Identifying a need

Although Richardson Primary School prided itself on a firm focus around improving student outcomes, the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) data in 2012 showed that student achievement was below benchmark in all areas. The leadership team looked at high-performing schools with similar demographics to identify the foundations of their success. What they found was a strong focus on student writing, feedback and engagement.

School leadership identified feedback and collaborative learning as two key areas to explore at Richardson Primary School. They formed two working groups to review the research on each focus and to determine how it could work within their context. The cooperative learning working group sought to understand how this could be used to support the school’s learning culture, particularly student engagement in learning.

Feedback should be creating a cognitive response not an emotional reaction. That’s what we want the feedback to do.

Mitch Bartholomew, Executive Teacher
Implementation narrative

The feedback working group looked at setting specific learning targets, developing student understanding about what they were learning and why, and how to move learning forward. Through a process of reviewing research on effective feedback and formative assessment, the work of Dylan Wiliam became the focus of their work. Group members identified some classroom strategies, trialled them with their students, and then came back together to discuss outcomes and effectiveness. They kept journals, observed each other’s practice and collected student work samples to inform collaborative discussions about their progress.

The working group developed several recommendations about implementing feedback based on the research and the strategies they trialled. These were shared at staff meetings and progressed by the leadership team.

The leadership team formed its own professional learning team to develop their understanding of the research underpinning feedback and explored ways to support teachers to implement it, using texts such as Leadership for teacher learning by Dylan Wiliam and Advancing formative assessment in every classroom by Moss and Brockhart.

The leadership team identified what was needed to enable all staff to be involved, such as professional learning to build knowledge and skills in feedback, and time to undertake the work.
Agreement gradients were an important tool used to secure staff buy-in and they shaped how feedback would look at Richardson Primary School. Before implementing new practices the staff were asked about their level of agreement using a scale with:

- disagree and cannot support
- disagree can support
- mixed feelings
- agree with a reservation
- fully endorse.

Before any practices were implemented, the leadership team secured agreement to trial them.

Richardson Primary School produced a scoreboard to monitor the changes in teaching practice. Developing the scoreboard was a highly collaborative task; many staff meetings over several months had been dedicated to unpacking and shaping the statements that appeared on the scoreboard. Each of the statements comprises about 10-15 things to look for in the classroom.

Staff saw developing and using the scoreboard as an extremely valuable professional learning activity, as it meant exploring and understanding feedback practices and how they translated to the classroom at the different year levels.

When agreed and implemented, the scoreboard held teachers and school leaders to account on the agreed practices. In walk-throughs and classroom observations they looked for the practices detailed on the scoreboard. This scoreboard data was regularly shared with staff to inform discussions about how the implementation of feedback was going and where they could improve. The data allowed staff to examine questions such as, “Why is peer and self-assessment low in the middle session?”

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**KEY FEEDBACK PRACTICES**

**Learning intentions and success criteria** are shared at the start of each lesson. The success criteria is differentiated for students whereas the learning intentions are applicable to the whole class. Feedback is connected to this success criteria and linked to the learning in the classrooms.

**Building student capacity.** Students are explicitly taught the social skills connected to giving and receiving feedback, including building resilience and supporting students to have a cognitive rather than an emotional response to it. The school also places a focus on developing student skills in understanding the learning process and how to use the feedback they receive.

**Self and peer assessment.** Students review their own and each other’s work against success criteria. With peer feedback they provide both positive and constructive comments. Students are expected to act on peer feedback and to show how they have addressed feedback to their peers.

**Classroom techniques** include:
- C3B4ME – students seek feedback or support from three peers before they approach the teacher
- using pop sticks to randomly pick students to respond to questions, including an option for seeking support if they cannot respond
- questioning to understand where students are in relation to the learning intentions. Students respond in a range of ways such as verbally, using whiteboards or feedback tools such as Plickers
- exit passes at the end of a lesson for students to record something they have learnt.
It has to come from the staff and they’ve got to want to do it. And the staff buy-in here has been a huge part of this success.

Mitch Bartholomew, Executive Teacher