

IMPROVING TOGETHER

A CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION
TOOLKIT FOR PRINCIPALS

**School Policy and Funding
Advisory Council**



Education
and Training

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2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002

Minister's message



The pursuit of excellence for every Victorian learner, in every classroom, in every community is what underpins our vision for the Education State.

Working together, harnessing our collective responsibility and enthusiasm to help young Victorians, is vital to succeeding in our journey. Together we can help every young student succeed regardless of where they come from or what school they attend.

Already there is great work happening within all school sectors to support collaboration across schools to improve student outcomes. However, collaboration *across our school sectors* is essential to achieving system-wide improvement in student achievement, engagement and wellbeing.

The School Policy and Funding Advisory Council, established in 2015 to advise me on issues impacting all school sectors, heralds a shift toward a more system-wide approach to improving the outcomes of every Victorian student.

Comprising the managers of the government, Catholic and independent school sectors, the Council is strongly focused on enhancing collaboration across sectors to improve educational opportunities for students in all Victorian schools, and lifting student achievement.

This collaboration resource has been developed by the Council to show case some of the great examples of cross-sector collaboration already occurring in Victoria. It aims to encourage schools to consider how partnerships with schools from other sectors may support them to achieve their own goals, and highlights some practical guidance for principals.

Through such collaboration, every part of our system can become a learning community – a place where we continually deepen our knowledge, reflect on our methods, and improve our practices to address shared challenges.

By unleashing the combined knowledge and unique strengths of all schools in every sector, we can provide every student with the knowledge, capabilities and attributes that will see them thrive throughout their lives, to have the skills that industry needs, and that employers expect.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Merlino". The signature is fluid and cursive.

The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education

Cross-sector collaboration

BACKGROUND

Cross-sector collaboration refers to primary or secondary schools partnering with schools from another sector (government, independent or Catholic) to deliver shared initiatives, teaching, curriculum, or facilities for students from each school. Cross-sector collaboration enables schools to share knowledge and expertise, address common issues and challenges and realise shared opportunities.

It is important to distinguish between collaboration within sectors and collaboration across different sectors.

Collaboration within sectors is not new, with many examples occurring within each sector, often facilitated and supported by central or regional staff.

The focus of this toolkit is cross-sector collaboration. This type of collaboration has developed organically for many Victorian schools. However, the most significant opportunities for cross-sector collaboration – sharing teaching expertise, enhanced curriculum provision and shared access to facilities – remain largely untapped.

Cross-sector collaboration is especially common in rural contexts, where small communities naturally lend themselves to working across sectors to achieve whole of community objectives. These efforts often focus on practical responses to smaller economies of scale, and lack of proximity to other schools from the same sector.

In the face of these challenges, deeper partnerships across school sectors have arisen in rural communities. These efforts include working together to attract and share specialist teachers, shared delivery of professional development, and shared curriculum offerings and the costs of transport, resources and facilities.

Drawing on consultations with principals, this toolkit provides guidance, fact sheets of best practice case studies and resources to assist school leaders interested in partnering across sectors to enhance provision and improve outcomes for their students.

BENEFITS OF CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

There is strong evidence that collaboration between schools can deliver positive gains for students and schools.¹

Cross-sector collaboration can seem difficult to achieve. Some of the barriers to cross-sector collaboration identified by schools include historical differences, declining enrolments, competition for enrolments, timetable clashes, increased workload, distance between schools and different school governance arrangements.

However, cross-sector collaboration can deliver significant benefits for participating schools and students. By working together, the likelihood of achieving improved outcomes for their students is greater than if schools acted alone.

Some of the benefits commonly identified by collaborating schools include:

¹ Mary Atkinson et al. [Interschool collaboration, a literature review](#), Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2007 p. xi.

Improved curriculum provision for students

Some schools may not have sufficient student numbers to offer every subject, or they may find it difficult to attract specialist teachers. By working together, schools can offer a full-time teaching load by sharing the cost of the educator, or share specialist classes or resources. Improved provision through collaboration can enhance learning opportunities for all students in a local community, thereby increasing student engagement and achievement.

