

Ferncourt Public School Annual Report



2017



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Introduction

The Annual Report for **2017** is provided to the community of **Ferncourt** as an account of the school's operations and achievements throughout the year.

It provides a detailed account of the progress the school has made to provide high quality educational opportunities for all students, as set out in the school plan. It outlines the findings from self-assessment that reflect the impact of key school strategies for improved learning and the benefit to all students from the expenditure of resources, including equity funding.

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School background

School vision statement

At Ferncourt Public School students, parents and teachers work together, sharing responsibility for learning and well-being in a nurturing environment where excellence, high achievement and creativity are fostered, and students inspired to achieve their best.

School context

Ferncourt Public School is located in South Murrumbidgee, alongside the Murrumbidgee River. Its heritage buildings have sweeping views across the city and out to Botany Bay. The school has approximately 440 students. We have a dedicated staff with a range of experiences who value collaborative decision-making and staff participation. The school and community have high expectations of students and value the provision of a wide variety of learning opportunities – academic, social, sporting and in the performing and visual arts. Ferncourt focuses on creating a learning environment that is engaging for students whilst continuing to build the capacity of staff. Our goal is to continue to strengthen the culture of our school: one that is supportive, engaging and challenging for our students.

Self-assessment and school achievement

Self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework

This section of the Annual Report outlines the findings from self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework, school achievements and the next steps to be pursued.

This year, our school undertook self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework. The framework supports public schools throughout NSW in the pursuit of excellence by providing a clear description of high quality practice across the three domains of Learning, Teaching and Leading.

Learning

In the area of Learning, our focus has centred around learning culture, well-being, curriculum and learning, and assessment and reporting. We continue to refine planning and programming to reflect quality teaching and professional practice across the school, providing opportunities for all students to work to and beyond their developmental potential. Our commitment to the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) and the PAVE Programs has provided scope for positive change around well-being, enabling students to learn in a supportive, structured and holistic environment.

Teaching

In the area of Teaching our focus has been on data skills and use, effective classroom practice, learning and development, and professional standards. Staff work collaboratively to interpret data around standardized tests and assessment (PLAN and NAPLAN). Staff undertake collaborative classroom observations and mentoring to ensure effective classroom practice is being achieved. Teachers work in a collaborative environment, reflect on their own practice and that of others, and implement strategies for success. We provide opportunities for staff to research and undertake extra-curricula university study.

Leading

In the area of Leading, focus was trained on the areas of leadership, resources and management practices and processes. We provided opportunities to teachers who aspire to school leadership and provided pathways for teachers to undertake professional learning in areas of expertise. Our strong and diverse school community presented opportunities for our staff and students to participate in a large array of experiences. Our partnerships with external bodies provided access and experiences relevant to our community. Our school is committed to providing resources and opportunities in keeping with the needs of our community. The school's management practices ensure that the school is resourced effectively and within the constraints of budget allocations. Our self-assessment process will assist the school to refine our school plan, leading to further improvements in the delivery of education to our students.

For more information about the School Excellence Framework:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability/sef-evidence-guide>

Strategic Direction 1

High quality educational practices and student achievement.

Purpose

To improve student learning outcomes through the development and delivery of consistent high quality teaching practice and the systematic implementation of the NSW Syllabus for the Australian curriculum.

Overall summary of progress

Planning and Assessment – The introduction of Focus on Reading (FOR) across the school was supported by three collaborative planning days throughout the year. Teachers new to FOR were supported and mentored by executive staff and teachers who had delivered the program as part of the initial uptake. Training, teaching and learning modules were completed to Phase 2. Also undertaken was a whole school approach to streamlining how we assess comprehension.

Data – Teacher professional learning conducted around writing and spelling further underpinned our commitment to success. Collection and analysis of data was crucial to these processes. The school developed a whole-school focus on the comprehension continuum to inform planning. PLAN data was entered from K–6 across the year. SMART (including NAPLAN) and AEDC data was collected and reviewed.

Learning support – Disability and Aboriginal student individual learning plans were completed. Early Stage 1 PLAN reports were completed. Teacher professional learning around speech therapy, boy's education and a PLAN parent information evening were completed. The Learning Support Team tracked report grades and measured student growth.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

Improvement measures (to be achieved over 3 years)	Funds Expended (Resources)	Progress achieved this year
Demonstrated growth in assessment in numeracy, literacy, PLAN, NAPLAN and Best Start.	\$21079.00	All teams reviewed 2016 milestones and set goals for 2017. In support of these goals staff created assessment tools in Reading, Comprehension, literacy and numeracy and collected and analysed data to ensure successful student performance and consistency.
Continued use of data as an effective tool for assessment across all facets of school business.		In 2017 rigorous data collection and analysis informed practice and assessment, and allowed for a high level of consistency and rigor across the whole school. Surveys and data collection informed the development and implementation of strategies crucial to meeting school milestones.
Ensuring learning support students continue to have access to support relevant to their individual needs.		Learning support students in 2017 were given access to a sizeable degree of initiatives and programs that supported needs relevant to the individual.

Next Steps

Planning and Assessing – In 2018 staff will review exit reading levels in Stage 1 and 2 and review writing performance across the school. The school will review best practice business intelligence data for literacy and numeracy. Teacher professional learning will take place around writing and spelling.

Data – Data collection will form the basis for a review of writing performance culminating in a whole school discussion around writing. A development stage focus for improvement in writing across genres for inclusion in individual PDPs.

Learning support – The learning support team will continue to track report grades and student growth for identified support students.

Strategic Direction 2

Quality relationships

Purpose

To improve the whole school organisational effectiveness in a positive school community. To improve students social and emotional well-being. To establish more effective partnerships with families and to foster social competencies.

