

School Case Study:

Hillvue Public School

New South Wales



PLP meeting with parent, student and teacher

School Profile

School Type:

Pre-School Primary Middle Years Secondary

Boarding Indigenous

Location:

Urban Regional Rural Remote

Sector:

Government Catholic Independent

Background

Hillvue Public School is a K-6 school located in Tamworth in the North West area of New South Wales. Seventy per cent of the school's student population of 310 students identify as Indigenous.

The school has a stable staff, each of whom focuses on personalising learning for their students. While the *Nucoorilma* Clan of the *Gamilaroi* Aboriginal people dominates the area, there is a diversity of family backgrounds.

The school is strongly inclusive, with tolerance promoted and practised at all levels. It uses an effective awards system and the positive life skills program, [*You Can Do It*](#) to promote values, respect and responsibility.

The school attracts a high number of students from low socio economic households and welfare dependent, single parent families. The highly dysfunctional nature of some families, often driven by alcohol and drug addiction, creates challenges for students and the school. Some parents have had limited exposure to education, while others have unpleasant memories of their own schooling which have caused them to find the school environment intimidating and uncomfortable.

As a government school, the New South Wales [*Aboriginal Education and Training Policy*](#) is the key driver for the school's Indigenous education programs. The school attracts additional resources through the [*Priority Schools Program*](#) which supports schools in low SES communities. It is also an active member of the national [*Dare to Lead Program*](#).

The school receives state funding under the [*Schools in Partnership*](#) initiative, a program for schools with high Indigenous enrolments. The initiative supports activities and services that engage and encourage students and improve retention outcomes. The additional funding allows the school to provide high quality teaching and support programs including Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs), as well as offering students a range of activity 'clubs'.

Improving literacy and numeracy achievement is a high priority for the school since, for many students, achievement of their full potential is limited by family transience and a lack of educational support and supervision at home. The school employs two full time Aboriginal Education Officers (AEO) and two Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) who provide a close connection to families for the school.

Developing the plan or personalised approach

The need to address poor educational achievement was evident to staff who recognised the value in Early Years development. Evidence showed that less than 50 per cent of students had access to any formal pre-school experience. As a result, the school introduced a transition-to-school program to increase both student and parent engagement with school in the formative years. This program now operates during Terms 3 and 4 each year.

As a *Schools in Partnership* (SiP) school, Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) are required as a component of the strategic planning process. The school established a SiP committee, responsible for setting directions and evaluating and improving the program and PLPs.

Representation by the Indigenous community on this committee was seen as crucial to its effectiveness.

Under the direction of the SiP committee, the development of PLPs and increasing the staff awareness of Aboriginal culture relevant to every child were part of an overall strategy designed to improve the learning outcomes for Indigenous students. Through SiP, all staff were accredited in a Certificate IV *Cultural Awareness* through the local TAFE, which instilled greater understanding and confidence.

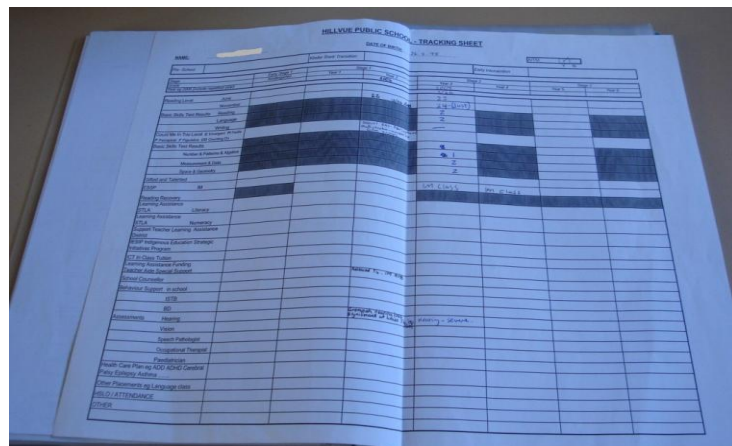
In its first year, the school developed a simple one page plan for a selected number of students. This has since been developed into a more comprehensive [Personal Learning Plan](#) (PLP), which is an ongoing portfolio of achievement for all students. Staff and the community agreed that the PLP is a learning collection containing:

- Family & residential information
- A tracking of guided reading levels
- Attendance and absence data
- Areas for development in literacy and numeracy
- PLP goal setting
- Student assessment schedules
- Running record and tracking sheets

The areas for development in literacy and numeracy are informed by a range of strategies used to benchmark a student's learning profile such as Basic Skills/NAPLAN results, school reports, work samples and in-school testing.