Pooled resources

Some schools may find it difficult to engage services or access facilities owing to their small size or location. Schools from different sectors may choose to pool resources or efforts and share resources they would otherwise be unable to obtain. This can improve access to specialist educational and other specialist services and supports for students and the local community, such as health and wellbeing. This can also save on planning time and administration.

Knowledge sharing

Not all schools are located near other schools within their own sector, or share similar educational challenges or needs with those schools. By collaborating with a school from another sector, principals and teachers can share knowledge and build effective practice to address similar challenges or opportunities. This might include joint professional development opportunities and sharing approaches to teaching and learning.

Broader community benefits

Cross-sector collaboration between schools can deliver significant benefits for the local community. Schools from different sectors may come together with the community to develop a whole of community response to local issues of concerns, such as student absenteeism or mental health outcomes. Collaborative initiatives can also foster a sense of shared responsibility for the education and wellbeing outcomes of all children and young people in the local community, through increased involvement in shared education, cultural and sporting activities.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLLABORATION

As the fact sheets in this resource show, there is no preferred or 'right way' to collaborate – participating schools are best placed to determine the arrangements that suit their needs. Collaboration may be time-limited, longer-term or change over time, depending on the need being addressed. It may be relatively informal, such as for social and sporting activities or more formal and supported by partnership or funding agreements with a governance structure in place, such as in the case of shared facilities, which carry more risk.

Practical guidance for principals and school leaders

There are a number of practical steps principals or school leaders may wish to consider when establishing a cross-sector partnership with another school or group of schools.

While these steps are commonly highlighted by principals who have undertaken cross-sector collaboration, schools are best place to determine the needs of their partnership.

1. Informally meet with nearby schools with similar needs

Informal meetings with a number of nearby schools may be organised to discuss shared challenges and opportunities and how collaborating may address shared needs. Effective education partnerships are mutually beneficial. School partnerships will be enhanced where both schools have a shared goal, and share a collective sense of responsibility for all students, regardless of which school they attend.

In discussion, it is suggested schools consider the benefits each school is seeking, and what each can bring to the partnership. The most effective partnerships can be demonstrated to contribute to the improved learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for a school's students, and align with individual school's strategic planning documents.

2. Prepare a partnership proposal

Principals might consider preparing a partnership proposal and review it with their school council (as approver of all partnership activity), students and their families to ensure that the partnership is relevant and supported. Be clear about the nature of the partnership and the benefits it will likely bring to students.

Consider discussing the partnership proposal with existing networks, or regional office, to identify other schools in the region that are working on similar initiatives. This provides an opportunity to investigate similar initiatives in the region, identify other schools that may also want to partner and to brainstorm opportunities collaboratively.

3. Develop a shared strategy with the partner school

Following initial discussions with a potential partner school, consider planning a shared strategy to achieve goals of both schools, depending on the nature and scale of the partnership. This could include:

- Agreement on clear and realistic objectives
- Agreement about how the partnership will be resourced
- Inviting community organisations and other community members to contribute to the partnership
- Equitably assigned responsibilities between the partners
- A dispute resolution mechanism for more formal partnerships that carry ongoing legal and financial risks
- An evaluation process.

4. Establish appropriate governance arrangements

Depending on the nature of the partnership, schools might consider appropriate governance arrangements to manage the partnership over time. After making contact with a nearby school or group of schools about partnership opportunities, partnerships plans,

expectations and possible roles may be formalised in writing. This will clarify responsibilities over time and support sound decision-making.

Consider documenting agreed partnership goals and well-defined shared objectives in a Memorandum of Understanding or Terms of Reference to ensure the partnership is purposeful and clear. Informal partnerships will be suited to more flexible governance arrangements. As above, the level of formality required will differ according to the type of partnership and foreseeable risks over time.

For example, a formal partnership to invest in shared facilities carries ongoing legal, financial and administrative risks, which should be managed through a formal shared-use agreement. In contrast, an informal partnership to share extra-curricular activities between schools might only require school representatives to meet once per term to discuss and plan initiatives.

For other types of partnerships, consideration could be given to establishing a steering committee with school representatives that makes decisions about the partnership and periodically reviews its progress.

