Southern Cross Program
Case Study

School Processes

Mt Eliza Primary School
Effective Meeting Schedules

School Description

A government school with 550 students, Mt Eliza Primary School is recognised as a highly effective school, committed to providing a safe and supportive learning environment for its community of learners. Academic achievement is highly valued in all curriculum areas, with a particularly strong focus on literacy and numeracy. The school’s programs are designed to cater for the individual needs of students. This includes extension, enrichment and learning support programs both within and beyond the classroom. Information Communication Technology (ICT) is integrated across all curriculum areas, providing stimulating learning and opportunities for globalisation of the classroom.

Project

After introducing Professional Learning Teams into the school in early 2012, Mt Eliza Primary School found that the school’s meeting schedules and distribution of information could be improved. ‘Some meetings were getting too caught up in housekeeping matters, such as, say, photocopying or booking buses for excursions, rather than concentrating on professional learning, teaching and learning and student data,’ explained Mt Eliza Primary School Principal Merilyn Haynes. ‘We weren’t getting to the nitty-gritty of issues.’

Process

Keen for staff buy-in to future changes about meeting schedules and distribution of information, Ms Haynes selected three teachers, none of them members of Mt Eliza Primary School’s leadership team, to join her in the Southern Cross training. ‘The four of us had different views about what to do but we all wanted a solution. I said everything is open for discussion.’

After learning new ways of process and performance management, the Mt Eliza Primary School team went back to staff and asked for their thoughts on meeting schedules and the like. ‘It was important that the information gathering and the meeting schedule should reflect the thoughts and needs of staff, as well as taking into account some non-negotiables from the leadership team. The final meeting schedule was very much developed by the staff.’

Results

Late in 2012, the school trialled whole-staff, twice-weekly briefings that were solely about housekeeping matters. ‘They are short and sharp meetings, some
for five minutes, none longer than 15 minutes,' said Ms Haynes. ‘And if there are no housekeeping items, there is no briefing.’

Ms Haynes said that except for those on duty, all staff attend the briefings. 'It's been really good for morale, as well as for imparting information.'

At the start of 2013, Mt Eliza Primary School began a four-week cycle of one-hour meetings for its various teams.

‘Staff love the fact that in these meetings they have time to work on teaching and learning, student data and professional learning. It means they can spread their wings.’

Mt Eliza Primary School has done away with its fortnightly, whole-staff meetings and now has just two, whole-staff meetings per term. ‘We’ve got rid of meetings that were just for the sake of having a meeting.

‘The new schedule of meetings is a vast improvement. The teams across the school now have a more direct focus. They know what they are meant to do and when. The teachers and team members work out the how.’

The Southern Cross training concluded with Ms Haynes and her colleagues giving a video presentation about what they had learnt over the four days. ‘It certainly made our thoughts gel, but it also meant that staff could later see what we had been doing for those days (apart from writing on a lot of butchers’ paper). They were long days, and you did a lot of thinking about issues.’

As well as valuing the nuts and bolts of the training, Ms Haynes and her colleagues really appreciated ‘the gift of time’ afforded by the offsite training. There were not the distractions of day-to-day school life and there was the added bonus of the four colleagues getting to know each other a little more during the daily drive together from Mt Eliza to the city – an hour each way.

Also at the training were three other schools, each addressing different issues. ‘There was a lot of friendly banter amongst the groups and the trainers. One school was addressing the topic of community engagement, an issue we had faced at Mt Eliza Primary School a few years ago.

‘Southern Cross is a terrific process,’ said Ms Haynes, who has been a Principal for eight years, the past four at Mt Eliza Primary School. ‘The training shows you there’s always a different way to do things.’