

CASE STUDY

Education Improvement Branch
Research Centre
Case study 4

School improvement is a continuous and highly contextualised process, with every Queensland state school at different stages of their improvement journey. The Education Improvement Branch produces case studies to showcase schools that are making significant gains in their journey, and identify factors that contributed to their success.

All eyes on every student — wrap around teams at Meridan State College

Wrap around teams are a keystone practice at Meridan State College. They marshal professional expertise, channel resources, focus minds, and keep everyone's eyes on the students. As the name suggests, the teams 'wrap around' the students in their care, maximising students' learning, engagement and wellbeing.

Background

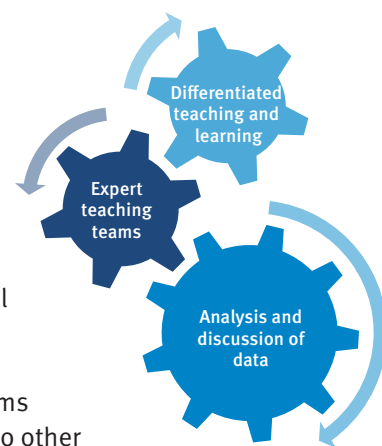
Established in 2006, Meridan State College is a P-12 school of more than 2700 students, situated north of Brisbane on the Sunshine Coast. The college has a distinctive sub-school structure across primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary, which fosters the education of a broad age range of students. Wrap around teams were introduced within the primary school in 2017.

Why were they implemented?

Running a large school, the Meridan State College leadership team simply wanted to do better by their students, to know every child and meet the needs of every teacher. Their commitment to every student succeeding meant they did not want anyone falling 'through the cracks'. The school had previously implemented strategies and seen lift in specific areas, but there remained a need for school practices that were sustainable and effective that also supported staff wellbeing. Meridan resolved to find ways to better know their students, support their staff, and enable students to better know themselves as learners.

What are they?

The wrap around teams are one of three key organisational elements that staff at Meridan developed to support student learning. The wrap around teams work interdependently with two other mechanisms: headline data indicators, and the teaching and learning cycle. Headline data indicators are year-level, termly summaries that analyse achievement and engagement data, and report on focus practices and students. The teaching and learning cycle is a system of planning for curriculum and differentiation that evaluates and continuously informs curriculum delivery at the primary school.



“ There are several layers in this. They are all deeply connected and I don't think that any one of them would work if you just went 'I'm going to have that piece'. ” Deputy Principal

Headline data indicators report on:

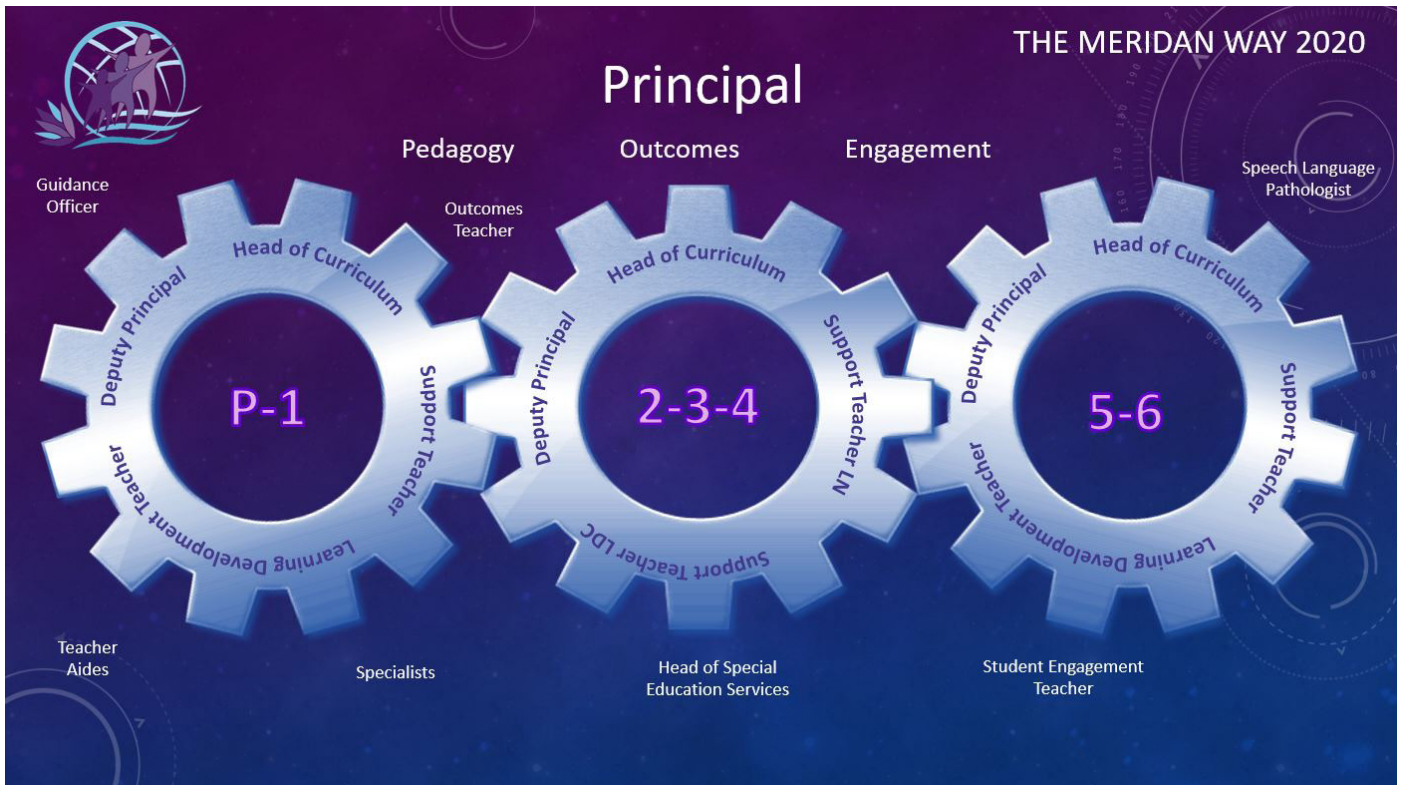
- literacy, learning progression, attendance, behaviour and level of achievement data (identifying trends, at-risk students and celebrations)
- the status of targeted programs
- ‘big rock’ priorities on improvement agendas, individual students, targeted programs, and planning for differentiation.