Partner schools will be best placed to determine the appropriate level of governance required for their partnership.

5. Embed ongoing communication

Even well planned partnerships can encounter barriers that may impede the achievement of shared objectives. Consider embedding ongoing communication, trust and respect at leadership level to assist resolving these issues early.

FACT SHEET 1

Collaborating to invest in shared school facilities

A formal partnership agreement between Koonung Secondary College (KSC) and Camberwell Grammar School (CGS) was developed to build and share a million dollar hockey and tennis facility. Built on the underutilised grounds of KSC, the infrastructure was funded by CGS in return for shared use of the facilities over the course of the 20-year agreement. In addition to providing state of the art sporting facilities for the students of both schools, the agreement delivers benefits to local community organisations and sporting clubs who can access the facilities.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Principals from government and non-government schools with an interest in forming a partnership to invest in shared facilities

For many schools, building new infrastructure, including sporting facilities, is not feasible due to the upfront capital required. This cost barrier can frustrate plans to develop new facilities, and result in existing facilities or excess space being underutilised. Other schools have limited space to build a new facility, even if they have the resources to invest.

Collaboration with a nearby school to invest in a new, shared facility can make an investment of this size more achievable and suit the needs of both schools. It can provide partner schools long-term access to a new facility, located nearby.

In the case of KSC and CGS, who share a million dollar sports facility used by both schools, this partnership was feasible for the following reasons:

- Both schools were able to share the cost of the development, making it affordable.
- KSC's underutilised football field was an ideal location for the new facility.
- CGS was prepared to invest capital upfront to develop the facility, but had limited space of its own.

BENEFITS

Shared costs

- Partner schools can negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement to share the cost of the investment in a new facility, structured to suit each school's unique circumstances.
- In the example above, CGS committed the upfront capital for the new facility, built on KSC's grounds, in return for guaranteed access for its students for a period of 20 years.
- CGS had insufficient space on its own grounds to build a new facility, which building the facility at KSC addressed.
- KSC agreed to pay for the ongoing costs of maintenance, which is significantly cheaper than paying for the facility outright.
- CGS no longer needs to lease external sports facilities from the local council, which were expensive and short-term.

Shared understanding

- Partner schools can learn from each other's approaches and connect students from both schools by arranging joint activities.

Use of excess or underutilised space

- Where a partner school has excess or underutilised space, this presents an opportunity to re-purpose that land.
- In this example, KSC re-purposed its underutilised football field into a hockey field, providing more opportunities for students to engage in physical activity.

Improved student outcomes

- Shared facilities may provide greater opportunities for students to improve their learning and development.
- In this example, the new facility located at KSC is only a short 15-minute drive away from CGS. Students of both schools can therefore easily access the new facility and engage in physical activity.

Local community

- Enabling local community organisations, including sporting clubs, to access the facility can create goodwill and connections between partner schools and those organisations.
- In this example, KSC negotiated with Camberwell Hockey Club to pay for the lights at

the new hockey field and in exchange, the club now has first choice of training times and can access the facility at a discount rate.

- This has created goodwill with the hockey club and the local community, and shared costs.

Enhanced reputation

- Partner schools having greater access to new facilities can enhance the reputation of both schools, and represents a selling point for potential students and their families.
- In this example, KSC and CGS enhanced both their reputations, as they were able to provide a new sports facility to their students that was easily accessible.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP – THE PROCESS

1. Informally meet with nearby schools

It may be worth considering whether a nearby school might also wish to invest in a shared facility to meet similar needs.

In this example, KSC initially approached multiple schools to discuss the potential of forming a partnership. KSC and CGS had a mutual interest in partnering to reduce cost, utilise excess space and increase student participation in physical activity.

2. Formalise the partnership

Once schools have informally agreed on entering into a partnership with another school, they could consider formalising it to provide clarity and certainty.