Access to professional development was established as crucial for teachers to ensure they could effectively deliver PLPs and align them to quality teaching, assessment and classroom practice. Programs such as [Count Me In Too Indigenous](#), based on the [Count Me In Too Learning Framework in Number](#), and the use of an extended [Schedule for Early Number Assessment](#) (SENA) to inform numeracy goal setting and conversations with parents, were a priority. The use of [Newman's Error Analysis](#) has given teachers a much stronger understanding of mathematical learning and numeracy assessment. The [QuickSmart](#) intervention program is used by the school to support Primary students experiencing learning problems or not achieving their academic potential to improve their numeracy development.

The *Tracking Sheet* was developed as an integral component of the PLP for teachers, particularly to facilitate a student's transition from one year to the next. The A3 sheet (see photographic sample) provides a snapshot of the student from the Early Years to Year 6. It documents their progress against the key benchmarks, their access to gifted and talented or learning



support programs, health care, behaviour support and attendance issues.

The tracking sheet enables staff to collect a 'picture' of the students in their class from the start of the year. It facilitates the role of the PLP in the ongoing learning process, integral to its success for this school. In developing the process two goals were identified as the focus for implementation:

- getting to know the parents and family
- getting to know the child's learning needs.

Implementing the plan or personalised approach

Time for teachers has been a key to the successful implementation of the PLPs. A teacher is released for half a day per week to manage the PLP process, engage new students and parents in the development of their PLPs, and support teachers with interviews. The teacher also assists with parent contact, especially follow-up with the small number of parents who do not attend the PLP meeting.

Class teachers are given three release days, two in Term 1 and one in Term 2. In Term 1, teachers use one release day for data analysis to develop the student profiles for their class and the other to organise and run PLP meetings. The third day in Term 2 is provided to enable teachers to complete the needs, goal setting and strategies required for each student. In Term 3, teachers conduct interviews in their own time. Tradeoffs on other duties such as parent/teacher meetings have given teachers the flexibility to use their own time to manage the meeting process and hold meetings after school as required. Teachers see the PLP process as 'core business' and part of their normal planning, teaching and assessment responsibilities.

Once in the primary section of the school, meetings with the student and their parent/s are arranged by the class teacher for early in Term 1. In the infants section, student PLP meetings do not include the student. Instead the Kindergarten teachers assist in the goal setting for each student. Year 1 and 2 students work on setting their goals with their teacher during class time. These are then discussed with the parent during the PLP meeting. The AEO attends meetings as a 'surrogate' parent for Indigenous students if the parent can't or does not attend.

The Personal Learning Plan (PLP) is a package of materials which includes:

- The [*Student Profile*](#)
- The [*Attendance*](#) profile
- [*Guided Reading Levels*](#) template
- [*Teaching Focus*](#) template for each learning stage
- [*PLP meetings*](#) record

The key purpose of the PLP meeting is to initiate and build the relationship with the family. Before the meeting K-2 students are asked to fill out the [*Help Me Get to Know You*](#) template as a classroom activity. The Years 3 to 6 students complete a different [*Help Me Get to Know You*](#) template. Both are designed to give the teacher an understanding of the student at a more personal level, through their own reflections. They also serve as a 'starting point' in the PLP meeting with parents who show great interest in their child's responses.

During the meeting, the student, teacher and parent identify one learning goal each for the student. The teacher records these on the [PLP meetings](#) record and engages the parent in discussion about how the school can assist them with their child's learning and how the parent can assist the child directly. The teacher ensures that the majority of the goals have an academic focus.

Following the PLP meeting the teacher documents the information collected and works to develop strategies which will support the achievement of learning goals for each student in their class. They consider a range of intervention and/or teaching and learning strategies suited to the student's needs.

The goals are transferred onto a [PLP goal sheet](#) which makes up a classroom goal wall chart (see photograph) by students as illustrated by the photo below.

As the year progresses a sticker placed against a goal represents the achievement of that goal for the student. The achievement, as part of the school's award system, accumulates towards a [goal certificate](#), rewards and recognition on the school assembly. This goal setting process builds a shared learning environment where the student, parent and the teacher each take ownership of the process.



Parents are encouraged to visit the classroom at appropriate times to see the goal achievement process in action.

Monitoring and reviewing the plan or approach

The documentation required for the PLP is explicit and comprehensive. Teachers are supported by the Assistant Principal and their own supervisors, who monitor the procedures and collect evidence to inform the process for the future. As part of their normal assessment and reporting cycles, teachers monitor student progress and adjust their teaching and learning programs accordingly. They now have a much stronger focus on the needs of individuals and the achievement of goals. The display of goals in the classroom introduces a level of accountability. The link to the school's award system motivates students to be engaged and focused on improvement.