Overall summary of progress

Student welfare and behaviour management – Sound, professional relationships within a school are contingent on all stakeholders belonging to the common cause. To achieve this the approach needs to be child-centred, holistic and relevant. The strategies and programs that allow this to happen at our school are clearly defined and able to reach all. The launch of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) and the implementation of SENTRAL has allowed the school to monitor behaviour with a view to working in a non-punitive and rewarding setting. PBL lessons are shown each week to all classes; describing in detail the types of expected behaviours required.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

Improvement measures (to be achieved over 3 years)	Funds Expended (Resources)	Progress achieved this year
Demonstrated commitment to enhancing student welfare practices and behaviour management strategies through PBL and TPL.	\$1289.00	Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) launch and surveys. New award system for students implemented. SENTRAL installation and training for teachers. Student welfare policy updated. Baseline data analysed for behavioural referrals.
Delivery of staff training around PAVE – Cool Kids and Friendly Schools. Emphasis on shared understanding of these programs within the whole school community		Emphasis on a whole-school approach to resilience, mental health and anti-bullying behaviours.
Delivery of communication through technology to meet the needs of the school community.		Continued pursuit of excellence in communication to meet the needs of stakeholders.

Next Steps

Student welfare and behaviour management – In 2018 the school will consolidate the strategic directions that are now in place, and embark on the next three years of strategic directions.

Strategic Direction 3

Fostering professional growth and leadership capacity

Purpose

To establish policies and practices to build leadership capacity for staff at all levels. To build stronger relationships as an educational community by leading and inspiring a culture of collaboration, engaged communication empowered leadership and organisational practices.

Overall summary of progress

Engaged communication – Ferncourt has met all of its term targets and annual milestones. All staff were consulted and trained for the implementation of the school's induction policy. Staff undertook teacher professional learning in the compulsory elements of the induction policy.

Teacher and Executive PDPs – Following the implementation of PDPs, supervisors undertook informal observation of teacher practice and provided feedback and support. Teacher professional development focused on goal setting and classroom observation, and the components of professional learning plans. Teachers were observed and given feedback on their practice. Supervisors completed observations in term 3 and provided feedback. Focus was made on differentiation within the classroom setting and in programming. A yearly review of PDPs was undertaken alongside professional teacher learning in strategies for effective learning of spelling.

Collaborative culture – The school undertook collaborative planning sessions throughout the year for forward planning, data analysis and a whole-school focus on literacy. Staff focused on consistent teacher judgment across stages to ensure clarity and transparency in reporting.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

Improvement measures (to be achieved over 3 years)	Funds Expended (Resources)	Progress achieved this year
Consolidation of engaged communication within the school. Maintaining lines of communication, transparency and best practice. Building stronger collaboration.	\$4000.00	A higher degree of engaged communication within the community. Survey and data collection to ensure transparency and best practice.
Review professional development policy and continue the implementation processes and practices.		Clear and concise structures that enable proper process and implementation.
Maintaining the collaborative culture via transparent communication and exemplars of best practice.		Collaboration, transparency of communication and meeting the desired needs of all stakeholders in a manner befitting best practice.

Next Steps

The school will continue to achieve milestones through vigorous maintenance of strategies. This will allow the school to steadily build structures that embed current practice whilst taking on new strategies.

Key Initiatives	Resources (annual)	Impact achieved this year
Aboriginal background loading	\$5998.00	Progress of students will be comparable to other students as measured by continuum data
English language proficiency	RAM STL allocation \$62833.00	Progress of EAL students will be comparable to other students as measured by continuum data
Low level adjustment for disability	\$19 537 to employ SLSO's	Progress of targeted students will be comparable to other students as measured by continuum data
Socio-economic background	2017 RAM allocation \$7887 \$6000.00	Progress of targeted students will be comparable to other students as measured by continuum data

Student information

Student enrolment profile

Students	Enrolments			
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Boys	214	226	238	232
Girls	215	206	202	207

Student attendance profile

School				
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017
K	96.9	96.9	96.2	96
1	96.8	96.1	95.8	96.2
2	95.4	95.5	96.8	95.6
3	95.4	94.9	96.6	96.3
4	95.9	93.9	95.8	96.2
5	96.5	95.9	96.2	94.9
6	97.2	94.7	96.2	93.8
All Years	96.3	95.5	96.3	95.7
State DoE				
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017
K	95.2	94.4	94.4	94.4
1	94.7	93.8	93.9	93.8
2	94.9	94	94.1	94
3	95	94.1	94.2	94.1
4	94.9	94	93.9	93.9
5	94.8	94	93.9	93.8
6	94.2	93.5	93.4	93.3
All Years	94.8	94	94	93.9

Management of non-attendance

Parents or caregivers of students who are absent from school are required to submit a letter outlining the nature of the absence. When an absence is unexplained, a letter is sent to the parent/caregiver requesting a reason for the absence. For prolonged, regular and unexplained absences the Home School Liaison Officer works with the school, student and student's family to remedy the situation. An attendance improvement plan is implemented in order to assist the student in achieving greater school attendance.

Workforce information

Workforce composition

Position	FTE*
Principal	1
Deputy Principal(s)	0
Assistant Principal(s)	4
Head Teacher(s)	0
Classroom Teacher(s)	15.88
Teacher of Reading Recovery	0.42
Learning & Support Teacher(s)	0.6
Teacher Librarian	1
Teacher of ESL	0.4
School Counsellor	0
School Administration & Support Staff	3.12
Other Positions	0

*Full Time Equivalent

The Australian Education Regulation, 2014 requires schools to report on Aboriginal composition of their workforce. In 2017 Ferncourt Public School did not have an Aboriginal Australian teacher in its workforce.