In this example, both schools worked with the Department of Education and Training (DET) to prepare a shared use agreement, at no cost to the schools. The agreement guarantees CGS's access to facilities for 20 years, after which the agreement may be renegotiated, or KSC takes back the facility. The agreement also specifies the times at which each school can access the facility: KSC has exclusive use of the facilities during school hours, while CGS has exclusive use from 4.00-5.00pm on weeknights and from 8.00am-1.00pm on Saturdays. At all other times, KSC has the right to lease the facility to raise funds for its upkeep.

3. Planning requirements

Consider the planning requirements of local council, and consult early with local residents to discuss potential impacts on traffic and noise. In the example above, KSC worked with its local council to receive

the planning approvals to build, and consulted with residents on traffic and noise impacts.

Schools might consider the cost of complying with council planning requirements. In this example, KSC was required to pay \$50,000 to receive the appropriate planning permits.

4. Benefiting the local community

Consider how local community organisations, including sporting clubs, could use the facility. This could build goodwill between partner schools and the local community.

In this example, the local hockey club was able to access the facility at a discount rate in exchange for paying for the cost of the lights.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. Time needed to formalise the partnership

Consider the time it could take to formalise the partnership. In the example above, it took KSC and CGS 12-18 months to formally establish their partnership.

2. Shared use and risk management

Partner schools may wish to consider entering into a shared use agreement, which takes into account each school's preferences and sets out clear expectations over time. Major infrastructure investment carries ongoing financial, legal and administrative risks. Legal advice could be sought on preparing a suitable shared use agreement to manage these risks appropriately.

FACT SHEET 2

Collaborating to improve curriculum provision

St Mary MacKillop and Swan Hill Secondary College have a history of shared curriculum provision to provide specialist subjects to students from both schools that otherwise would be unviable, such as specialist mathematics, physics and music. The partnership is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure expectations between schools are clear. In addition to providing more choice for students, the positive ongoing relationship between the schools has also supported broader collaborative activities, such as shared informal professional development.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Principals from government and non-government schools in which small class sizes restrict the breadth of curriculum they can offer

For many schools, providing a broad curriculum for students can be challenging for different reasons, including school size, student demand for particular subjects, location and resourcing. This can affect student outcomes and opportunities.

For small or medium size schools, this challenge can be more pronounced due to resourcing and budgeting constraints.

For schools located in rural or regional locations, it can also be difficult to attract specialist teachers without offering a full-time teaching load.

Partnering with a nearby school to share a specialist teacher, or enabling some students from both schools to share a particular class, can help to overcome these challenges and meet the needs of students.

An example of a successful partnership to share classes is Swan Hill Secondary College and St Mary MacKillop College in Swan Hill. This partnership was successful as:

- Both schools had a history of running collaborative programs, including specialist mathematics, physics and music classes.

- Both schools felt a shared responsibility to provide the best possible education to their students and the local community.

An example of a successful partnership to share a language teacher is Warracknabeal Secondary College and St Mary's Catholic Primary School. This partnership comprised:

- Arranging for the language teacher to work at both schools, so a full-time teaching load could be provided.
- Sharing the cost of the teacher's salary, making it more affordable.

BENEFITS

Breadth of curriculum

- Partnering to share classes and teachers enables partner schools to offer a broader range of subjects to their students (e.g. languages, specialist mathematics, physics and music).
- Sharing the cost of a specialist teacher is cost effective for both schools, and can be delivered in the classroom, or via videoconferencing.
- Sharing a teacher can also work between primary and secondary school partners.

Collaboration and improved teaching

- Sharing students or teachers can provide an opening for sharing knowledge and good practice.
- Collaborating allows partner schools to develop and maintain positive relationships, which can be the foundation for future partnership opportunities.
- Strong working relationships also help partner schools to engage constructively with other issues, such as student movement between schools.

Building a sense of community

- Improving curriculum provision, partnering to meet student demand and improving student outcomes benefits the local community as a whole, in addition to the partner schools themselves.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP – THE PROCESS

1. Informally meet with nearby schools

It is suggested that principals interested in collaborating with a school in another sector meet to

informally discuss whether they have similar interests in enhancing curriculum provision by sharing a teacher and / or classes. Consider whether:

- Both schools have students interested in studying subjects not currently offered.
- It would be possible to either share a class or teacher with that school to meet student demand.
- Doing so would be affordable and sustainable over time.

