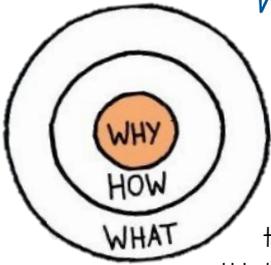## Why this work, and why now?

We always had a feeling that something was missing – a burning curiosity and a need to find out more. We have wonderful, positive and dedicated staff, a great community, a collaborative commitment to school improvement, a strengths-based approach to learning, a solid focus on wellbeing and strong instructional leadership but our data told a different story. Our wellbeing intervention data showed that we had students who needed support around peer-connectedness, social interactions, transitions, peer relationships, anxiety and self-esteem. Our yard-duty data showed that our students needed support in navigating positive social relationships. Our AtoSS data showed a decline in positive attitudes in our Year 5 and Year 6 students and our academic data showed that we were not meeting our goals and targets in relation to student achievement. While we had an enormous deal of positives within our context, we needed to get curious and seek to understand why the hard work of our teachers and students wasn't having the greatest impact on students' social, personal and academic growth. The type of impact we join this profession to actually make.

We needed to create opportunities for all teachers and students to feel empowered, we needed to listen more to our students and learn about their perceptions of our school. It was within half an hour of Russ's session at the 2019 Education State School Leadership Conference that we knew this was the right work for us at Winchelsea Primary School. Initially we thought this would support only one of our strategic goals; 'to create actively engaged learners' however we soon realised if we were to be successful in achieving all of our strategic goals, we had to widen the lens, apply The Aspirations Framework filter, and view all school improvements through this. We felt so lucky to have found this framework and knew this was the missing piece for us. We were so inspired and so excited to explore the four interrelated parts of The Aspiration Framework and how it would make a difference to our students, staff and our whole school community.

So where did we start and what did we do?

We had already committed to starting 2020 by rebranding 'Starting Right' and developed some guiding documents to support all teachers in creating the conditions to develop students to be curious, independent, motivated, creative and lifelong learners. These documents supported and empowered students and teachers to work together to establish classroom climate, culture and the physical environment. We also formed 'learning communities' to establish and build a sense of community across the school. We had committed to doing this work without consciously understanding how closely related what we were already doing was to the research from The Quaglia Institute.

Making Professional Learning a Priority

We asked all staff, 'what comes to mind when you think of student voice?' and although our responses were encouraging, they were varied. It supported the belief that perhaps we were being held back because we didn't have a 'clear definition around voice that we can all understand, accept and put into practice'. We prioritised this work and committed to weekly professional learning sessions during 2020 (and beyond) to explore Voice (Components and Process), The Aspirations Profile, the 3 Guiding Principles and the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference. We were very inspired by the research and driven by The Fundamental Beliefs, but what we loved most was that we could use this research and actually work with it in a way that would best support our context at WPS. The purpose of our regular professional learning sessions was to build a common understanding and vocabulary around student voice and aspirations, provide opportunities to share our own thoughts, ideas and experiences, allow protected time to co-build action plans and reflect often. It also provided opportunities for all staff to work alongside kids in building their understanding of The Aspirations Framework too. Sharing the thoughts and ideas of students within our staff Professional Learning was also a vital part of our sessions and really highlighted the importance of teachers working with students.

But what are our kids saying?

After spending time building our understanding of the 3 conditions within Self-Worth as a staff, we felt that we couldn't move further forward without knowing what our kids thought. We decided to use the Student Voice survey for our Middle and Senior Learning Communities and held some focus groups for our Junior Learning Community as a way to measure how our kids perceive the environment at WPS. We felt that it was extremely important to start viewing things through the lens of our students.

Staff were keen to hear what our students were thinking and feeling about our school environment and spent time engaging in conversations looking at the data, making inferences and exploring strategies for moving forward and thinking about 'what next.'