Teacher qualifications

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

Teacher qualifications

Qualifications	% of staff
Undergraduate degree or diploma	100
Postgraduate degree	0

Professional learning and teacher accreditation

All teaching staff at Ferncourt Public School participate in professional learning on a weekly basis. In 2017, key focus areas covered were the Performance and Development Framework, Focus on Reading (Literacy), Mandatory training (Child Protection, Emergency Care et al), Information Communication Technologies (ICT), Eight Ways for Learning (Aboriginal Education), Positive Behavior for Learning (PBL) and curriculum training and development.

Financial information (for schools fully deployed to SAP/SALM)

Financial summary

The information provided in the financial summary includes reporting from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017.

	2017 Actual (\$)
Opening Balance	69,829
Revenue	3,634,935
Appropriation	3,200,524
Sale of Goods and Services	6,656
Grants and Contributions	424,878
Gain and Loss	0
Other Revenue	0
Investment Income	2,877
Expenses	-3,500,094
Recurrent Expenses	-3,500,094
Employee Related	-3,019,161
Operating Expenses	-480,932
Capital Expenses	0
Employee Related	0
Operating Expenses	0
SURPLUS / DEFICIT FOR THE YEAR	134,841
Balance Carried Forward	204,669

	2017 Actual (\$)
Base Total	2,894,233
Base Per Capita	67,244
Base Location	0
Other Base	2,826,989
Equity Total	159,376
Equity Aboriginal	3,998
Equity Socio economic	7,538
Equity Language	62,833
Equity Disability	85,008
Targeted Total	57,782
Other Total	77,289
Grand Total	3,188,680

Figures presented in this report may be subject to rounding so may not reconcile exactly with the bottom line totals, which are calculated without any rounding.

A full copy of the school's financial statement is tabled at the annual general meetings of the parent and/or community groups. Further details concerning the statement can be obtained by contacting the school.

- The Finance Committee is the main financial body of the school. It has governance over all school policies. It consists of the Principal, Deputy Principals and School Administrative Manager. The Finance Committee plans the school budget with input from staff. Educational priorities for the coming year are assessed. The Principal is responsible for the budget and at the end of each year requests funding for school priorities. The school is financially supported by the many activities of the P&C. The P&C works in concert with the Finance Committee to enable expenditure outside of government funding.
- Voluntary school contributions are an integral component of Ferncourt's overall funding. Without voluntary contributions from our parent body, the school loses the capacity to adequately fund classroom resources, minor and major improvements and unexpected outlays arising from unforeseen events.

Financial summary equity funding

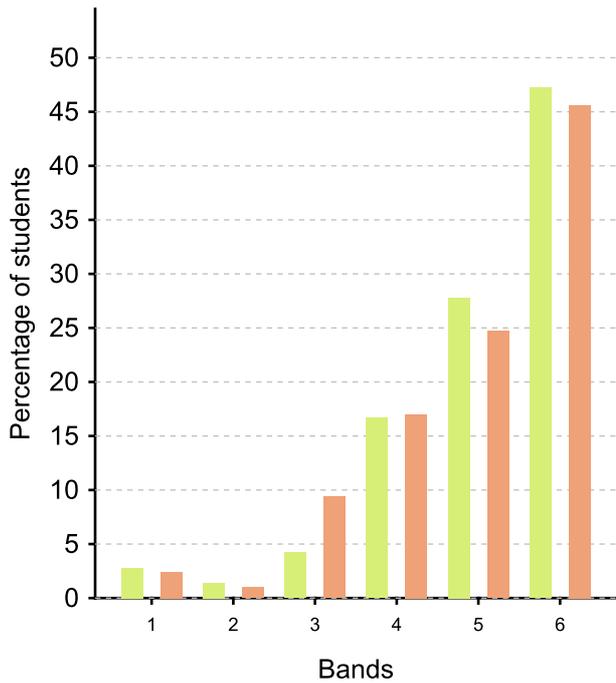
The equity funding data is the main component of the 'Appropriation' section of the financial summary above.

School performance

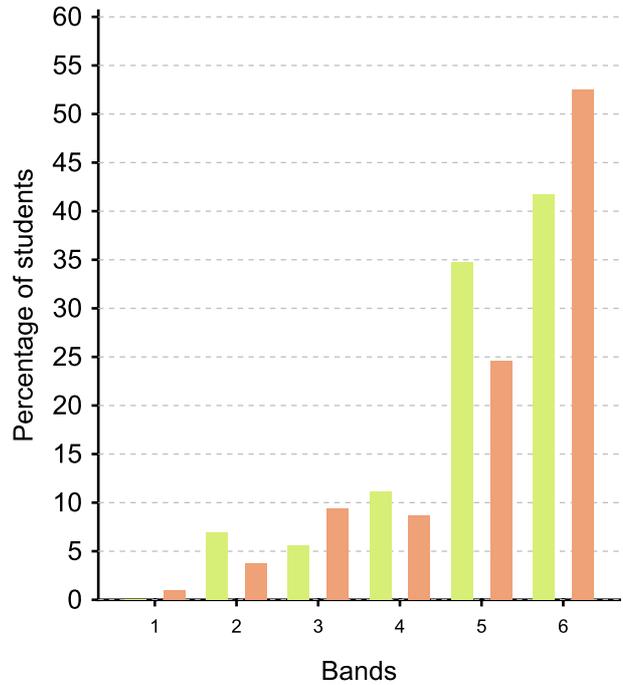
NAPLAN

In the National Assessment Program, the results across the Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 literacy and numeracy assessments are reported on a scale from Band 1 to Band 10. The achievement scale represents increasing levels of skills and understandings demonstrated in these assessments.

