

# Effective teaching: A principal's perspective



Mr B is the principal of a primary school in a remote community in Northern Australia. The school had over 100 students.

*Being a principal in a school in a community like this is very rewarding. Effective teaching is achieving great results for students in our classrooms. I have never seen children as engaged with the curriculum as I have at our school.*

## Data analysis A key component

As a principal in a school that has adopted effective teaching, I can say that what sets our school apart from many other schools is the quality and integrity of the data analysis we do across our school.

Every day our teachers collect data on the lessons taught, test results and behaviour. At the end of the week, our data is analysed with the help of a Good to Great Schools Australia expert who coaches us.

We respond to the feedback on a weekly basis rather than having to wait till the end of the term to find out how our students are tacking. We know within a very short time frame how well students are progressing and whether they are firm on the lessons being taught.

We can also allocate additional support to students to help them master concepts before the class moves ahead. This is an important aspect of the program.

For a large part of my week, I am in classrooms, observing teaching, collecting data, delivering regular feedback and coaching my team.



*We are responding to testing data on a weekly basis.*



## Before school Getting prepared

On Wednesday mornings, I arrive at school just before 7 am with our head of class. We have a weekly effective teaching data teleconference with our Instructional Coach. We review a summary report of the testing data that has been collected over the last week, so we can analyse.

We start by discussing the action points from last week's call and what progress has been made. Then we review the data summaries for each teacher and their classes. If the data shows students aren't firm on the content, we may direct students to remediate lessons (they don't move forward until they've mastered each concept).

We talk about test and independent work scores, behaviour issues and questions from teachers. Strategies are suggested and follow-up actions are agreed upon.

We discuss solutions to any 'red-flag' issues that could impact the overall implementation of the program or student progress rates. We celebrate this week's accolades and note positive feedback for those teachers whose groups are progressing well.

Sometimes I meet with our Instructional Coach to go over our term goals, priorities, student data, classrooms and procedures to assist with any issues.

I am grateful for the experience our Coach has so that I can get practical advice on planning, staff management, issue resolution and instructional leadership.

They have also coached me on how to give effective feedback to staff to help them develop, and how to prioritise my workload.

We finish the call by agreeing on our actions for the week, prioritising support for teachers and determining feedback to be delivered from the call.

At 7.45 am, the entire teaching team gathers to receive general feedback and then pairs off to do their weekly partner practice and individual feedback from the call. The entire staff room is buzzing as the teachers practise the aspects of their delivery that have been highlighted as areas for improvement. They also practise their scripts for the upcoming day.

At 8.30 am, I join the Positive Behaviour Interventions and Support (PBIS) management team for fifteen minutes to talk about the previous day and to prioritise any students that may require support or intervention.

Once a week, we have a morning assembly. This is an opportunity for all students and staff to gather to hear the daily messages and to remind each other about our expectations for hard work and great behaviour.



*It's useful having a highly experienced School Improvement Coach on hand.*



## Morning

### Attendance strategy | Classroom observation

Once school starts, I meet with our case managers to discuss targets and attendance strategies for the week. The classroom teachers record attendance twice daily and feed this information to the Case Managers. We use the rolls to decide who to follow up on that morning. Then we visit the parents to enquire about their child's absence, remind them of their obligations and help resolve issues that are keeping the student from school.

Besides the important work we do with parents to ensure they meet their obligation to get their children to school, we have a number of other attendance strategies aimed at the students. These include scheduling birthday clubs, rewards on Fridays (when there is often a dip in attendance) and celebrating students who are doing well by giving attendance awards.

At 9.30 am, I begin my classroom observations for the day to follow up on actions from the data review that morning.

We have a brief classroom observation form that I check off to record:

- Teachers apply effective teaching techniques with fidelity.
- The subject and lesson being taught is the correct one.
- The number of students in groups is appropriate for the class.
- Physical arrangements allow students to see and hear the lesson clearly.
- The teacher uses positive techniques to manage behaviour.
- Students doing independent work are on task.
- Independent work is corrected, and students have done 'fix-ups'.
- Student work is neat and well organised.
- Materials are organised and accessible.
- Written records of student performance are accessible.
- Reward charts are posted.

