Turvey Park Public School
Gaining community trust through open and welcoming school practice

Context

Turvey Park Public School is close to the centre of Wagga Wagga, a large inland city in NSW. In 2015 the school had a student population of 366. Of these students, 11 per cent identified as Aboriginal and a further 8 per cent, including 19 refugees, came from a language background other than English. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 101 (2014/15 average).

Enhancing community consultation

To engage the community in school planning and capture the views of as many parents as possible, a member of the executive informally surveyed families during the school fete. The responses from 100 families, representing over 40 per cent of families, informed the development of the strategic directions of the school plan.

A school team attended professional learning provided through Dare to Lead, an initiative committed to supporting schools to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. At the professional learning, discussions were held on the effectiveness of personalised learning plans (PLPs) and feedback from staff and community members led to the development of a less formal PLP format. All Aboriginal families were supported in working with staff to contribute to the development of PLPs for their children. Another valued and successful strategy was the relationship with a significant Aboriginal Elder who made a commitment to come into classrooms to share her culture with students.

An ethnic school learning support officer (ESLSO) was employed to assist refugee families to develop an understanding of the culture of the school and participate in school activities. Teachers were helped to understand the cultural backgrounds of students and the implications for learning. The school implemented the Beginning School Well program, a transition program for families who had recently arrived in Australia with children about to enter the school system. The program included information sessions and playgroup activities for children.

Achievements

There is strong school community commitment to the current school plan. Over 40 per cent of families responded to the survey conducted at the school fete, exceeding the previous response rate of 10 per cent when surveys were sent home.

As result of the PLP process, students had a say in their learning and parents became much more involved in the process. The relationships between Aboriginal parents and teachers have been strengthened with Aboriginal parents coming to the school to provide support and advice in relation to special events and cultural issues.

The Beginning School Well program supported the positive transition of refugee children into the school and formed effective relationships with parents who felt comfortable requesting help with school routines and activities. Parents of refugee students became more confident in their ability to communicate with members of the school community. The program helped to build a more cohesive school community.

Sustainability

The school leadership team will maintain the more successful elements of the projects. They are considering new ways of engaging the community and are committed to ensuring that communication between the school and the community is clear and accessible.

The process of developing PLPs will continue with an emphasis on ensuring that the family of every Aboriginal student continues to participate in the process. Staff are keen to develop sustained relationships with more Aboriginal Elders in the near future.

Families from the Beginning School Well program will be supported as their children enter Kindergarten and support staff will provide specific assistance when required. The ESLSO will continue to liaise between the school and the community to build mutual understanding.

For more information on Turvey Park Public School visit their website.