

# Blue Haven Public School: Evidence-based practice case study

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Between 2016 and 2018, Blue Haven demonstrated rapid and substantial growth in student academic performance in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Analysis of value-added data shows that in 2016, the school was in the bottom 10% of schools in the state for value-added and in 2018, it was in the top 10%. Blue Haven has participated in the Early Action for Success, Bump it Up and tailored support programs. The work underway at the school aligns strongly with the department's strategic plan. The Blue Haven case study examines those aspects of practice that the school believes have been most influential in the rapid and substantial growth in student academic performance in the past three years.

## Strong leadership with an instructional focus, and a clear vision

- Blue Haven has a tiered leadership model. The **senior executive** consists of the principal and deputy principals. It is responsible for promoting a positive school culture and leading teaching and learning, professional development and wellbeing. The **executive** includes the assistant principals, who work closely with Stage teachers, using data to analyse student progress. An **aspiring executive** is made up of teachers who are looking to lead in the future.
- The school vision 2018-2020 was created in consultation with the school community: **'To be a high performing school with a positive and inclusive school culture that promotes the wellbeing and success of all.'**



## Evidence-based practice

- Blue Haven has a signature pedagogy of explicit instruction – an approach that is characterised by carefully planned and sequenced lessons; clear and detailed instructions and modelling; and frequent and systematic monitoring of student progress and feedback to students.
- The signature pedagogy is implemented from K-6 and across all key learning areas, but with a particular focus on English and maths. It underpins teaching and learning practices in both the academic and wellbeing spheres.
- Synthetic phonics and ongoing formative assessment are key elements of the school's pedagogy, and practices derived from cognitive load theory are also embedded in teaching and learning programs.
- A whole-school approach has been key to the school's success with their pedagogy. Intensive, ongoing professional development and support for teachers have also played an important role.
- Blue Haven continuously evaluates the effectiveness of its programs and practices, and adapts or replaces them as new data is received. Data is driving change at the school as teachers adjust their approach to keep pace with student learning.

## Partnering with parents and the community

- Good communication with parents and carers is a priority, and the school makes use of multiple platforms to share information.
- The leadership team makes a point of being highly visible and accessible to families. Members of the team stand at the front of the school each morning and greet students as they arrive, opening car doors and giving high-fives as students enter the school.
- Building strong partnerships with local service providers and businesses is a priority. In 2017, the school vision was created in consultation with members of the school and local community. In 2018, local service providers and businesses participated in a community expo hosted at the school. The expo strengthened the connections between staff, parents and the local community.

## Clear and consistent practices and structures

- A variety of clear and consistent practices and structures has been put in place to support teaching and learning in both the academic and wellbeing spheres.
- A range of staff meetings operate each term. **Weekly whole-school** staff meetings focus on developing teaching practice. **Fortnightly Stage** meetings focus on issues relevant to the particular Stage at the time. On **alternate fortnights, professional learning community** meetings focus on an area of identified need in the school and how it can be addressed. **Twice-a-term (Weeks 5 and 10) half-day Stage** meetings focus on analysing student data and monitoring growth, identifying what is working and what isn't, and planning for the next five weeks.
- The Earlybirds literacy and numeracy support program operates for half an hour before school each morning for students in need of, or interested in, further support in literacy and numeracy.
- Donny's Diner breakfast club operates before school each morning and is open to all students.
- All Kindergarten students are screened by speech and occupational therapists on entry to school.
- A majority of teachers have been taken off roving duties at recess and lunch and put in charge of running activities for students. These include touch football, handball and quiet indoor activities. Teachers participate with students and model appropriate behaviour. Students who have difficulty participating appropriately receive extra support via a small group program.
- Students who need more intensive teaching to interact appropriately with others take part in social groups of four to eight students each, which operate on a withdrawal basis.
- Blue Haven's behaviour management plan includes a progressive series of consequences for positive and inappropriate behaviours. More serious inappropriate behaviours result in time in the school's 'planning room' the following day. Recess sessions focus on relaxation and emotional regulation strategies and lunchtime is dedicated to a restorative justice session.

## A focus on staff professional learning

- Blue Haven places a major focus on, and invests heavily in staff professional learning.
- All teachers receive a lot of training in the school's pedagogy and approaches, particularly from the instructional leaders and deputy principal wellbeing. New practices are introduced via a well-established process: demonstration by members of the leadership team, team teaching in the classroom, observations, regular conversations, feedback and adjustments. At the end of five weeks, teachers discuss how the new practice is progressing and consider next steps.
- Annual performance and development processes have been separated from staff coaching so that teachers won't feel anxious about inviting observers into their classroom.
- Staff are encouraged to engage in professional reading and seek out opportunities for growth. Blue Haven does not invest in one-off events for a single staff member. Any professional development must be consistent with the school's pedagogy and priorities and staff with mentoring capability will often participate together with staff who would benefit from mentoring.

## A strong school culture

- No single program, practice or structure has been responsible for the school's rapid and substantial growth. Rather, it has been the result of all the programs, practices and structures combined.
- Principal Paul McDermott stresses the importance of school culture. At Blue Haven, the culture includes high expectations of students, staff and the leadership team; trust and respect between all members of the school community; a hardworking and highly cohesive teaching staff with a willingness to share and grow together; and a spirit of fun. Staff at Blue Haven are also very willing to share their time, knowledge and resources with others outside the school.
- While the school stresses that they are still in the early stage of their journey, with much work left to do, they are confident in their approach and looking forward to the journey ahead.