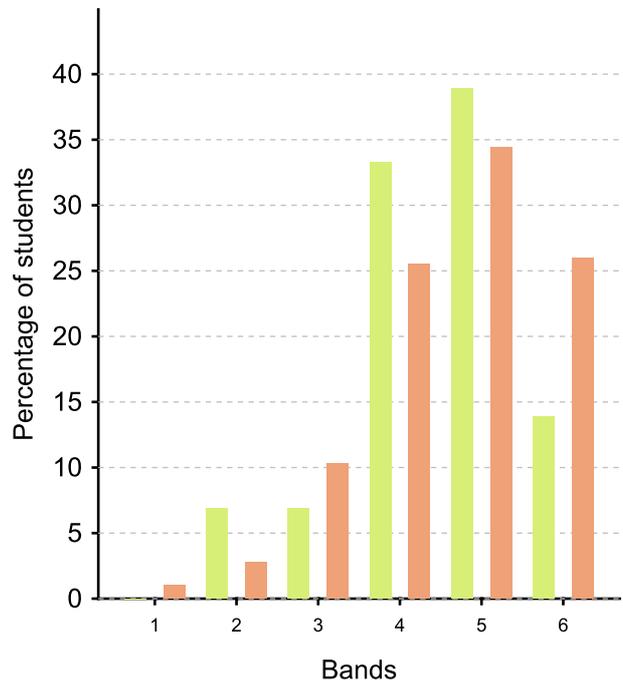
Percentage in bands:
Year 3 Grammar & Punctuation