2. Clearly define the partnership

Principals might wish to consider how both schools can contribute to the cost of sharing classes or teachers, and formalise the arrangement in writing to ensure clarity and certainty.

In the example of Warracknabeal Secondary College and St Mary's Catholic Primary School, both schools share the cost of the Japanese teacher. The teacher is employed by Warracknabeal, but St Mary's pays an invoice based on the time spent at the school. This is a collaborative cost-sharing arrangement.

3. Maintain communication

Principals and school leaders might consider how to ensure shared classes and teachers are well supported by both schools, by maintaining communication about the arrangement at leadership level.

4. Communicate with parents

Parents are important stakeholders in curriculum provision and shared arrangements between schools.

In the example of Swan Hill Secondary College and St Mary MacKillop College, clear communication helped to generate support for collaboration from parents and the community.

communication between both schools, and joint support provided to the teacher, helped to overcome these challenges.

To manage discrepancies in timetabling between schools, it is vitally important to start the conversation well in advance of timetables being developed so the best solution can be built in from the beginning.

2. Administrative and logistical barriers

If both partner schools operate with different school periods and student-free days, class sharing will need to be managed accordingly.

Similarly, logistical barriers such as distance and travel time between schools need to be considered.

3. Maintaining distinctiveness

Partner schools might consider how to manage the messaging around shared classes or teachers, so the community is confident that both schools can provide a range of classes and opportunities to students.

In these examples, all schools were clear and confident in articulating the distinctive qualities of each school, which were enhanced, not reduced, through collaboration.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. Curriculum or age discrepancies

A significant challenge of sharing a teacher can be where partner schools have different curricula or year levels. For example, if one of the partner schools is primary and the other secondary, the shared teacher will need to be able to cater for the different abilities of students in each school.

In the example of Warracknabeal Secondary College and St Mary's Catholic Primary School, their shared Japanese teacher needed to prepare content for Years 7, 8 and 9 students at the secondary school and content for Year 5s at the primary school. Clear

FACT SHEET 3

Collaborating to improve teaching, share knowledge and co-create initiatives

In the small Victoria town of Warracknabeal where everyone knows everyone, it was natural for the town's four schools to come together across sectors to address their shared challenges collaboratively. Initiatives have included working together to improve transitions from kindergarten to primary school and from primary to secondary school, shared professional development, and a shared Japanese teacher between St Mary's Primary School and Warracknabeal Secondary College.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Principals from government and non-government schools in rural areas that face shared educational challenges

Schools serving similar communities may face similar educational challenges, such as delivering a breadth of curriculum in small rural areas.

Partnering with a nearby school by sharing professional development opportunities for staff, transferring knowledge and co-creating educational programs can improve student outcomes. It can also assist the development of approaches tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the local community.

An example of a successful partnership is Warracknabeal Secondary School, Warracknabeal Primary School, Warracknabeal Special Development School and St Mary's Catholic Primary School. This partnership is successful because:

- The schools faced similar educational challenges and developed a culture of collective responsibility to improve student outcomes in Warracknabeal.
- Students at both primary schools usually attended the same kindergarten and secondary school, creating a strong basis for collaboration around student transitions.

- Pooling resources enabled the schools to provide rich professional development opportunities to staff.
- The partnership received support from the community and key stakeholders.

BENEFITS

Improved teaching

- Teaching can be improved through shared professional development (PD) opportunities. Teachers can learn together and from each other, through formal or informal PD events and activities.
- Sharing PD enables schools to transfer useful knowledge tailored to the specific challenges faced by local students.
- In the example above, partner schools shared both informal and formal PD, which expanded the knowledge and skills of teachers in Warracknabeal.

Co-creating initiatives

- Where schools face shared educational challenges, for example in literacy and numeracy, partnering to co-create educational programs can improve outcomes.
- In this example, the schools leveraged the Department of Education and Training (DET)'s three-year 'Linking Learning' project, which focused on improving learning outcomes for children from birth to 12 years across different services.
- The schools introduced a Reader Leaders program, where secondary school students assist students in primary schools and kindergarten to improve their literacy.
- The schools have also been able to share best practice approaches with schools across Victoria through DET's online Community of Practice platform.
- The schools meet regularly to discuss how their teaching can be more aligned.