Involving Indigenous parents and the community in the school has been a key target for the PLP process. The school recognises the importance of parents feeling confident enough to approach the school and be able to understand their child's learning needs. [Parent participation data](#) has shown that, in 2008, 88 per cent of parents attended the PLP meeting arranged for their child. This is an increase from 65 per cent in 2006. The increase is more significant for Indigenous parents. In 2008, 75 per cent of Indigenous parents attended the PLP meeting compared to 25 per cent in 2006.





Staff reflect on some of the major challenges they faced during the implementation of PLPs. While tradeoffs, such as not having traditional parent/teacher interviews, were seen as

necessary to engage staff in the process, these types of changes created a new school culture, which was unsettling for some in the school community. The changes that followed were the most unsettling for parents with the oldest children and those families who had limited access to support, or those from dysfunctional or disengaged families. It was these families who felt most 'threatened' by change or nervous about the shared role they were being asked to play.

Teachers have identified the following helpful factors for the implementation of PLPs.

- The availability of resources which has allowed time for managing and implementing the process.
- Teacher cooperation and collaboration.
- Having a teacher coordinator who could provide invaluable support to assist teachers with parent follow-up and planning for new students.
- The motivation gained by improved student engagement and learning outcomes.
- High quality assessment strategies embedded in the teaching and learning cycle.
- The capacity to track students from one year to the next.
- The three-way PLP meeting, which enables primary students to take responsibility for their own learning and tracking their own goals.
- The stronger partnerships that have been built with the community.
- The stronger relationships between staff and parents, and staff and students.
- The capacity to 'trade-off' some duties to avoid teacher 'burnout'.

An analogy of a 'jigsaw' was used by the principal to describe the PLP process. The jigsaw is linked, one step at a time.

- The school aims to engage parents so that they value education and appreciate the role they play in their child's learning process. If this is achieved parents are more likely to ensure their child attends school regularly; therefore attendance improves.

- If students attend school more regularly and see that their parents are interested in the school and if teachers build better relationships with students and parents, students are more likely to engage in positive behaviours in the classroom. This will mean that there will be less conflict and students will be more motivated to learn.

- If teachers are using a planned approach to learning based on sound assessment and quality teaching strategies, then student learning outcomes will improve. Students will be more engaged if the lesson content is relevant and culturally significant and respectful of the student's individual learning needs.

- If students are more motivated to learn they will take ownership of the goals they have agreed to in the PLP meeting, attend school regularly and work harder towards goal achievement, their results will improve.


- If the community is willing to establish strong partnerships with the school and values its place in education, the school will be supported and recognised for its achievements.

The school sees the PLP process as a part of a total package which includes teaching and learning programs, attendance and behaviour. There has been a general improvement in learning, attendance and behaviour which the principal attributes, in part, to the introduction of PLPs in 2006.

The number of students on negative behaviour levels has decreased by 50 per cent between 2006 and 2008. Particular issues with a highly transient group of students across the 2008 cohort have impacted negatively on attendance results. However, more continuous improvements in attendance, literacy, numeracy and behaviour are expected in the long term.

To date improvements in literacy are evident. The school decided in 2006 that by 2008 every student would have grown by one skill band in literacy in state/national benchmarks. This was achieved by 90 per cent for literacy.

Four Indigenous students currently in Year 6 can be used to illustrate the impact of the personalised learning process over the past three years. The table shows the extent of the band growth for these students from Year 3 to Year 5:

Student	Increase in the no. bands for:	
	Literacy	Numeracy
A	3	2
B	2	3
C	2	2
D	2	2

The introduction of the PLP has created a number of positive outcomes for staff. Teachers have built better relationships with students and parents and are better informed about the background and needs of their students. They have become more culturally aware and sensitive to the individual needs of families and students and are confident that their curriculum is culturally inclusive.

Teachers have been responsive to the professional development opportunities they have received, which have improved their teaching. The PLP process has given a greater level of meaning and understanding to staff and parents of the role of the AEO and learning support team members.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the PLP process has given parents more confidence in the school and has changed their views of education to a more positive one. Parents are happy to be engaged with their child's learning through the goal setting and PLP meetings. They are now more confident to volunteer for roles and activities within the school.

Contact details

Telephone: 02 6765 7446. Fax: 02 6762 1215.

Email: hillvue-p.school@det.nsw.edu

Website: www.hillvue-p.schools.nsw.edu.au