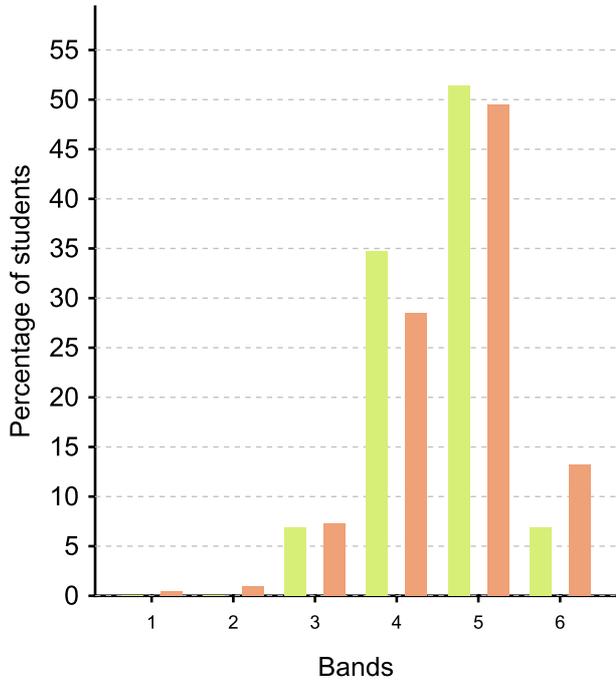
Percentage in bands:
Year 3 Reading



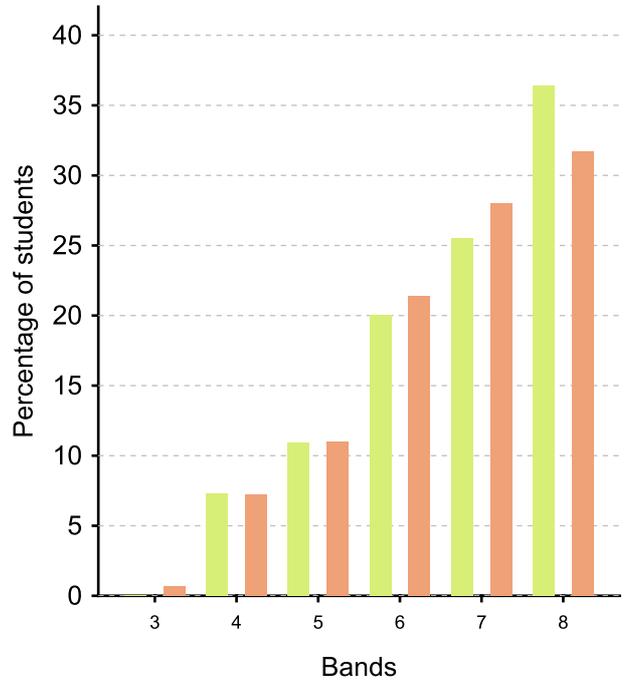
Percentage in bands:
Year 3 Spelling



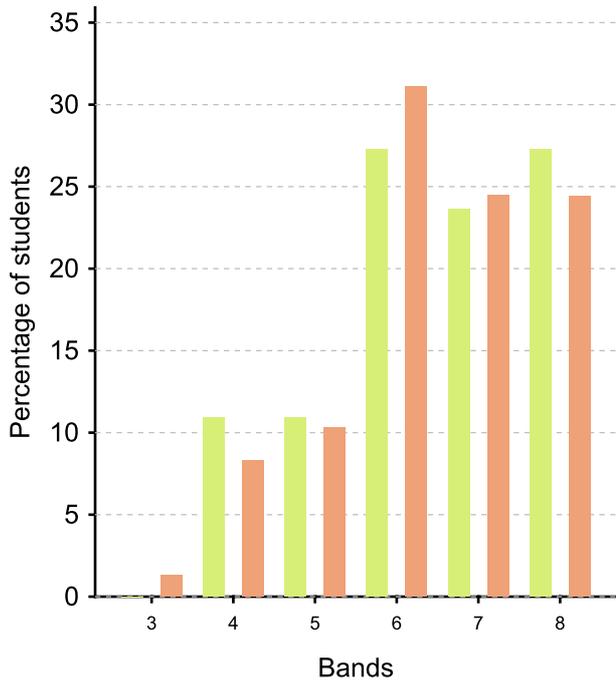
Percentage in bands:
Year 3 Writing



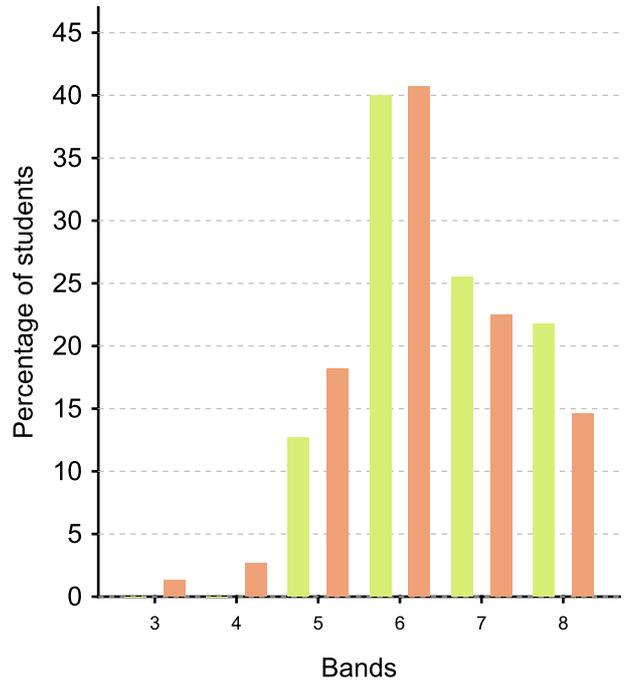
Percentage in bands:
Year 5 Reading



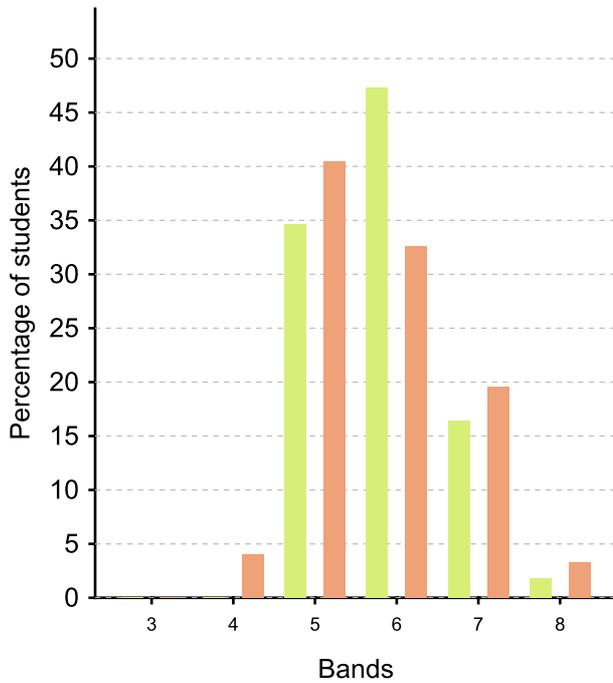
Percentage in bands:
Year 5 Grammar & Punctuation



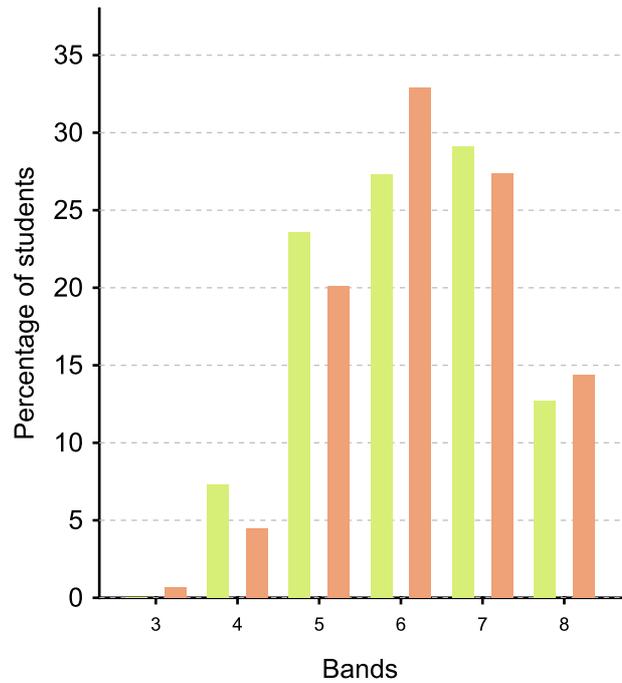
Percentage in bands:
Year 5 Spelling



Percentage in bands:
Year 5 Writing

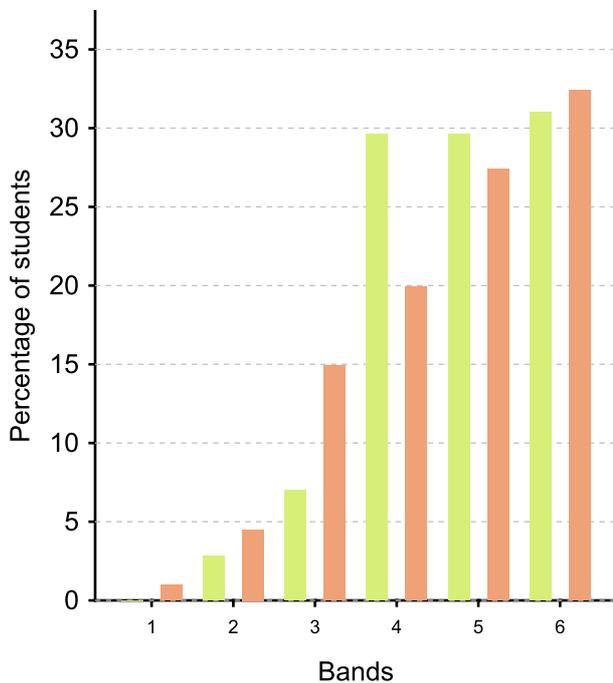


Percentage in bands:
Year 5 Numeracy



The My School website provides detailed information and data for national literacy and numeracy testing. Go to <http://www.myschool.edu.au> to access the school data.

