School Improvement to Maximise Learning

Evidence of Impact

Quorn Area School
Quorn, South Australia • Australia

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DEMOGRAPHICS

SACE Completion	Students	Staff	Nationalities	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
100%	116	22	4	24

The Context

Quorn Area School is a rural co-educational school, located in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia. We have always been committed to providing quality learning experiences that enables students to achieve their personal best. We have now raised our expectations to have all students make at least one year's progress for a year's worth of teaching. Our school has a current enrolment of 110 students, ranging from Foundation (5 years old) to grade 12 (17-18 years old).

Getting Started

Our Visible Learning (VL) journey began late in 2017 when we entered into a three-year professional learning process to make learning visible across our school. Our aim was to continually improve learning outcomes and have higher progress for all students.

Visible Learning has been implemented with the purpose to maximise student and teacher learning and work towards developing a shared understanding of a language of learning. The short-term goal was to ensure everyone, especially our learners, had a common understanding of what makes an effective learner.

Prior to 2017, staff professional learning, both at a school level and individual level was extremely ad hoc. As a site, we had minimal evidence to show impact on learning for staff and for students for the investment of time and resources we had placed on professional learning. This paper highlights a professional learning process we began in 2017 and how this evidence-based cycle of ongoing learning

> **This has been an amazing opportunity, to start over with a real sense of focus on student learning. It has been great to see students shifting their learnings from a risky adventure to personal journey over which they have increasing control.**
>
> **- Leadership Team**

and school improvement has maximised learning for students and staff.
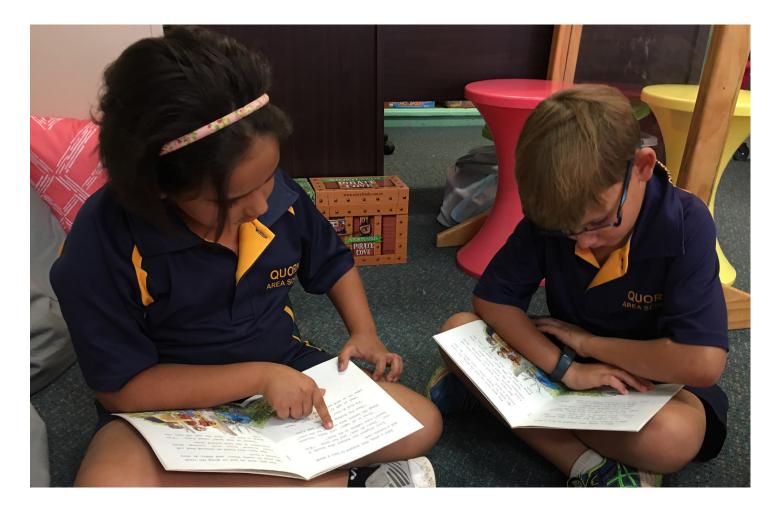
The Deciding Factor

The Approach

Prior to embarking on the Visible Learning journey, there was a wide variety of programs running across the school. These programs were not always connected to our overarching goals and it was clear from a review of evidence, gathered from an external review process with our Corwin partners and through our own evidence gathering processes, that there was a lack of understanding of current and effective pedagogies to maximise student learning.

All staff participated in the Visible Learning Foundation Day workshop, which provided important background to the research of what works best in schools for improving student achievement. As a result of an evidence gathering process over a period of three months, it became apparent that both teachers and students had varied understandings of the characteristics and dispositions of effective learners. Whilst there was clarity in 'what' learners were learning, 'how' effective learners learn was not

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clear and this became our first focus area. We wanted to develop a shared language of effective learners i.e. clearly identifying learning dispositions we wanted our learners to be able to articulate and use.

> ❝ *It's nice to know what we are doing and why we are doing it. We also have goals and they are up on the wall to remind us. We get to change them when we meet our goals. I also have a chance to improve each piece of writing with our class criterion scale. I also set myself goals based on this criteria.* ❞
>
> *- Mia - Year 6 Student*

Evidence Informed Implementation

We participated in a School Capability Assessment (SCA), an evaluation visit conducted by the Corwin team, which provided immense insight into the school's current perceived practices verses actual

reality. The SCA report along with evidence gathered by the Leadership Team was analysed to inform the design of the first Visible Learning Action Plan, a process undertaken by the Leadership Team during another day with a Corwin Visible Learning consultant.

Our evidence gathering and analysis informed our key focus areas. These included:

1. Developing a shared language of learning across the school *(Learner Dispositions)*.
Learning Intentions and Success Criteria *(WALT 'We are teaching to…'*, *WILF 'What I am looking for…',* *TIB 'This is because…', WAGOLL 'What a Good One Looks Like')*.

