to Higher Education (PATHE)** and **Fast Forward** – which support students in realising their post-school aspirations. The PATHE program, established in 2012, is specifically targeted at Pacific Islander students and aims to develop aspirations towards further education and training within Pacific communities. The Western Sydney University PATHE team runs in-school workshops with high school students on a range of topics, including stress management, leadership and self-confidence, and post-school transition pathways. PATHE also offers a \$5000/year scholarship (for up to four years) to new Western Sydney University students who had previously been involved in the high school PATHE program.

Western Sydney University's Fast Forward program, established in 2004, is a mentoring program that is aimed at gifted and talented students in western Sydney high schools. Two of its core objectives are to increase the rates of Year 12 completion, and enhance students' awareness of post-school education opportunities. At SJBHS, the program is introduced in Year 9, when a university mentor is allocated to a group of students who participate in university workshops and visits. This continues through to Year 12 where each student is paired with a university mentor who is studying the degree that the SJBHS student is interested in. This arrangement gives SJBHS students an insider's perspective on what their chosen field of study entails, so that they are better prepared when they enrol in university courses.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Australia

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (commonly referred to as 'Duke of Ed') is an internationally recognised enrichment program that invites young people (aged 14-25) to participate in self-directed activities/challenges that aim to help them 'reach their potential'. There are four categories of challenges that participants can choose from: service, skill, physical recreation and adventurous journeys. The aim is for students to develop, through the challenges, skills that mirror what is required in life after school, such as independence, self-sufficiency and collaboration. Canowindra High School has been involved in the Duke of Ed program for at least as long as the principal has been at the school, and the students have undertaken various challenges as part of the program. For example, in 2014, a group of Year 9 and Year 10 students from Canowindra High School completed a 110 kilometre, two-day cycling adventure under the 'adventurous journeys' category. In 2018, under the same category, a group of the school's Year 12 students completed a four-day hike in Kosciuszko National Park. The school describes these 'adventures' as challenging but eminently rewarding because of the valuable skills that students learn along the way, like persistence.

Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN)

The ABCN offers a variety of programs that support schools, including Sir Joseph Banks High School (SJBHS) and Birrong Girls High School, in helping students realise their post-school aspirations. SJBHS's principal described the ABCN as 'a conduit from corporate enterprise to low-SES schools', and expressed how much his students value the support and mentorship provided through the ABCN programs. The following ABCN programs are all delivered at Sir Joseph Banks High School, but only 'Focus' is delivered at Birrong Girls High School:

- **GOALS** (Growing Opportunity and Learning Skills) is a program that aims to raise the aspirations of Year 9 SJBHS students and increase their awareness of available post-school pathways. It does this by pairing students with a corporate mentor who has shared interests and experiences.
- The **Aspirations** program has a similar objective to GOALS but is targeted at Year 11 students, and it goes further to

help students develop the employability skills they will need to succeed in their chosen future occupation.

- **InRoads** is another program delivered to SJBHS students. It is aimed at Year 12 students who are interested in entry-level jobs in technology and business administration, rather than tertiary education after school.
- **Focus** is a program specifically targeted at female high school students in Years 10, 11 and 12 who already demonstrate leadership potential. At both SJBHS and Birrong Girls High School, the program offers female executives as role models and mentors to help the young women develop their leadership skills and aspire to senior roles in business and the community.

Have you seen the department's other resources?



Supporting students' learning: Insights from students, parents and teachers

This Learning Curve draws upon the 2016 Tell Them From Me surveys completed by primary and secondary students, teachers and parents/carers. It explores students' feedback on how they experience support for learning at school and in their homes, and to what extent teachers and parents/carers provide support to students at school and at home respectively. Key findings reveal how the provision of advocacy and support varies across different groups of students and different stages of school. This Learning Curve is accompanied by a resource document that highlights strategies for creating supportive frameworks and includes two case studies of NSW schools providing high levels of advocacy and learning support, as reported by their students.

<https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/supporting-students-learning>

'What Works Best' reflection guide

This is a practical resource that schools and teachers can use to reflect on, and evaluate, their teaching practice in order to enhance student engagement and achievement. It explicitly highlights examples of school-wide approaches to driving this objective.

https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/What_Works_Best_Reflection_Guide_202016_AA.pdf

Case studies: Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools

These case studies highlight effective wellbeing practice, and how it supports learning, in local contexts. They have been prepared to assist schools to meet the department's strategic goal of 'Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools'.

<https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/known-valued-cared-for>



Authors: Brianna McCourt and Victoria Ikutegbe
May 2019

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001, Australia

Visit our website to subscribe to the CESE newsletter

☎ 02 7814 1527

Yammer

✉ info@cese.nsw.gov.au

🌐 cese.nsw.gov.au