Percentage in bands:
Year 3 Numeracy



Parent/caregiver, student, teacher satisfaction

In 2017 Ferncourt Public School participated in the Partners in Learning survey for parents, students and teachers. The Partners in Learning Survey is based on a comprehensive questionnaire covering several aspects of parents' perceptions of their children's experiences at home and school. It is based primarily on Joyce Epstein's framework for fostering positive relations between the school and the community. Successful schools foster greater communication with parents, encourage parental involvement in their child's schoolwork, and enlist parents to volunteer at the school and participate in school governance. The survey also provides feedback to schools about the extent to which parents feel the school supports learning and positive behaviour and promotes a safe and inclusive environment. The survey was completed by 37 parents/carers. Each survey is out of 10 or by percentages. (NB: NSW = NSW Gov Norm)

Parent survey – Partners in Learning (37 respondents).

Parents feel welcome – Ferncourt 6.8, NSW 7.4: highest response – I can easily speak with my child's teacher (7.8); lowest response – Parent activities are scheduled at times when I can attend (5.5)

Parents are informed – Ferncourt 5.9, NSW 6.6: highest response – If there were concerns with my child's behaviour at school, the teachers would inform me immediately (6.8); lowest response – I am informed about my child's social and emotional development (5.2)

Parents talked with a teacher about a child's learning or behaviour – of the 37 respondents, 27 per cent talked once to a teacher, 48 per cent talked two or three times to a teacher, and 23 per cent talked three or more times to a teacher.

Parents attended meetings (social or parent/carer/teacher meetings) – 16 per cent attended meetings once, 41 per cent attended two or three times, and 43 per cent attended more than three times.

Parents involved in school committees – 35 percent responded that they were on a committee, and 65 per cent responded they were not on a committee.

Parents support learning at home – Ferncourt 5.3, NSW 6.3: highest response – Talk with your child about feelings towards other children at school (6.0); lowest response – Talk about how important schoolwork is (4.6)

Time on homework (Student) – Distribution of the time children spend doing homework each day – five students did not complete homework, 27 students spent 18 minutes, ten spent 24 minutes, and four spent 48 minutes.

Time on homework (Parent) – Distribution of the time parents spend helping their children do homework each day – one child did not complete homework, 18 parents spent six minutes, 22 parents spent 18 minutes, three parents spent 24 minutes, and three parents spent 48 minutes.

Schools supporting learning – Ferncourt 6.8, NSW 7.3: highest response – My child is encouraged to do his or her best work (7.3); Teachers take account of my child's needs, abilities, and interests. (6.4)

School supports positive behaviour – Ferncourt 7.9, NSW 7.7: highest response – Teachers expect my child to pay attention in class (8.4); lowest response – Teachers maintain control of their classes (7.1)

Safety at School – Ferncourt 7.3, NSW 7.4: highest response – My child feels safe going to and from school (8.2); lowest response – Behaviour issues are dealt with in a timely manner (6.8)

Inclusive School – Ferncourt 6.4, NSW 6.7: highest response – School staff take an active role in making sure all students are included in school activities (6.4); lowest response – School staff create opportunities for students who are learning at a slower pace (5.9)

Parent Input – Has the school sought your input into, or opinions about: **School planning** – six parents; **Development or review of school policies** – three

parents; **Teaching practices** – 1 parent; **Curriculum (Key Learning Area) delivery** – 1 parent.

Specialist Assistance – The school was able to access specialist assistance for my child when needed: five per cent

School Voluntary Work – School sport 17 per cent; canteen 48 per cent; assisting the teachers or school in some other way 70 per cent; assisting the teacher in the classroom 26 per cent

Useful communication types at school – Telephone 55 per cent; school reports 40 per cent; informal meetings 38 per cent; formal interviews 29 per cent; emails 50 per cent.

Useful communication about school news – School newsletters 68 per cent; emails 56 per cent; social media 38 per cent; school website 15 per cent; and P&C 25 per cent

Educational Aspiration – Go to university 77 per cent; complete year 12 91 per cent; attend TAFE 24 per cent.

Teacher survey – Focus on Learning: A Planning Tool for School Communities

The Focus on Learning Survey is a self-evaluation tool for teachers and schools which is based on two complementary research paradigms. One is 'effective schools' research which has identified the most important correlates of student outcomes. The questions in the survey are grouped to assess eight of the most important Drivers of Student Learning. The research on classroom and school effectiveness has consistently shown these factors to be strong correlates of student achievement. The second paradigm, related to Dimensions of Classroom and School Practices, is based on the learning model followed by the Outward Bound program. This is hailed as an effective model of teaching as participants are presented with tangible, challenging goals; the training entails a series of activities that lead participants to achieving those goals in incremental steps; there is constant feedback from trainers and peers; and the staff help participants overcome personal obstacles such as fear or a lack of perseverance. The Outward Bound model is described in John Hattie's book, *Visible Learning* (Routledge, 2008), which builds upon Carl Bereiter's model of learning and the taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessment set out by Lorin Anderson, David Krathwohl and Benjamin Bloom.

Eight drivers of student learning

Leadership: Ferncourt 7.1, NSW 7.1 – highest response – School leaders have taken time to observe my teaching (8.3); lowest response – School leaders have provided me with useful feedback about my teaching (6.3)

Collaboration: Ferncourt 7.7, NSW 7.8 – highest response – I discuss learning problems of particular students with other teachers (8.8); lowest response – Other teachers have shared their learning goals for

students with me (6.2)

Learning culture: Ferncourt 8.0, NSW 8.0 – highest response – I set high expectations for student learning (9.2); lowest response – I talk with students about the barriers to learning (7.2)

Data informs practice: Ferncourt 7.8, NSW 7.8 – highest response – My assessments help me understand where students are having difficulty (8.8); lowest response – I provide examples of work that would receive an "A", a "B", or a "C" (or their equivalent) (6.5)

Teaching Strategies: Ferncourt 7.9, NSW 7.9 – highest response – When I present a new concept I try to link it to previously mastered skills and knowledge (8.9); lowest response – I help students set challenging learning goals (6.7)

