

How do you know they've learnt?

Evidence of Impact



Quirindi High School, Quirindi, NSW • Australia

DEMOGRAPHICS

Students

376

Staff

36

Indigenous
students

29%

Languages
background other
than English

2%

How do you know they've learnt?

“ I now know that it's all about students' learning and now I know a plethora of ways to make sure that every lesson my students have learned something - whether it be before the lesson, during the lesson or after the lesson. And I never would have learned that if I hadn't: (a) become a teacher here and (b) undertaken Corwin [professional learning]. ” - Angela

There's an air of confidence at Quirindi High School. Students exude it; teachers like Angela breathe it. They're not there yet, but they're on a journey and they're feeling good about the destination.

That journey has been a long-term and intentional one. It began over 7 years ago with the introduction of Assessment for Learning and has been strengthened through a 3 year Visible Learning School Improvement Process focused on the principles of Visible Learning. Now, in their Evidence of Impact cycles, the school is reaping the rewards of a culture open to change, structures to support that change and an investment in professional learning.

Through the process, teachers and leaders have become very clear about their mission. Contrary to prevailing views and perhaps surprisingly for some readers, the teachers argue it's not about student achievement or about engagement. Some students achieve regardless of their teachers' best efforts and engagement in a lesson doesn't necessarily result in learning. Rather, at Quirindi, the emphasis is unequivocally on progress.

Being able to evidence progress in learning is something that Andrew and Peter, the school Impact Coaches, have been exploring with staff over several

years. Angela laughs when she thinks of Andrew's inevitable question to new staff and the predictability of their green responses, including her own on her arrival. His question, 'How do you know that they've learnt?' is highly revealing. Equipping teachers to answer that question of impact lies at the heart of the QHS journey.

As Jenny, a Head Teacher and PDHPE teacher, frankly admits:

“The most important aspect is getting an assessment of what's actually happening. You can think that you're doing a great job, but the data says otherwise and really reflecting on that and moving forward is really important.”

Ian, the Principal, is encouraging of professional discussions which focus on students as learners and the part that individual staff play in that learning - sharing the what and the how of impact:

“People are really starting to delve into understanding their impact on learners and how that is happening.”

In the spirit of 'no hiding', teachers are encouraged to be honest in their professional self-appraisal. While it's hard to imagine her being anything other than an enthusiastic and effective teacher, Liz regrets that her students of the past 30 years didn't have the benefit of her newfound knowledge.

“I get really upset when I look back at the students I was teaching 10, 12 years ago and I think how basic my teaching was and how much better I could have approached things now with the knowledge that I have.”

Liz's honest, albeit overly harsh, self-analysis is symptomatic of a culture that puts a high price on professional growth and on pedagogy that demonstrably results in student learning. The change for Liz has been 'liberating':

"The kids are very good now because they understand how to learn but it's also my understanding about how much they're learning and how effective my teaching is with their learning, and then both sides being able to articulate that. It's not just the what you're teaching, it's the how you're teaching and why you're teaching it."

As a former student of the school, (and ex-student of Liz), Jenny recognises the transition that has taken place and the way in which people like Liz have embraced the change.

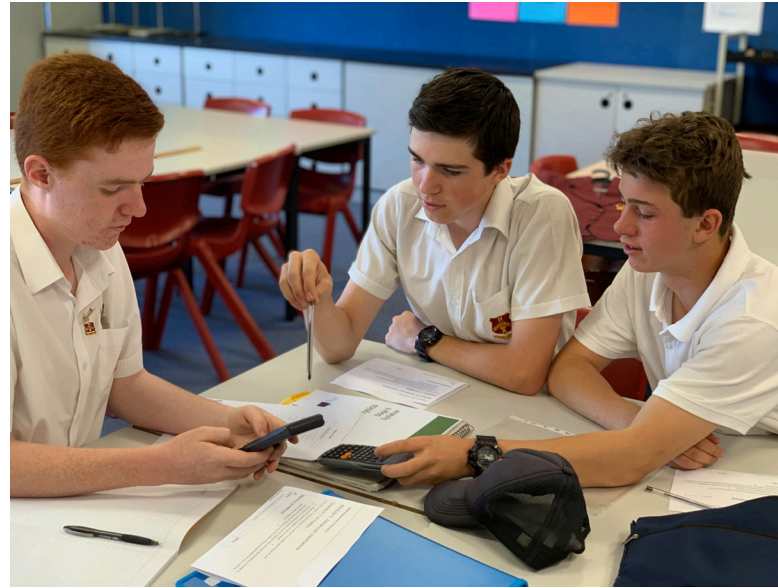
"It's completely different to the way we grew up with teaching and learning and our understanding of that. It's about teachers being more accountable for how they are introducing their teaching. And kids should be able to transfer their skills from one subject to another."

Luke is a Year 11 student who recognises the changed pedagogy across the school and explains the difference from his Year 7 days:

"The overall way a teacher has come to teach a student has changed because it's not about the teacher just teaching you the content. It's more about them knowing where you're at with the content and how you understand it."

Lilly, another Year 11 student, agrees and says that while teachers used to teach to the whole class, now it's more individualised. Knowledge of subject is a given, but what's become central for teachers is knowledge of their students and personalised knowledge of each student's learning. And the students are in on the deal – no hiding here.