Transitions

- Collaboration supports student transitions from kindergarten to schools, and primary to secondary.
- In the example above, the primary schools used data collected by kindergarten teachers to design

and implement strategies to address literacy challenges.

- Partnerships also improve relationships between primary and secondary schools, reducing student anxiety during the transition to secondary school.

Community building

- Partnering to co-create initiatives can also present opportunities to involve and benefit the broader community.
- In the example above, the schools' steering committee for the partnership involved representatives from the local newspaper, Rural North West Health, local employment networks, local council and Victoria Police.
- Rural North West Health also provides a speech pathologist free of charge to assist in improving literacy outcomes.
- All schools have participated in the 'Bridges out of poverty program', which aims to increase feelings of inclusion for disadvantaged members of the community.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP – THE PROCESS

1. Informally meet with nearby schools with similar needs

Consider meeting informally with nearby schools to discuss whether they face similar educational challenges, would like to improve their teaching, share knowledge, and co-create student initiatives or projects.

A partnership within a local community will be enhanced where all schools share a collective sense of responsibility for all students, regardless of which school they attend.

2. Governance arrangements

It is suggested schools consider appropriate governance arrangements to manage the partnership over time.

For example, this could involve a steering committee with school and community representatives that periodically reviews the partnership and recommends changes.

3. Maintain communication

It is suggested that regular communication about the partnership is maintained at school leadership level.

This will help to identify opportunities to maximise benefits for all schools.

4. Evaluate outcomes

Partnerships aimed at improving outcomes can be enhanced by regular use of data to monitor impact in all schools.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. School resources and time

A barrier to cross-sector collaboration can be principal and staff time in establishing and maintaining the partnership.

Consider ways to re-purpose existing meeting time to build the partnership, and share organisational tasks between schools.

2. Maintaining distinctiveness

Schools might together consider how to manage the messaging around shared PD and student initiatives, so that the community is confident that all schools can provide a range of opportunities to students.

In the examples above, schools were clear and confident in articulating the distinctive qualities of each school, which were enhanced, not reduced, through collaboration.

3. Differences between sectors

There are multiple differences between sectors, such as their strategic or annual planning processes. However, if the educational challenges and priorities are shared by all schools, this lends itself to collaboration.

FACT SHEET 4

Collaborating to expand your student community

Formed 12 year ago, the Southern Mallee Lakes Cluster comprises six government and non-government schools that have come together to provide the best education opportunities for their students, irrespective of which school sector they attend. By working together, these schools can deliver for their students, curriculum and other activities that would not otherwise be viable owing to their small size, such as school sports and excursions, social and cultural activities, and shared professional development.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Principals from small government and non-government schools who would like to bring together their student community.

Small schools face a number of challenges in providing a diverse range of opportunities for students that contribute to their educational outcomes, as well as their health and wellbeing. Schools may not have sufficient student numbers or resources to offer all of the extra-curricular activities that could be offered if nearby schools worked together.

Forming a partnership cluster with nearby schools can help to build sufficient student numbers. For example, a cluster of schools working together could:

- Organise combined sporting teams
- Share camps or other social activities
- Share cultural performances
- Share other educational activities.

An example of a successful partnership is the Southern Mallee Lakes cluster, formed 12 years ago involving six schools, both government and non-government. The cluster includes schools from Hopetoun, Yaapeet, Rainbow, Jeparit and Beulah. This partnership was successful for the following reasons:

- The schools had an existing relationship through the Southern Mallee Sports Association, which formed the basis for further collaborative efforts.
- The schools share camps and host cluster days when students from all schools come together for sporting and social interaction, or to watch a cultural performance and then participate in learning activities.
- Pooling resources enabled the schools to provide a wider variety of extra-curricular opportunities to students.