Technology: Ferncourt 6.1, NSW 6.7 – highest response – Students have opportunities to use computers or other interactive technology for describing relationships among ideas or concepts (7.7), lowest response – Students use computers or other interactive technology to track progress towards their goals. (4.3)

Inclusive school: Ferncourt 8.5, NSW 8.2 – highest response – I establish clear expectations for classroom behaviour (9.2), lowest response – I make sure that students with special learning needs receive meaningful feedback on their work. (7.7)

Parent involvement: Ferncourt 6.8, NSW 6.8 – highest response – I work with parents to help solve problems interfering with their child's progress. (8.4), lowest response – I ask parents to review and comment on students' work. (3.7)

Four Dimensions of Classroom and School Practices

Challenging and visible goals: Ferncourt 7.1, NSW 7.5 – highest response – I set high expectations for student learning (9.2), lowest response – I work with students to identify a challenging learning goal relevant to the use of interactive technology (5.5)

Planned Learning Opportunities: Ferncourt 7.7, NSW 7.6 – highest response – I use results from formal assessment tasks to inform my lesson planning (8.7), lowest response – I use strategies to engage parents in their child's learning (6.5)

Quality Feedback: Ferncourt 7.3, NSW 7.3 – highest response – I am regularly available to help students with special learning needs (8.4), lowest response – I ask parents to review and comment on students' work (3.7)

Overcoming Obstacles to Learning: Ferncourt 7.8, NSW 7.7 – highest response – I discuss learning problems of particular students with other teachers (8.8), lowest response – Students use computers or other interactive technology to track progress towards their goals (4.3)

Undertook professional learning for supervisors – 40 per cent responded yes, 20 per cent responded no, and 40 per cent responded n/a

School leaders leading improvement and change – 13 per cent strongly agree, 60 per cent agree, and 27 per cent neither agree nor disagree

Communication of strategic vision – seven per cent strongly agree, 53 per cent agree, 13 per cent neither agree nor disagree, and 27 per cent disagree.

Student Survey – Student Engagement

Student engagement is 'a disposition towards learning, working with others, and functioning in a social institution' [1]. It includes students' sense of belonging at school, the extent to which they value schoolin goutcomes, and their psychological investment in learning. Measures of these aspects of engagement can be classified as social engagement, institutional engagement, and intellectual engagement. Engagement and learning go hand-in-hand: engagement begets learning and learning begets engagement. This dynamic and interactive process begins early – during the primary years or even earlier – and continues through to adulthood. Student engagement needs to be considered an important schooling outcome in its own right, sitting alongside academic achievement as a key measure of student success.

Key findings from the research

The average levels of the three types of engagement tend to be quite stable during the primary school years. However, student engagement declines steadily as students proceed through middle and secondary school.

At the primary level, teachers need to be aware of early signs of disengagement. Students who are prone to becoming disengaged tend to have a low sense of belonging at school, display poor social behaviours, and lack interest in their school work.

Students who are intellectually engaged are more likely to feel confident in their skills and challenged in their classes. Students who lack confidence in their skills are more than one-and-a-half times as likely to suffer anxiety problems during middle and secondary school[2].

Aboriginal students and students from low socio-economic families are less likely to be engaged at school. Immigrant students tend to be more engaged than non-immigrant students on measures of institutional and intellectual engagement, but this is not the case for measures of social engagement. Girls have slightly higher levels of engagement than boys.

Schools vary in their levels of engagement, even after taking account of the family background of students attending each school. Some of this variation is attributable to five 'drivers of student outcomes': quality instruction, teacher-student relations, classroom learning climate, expectations for success, and student

advocacy[3]. However, there is less variation among primary schools than among secondary schools.

Data from students can help school staff develop policies and practices that increase student engagement.

In Ferncourt Public School, 142 students completed the Tell Them From Me survey which included nine measures of student engagement alongside the five drivers of student outcomes. This report summarises the results.

A Framework for Assessing Student Engagement

The Tell Them From Me Primary School Survey includes nine measures of student engagement, categorised as social, institutional and intellectual engagement. For each aspect of engagement, students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements, such as 'I get along well with others at school.' Their scores were scaled on a 10–point scale, and students with scores above 6.0 (i.e., a mild to moderately favourable view) were considered engaged. Similar criteria were established for participation in sports and clubs and positive school behaviour.

Social Engagement

Students who are socially engaged are actively involved in the life of the school; their friends are there and they are involved in sports or other extra-curricular activities. This involvement can give them a sense of belonging at school and increase academic motivation[5]. Eighty–three per cent of Ferncourt students in the survey recorded 'a sense of belonging', as opposed to NSW Government Norm (NSW) 81 per cent; 93 per cent of Ferncourt students recorded participation in sport and clubs, while NSW recorded 89 per cent. Ferncourt students recorded 94 per cent for positive relationships, NSW recorded 85 per cent.

Institutional Engagement

Students who value schooling outcomes and meet the formal rules of schooling are considered institutionally engaged. These students feel that what they are learning at school is directly related to their long-term success, and this view is reflected in their classroom and school behaviour and their effort in doing homework. Levels of institutional engagement in Ferncourt Public School are 95 per cent for valuing school outcomes, 91 per cent for positive behavior and 49 per cent for homework. NSW records 96 per cent, 83 per cent and 63 per cent.

Intellectual engagement

Some students meet the institutional demands of school, but they are not truly engaged in their learning. Intellectual engagement entails a serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher-order thinking skills, to increase understanding, solve complex problems, and construct new knowledge[4]. Students are more engaged when their level of skills is consistent with the challenges presented to them in

their classes[5]. These students are often deeply absorbed in academic activities. Ferncourt Public School on the three measures of intellectual engagement. Interest and motivation 67 per cent, effort 92 per cent, and 96 per cent for high-quality instruction. NSW recorded 78 per cent, 88 per cent and 93 per cent.