The **Teaching and learning cycle** has three phases. Following on from the prior year’s review of data, planning for differentiation (P4D) in week five examines learning progressions, and adjusts strategies in response to student needs. Planning for curriculum (P4C) occurs in weeks 9/10 with the unpacking of the curriculum and developing a common understanding of work units, assessment tasks and resources. This leads into the next phase of P4D that reviews achievements of the term, introducing learning goals and baseline assessment for the next term.

The wrap around teams are devolved work units that put a ‘magnifying glass’ over smaller groups of students in the school. There are three teams, each covering a sector in the primary school: Prep to Year 1, Years 2-4, and Years 5-6. The three teams operate together as a ‘cog model’, sharing data and insights twice a term. The wrap around teams are staffed by a deputy principal, head of curriculum (HOC) and highly skilled support teachers. The teams are supported by a range of specialist staff, including those with skills in engagement, special education, guidance, and speech language and pathology (see below, The Meridan Way 2020). The focus is on making sure our eyes stay on individual students whilst monitoring the whole cohort. Team members effectively have children in their care for up to three years. Students may change teachers every year, but the wrap around team has them for more than that. Every student has a champion at Meridan State College: ‘So we know our kids very well’. This knowledge is significant in supporting students through their year-level learning and transition between sectors and from primary to secondary in the school.

“To me it feels like a magnifying glass on each area of the school, rather than a spotlight on one ... There are no dark areas; everything is seen. We’re getting three times the impact that you would if you had one big team.” Deputy Principal





The wrap around teams promote collective efficacy. The teams meet each week to discuss students, review programs and address staff needs. They are places of equal voice for collective problem solving. The composition of the wrap around teams means that each team member contributes something unique. The team members have diverse skills and different relationships with staff. They see and hear different things throughout their day, and bring their observations back to the room, triangulate that information, and then focus on areas to support student progress. The teams provide an on-going opportunity to get together and see how everyone's traveling. The staff work collaboratively and the responsibilities for the students under their care are shared equally: 'We prefer a flat leadership structure here.' Anyone of the team members can step in if somebody is not available.

The collective efficacy extends to the teaching staff. The closer proximity of the teams to the classroom makes communication more fluid and frequent. The team members sit in on year level meetings. They are in classrooms with teachers modelling good practice and working alongside their colleagues. This could be conducting targeted 'blitzes' supporting reading groups or stepping in for staff who are developing programs, sharing good practice and observing others work. This occurs in an 'intentional and focused way with a manageable sized group of teachers.' It reinforces a culture of collegiality and trust because everyone is part of moving the students forward in the classroom. The proximity also supports relationships to develop, and this is critical to getting things to happen. As a consequence, teachers 'know we're all in' and they are more willing to do the hard work because they can see 'we are doing it as a team'.



“It's that collective efficacy. It's absolutely around that team and the expectation to do better and the culture to do better and the staff wanting to do better.” Deputy Principal



The magnifying glass of the wrap around teams applies equally to how the primary school supports teachers. The autonomy and flexibility around resourcing results in a responsiveness to teacher needs. On the one hand, this is about staff wellbeing – checking in with each person in the team’s sector to see how they are going. On the other hand, it is about capability building – assisting staff in building skills in curriculum planning, pedagogy and data literacy.

