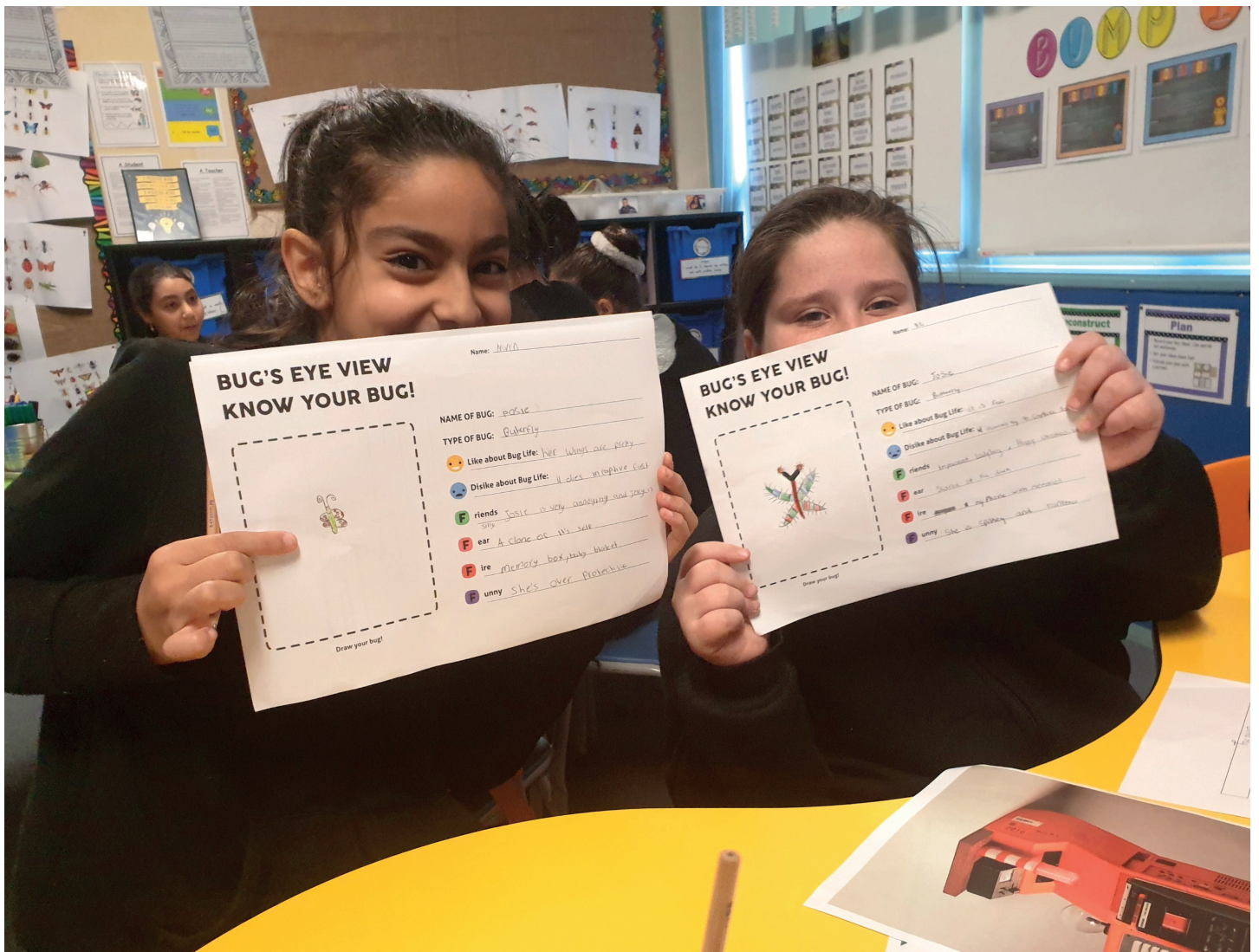


DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Supporting student engagement and effective classroom practices in primary school: Liverpool West Public School

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation





CESE would like to thank the staff, students and parents of Liverpool West Public School for their participation in this case study. Particular thanks to Principal, Patricia Bull.