2. Developing students' understanding of assessment and results *(Effective Feedback)*.

3. Using data to inform planning *(Moderation)*.

It became evident that the school's priorities needed immediate refinement to avoid initiative fatigue. This decision prompted the re-design of a whole school site improvement plan, with VL in the

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Visible Learning Strand	What do we want to find out?	What tools/methods will we use?
Visible Learners	What does it mean to be a good learner at QAS?	Video diary & focus group questions.
Know Thy Impact	How are staff tracking progress to support students in understanding their achievement?	Progress and achievement tool & Student interviews.
Passionate & Inspired	To what extent do QAS teachers match the profile of an Inspired and Passionate teacher?	Teacher survey & Student survey.
Effective Feedback	What is the quality of our feedback to both students and teachers? Who is it from and how is it received?	Student Feedback survey & Student interview about feedback.

Figure 1: Evidence Gathered

centre, emphasising the focus on developing learner capability as our core purpose.

As we began implementation, we recognised we had been too ambitious in our focus areas. This led to the creation of teacher PLC (Professional Learning Communities) for each area of focus, providing opportunities for further research and understanding aligning the whole school focus in one area, developing student capability to become effective learners.

The second stage was to ensure Learning Design (teacher planning and delivery) became an embodiment of learning in reality, whereby students were encouraged to be more active with their learning, understanding what they were learning and the purpose of their learning.

The guiding coalition led the development of a strategic plan for implementation of systems and processes including intentional evidence gathering, analysis and communication processes and weekly activities that were timetabled and carried out by the Visible Learning team. This ensured that relevant data was gathered and current information was openly shared with teachers and students. The PLC teams were responsible for sharing their learning with staff. This ongoing communication and professional learning ensured all staff were aware of the focus and alignment of the strategic plan to the needs of our learners.

Using the evidence gathered from a variety of

methods (see Figure 1 above), we developed our aspiration. The aspiration has been kept alive through scheduled walkthroughs, a Professional Learning Community model, Impact Coach meetings and analysis of data, as well as the first topic of our agenda at weekly leadership meetings.

Learner Dispositions:
Apart from developing and publishing our Site Improvement Plan, the Learner Dispositions were the first visible sign in classrooms that we were on a new learning journey, as a whole school. Although a lengthy process, it was really rewarding. We made time to speak with students and understand their idea of what a good learner is. This meant that the students and community knew that their opinion mattered and that we valued their choice and voice in how the school operated. Collectively we decided that the overall choice of dispositions would line the walls of our classrooms and be embedded within the learning process. This would help them be lived, embedded and articulated on a daily basis. The dispositions sit alongside the learning intentions as reminders to students of 'how' we learn effectively. Teachers make reference to the task first and encourage and name relevant dispositions that will help students achieve success, for example how they could be working like 'Inquiring Ivy' whilst assessing their achievement of the learning intention and being self-aware of their approach to learning.

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Learning Intentions & Success Criteria:

To develop assessment capable learners, teachers needed to first know what students would learn and what success would look like. Teacher clarity was paramount as a building block to building assessment capable learners. Learning intentions and success criteria are now visible for all students across the school. After 12 months of implementation of learning intentions and success criteria across the school, when students are asked, "What are you learning?" we have had a 40% increase in students who can articulate the learning intention not just the task or subject. Just with this slight tweak of practice, walkthroughs and school data have also identified that there has been a 60% reduction in behavior issues as the students are more focused on the learning.

Successes:

Key milestones in our journey would have to be the willingness for teachers to make pedagogical changes and shift in their practice. There is evidence of a deeper understanding and belief from staff that they are accountable for knowing the impact they have on outcomes and growth for all students. This movement from teacher perception to seeking evidence of their impact has been attributed to robust questioning and analysis of quality data and student voice. One example of this was sharing our baseline data, "What makes a good learner" student interviews video with all staff, which highlighted students' lack of awareness and language around what constituted a good learner.

It has also been refreshing to shift the focus of staff meetings to professional dialogue around student learning and measurable growth. Practices that have become common place such as making learning intentions and success criteria visible have made a significant impact on pace and rigor within the classrooms, as students have a clearer understanding of what the end game is for the lesson, why they are learning it and how to successfully achieve that learning.

We also have a large proportion of teachers working with ICT to allow students constant access to success criteria, as well as providing pertinent and timely feedback on learning tasks. A whole school data management system has made individual data and assessment information more visible to stakeholders. This data is made accessible to students and in turn more open and transparent for parents to discuss and keep track of their child's learning.

