Context

Smithfield Public School is in the Fairfield area of south-western Sydney. In 2015 the school had 560 students of whom 80 per cent were from language backgrounds other than English. Many of the increasing number of refugee students had no previous schooling. Features of the school include community languages programs in Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and Spanish, a preschool and early intervention program and a satellite class funded and staffed by Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT) for students with autism. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 125 (2014/15 average).

Enhancing community consultation

The school aimed to develop an evidence driven, inclusive school planning and evaluation process by creating differentiated programs for members of the community to enhance their engagement in decision making and governance within the school. The differentiated model comprises three tiers:

- Tier 1 strategies are focused on improving communication with all families. Strategies include workshops on topics such as parenting, accessing support services in Australia, curriculum information sessions as well as Parents & Citizens (P&C) meetings and playgroups two days per week.
- Tier 2 activities are coordinated by the community liaison officer and include parent volunteer training covering skills needed to assist in class and support for parents of children with special needs, such as access to Keyword Signing Courses.
- Tier 3 activities focus on parents playing a role in the decision making and governance of the school. This includes the evaluation of programs and feedback, the proposal of innovations and changes in direction as well as input into prioritising budget areas during the school planning process.

Achievements

The whole school community contributed to the school planning process for 2015-17 through surveys and focus group meetings to evaluate current programs and inform future directions. The school has implemented a variety of opportunities for parents to participate in school activities across the three tiers. Identified achievements include:

- significantly improved communication between the school and home
- the school app had 212 active users and an average of 11 notifications per month
- the community liaison officer and the Vietnamese and Arabic school learning support officers facilitated communication with a diverse range of families and promoted cultural understanding
- thirty families registered for playgroups with an average of 10 toddlers attending each day
- significant numbers of parents completed a range of workshops and courses and accreditation by the local TAFE is being sought for this school-based training
- forty-five registered and active volunteers working in the school
- the number of parents contributing to the school planning process and attending the school development day increased between 2014 and 2015.

Sustainability

The school is committed to continuing the focus on increasing community consultation. In order to engage the growing number of refugee families, a cultural program designed to connect isolated and disengaged families to the school, local community services and the wider community will be implemented. The school will offer sessions in child development, teaching children resilience and other essential life skills. Participants will also have the opportunity to attend classes to develop a greater understanding of spoken and written English. This will support parents to understand what is happening in their child’s classroom, participate in activities and programs offered by the school and contribute to the school decision-making process.

For more information on Smithfield Public School visit their website.