Expectations for success is a measure of classroom context and represents the extent to which school staff value academic achievement and hold high expectations for all students. Students who receive high expectations in primary school can be over 6 months ahead in their learning by Year 7. This case study describes how Liverpool West Public School maintains high expectations of its students. It looks at how structures within the school support a culture where both staff and students are continuously challenged to grow and succeed.

## Introduction

Liverpool West Public School (PS) is located in south western Sydney. In 2018, the school had an enrolment of 727 students across K-6, 88% of whom were from a language background other than English (LBOTE). The school has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value of 906, which is lower than the Australian average, with the majority (65%) of their student cohort from disadvantaged families in the bottom quarter of socio-economic status. The school has high levels of socio-emotional engagement and consistently scores above expected levels for the proportion of students reporting that they experience high expectations from their teachers, as reported in Tell Them From Me student survey results.

The principal of Liverpool West PS identifies the commitment from the school staff as one of the driving forces behind the school's success in engaging students and supporting their growth and success. The school has benefited from a well-established leadership team, which has facilitated a sense of stability and consistency in the direction of the school and the expectations of staff and students. The school encourages both permanent and temporary staff to step up into relieving leadership positions across the school. This helps retain key staff while also communicating the school's high expectations of their younger and/or temporary staff and providing opportunities for career development.

The school has a strong focus on developing their students, offering a range of leadership, peer support, and teaching and learning programs and initiatives. These aim to build students' confidence and help them to engage fully in school life. 'Buddying' programs form a key component of the school's efforts to engage their students, providing all students across the school with opportunities to support one another and create positive peer relationships. Teachers work to ensure that their students are able to engage with, and succeed in, their learning by adapting their teaching to meet the needs of the school's diverse student population.



## Knowing and supporting vulnerable students with school structures and interventions

The school works hard to ensure that their students are supported and engaged in their learning from their very first day of enrolment, establishing high expectations for students from their first day at school. For their vulnerable students, many of whom have come from refugee backgrounds, the school provides opportunities for siblings to enter class together in order to maintain familial support structures as they commence school. These special transition classes help these children to integrate into school life, allowing them to build relationships with their peers and teachers and become accustomed to school routines before they enter their more typical, age-based classes.

Other programs across the school help to support those students most at risk of disengagement and ensure that all students can access the same learning opportunities. Bilingual community liaison officers support students from language backgrounds other than English and Aboriginal families. The school also uses their RAM (Resource Allocation Model) funding to employ speech pathologists who undertake an initial assessment of every kindergarten or newly enrolled student. This allows the school to develop a learning program and provide support for students with specific learning needs, particularly those who require support to develop English language and literacy skills. These initiatives help to ensure that students engage in their classroom learning from the very beginning of their time at school. Other external programs include SPARK, STARTTS and yoga programs. The Drum Beat program is in place to help stage 3 students understand and regulate emotional and behavioural issues. School leaders expect their students to develop skills that they will be able to take into high school in order to regulate their own school behaviours.

Dedicated transition time at the end of each year allows teachers to transfer and share knowledge about their students with new members of staff or new classroom teachers. The school prides itself on knowing not only where their students are academically, but also something personal to each individual. This information is used to inform the creation of new classes each year. Teaching staff come together at the end of the year to plan a strategic placement of their students into new classes based on their knowledge of students' individual learning needs, as well as their knowledge of which students are friends and which students might be better split up. At the start of the new school year, each class has a two-week period focused on explicitly establishing expectations and routines and building foundational relationships between students and teachers. Teachers also use this time to assess classroom dynamics and determine if further changes to classes are required.

Liverpool West PS also has a strong partnership with Western Sydney University (WSU). Through the Classroom Without Borders program, the school receives around 16 pre-service teachers currently studying at WSU to work with their refugee students. The school coordinates these one-on-one learning opportunities four days a week in order to provide an almost daily routine of short lessons on building vocabulary or improving comprehension. The result is that students feel valued and have their learning needs met, while also helping to build their confidence in learning. While the school is well resourced through RAM funding, links with external organisations, such as WSU, also help to bring additional support staff into the school.

