

Latrobe Primary School, Tasmania

A Case Study
for the National
strategy to address
the abuse of
teachers, school
leaders and other
school staff.

Latrobe Primary school is a regional government school located in Latrobe, Tasmania. With a total enrolment of 334 students, and 34 teaching staff, Latrobe is committed to achieving the best possible student learning outcomes, and increasing teacher effectiveness.

Latrobe endeavours to celebrate the uniqueness of its school community by providing opportunities for all and strives for a culture that acknowledges that *“the journey towards high achievement is often paved with test and try, calculated risk taking, learning from mistakes, resilience, flexibility and adaptability”*.

Parents/carers as partners in education

Even after a child enters the school environment, parents/carers continue to be the most important adult influences in their lives. Positive relationships between parents/carers and school staff benefits not only their children's academic and socioemotional development, but also has positive outcomes for teachers, parents/carers, and the wider community.

Through increased parental involvement in schools, school staff can gain a deeper understanding of the sociocultural context of the school community. This allows teachers to gain a greater understanding of their students and establish the events that their students may encounter outside of their schools which may have an impact on their learning¹. This knowledge base is likely to lead to an improved sense of self efficacy among teachers, and more effective classroom management strategies.

In acknowledgement of this, Latrobe uses evidence-based strategies to engage parents/carers/carers as partners in learning.

Communication

Many educators acknowledge that targeted outreach to parents/carers can make a significant difference to students. However, in some schools, teacher-parent communication can be infrequent, unsystematic, and not adequately supported. Teachers can face a range of obstacles in attempting to communicate with parents/carers. Without formal expectations combined with sufficient time and the necessary communication infrastructure, teachers may often take a more passive approach to communication as their attention is consumed by other tasks.

To support addressing this, Latrobe strives to provide families with timely and succinct information about their child's learning progress which is accessible and free of jargon. For example, the introduction of a Student Engagement rubric (Prep-6) has enabled Latrobe to communicate with families early in the school year, in a systematic manner about their child's engagement, and provide transparency about wellbeing and connection to purposeful learning.

Research suggests that cultural dissonance or parents/carers own negative experiences with schooling can be at the heart of the issue of what factors influence parental involvement. Many teachers do not always feel adequately prepared to work with parents/carers or know how to best utilise them as allies in supporting the growth and development of students. Therefore, schools benefit from having proactive and considered strategies to promote parental involvement.

Establishing reciprocal respectful relationships, and clarity about communication channels at Latrobe is supported by a commitment to being transparent around the core purpose of the school, which is learning and wellbeing. Working to shift the school's culture to a learning culture has encouraged all staff to think about how best to consider things from parent/carer points of view, communicate with parents/carers in a way they can understand, and be willing and able to evidence of how their students are achieving or where they may need additional support outside of the classroom, in a professional, timely and systematic manner.

Modelling positive behaviour

Engaging parents/carers as partners in education provides an opportunity to model positive behaviour. When working to overcome challenges with parents/carers, teachers and school leaders at Latrobe remain conscious of the value of demonstrating to students how adults can sit together and calmly have conversations in order to reach a resolution, with the goal of establishing a cultural norm of respectful communication, emotional regulation and social cohesion.

Social emotional learning

Social emotional learning (SEL) programs foster young people's social, emotional and relational wellbeing, and provide learning activities that help students to develop knowledge and skills to understand, manage and communicate their own emotions and to feel and show empathy for others. SEL can also help students learn the competencies and skills they need to build resilience and manage setbacks and conflict.

Primary and secondary schools students involved in school-wide SEL learning programs have shown improved academic attainment, improved social and emotional competencies, reduced rates of depression, along with reductions in antisocial behaviours and gender-based bullying³.

Traditionally, social emotional learning primarily involves students and educators, but as with academic learning, social emotional development does not stop at the end of the school day. Engaging parents/carers and enlisting them as partners in their children's learning increases the chances that they will actively reinforce these ideas and learnings at home.

Social-emotional learning at Latrobe Primary School

Latrobe Primary School has implemented specific social emotional learning programs which include Zones of Regulation, incorporating Size of Problem.

The Zones of Regulation framework and a curriculum being trialled by LPS wellbeing teachers scaffolds students' skills to build awareness of their feelings and to utilise a variety of tools and strategies for regulation, prosocial skills, self-care and overall wellness.

Rooted in cognitive behavioural therapy, this approach uses four colours to help students identify how they are feeling in the moment given their emotions and level of alertness as well as guide them to strategies to support regulation.

Tools and strategies include mindfulness, sensory integration, movement and healthy connection with others².

Latrobe acknowledges the importance of developing a shared understanding and common language regarding this work with parents/carers, students, and community members, which is instrumental to ensuring that learning is not just established but embedded in practice.

Aspirations for the future

The leadership and teaching staff are aiming for Latrobe to be a school where:

- Students and staff are thriving and flourishing, not simply surviving.
- Staff are adept at choosing strategies that promote mindfulness, resilience, and gratitude in response to challenges and setbacks.
- Empathy, compassion, contentment, kindness, and optimism, replace a pursuit of happiness.