



Valuable Lessons

At the start of each month at Al-Taqwa College, dozens of primary school students crowd around a display board outside the office of Mrs Amal Assafiri, Student Welfare Coordinator Primary.

The students are clamouring to see if their name and photo are amongst the 37 students of the month awards – one award for each class. One month the awards may be for students who have shown the values of forgiveness and inclusion, the next month the awards may be about the values of honesty and trustworthiness, during another month, the focus may be on responsibility.

Parents, too, like to visit the display board and see if their children are amongst the smiling, beaming faces that feature on the award certificates.

The awards are part of the College's code of cooperation, introduced in 2011 following a review of student wellbeing.

'Each classroom teacher in the primary school was asked to work with the students and to come up with three class values, their meaning and their expected behaviour,' explained Mrs Assafiri. 'The agreed values were displayed in each classroom and the teachers, discipline leaders and coordinators refer to the values when discussing issues with the students.'

For example, if a child has pushed another child over in the playground, the yard duty teacher will ask them what such an action means in terms of the student's class's values. Is it showing respect? Is it showing care? Is it responsible? The victim, the student who has been pushed over, will be asked to show the value of forgiveness. The matter is often quickly resolved.

'We all make mistakes,' said Mrs Assafiri, 'and children are only children, after all. With the code of cooperation the students are now more aware of their behaviour – why it may be wrong and what to do about it.'

Al-Taqwa College being an Islamic school, the classroom values are linked to the words of the prophet Mohammad (PBUH)¹ and also to verses of the Quran. Regarding respect, for example, the Prophet says, 'He is not one of us who does not show tenderness to the young and who does not show respect to the elder'. Regarding honesty, a verse of the Quran says, 'Oh believers, have fear of Allah and stand with the truth'.

Al-Taqwa College is a Prep to Year 12 coeducational Islamic school in Truganina. It has approximately 900 primary students and 500 secondary students.

Challenge: To encourage students to take more responsibility for their behaviour.

Action: To develop a code of cooperation in the primary school, emphasising values.

Results: Many issues resolved quickly, students keen to win 'values' awards.

There has been a big change in the students' behaviour, attitude, maturity and language since we introduced the concept of code of cooperation. It has had a very positive impact on the school and its community.

– Mrs Amal Assafiri, Student Welfare Coordinator Primary



Under the code of cooperation, teachers often ask students to suggest their own consequence for a small misdemeanour. This means that Mrs Assafiri and other discipline leaders do not have students knocking on their doors throughout much of the day, giving Mrs Assafiri and her colleagues more time to dedicate to other school matters – such as the weekly ‘positive parent phone call’.

Each week, the discipline leaders call a parent of a student of each of the 37 primary school classes and give positive feedback about the child, emphasising values.

‘If a parent gets a call from school, they usually think their child is sick or in trouble,’ said Mrs Assafiri, ‘but our discipline leaders ring to say things like, “Your child is doing a fantastic job this week, showing great cooperation” or “Your child has been very respectful this week”. The calls are good for strengthening the relationship between parents and the school.’

The classroom values are also emphasised at the weekly school assemblies, where students may sing a song about a value, or perform a short role-play.

Such initiatives are new to Al-Taqwa College and new to Mrs Assafiri. ‘I had to change my own way of thinking about discipline. Before the code of cooperation, responding to discipline at the school was very much ‘action/re-action’. Now the students become responsible for their own behaviour and they can often negotiate the consequences of their actions.’

The creation of the code of cooperation included input from an Independent Schools Victoria SSNP Advisor, Craig Dunstan, who ran introductory professional learning sessions for 60 of Al-Taqwa College’s teachers.

‘The code of cooperation empowers teachers to resolve issues in the classroom, rather than sending problems to discipline leaders,’ said Mr Dunstan. ‘It also highlights positive behaviour. It’s been a real game-changer.’

Mrs Assafiri said that the creation of the code of cooperation would not have been possible without ‘the encouragement and support of Mr Dunstan and of our school’s Principal, Deputy Principal and teachers’.

After cautious initial steps in 2011, the code of cooperation was embraced by Al-Taqwa College’s primary school in 2012. In 2013, all of Al-Taqwa College, including the secondary school, will embrace five values: responsibility, cooperation, respect, honesty and do your best.

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¹ When writing the name of the Prophet Muhammad, those of Muslim faith often follow it with the abbreviation PBUH. This acronym stands for the English words ‘peace be upon him’, and they are written to show respect to one of God’s Prophets when mentioning his name.

