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1.0 Introduction

In this year, 2011, Werribee Primary School (WPS) is setting it’s strategic direction for the next four years, the 2011 – 2014 period. To assist this planning the school will evaluate it’s progress to date and plan a strategy that focuses on the school’s continued success in the areas of improving learning, engagement and wellbeing and successful transitions and pathways for our students.

School self-evaluation provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including students, parents and all staff, to reflect on student outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle. This includes examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes.


The School Council parents hosted a Parents forum in the school’s Learning Gallery from 6.30 to 8pm on 16th June 2011. Parents were notified of the event through the school’s newsletter, The Owl, on two occasions, a separate reminder flier, announcements across the PA system at school assembly and school pick-up time and notice boards at three of the school’s gates.

The forum was attended by 43 participants. The participants included the School council president and 42 Werribee primary school parents and carers of whom five were school council members and 24 from the Karen community.

The evening began with a presentation by the School council president, Phil Morley and Penny Hendricksen. The introduction included an introduction to the self-evaluation process, information about WPS; priority areas and objectives, programs to improve student learning and wellbeing and also methods for measuring success of the schools goals and some of the data resulting from this measurement. The group then formed smaller discussion groups which concluded with an informal supper though many of the participants preferred to have their supper at their discussion table to continue their discussion.

As there was only one translator available the Karen parents formed one discussion group and the remaining parents formed two smaller groups of about eight per table.

The main focus of discussion at the forum was “What can we do in the future to continue to improve?” While the discussion at the Forum was more general in nature and did not follow the questions provided in The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Step-by-Step Guide to the School Self-evaluation (http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/account/operate/saif2011/Step_by_Step_SSE_2011_FINAL.pdf) much of the feedback addresses some of these questions and so have been used as a structure for reporting purposes where appropriate.
All participants were appreciative of the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience with the school and offer suggestions to contribute to the development of a strategy for future success.

While not all feedback is directly relevant to the self-evaluation report it is worthy of consideration and further discussion and has therefore been captured in this report.

2.0 Feedback

2.1 Student learning

2.1.1 Learning communities

To what extent does the school encourage parents to be actively engaged in their child’s learning?

A number of parents, including those from the Karen group, expressed interest in sessions where they could find out how school works, what the daily timetable is, about specialist lessons such as art and phys ed. Parents commented on how useful they found the Maths information session during education week (and education week in general) and suggested more of these be held. It was also thought that while having experts in was useful, it would be useful having sessions led by teachers if funds prohibited more expert sessions.

Participants thought more parents needed more encouragement to join in. There were a number of discussions about parent help in the classroom and how this differs between classes. Some teachers were perceived to actively ask for help, others accept help that is offered, one parent had offered help and had this offer turned down and others knew of classes where parents had been specifically asked to help and had not agreed to help. It was suggested that there could be some non-compulsory training offered to parent helpers so they can feel more confident and they feel they “can do it!”. It was felt that if more parents were encouraged to help in classrooms teachers can get on with the real teaching.

Some parents felt that their input to teachers was not regarded as important or listened to. One parent commented that as teachers did not arrive at the class and allow admittance until 8.50am and class activity began straight away there was little opportunity to speak with teachers. 3/4 parents commented they were happy as they were able to speak to their teachers during FIT time.

One group of parents said they tried to be as involved in their children’s schooling as possible. They thought that as their children got older they became less informed about what was going on in the classroom and therefore weren’t as able to help their children at home. The parents wanted to be involved in the class not to judge the teacher but to understand the teaching approaches and methodology. The parents suggested a newsletter from the teacher at the start of each term advising parents of the terms plan and upcoming events.

Parents questioned if there was a homework policy as homework seems to be inconsistent. A number of parents thought that there was too much homework and that homework should be limited to the basics such as reading, maths and spelling or be a reinforcement of the work completed in class that day. Some thought the project homework put stress on families.
with both parents working or single parent families where the parent was working. Discussion was held about the professionalism of some of the projects suggesting parents did a lot of the work which other parents supported their children but they had to do the actual work themselves. One parent thought the project work was a good opportunity for the family to work together on the task and they had fun doing so.

There was discussion around the lack of consistency and requirements of homework between different classes in the same grades, for example 5/6. A parent thought the requirements were more consistent this year than last year and thought this was good. Several parents would like the teacher to check the reading log and show somehow they have done so and for parents to have to sign off homework so it gets done. One parent talked about a home-school communication book they had seen in another school that worked well. The book went home every night, even if it only listed that students needed to read and, for example bring their bathers. Notices were pasted in the book and parents notes to the teacher were also put in the book. The teacher signed it each day and the parent signed it each day to ensure consistent communication. Some parents thought a homework expectation sheet would be useful in assisting their students with their homework.

A lot of parents liked Mathletics in general and one commented on liking the ‘free’ Mathletics’ subscription. Another parent thought that teachers could utilise the option to set specific Mathletics tasks for homework more frequently.