But it's not all about teachers' changed practice. As Year 11 student Tom observes, there are more opportunities now. But the dramatic shift has been in the transfer to the student of understandings of learning and responsibility for learning. Also in Year 11, Kelsey says that instead of past practices of learning by rote, it's now about understanding the processes that go into learning. Metacognitive processes of thinking about thinking, as Luke puts it. And as for accepting responsibility, when asked what could have been better in their previous school experience, Luke confesses:



"I feel like if I could make personal adjustments in the way I dealt with certain things, then yeah, I would have changed that."

For the students too, no hiding.

The concept of Key Learning Area (KLA) based collegial practice is integral to the QHS approach. The combined English and Creative and Performing Arts KLAs, for example, have set their focus on feedback, in the belief that it's a powerful means to help students improve and take ownership of performance. Janelle is the KLA Head Teacher whose colleagues recently engaged in a rich conversation about moving kids towards self-regulation.

"At our last meeting 8 people were here, all talking about what we wanted to do. They're trying to work out whether they want the feedback for our next Impact Cycle to be on how they give feedback or the quality and type of feedback they give or even what the students are doing with the feedback. There were so many questions and multiple ways to investigate our teaching practice. It was a really good discussion from passionate teachers. They were very comfortable talking about their teaching and sharing their experiences with each other."

With her faculty, 'Tash, the Technology and Applied Studies Head Teacher, is gathering Stage 5 data that taps student perceptions and feelings about teacher practice. She's formed a student target group



representative of Stage 5 classes to help inform the process and optimise student voice. Student survey responses will be used for teacher reflective analysis, and to guide interventions, whether at an individual and/or faculty level. It's clearly upping the ante on transparency and teacher responsiveness.

Whereas a catchcry can sometimes be that new ways are add-ons that impose on teachers' time and distract them from core business, 'Tash, challenges such thinking. She believes the school's direction and professional development are not only entirely consistent with regulatory frameworks, such as the National Curriculum and Australian Teaching Standards, but enriches their implementation. *"What's been great is showing the staff how all our new curricula are so well-linked to the learning goals and the language of Visible Learning; so well woven into that. So, they're realising that it's not extra or a new thing that we've been told to do. It's embedded."*

Afterall, she says,

"Standards 3, 4 and 5 are about classroom and all about teaching and when you think 3 of the 7 Standards are related directly to the teaching, then how is this not a part of that process? And they can evidence that for their proficiency, for their maintenance, through the cycles."

A theme at QHS is the significance of common purpose and understanding, as demonstrated and enabled through a shared language of learning. This notion extends beyond school boundaries to the parent and local community. As one of two Community Liaison Officers, Sally is totally committed to immersing parents in the school's vision for learning and bringing them along on the journey. *"When the kids go home and they're using this language and talking about what they're experiencing, the parents are aware of it and can assist them. So, everyone is on the same page. Now the community is using that language and those wordings and that terminology to promote the school, which is a whole side effect that might not have been expected."*

So, let's review some of the enablers that have brought Quirindi High School to this stage of their learning journey. They tick many of the boxes for effective school change:

- » Clarity of school vision
- » Aspiration for the types of learners they are developing
- » An unequivocal focus on student progress
- » A shared language of learning across the school community

- » Student voice informing teacher practice
- » High quality and continuous professional learning
- » School structures that support transformation
- » An emphasis on reflective practice and teachers as learners
- » The development of learners responsible for their own learning
- » Errors as an impetus for learning
- » Explicit instruction and quality feedback
- » Inquiry-based teaching and learning
- » Parents and community as partners in the change process

Seems a healthy report card indicative of ongoing success, doesn't it?

At the time of writing, despite the Liverpool Plains being in deep drought and desperately awaiting relieving rains, Quirindi High offers a rich and fertile environment in which students and their teachers learn and grow. As with any learning, they still have a way to go but their confidence, optimism and commitment should see them continue to flourish.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We would like to thank Dr. Pam Ryan for collaborating with Quirindi High School and writing this case study.

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Three-Year School Impact Model Instance (can be customised for each school)

YEAR 1		YEAR 2		YEAR 3	
Delivery Options		Delivery Options		Delivery Options	
Foundations of Visible Learning (whole staff)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Impact Series: e.g. Making Learning Visible: Learning Intentions and Success Criteria (whole staff)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Impact Series or Foundation Series: e.g. Visible Learning into Action for Teachers (VLAT)1 (whole staff) (2-3months before VLAT Day 2)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C
Evidence into Action 1 (school leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Impact Coach 2 (impact coaches/ instructional leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC	Impact Coach 3 (impact coaches/ instructional leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC
Impact Coach 1 (impact coaches/ instructional leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC	Evidence into Action 3 (school leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Leadership into Action (school leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC
Evidence into Action 2 (school leaders)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Impact Series: e.g. How Students Learn or SOLO Taxonomy or Feedback That Makes Learning Visible (whole staff)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Impact Series or Foundation Series: e.g. Visible Learning into Action for Teachers (VLAT) 2	✓ F2F ✓ SVC
Impact Series: e.g. Developing Visible Learners (whole staff)	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Evaluation: School Capability Assessment- school visit Time 2	✓ F2F ✓ SVC	Evaluation: School Capability Assessment- school visit Time 3	✓ F2F ✓ SVC
Evaluation: School Capability Assessment- school visit Time 1	✓ F2F ✓ SVC ✓ A6C	Mindframe Survey Time 2	Virtual link	Mindframe Survey Time 3	Virtual link
Mindframe Survey Time 1	Virtual link				

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+ 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

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