

## Berry Public School:

Using *Tell Them From Me* to capture student, teacher and parent voice and inform responses.

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### Introduction

This case study looks at how Berry Public School has been using its *Tell Them From Me* data. It particularly focuses on the way Berry Public School is using *Tell Them From Me* to capture student, teacher and parent voice, identify issues and inform responses.

### Background

Berry Public School is a government primary school located approximately two hours south of Sydney in the township of Berry in the Shoalhaven Local Government Area. It has an enrolment of 321 students. Two per cent of students identify as Aboriginal, and six per cent come from a non-English speaking background. The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA<sup>1</sup>) value is higher than the state average. NAPLAN results are also above the state average. The student attendance rate was around 93 per cent in 2015 (My School 2015).

### Using *Tell Them From Me*

Berry Public School has participated in the *Tell Them From Me* surveys since 2014. They completed the pilot student survey in 2014 and subsequent student surveys in 2015 and 2016, the teacher survey in 2014 and 2015, and the parent survey in 2015. The school leadership first decided to participate in the surveys as they were interested in enhancing their capture of student, teacher and parent voice. They also recognised the role the data could play in informing the implementation of other Department of Education (DoE) initiatives at the school, such as the new Wellbeing Framework for Schools.

The results from the student, teacher and parent surveys are widely disseminated within the school community, who are encouraged to provide feedback on the results. The student survey results are presented by the Principal at a school assembly; the teacher survey results are presented to staff; and the parent survey data is presented by the Principal to the P&C. *Tell Them From Me* data is also incorporated into the school planning process, both to inform the school's strategic directions and to provide 'SMART<sup>2</sup>' targets. For example, one of the strategic directions in the current school plan is to enhance the culture of care, respect and enrichment at the school.



*Tell Them From Me* is an online survey system that assists schools to capture the views of students, teachers and parents. The survey system has been devised by Canadian company, The Learning Bar, under the leadership of Professor Doug Willms. Dr Willms is an expert in education who led the development of questions on student engagement for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The surveys have been offered to NSW government schools since 2013/2014 (student and teacher surveys) in pilot form, and to all schools since 2015 (student, teacher and parent surveys). The surveys have been adapted to suit the NSW context.

In 2015, 236,000 students from 1,157 NSW government schools completed the student survey; 14,000 teachers did the teacher survey; and 29,000 parents completed the parent survey.

<sup>1</sup> ICSEA is a measure of school socio-educational advantage created by ACARA.

<sup>2</sup> Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-Framed



This strategic direction was informed in part by data from the *Tell Them From Me* surveys, including the bullying data from the student survey and quality feedback data from the teacher survey.

## Identifying issues and informing responses

### Responding to bullying

Results of the *Tell Them From Me* student survey indicated that students were reporting a higher level of bullying than expected. This did not seem to conform with the school culture or results from other survey instruments. Engagement is generally very strong at the school, as is the school culture, and the school often talks about 'the Berry way' which emphasises the values the school holds strongly ('care', 'respect', 'enrichment'). In light of these results, the school leadership decided to take action. The bullying data was presented by the Principal at the school assembly so students could see what they had said about the school, and so the school could use this as a starting point to explore students' understanding of bullying. The school is also looking to introduce the Positive Behaviour for Learning and Kids Matter programs as a response to the *Tell Them From Me* data about bullying at the school. The school hopes that by introducing these programs, they can increase the percentage of students who do not report any experience of bullying in the *Tell Them From Me* survey by 10 per cent over 2015-2017. This is also a stated objective in the school plan (NSW Department of Education 2015).

### Providing more support for teachers in quality teaching

The school leadership felt that the initial *Tell Them From Me* teacher survey results from 2014 showed that they could do more to support, improve and enhance quality teaching, including spending more time in classrooms and giving teachers quality feedback. The leadership were also aware that Berry's teaching cohort had undergone a radical shift in recent years, from one made up largely of older, very experienced teachers, to a much younger, less experienced workforce, a change which could potentially impact upon quality teaching and contextualise the survey findings.

The school executive shared the *Tell Them From Me* data with teachers and asked for feedback on the results. Both the data and the feedback from teachers highlighted that teachers wanted more teacher collaboration and support from the executive. As a result of this feedback, and in response to the contextual environment, there has been a shift in the culture at the school to ensure that teachers are far more involved in decision-making

and school planning, are sharing feedback from the classroom with their colleagues, and that members of the executive are also spending more time in classrooms observing teachers. In addition, the school is looking at the effectiveness of different types of teacher professional learning, with a view to deciding what would be the best professional learning for its staff. The outcomes of this change in culture at the school around quality teaching, will be measured in part through future *Tell Them From Me* data. The school plan targets an increase in performance in the leadership domain of the teacher survey from 6.4 to 7.0.

The teacher survey data also showed that technology was one area where Berry could improve. In response, after consulting with teachers, the school executive has decided to move away from a computer lab system to integrating technology in the classroom. The school plan states that Berry hopes to see an increase in teaching and leadership capacity in the technology domain of the teacher survey from 6.2 to 7.0 between 2015 and 2017 as a result of these changes (NSW Department of Education 2015).

### Improving parent engagement

Berry Public School received around a ten per cent response rate for the *Tell Them From Me* parent survey. This was better than other non-TTFM parent surveys the school had run, although still not particularly high. The school has therefore been looking at ways to enhance parent feedback. One way this is being done is to present the findings of the parent survey to the P&C, to highlight to the parent community that their feedback is welcome and that the school does use this feedback to make school improvements. The principal is also planning to run focus groups with parents – one with parents who did the survey and another with parents who did not do the survey – and will present the data from the parent survey to both groups. The aim of these focus groups is to show that the school takes the parent survey seriously, is genuinely interested in parent feedback and is listening to parents. By running these focus groups, the school hopes to strengthen parent feedback and raise the participation rate in the parent survey next year.

## Reference list

My School 2015, *My School: Berry Public School*, viewed 3 December 2015, <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

NSW Department of Education 2015, *School Plan 2015-2017: Berry Public School Strategic Directions*, school plan, report prepared by Berry Public School.