Several parents commented on the school newsletter, The Owl. It was considered that the format made it difficult to scan for information and one parents said that while they scanned it regularly often the content was not information that was relevant or personal to them and their children. Several parents thought that it would be good to include a section listing all the notices that had been sent home that week and when they were due back, as a reminder if parents hadn’t seen the notes from their children.

**To what extent does the school use ICT and the Ultranet to communicate and collaborate with its community?**

There was an interest expressed in an Ultranet session for parents. They also thought that they might be able to have access to their student’s school resources through the Ultranet. Parents thought that the school website needed updating more regularly and could do with a new look. Ease of use, additional content, possibly interactive sites for Parent, student learning

**2.1.2 Accountability**

What aspects of our reporting and feedback to parents work well and what aspects do we need to improve?

There was a lot of discussion about communication between home and school. A parent talked about a system they had experienced in another school where each class had a volunteer parent who was the class delegate who ensured parents and carers were kept informed about information, events and issues as required. In the instance of the other school the parent delegate had the contact details of the parents for that class and also initiated some social contact out of school hours. It was felt this would help parents feel connected to the school. One parent thought that somehow ‘positive gossip’ needed to replace the usually negative gossip that takes place outside the classroom/gates by some parents at pick-up time and it was thought that the delegate idea might help to do this.
Another suggestion to ensure timely communication of notices and events was an ‘Information hub’. A large notice board that was easily accessible by parents before and after school which could include a calendar as well as copies of all notices.(possibly positioned at the main gateways, as parents commented on the effectiveness of the sandwich boards for advertising the Parents forum evening. Another suggestion was an email mailing list so parents could receive newsletters by email which would ensure they got home as well as save paper.

It was felt that more information was needed for parents about the school report and its contents. Some parents felt the new format was too general and did not provide information that was specific to their child.

Some of the parents expressed an interest in knowing how their children had performed in the assessments conducted at school rather than waiting to hear in reports or interviews. One parent was concerned her child has been placed into a program to address learning difficulties and the first she heard of it was from her child. She thought some kind of correspondence directly from the teacher would have been beneficial as she would have been able, understand why the child was in the session and additionally, to support her child’s learning at home.

### 2.1.3 Stimulating and secure learning environment

Parents thought that in general the school has a good feel to it and that teachers are positive and encouraging of their students. One parent thought that involvement on the junior council had led to improved behaviour by some students.

A number of parents reported that they felt comfortable approaching their children’s teachers. They felt the teachers are open and that they have good teacher-student relationships.

There were mixed comments about composite classes. A number of parents did not like them and one couldn’t see why WPS has them when other schools do not. One parent thought they were good for the lower grade of the two – so grades one, three and five in the case of WPS but not good for grades two, four and six. One parent thought that composites work well when teachers taught to the needs to the students. Other parents questioned whether the assessments undertaken in the class were the same for the different grades. Some parents also thought that the children from different grades should have different work.

**Are there particular aspects of our school’s environment that are less conducive to student learning? How have we responded to the challenges presented?**

Parents thought the improvement in the facilities has been fantastic. One parent likes the care that the teachers show – and thought this is reflected in the arrangement of their classrooms and classroom displays. One parent was disappointed there was not a school opening for the Gymnasium before the facility was opened to the public.

The issue of space per student was mentioned in the introduction. It was suggested that students could be allowed to play in the grass area in front of the office/art block.
What learning spaces and places in our school capitalise on the potential of ICT to drive powerful learning?

Disappointment was expressed in the cessation of the specialist ICT classes. Parents also thought that students should be taught programs that they will use in secondary school and in life such as Word, PowerPoint and Excel, not just participation in social networking activity.

Parents were also excited by the possibilities of the Ultranet and would like to know more about it suggesting an information session. They thought it would be useful, as homework could be set through the Ultranet and they could see what their children were doing in class and assist where required or even just discuss and take an interest. Some parents explained they already do this with Mathletics.

2.2 Student engagement and wellbeing

Parents thought the variety in programs provided for students is good, such as gardening. Another parent thought it would be good to extend this to programs they had heard of at another school, Thomas Chirnside, where they garden vegetables and then cook with them.

It was thought that children were given opportunities to take responsibility, such as when judging their peers projects, and leadership opportunities. Parents thought the buddy system worked well providing leadership opportunities for the older students and forming relationships between the younger and older students. The junior school council and the house captains also provided leadership opportunities. One parent liked the house captains getting their badges earlier this year. Another parent suggested the method used for the announcement of the house captains at the end of last year should be reconsidered. The three students who were not successful were left standing in front of everyone and some were clearly very disappointed and stressed and could not deal with this privately.

A parent who said this was his third school was extremely happy with how he was notified and how the positive reinforcement was used when his child had used inappropriate behaviour. He felt it was a positive experience which will improve his child’s behaviour. A number of parents with children who have English as a second language reported that their children picked up swearing from other children.