Early signs of disengagement

A small percentage of students display signs of disengagement during the primary school years. Some of these children exhibit intense anxiety or other psychological problems, which is sometimes characterised as 'school phobia'[5]. For most children however, early disengagement is associated with learning and behavioural problems which are evident in kindergarten or even earlier. Early disengagement is also associated with family socio-economic factors, and some analysts attribute it to factors associated with living in poverty as well as parenting styles and levels of parental involvement in their children's education. However, the school's role is increasingly being recognised as important. A composite measure of student engagement derived from the nine Tell Them From Me measures of engagement can be used to discern the prevalence of students displaying early signs of disengagement. The prevalence of disengagement in Ferncourt Public School by year is as follows: Year 4 – five per cent, Year 5 – 12 per cent, and Year 6 – five per cent. NSW records disengagement at Year 4 – ten per cent, Year 5 – 11 per cent, and Year 6 – 12 per cent.

Equality of engagement outcomes

'Equality' refers to differences in social outcomes among sub-populations, such as differences between students from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds. A measure of socioeconomic status (SES) was derived from students' reports of educational and cultural possessions in the home. Students were classified into three equal groups, which are referred to as low, middle, and high SES. The extent of inequalities among these socioeconomic groups in Ferncourt Public School is as follows: Low SES 81 per cent, Mid SES 96 per cent, and High SES 95 per cent. NSW scored Low SES 81 per cent, Mid SES 91 per cent, and High SES 94 per cent.

Drivers of student engagement

Research by The Learning Bar found that there were considerable differences among schools in their levels of engagement and only some of this variation was attributable to students' family backgrounds. Five school-level factors were consistently related to student engagement: quality instruction, teacher–student relations, classroom learning climate, teacher expectations for success, and student advocacy. The ten–point scale for each factor for Ferncourt Public School compared with NSW Govt norms for students at the year level assessed in this school is shown below:

Quality instruction Ferncourt 8.1/NSW 8.2

Positive teacher student relations 8.4/8.4

Positive learning climate 7.0/7.2

Expectations for success 8.6/8.7

What schools can do

First and foremost, all students need an advocate – someone at school who consistently provides encouragement and to whom they can turn to for advice. School staff need to identify the students showing early signs of disengagement and regularly monitor their progress. Someone on staff needs to check in with each of these students regularly, in some cases every day. Improving student engagement cannot be seen as solely the role of support personnel, such as counsellors or psychologists; it needs to be viewed as a key role of classroom teachers. A substantial number of disengaged students have poor literacy skills. The majority of these students did not learn to read well during the first three years of primary school and by the fourth year they feel inadequate as learners at school. They need an intervention aimed at improving their basic reading and maths skills. Some of these students are disruptive in class and disrespectful with others. These students need short- and long-term plans for school success guided by school staff. Many students need help in developing positive friendships and resolving conflicts in constructive ways. A number of students who are disengaged suffer anxiety. The school can play a role in reducing anxiety by supporting programs designed to improve students' emotional resilience, by tackling issues concerning bullying and school safety, and by building effective family-school partnerships. These measures can dramatically improve levels of social and institutional engagement. Increasing the intellectual engagement of students is perhaps more difficult to achieve as it requires a marked change in classroom practice. Educators will need to challenge and alter some of the long-standing structural features of schools, such as teaching arrangements, approaches to instruction, school and class schedules, the ways students are grouped for instruction, and assessment strategies.

About this report

This report was prepared by Dr. J. Douglas Willms, President and CEO of The Learning Bar. It was based on data from 142 students in Ferncourt Public School that completed the Tell Them From Me student survey in 2017. Schools can print this report free of charge for use in staff meetings and professional development activities. It can also be reproduced for distribution to parents.

References can be cited by requesting a copy of the report, obtained from the school.

Policy requirements

Aboriginal education

Ferncourt provides support programs for Aboriginal &

Torres Strait Islander students on the basis of individual need, in addition to whole school programs relating to indigenous culture. A committee of parents and teachers meet periodically to support new initiatives and programs. These programs include but are not limited to:

- Individual and group learning programs in literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students
- Group and class programs focused on the teaching and learning of Indigenous perspectives and culture for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students
- The integration of Indigenous content and perspective across the curriculum in literacy, numeracy, science, geography, digital media, animation, film, documentaries and the visual arts
- The integration of Indigenous content and perspectives in sport and games
- Participation in extra-curricular programs for Indigenous students including Yarn-Up (a transition to secondary school program for developing skills in impromptu speaking, public speaking, debating and positive feedback), and informal and formal family get-togethers
- Pathways for Indigenous students to play extra-curricular team sports by way of scholarship
- Whole-school approach to learning about Indigenous Australian history and culture through the delivery of the curriculum, in addition to the celebration of NAIDOC week, Reconciliation week, Sorry Day and other relevant events throughout the year.

Multicultural and anti-racism education

Multicultural perspectives are integrated across the curriculum to ensure an inclusive school community and a racism-free learning and working environment. Ferncourt continues to support and celebrate the diversity of the Inner West through recognition and participation of culture at special occasions such as Harmony Day, NAIDOC week, Sorry Day, Reconciliation Day, White and Purple Ribbon day, Marrickville Festival and the Multicultural Perspectives Public Speaking competition.

Teachers, trained in English as a Second Language (ESL), continue to inspire and support students for whom English is a second language. Students are assisted both in the classroom and in small withdrawal groups.

The school's Anti-Racism Contact Officers, Bonnie Kay and Matthew Dowdell-McPherson, attend training and network meetings to assist in maintaining current knowledge of Anti-Racism policy. The role of the Anti-Racism Officer is to counsel students about racial behaviour when necessary, and to monitor and implement the school's anti-racism practices.