Challenges:

Moving from anecdotal evidence to hard evidence gathering was difficult to begin with and some staff found openly sharing data initially confronting, but
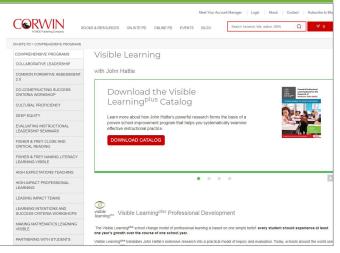
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led to the co creation and shared understanding of expected standards of student work across the school. Establishing benchmarks and standards of work allowed for effective dialogue of student progress, and we were able to establish a data gathering cycle that was efficient and effective in providing evidence to support our decision-making processes.

Another challenge was capturing student progressions and how it could be measured, monitored and tracked on a continual basis. To overcome this, a whole school data gathering process and the use of and online platform was used. This ensured data was captured electronically and accessible by stakeholders and not just classroom teachers.

Leadership challenges included making time to monitor change and ensure there were processes embedded and communicated clearly to staff to build sustainable practice. This was overcome with allocated time on the timetable to focus on the implementation process for teachers, providing opportunities for teacher collaboration and support from the Impact Coaches to understand what changes may be needed in practice. Overall, the sites biggest challenge was shifting the thinking and daily

practices of staff, recognising we too were learners and that we were part of a collaborative process of implementing practices that would help all students progress and become successful learners. Creating an environment where people and practices can be challenged using effective feedback in a safe learning environment was imperative to moving forward.

> *66 With a focus on Visible Learning within my teaching practice I have been able to clearly define the process of teaching to my students, for example discussions about 'What I am looking for", "This is Because" & What A Good One Looks Like". This transparency has made learning more visible as well as taking the guess work out of not knowing what the teacher wants by the end of each lesson. We have been setting goals and it's great to see students using the language of our agreed learner dispositions and also articulating their nest steps. 99*

Key Outcomes

Impact of the Professional Learning Process:
The Year 2 Teacher Mindframes Surveys undertaken throughout the process indicated that there had

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been a significant shift in teachers focusing more on dialogue than monologue within classrooms. Student discussion and collaborative learning is seen as a valuable part of learning and this has led to a significant reduction in student disengagement.

Our evidence tells us that we now also have a higher degree of collaboration and trust amongst colleagues as teachers are working across year levels moderating work and creating agreed criterion. Teachers are more willing to share practices and opening up their classrooms to allow for lesson observations and peer feedback. Time is allocated to analyse, share and use data amongst staff. This has helped create a culture of transparency and professional dialogue about learner progress and high achievement. Visible Learning is now also aligned with our Learning, Design and Moderation process requirements from State initiatives and other key priorities as we create a culture of continual evaluation and improvement so all may progress.

More importantly, our learners are clear about what they are learning, what success looks like, and how to be an effective learner, using the learner dispositions when learning becomes challenging.

Lessons Learnt:
Intentionality is key. As a site, we found that once a timeline of targets was established, the implementation was more likely to happen as priorities had been established and planned. It was also important to communicate that Visible Learning is not a program that you implement; it is a philosophy and culture of learning that it is imperative to continually focus and communicate as a whole community to ensure a clear focus of improving student outcomes and to build visible learners.

Where We Are Now:
1. Created a deliberate professional learning structure where data, evidence and information can be shared and discussed as all teachers take shared responsibility for improving student outcomes.

2. Developing data literacy for all teachers and learners.

3. Unpacking and embedding effective learning intentions and success criteria thus ensuring teacher clarity for all learners.

4. Keeping a focus on learning through PLC's, relevant coherent professional learning, continued evidence gathering through Walkthroughs and quality feedback.

The Journey Continues:
The improvements that have been made on maximising student learning over the past year has been significant. We will continue professional learning in Visible Learning to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the practices that work best to develop assessment capable learners and effective use of evidence to inform practice. Staff are committed to exhibiting exemplary practice and deepen implementation of whole school aligned systems and processes. We know now we are making, and can make, a difference to the progress and achievement for ALL students, because our evidence tells us so.

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What does it take to create schools where all students are learning—not by chance, but by design?

Professional learning is successful if—and only if—it has a measurable impact on student learning. **Corwin's Visible Learning^plus School Impact Process** approaches professional learning with a focus on evidence-based practices and implementation support for long-term success for all learners.

Understand what works

Build a common understanding and language of learning across school around what works (and what doesn't) to accelerate learning and monitor progress.

Collect and analyse your evidence

Understand where you are now in implementing high-impact practices so you can chart where you want to go and how to get there.

Develop your PD plan with experts

Bring in the leading minds to help you formulate a PD plan for long-term, measurable growth and collaboration amongst team members.

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