To foster a climate of high expectations, the school's First Foot Forward program, also in partnership with WSU, allows Year 6 students to visit the university twice during the year, and provides an orientation and information evening for parents. This program encourages students to think about tertiary education very early in their schooling and helps to engage them through Year 6 and across the transition to secondary school. Seeing, experiencing and learning about higher education helps instil high aspirations early.





## Using data and research to drive effective classroom practices

The school's principal is committed to ensuring that practices and programs across the school are continually refined and improved. To support this, the school's leadership team meets regularly to unpack new research and review how it may help to improve student outcomes and be relevant to the school's priorities. The school utilises the logic model framework to guide school improvements. The framework helps the school to evaluate the impact and cost effectiveness of interventions and programs, strengthening the link between teaching practices and student outcomes. An evaluative mindset has helped the school's leaders to effectively manage available RAM funding so as to maximise the benefits for their students.

Evaluation using data and feedback from students, parents and teachers has also helped to refine and adjust initiatives that have been implemented across the school. For example, the school explores their Sentral data to evaluate whether their Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) lessons have made an impact and whether certain behavioural lessons require further teaching. Having this explicit evaluation and reflective stage helps the school to adjust and improve year on year. The school recognises that asking 'did it meet the goal?' and 'was it the best or most efficient method for the outcome?' are crucial questions for ensuring ongoing school improvement.

The school reiterates the philosophy of growth for every student, regardless of their language background or starting point. One-to-one data-driven meetings with instructional leaders help teachers to identify the needs of their specific classrooms. Remedial interventions can then be put in place to support those students with specific learning needs to ensure that every student is able to make learning progress. This systematic collaboration amongst staff also helps school leaders see when similar issues are being encountered across the school and develop strategies to address them.