What was even more powerful were the sessions we ran with the kids, about their own data. While exploring student data with staff was common practice at WPS, sharing it with the kids and finding out more was not something we did often, if ever. To reflect upon this now, we feel a sense of guilt and lost opportunities in the past when we have collected data from our kids (AtOSS and Class Surveys). It was a great shift in mindset and a great opportunity to really listen and learn so we could lead together. The data workshops we ran with our Middle and Senior Learning communities allowed our kids to truly connect

to the voice definition and really work towards sharing ideas that would benefit their entire learning community and our school. They used their own data to talk about why them and their peers might be saying what they're saying, and developed action plans to take responsibility for this data. This gave students and teachers a real sense of empowerment and strategies to ensure Self-Worth was being fostered back in the classroom and in the yard. It was a real turning point in the way we had conversations with kids, the way we responded to less-desirable behaviours, the way we acknowledged success and the way in which we saw the voice definition components really come to life. It showed our kids that they really do matter. This has to be the way we continue to move forward.

Taking Action

A big focus for us at WPS was to unpack and understand the importance of Self-Worth and the conditions within; Belonging, Heroes and Sense of Accomplishment. Whilst we initially thought we could explore all conditions during our Professional Learning sessions, we soon realised that we needed to slow right down and take the time to delve deeper into what these conditions meant, how we could foster them and the impact they would have on our kids. It was great to also connect this learning directly to what our kids were saying from the surveys and focus groups. These three conditions have made a big difference to the practice of all staff and the way they think and sit in the forefront when planning and teaching. Using the 'Taking Action' documents allowed all teachers to plan to commit to deliberate strategies to foster Belonging, Heroes and Sense of Accomplishment. During reflections, staff spoke about the way these strategies encouraged them to deliberately take action in enhancing the conditions of Self-Worth. It provided them with the lens they needed to consciously think about these conditions when working with their kids – online or onsite.

What we have noticed so far?

Not only do we have a common understanding of student voice and the impact we can have on student aspirations, our staff are also using this work and understanding to reflect upon their own practice and how they work with kids every day. Their mindset is reflective of the fundamental beliefs; in their planning, in their conversations, in their classroom operations and when solving problems. Teachers are taking time to think about what they can do to foster self-worth, to embrace the voice definition and how they can create these conditions for all students to be aspirational and to feel like they really do matter.
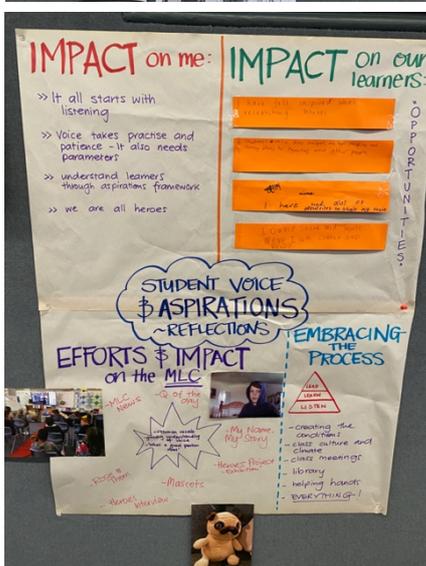
When asked what impact this work has had on them and their learners, staff reflected with genuine excitement, confidence and enthusiasm about the difference this work has made not only to them, but to the learners they work with every day. The most common and shared impact this work has had on staff is that they are noticing themselves really authentically and actively listening to students and they are seeing the power of truly listening. Alongside this, the way they have developed and prioritised the building of relationships has been extremely important and is now always at the forefront of their minds. Huge links to our school values, 'Be Kind, Be Safe, Learn Well' were spoken about and how we listen, learn and lead whilst co-building our school values matrix with students. Staff are now seeing themselves as heroes to their learners and are finding themselves consciously acting like heroes through listening, being positive, showing genuine interest and care, showing kids they matter and having high expectations. Another impact this work has had on staff is the common vocabulary used to talk about student voice and aspirations, and the way this language is also used with all students too. Teachers and students have really shown learning and leading together through building their understanding of this framework alongside one another. Fostering Self-Worth has proven to have great impact on the staff, but also on their learners and the way they feel. Staff have actively worked on fostering a sense of Belonging, Heroes and Sense of Accomplishment through deliberate planning and accessing resources from The Quaglia Institute. Having access to Instructional Strategies and the texts, 'Raising Student Aspirations' and 'Turn up the Volume' has allowed