To what extent is there a planned, whole-school approach to supporting students who may be experiencing difficulties, including newly arrived students or those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

Participants from the Karen community said that their children felt confident and happy about coming to school. They were very positive about the homework club that is provided for students. They felt that as they were not conversant in English they could not provide sufficient support for their children’s learning. They expressed strong and unanimous interest in more spaces being made available at the homework club, for more days a week and for younger students to be allowed to attend. They also thought their children should be given more homework, and more reading and writing in school time, since they had further to catch up to the other children in their grades. They also felt that where children did not do well in tasks at school more practise tasks should be sent home.
A number of participants from the non-Karen groups commented on the acceptance of all students and thought this flowed into student attitudes and behaviour in that the students accepted all students from differing nationalities. One of these parents commented on the value of the ESL program and suggested it should be continued and extended. One parent thought that the ESL students could sometimes hold classes back as more literacy help was needed.

To what extent do students feel safe at this school?

In general, most of the parents said that their children felt safe at school. One parent reported that her daughter did not feel so safe coming to school. She had been in a class where another student had thrown an object and now felt scared. She said that the child would not say anything about this to her teacher as that is not something they would do in their culture.

2.3 Successful pathways and transitions

What are the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of student transitions in supporting students entering, through and exiting the school?

Parents discussed their experience when coming to the school as new parents. They felt the transition would have been easier if they had a better understanding of what was going on. Things are often spoken about as though people already know what they are and how they work. Examples include the book fair where one parent didn’t really know what it was until they went there (at another school they knew of book fairs where there was a chance to buy books personally but also for the school library and books were of a better quality) and prep assessments. One parent thought they would stay through the assessment and saw another parent turn up without the student thinking that the interview was only with the parent. The suggestion was made to explain everything as if it is new to everyone as new people are coming into the school all the time.

Prep parents also commented that they did not know that on their school visits from kindergarten they would not be allowed to stay in the classroom. One parent had placated their autistic son the night before telling him not to worry as dad would be with him on the first visit. When it turned out parents were not invited in at all the parent felt disappointed he had unknowingly misled his son.

Other parents thought that the transitions within the school were difficult for children. That the step from Prep to one, three to four and four to five was difficult as they went into classes with new students who were already familiar with the teacher and the way in which the class ran and as a result felt unconfident. It was commented that the “day in the life” at the end of the year was a positive step in the right direction for those going up to the next big level.

Parents would also like to be invited in to special days at school. The one ‘come and see school’ day on education week didn’t suit all people’s schedules and parents thought that more regular invitations to days where students share their work would be good. It was also thought if parents were invited to specifically see their child present something it might encourage parents to come.
One parent with a child in prep said her child was thoroughly enjoying his schooling. The teacher made learning exciting and the lessons were often game like and fun.

3.0 Other

3.1 Sport

Participants really liked the sporting activities that the school is involved in and also liked that everyone is encouraged to participate. One parent said that the cost of sport participation was sometimes too high and put stress on family finances.

One parent raised concerns that Aussie rules was a traditional game in Victoria and the development of the oval had left little opportunity to play.

A parent thought that the swimming lessons were good and would have liked these extended through vouchers for free lessons as they said another school provided once the school swimming lessons were complete.

Parents also raised their disappointment that at the Werribee District swimming carnival this year a lot of students missed out in representing the school because the number of events was halved.

Parents of children in 3/4 think the FIT sessions first thing each morning are a great idea, getting the kids active and ready for the day.

3.2 Parking

The double parking that occurs around the school at the beginning and end of school was raised as a safety concern.

3.3 Uniform

A parent said that the uniform was good; that his child enjoyed wearing it and that other students wore it well. It was also mentioned that it was good that while the ‘proper’ uniform was available through school it was good that students were allowed to wear cheaper versions purchased elsewhere. Participants also thought the school offering the second-hand uniform sales was good.

3.4 Working bees

Sunday was considered a difficult day for working bees by the Karen community as majority attend church which starts at 11am. They preferred the Friday evening time. They also expressed their appreciation for the barbeque that is provided after the working bee.
3.5 Fundraising

Some parents thought there needed to be more promotion around fund raising events. They also wanted the fundraising activities spread over the year more evenly than they had in the past.

Some of the Karen participants expressed an interest in being able to be involved in school community activities such as the Trivia Night but without the need to be involved in the actual Trivia quiz due to the language barrier. They would be interested in participating in the auctions and other activities.

3.6 Sex education

Parents discussed the need for their approval of what is covered before it is taught. They also thought teachers needed more specific guidelines on what to cover and what not to cover. For example they should be teaching the facts and not values and opinions. They also preferred the teacher to direct students to ask their parents if the questions were of a sexual nature. There was also the suggestion that maybe sex education not be taught as part of the curriculum and offered as an outside of school hours information session where parents were welcome to attend.

4.0 Feedback on the Parent’s Forum.

Five feedback forms were returned from participants of the forum. All participants who completed the forum found the forum worthwhile; thought the time was suitable and all except one thought the duration was appropriate. All thought the format of the meeting was useful and would come to another meeting - “Yes, to know more and to share my ideas to support school improvement”. All those who completed the feedback form wanted meeting like this twice a year. Two wanted them more frequently suggesting each term. People also appreciated the child-friendly time and the ability to be able to bring children along and have activities provided for them.