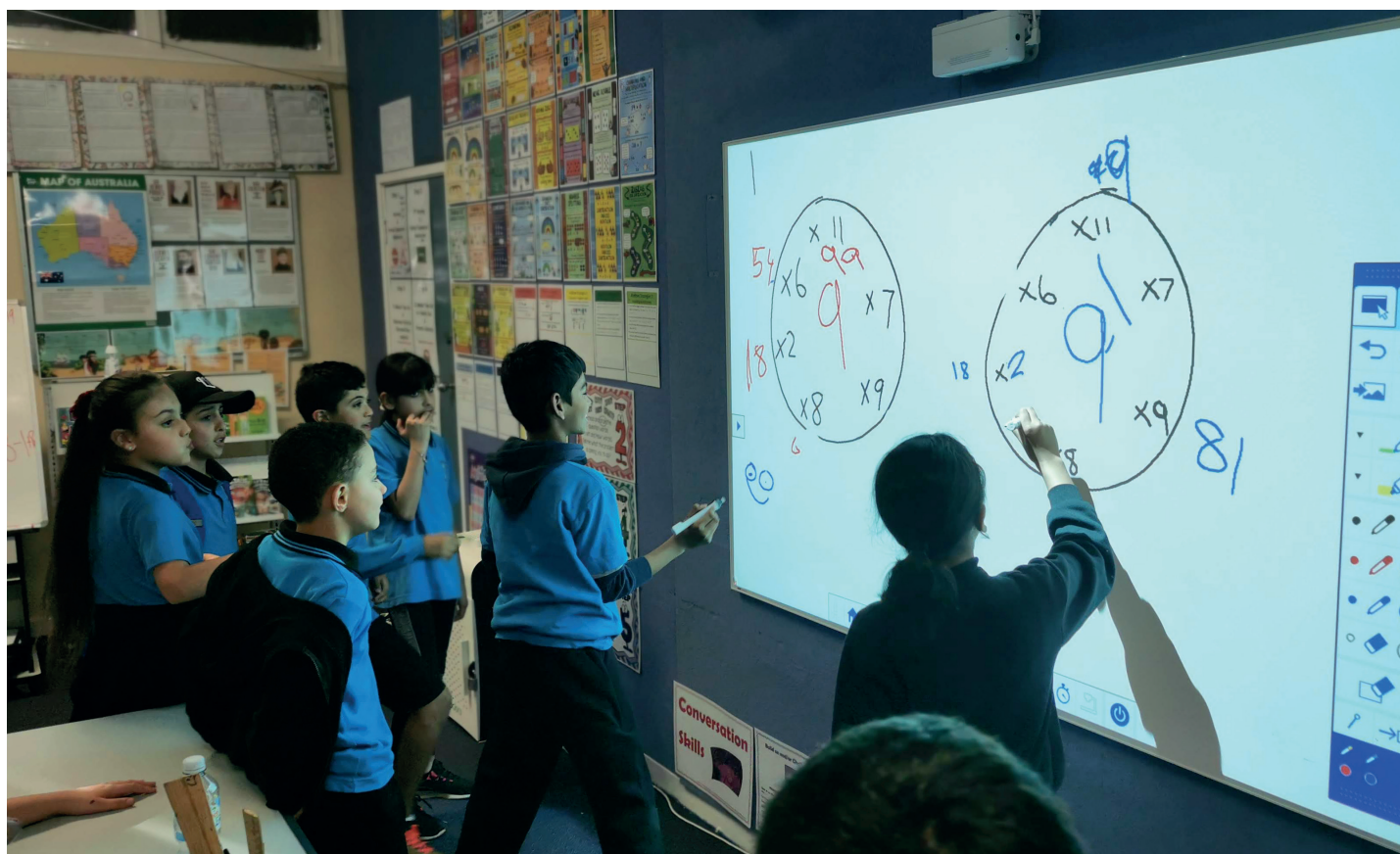


## Prioritising professional learning to meet staff and student needs

Upskilling teachers is a key part of the school's improvement journey. Alongside a diverse student cohort, Liverpool West PS also has diversity in their staffing. To ensure that teaching staff are able to address the learning needs of their students, a formal professional learning model has been developed where every teacher across the school is challenged and encouraged to grow and improve in their teaching practice. The school's leaders understand that teaching experience differs among their staff, which means that their teachers should also experience differentiated professional development. Assistant principals work with both new and established classroom teachers on a weekly basis to ensure that there is always the opportunity for peer feedback and learning. In-class demonstrations and team teaching help to model effective classroom practices. Explicit teaching is at the core of classroom practice across the school and the school uses classroom observation, demonstration and peer feedback to ensure all teachers are able to confidently deliver explicit teaching strategies.

The school welcomes a large number of temporary teachers, some within their first few years of qualification; however, they make a point to upskill their less experienced teachers quickly. The school uses their funding resources to 'buy' incoming teachers one week of classroom time before they start their teaching role so that they can familiarise them with the classrooms and their students. The school recognises that teacher-student relationships are important to all students, but especially for their vulnerable students. This initial classroom time is important both to help transition new staff into the school and to connect the students to their new teachers.

All teaching staff at Liverpool West PS are paired with experienced instructional leaders and participate in reciprocal classroom visits and peer observations. Feedback opportunities and reflective discussions have been some of the most effective ways for the school to provide the differentiated support required to develop effective classroom practice. Demonstrations of good practice are the most important learning tool for their teachers, according to the school's leaders. 'Show, don't tell' underpins this aspect of teacher development, and the modelling undertaken by instructional leaders in the classroom is pivotal in understanding good practice and what it looks like for teachers who require more help, while at the same time confirming that what they are doing is correct for those more experienced teachers. According to the principal, this is critical in establishing high expectations of teaching staff while also ensuring that they feel valued and supported in the school. This, in turn, improves teachers' confidence levels, which is reflected in improved classroom practice.



A network diagram with various sized nodes and connecting lines, set against a teal background.

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Please cite this publication as:

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2019), *Supporting student engagement and effective classroom practices in primary school -Liverpool West Public School*, NSW Department of Education, [cese.nsw.gov.au](http://cese.nsw.gov.au)