staff to explore practical ways to really foster these conditions with students. Having a clear understanding of The Voice Process has also allowed staff to see that this process now happens often at our school, and it needs to happen with everything we do if we really are to work with students and make a difference. We talk with our learners all the time about being great writers, great readers and great mathematicians and what great readers, writers and mathematicians do. This work helps us show kids how they (and us) can be great (or even greater) people.
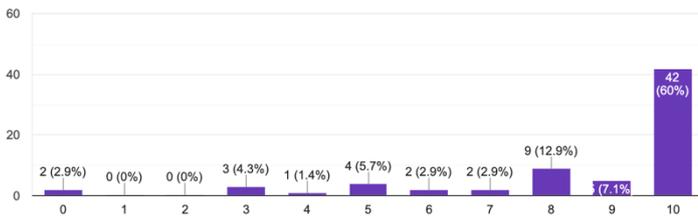
Through conversations with staff, general observations and finding out more from our kids through the Student Voice Self-Assessment: Understanding the Power of my Voice, we were able to also tap into the impact this work is beginning to have on our learners. They believe they have a lot of opportunity to share their opinions, ideas and thoughts at school; in all learning areas, and in and out of the classroom. Some students spoke strongly about the opportunities they do have and how they believe teachers make sure everyone gets an opportunity to share their ideas and talk.

By sharing their ideas, students who feel their voice can make a difference believe this because they feel they may inspire others around them. They also believe their voice can make a difference by being kind and helpful to others. By offering their ideas, they feel that they can make changes.

I believe my voice can make a difference
70 responses

Score	Count
0	1 (1.4%)
1	3 (4.3%)
2	1 (1.4%)
3	0 (0%)
4	3 (4.3%)
5	6 (8.6%)
6	3 (4.3%)
7	10 (14.3%)
8	13 (18.6%)
9	6 (8.6%)
10	24 (34.3%)
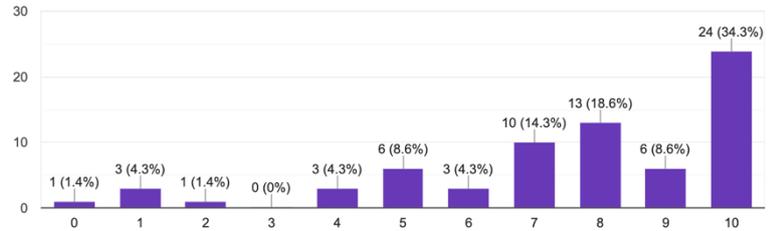
My teachers care about my ideas and opinions
70 responses

Score	Count
0	2 (2.9%)
1	0 (0%)
2	0 (0%)
3	3 (4.3%)
4	1 (1.4%)
5	4 (5.7%)
6	2 (2.9%)
7	2 (2.9%)
8	9 (12.9%)
9	(7.1%)
10	42 (60%)

Our students strongly believe that teachers care about what they have to say. They are saying this because they believe our teachers really listen, make opportunities to listen and respond/give feedback when they do share their thoughts and ideas.

Our students are feeling more confident to share their thoughts and ideas and are beginning to think about the Voice Definition and the components within. They are starting to see that their thoughts and ideas need to benefit everyone around them and if they truly are going to make a difference, they need to take action. They can share what the conditions Belonging, Heroes and Sense of Accomplishment are all about and are genuinely enthused to work with teachers to cultivate a sense of Self-Worth within their communities and across the school.

And what now?

Although there has been a fundamental shift in the mindsets, beliefs and practices of our staff and teachers, we know this work is still in its infancy at our school and we don't envisage seeing strong changes reflected in formal data sets straight away. We are not doing this to see the data improve, the data should improve as a result of our efforts to genuinely ensure that our entire school system operates through the lens of The Aspirations Framework. Our teachers, students and wider community need this if we are to ever truly make a difference in the life trajectories of the young people we work with.

The sentiments in Russ's article, *'Dream Bigger'* resonated so much with us and the work we're doing. Just like what we've learnt through Remote Learning, we mustn't default back to a time before this work. We need to continue to be intentional and deliberate in taking action with our learners, continue to adapt and navigate through this work and continue to grow. We can't snap back and need to continue to learn from our students as we move forward. We can no longer just assume what our kids are thinking or feeling; we actually have to find out, listen and be responsive. Now we truly know 'the why,' we can use this as the moral imperative that drives all we do. We need to continue to *'dream bigger'* and make this 'work' common work and genuinely lived at Winchelsea Primary School. This is the right work for us, and for the future of the kids we are so lucky to work with every day.