The school’s coaching model, for example, evolved in response to the support and engagement teachers received from the wrap around teams. There are still formal coaching processes for supporting new teachers, but the system matured and was superseded by the relationships developed under the wrap around team umbrellas. The prior approach to coaching had become something of a formality for some, with the real coaching happening naturally and responsively with the wrap around team members.

It is also about developing teachers as leaders. Because the wrap around teams are constantly interrogating data and identifying needs, they create an openness to innovation. The teams are responsive to ideas about practice. Some liken the approach to action research. Teachers can try things out and the teams can make sense of what works. Teachers undertake projects, develop peer resources and share the results, and this feeds into school practices.

“I think if you asked our teachers, the wrap around teams have provided them with a support team that they know they can go to.”

Deputy Principal

How were they implemented?

The wrap around teams, among the school’s other initiatives, were implemented through a pragmatic and planned approach, but also through refinement and a trial-and-error process. There was an early recognition that the school was stepping into less familiar territory, and that was a concern for some. However, staff successfully navigated a process of change resulting in quality practices people are proud of.

A key aspect of pursuing change was to have ‘buy in’ from staff. This meant teachers had to understand why it was happening. Teachers also had to have a say in steering it – the process could not be all top down. Teachers were used to existing practices and had to be convinced that the new work was worth it – ‘it was a big deal, it was a big change’ – and the school’s executive knew they had to take care about the imposition on staff.

The initial ideas came from various sources. The leadership group examined the practices of other schools and applied lessons from earlier experiences. It was clear to the executive they could not simply adopt another school’s model of operation: ‘We couldn’t pick something up from somewhere else and plonk it here.’ Instead, there was selective adaption of practices that had merit because of their impact.

The school has implemented changes of practice by targeting resources. This is most notable in funding a HOC for each wrap around team. The presence of the HOC completes the professional input, oversight and expertise required of each team, and supports the authority and autonomy of their operation. The extra position is supported through departmental funding of improvement initiatives, and flexible staffing arrangements.



Outcomes

The wrap around teams have contributed to improved outcomes at the school, directly and indirectly. Significant progress has been made in organisational change, which is leading to results for students. The distributed leadership structure has produced a sensitivity to staff and student needs. The school is better equipped to direct resources where they are needed, plan strategically and ameliorate staff workloads. This includes an extensive and differentiated support network of expert leaders, specialist teachers and peers skilled in coaching, mentoring and profiling.

Meridan has developed a proactive model of student support. Needs are identified through the data, resources are put into the classroom rather than taking the students out, and classroom differentiation has become second nature. The learning progression 'star system' for plotting student progress is also producing assessment literate learners. Students have a clearer understanding of their learning goals and how to get there, and teachers can differentiate to promote individual student progress.

All these achievements have translated to improvements in student outcomes. Student school opinion survey data show an increase in agreement across all survey items over the last two years. On the academic front, the school has seen an increase in the proportion of Prep Year, Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 students with A-C levels of achievement in English.



Success factors

- Willingness to experiment, take risks and develop ideas.
- Democratic approach where teachers have input and buy-in, and leaders care.
- Ability to evaluate practice by analysing student progress data.
- Strategic use of school resources to fund positions and teacher release time.

Next steps

The primary school talks about constant evolution in their practices: 'We're not sitting here saying "we've nailed this".' Wrap around team members are always looking for the 'next thing' that will improve student learning. There is unwavering commitment to the wrap around teams because they facilitate change.

“ Because we have those meetings each week and because we come together as teams, we talk about ‘where’s our next lift coming from, what are we going to do next?’ ” Deputy Principal

The primary school recently refined its learning progressions 'star system' to align with levels of achievement, so that it better supports high-achieving students. The 4 and 3 star success criteria were respectively matched to A and B levels of achievement, so that students have clear goals about moving from B to A, and staff understand the next steps in student learning.

Aligning 3 star criteria to B also made goals for C students clearer, so they can more readily lift from C to B.

This year has seen an increasing focus on student and teacher wellbeing. Wrap around team meetings now have students and teachers as first and second agenda items, respectively. The discussion about students informs the team members' daily Learning Walks and Talks around the school. The discussion about staff identifies teachers who may need support and the team members best able to assist them, and manages the follow up to evaluate the effectiveness of the support.

An emerging practice is the addition of Lyn Sharratt-style case management to address staff needs. It is intended to work as an additional element in the teaching and learning cycle. This is in its early stages, but the primary school believes it will improve teacher capability and further assist in progressing student learning.

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