Later in the morning, I meet with the head of class to discuss my observations from the classroom visits and delegate tasks for them to follow up on during the day.



*Besides the important work we do with parents to ensure they can fulfil their obligation to get their children to school, we have a number of other attendance strategies aimed at the students.*



## Middle

### Weekly leaders operations meeting | Classroom observation

At 11.30 am, principals from both campuses dial into a weekly operations meeting with our network school to discuss specific strategies. This is a great opportunity to share and agree on our continuous improvement strategies.

At lunchtime, I always make time to talk with the students. They love sharing stories with me, and it's a good way to build relationships outside of class time.

In the afternoon, I undertake more classroom observations and pass on feedback to the teachers between

administration tasks. Building great teachers is one of the key elements of our program, so there is a lot of professional development and support available. Receiving regular feedback from observations and information through daily data recording enables them to develop their skills quickly.



## Afternoon

**Extended school day | Home visit | Staff meeting**

We use an extended school day so we can provide four hours of literacy and numeracy in the timetable and have time for our students to practice and learn about their culture and other enriching activities. There are few opportunities to learn other activities in the community, so some of our extracurricular components allow us to provide science, music and culture that are aligned to the Australian Curriculum.

At 3.00 pm, I join the behaviour management team to do home visits for students who have misbehaved during the day. Parents are more open to talking with us in their own homes and are more willing to collaborate on ways to help their child. We talk to the parents about the behaviour incident that day and

any consequences. We also advise on how they can help us to improve behaviour.

After home visits, I catch up with agencies who may have an appointment with me. Once a week at 4.00 pm, we have a staff meeting, which is attended by all staff. This is where we review last week's data, set targets and discuss strategies to improve student progress and mastery.

Afterwards, I meet with administration staff or any teachers who have made appointments.

I finish the day by planning my priorities for the next day and making sure any staff notices and messages for parades are ready to go.



*We use an extended school day so we can provide sufficient literacy and numeracy in the timetable.*

## Our school improvement plan

### Annual planning and continual monitoring and evaluation

Each year, the school leadership and teaching team set the plan. They check back in at key points or term reviews to look at what they have achieved and what they need to do to deliver on our desired outcomes. The school improvement plan maps out:

- essential changes to improve student achievement.
- practices to be undertaken and by whom
- how and when expected changes will be made
- how we will measure the impacts of our efforts
- the role of parents and the community in supporting the plan.

Throughout the year, we continually collect data on student progress and achievements, and school team action and results. During our term

reviews, we compare the data to the goals in our school improvement plan and this informs our actions for the rest of the year.



## School and community partnership

### Annual and monthly forums

Our school has a formal partnership with the community called the Community School Improvement Partnership. The partnership operates through a forum made up of members of the teaching faculty, school leadership, and parent and community leaders.

The forum meets once a year to run a strategic planning session to map out ways we can further develop and enhance the school's education offering. The strategies we develop

inform the school's annual improvement plan.

The forum then meets monthly with a community leader and me facilitating the forum to plan how we can improve the school and our students' education outcomes. We also review a progress report I prepared and discuss what has been achieved and where the community wants to improve, set goals, agree on actions and celebrate achievements.



## School-wide focus on improving attendance

### Annual school attendance strategy

Our school uses targeted school-wide and teacher-led strategies to improve school attendance. Each year, I develop and lead the annual school attendance strategy and support classroom teachers to develop their own classroom attendance strategy for their homeroom students. They adjust the strategies each term based on the impact they are having on attendance.

A rigorous and effective attendance strategy is extremely important as regular absenteeism stunts student development. An effective teaching and learning program cannot solve chronic poor attendance and cannot succeed in teaching students who are simply not present.

Activities I undertake regularly to ensure our school is striving for 100 per cent attendance include ensuring the teaching faculty is active in implementing our attendance strategy, the student data wall is updated, running a 'spotlight' on attendance in the weekly staff meeting and having regular meetings with local agencies and authorities to gain their support and commitment to attendance.

I provide motivating messages to students, teachers and parents. I do this by acknowledging classrooms that have full attendance for the week and recognising 100 per cent attending students at the weekly school assembly. I also hold mid-term attendance awards to recognise high attenders and their parents and teachers.



### About effective teaching

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