BENEFITS

Pool resources and share facilities

- Forming a partnership can enable schools to pool resources and share facilities or activities.
- Some schools might have different facilities than other schools in the cluster. Therefore, partnering can provide schools with an otherwise unavailable site to host shared activities, including sport, camps or cultural performances.
- Pooling resources and combining student experiences can also be more cost effective.
- In this example, primary schools in the cluster share Grade 5 and 6 camps.
- Where previously some of the schools organised camps individually with a very small number of students, combining camps was more cost effective.

Improve student outcomes

- A cluster of schools could provide a wider variety of opportunities for students compared to what each school could offer individually.
- This could increase the health and wellbeing outcomes of students in the local community, regardless of which school they attend.
- In the example above, schools combine to send netball and football teams to compete in Horsham when low student numbers per school would otherwise prevent this.
- Students were able to socialise and build relationships with peers more easily, which assisted in their transition to secondary school.

Community building

- In small rural areas, establishing school clusters that collaboratively provide opportunities for students also benefits the community as a whole.

- In this example, student engagement with local sporting clubs has improved, as all students in the local area know each other.
- Broader connections in the community have also improved, including stronger connections between parents from all schools.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP – THE PROCESS

1. Informally meet with nearby schools

It is suggested principals meet informally with nearby schools to discuss whether any face similar challenges and would like to partner to provide a wider variety of opportunities to students.

A partnership within a shared community may be enhanced when all schools share a collective sense of responsibility for all students, regardless of which school they attend.

2. Governance arrangements

It is suggested schools consider appropriate governance arrangements to manage their partnership over time.

This could involve a steering committee with school representatives that makes decisions about joint activities.

In this example, the representatives from cluster schools meet once per term to plan events and discuss initiatives that the cluster might pursue.

3. Share workload

Schools might consider sharing hosting and logistical duties. It is suggested that all schools agree to contribute to all activities at the outset and continue to share cost and resourcing fairly.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. Logistics and costs

A barrier to collaboration can be varying proximity of schools in the cluster, and the costs of travel. It is suggested schools consider the implications of partners needing to travel long distances for shared activities.

In this example, Jeparit is an hour from Hopetoun. One way of overcoming this challenge was to rotate events around the cluster, so schools could take turns travelling to shared activities.

2. Different facilities

Schools in the partnership may have different facilities, affecting their capacity to host shared events. If events more frequently occur at one school, consideration might be given to other schools in sharing other tasks related to the partnership, such as designing or evaluating activities.

3. Changes in leadership

Embedding a culture of collaboration in cluster schools will help to ensure that the cluster arrangement retains support over time, even when leadership structures change.

Schools might consider collecting evidence on the effectiveness of the partnership to form the basis of an evaluation of the partnership, and assist in convincing new leadership of the partnership's value over time.

Further reading

Analysis of evidence on partnerships

Analysis of evidence on school partnerships:

- Mary Atkinson, et al., *Inter-school collaboration: a literature review* National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2007. Accessible at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED502393>
- Dr. Paul Armstrong, *Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement: a review of the evidence*. UK Department of Education, 2015. Accessible at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-improvement-effective-school-partnerships>
- Tom Bentley and Ciannon Cazaly, *The shared work of learning: Lifting educational achievement through collaboration*. Mitchell Institute, 2015. Accessible at: <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/the-shared-work-of-learning/>
- Robert Hill, *Achieving more together: Adding value through partnership*. Association of School and College Leaders, 2008.

Rural areas

Analysis of the benefits and challenges of school partnerships in rural areas:

- Robert Hill, Kelly Kettlewell and Jane Salt, *Partnership working in small rural primary schools: The best of both worlds*. Education Development Trust, 2014. Accessible at: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/en-GB/our-research/our-research-library/2014/r-partnership-working-2014>
- Daniel Muijs, 'Widening opportunities? A case study of school-to-school collaboration in a rural district' (2008) 11(1) *Improving Schools* 61-73. Accessible at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1365480207086755>

International guidance

International guidance on establishing school partnerships:

- National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, *A National College guide to partnerships and collaborations*, 2010. Accessible at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2098/>

Department of Education and Training

Guidance on collaboration and resources:

- Shared use of school facilities web page, including joint-use agreements: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/infrastructure/pages/propertyshare.aspx>