

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DAYS

Here are some examples of how principals and teachers have approached the planning and implementation of professional practice days within their school setting. It may prompt thinking and add value to discussions amongst colleagues.

Assessing well-made plans

Dedicated collaboration

Transparent planning

Planning alongside FISO

Supported planning

Consultative refinement

Supported teams

Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

East Gippsland Specialist School

Oberon Primary School

Koo Wee Rup Primary School

Williamstown High School

Boneo Primary School

Footscray City Primary School

ASSESSING WELL-MADE PLANS

Principal Keith Hauge and Teacher Kate Elmer assess the schools implementation of professional practice days.

Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

Hoppers Crossing Secondary College is a co-educational school situated 30 kilometres west of Melbourne's CBD, with almost 1500 students and over 100 teachers.

Starting point

'We have encouraged our staff to see the big picture', Keith explains.

Encouraging staff to see the big picture, one of Hoppers Crossing's priorities in the 2018 AIP was building teacher capacity to differentiate when delivering curriculum. The aim was to challenge and ensure progress for every student.

A managed schedule

Using an online system, Hoppers Crossing is able to manage the scheduling of PPDs for teachers. Days of school activity requiring staff coverage were marked as unavailable for PPDs. The leadership team requested no more than four teachers take a PPD on any given day. During exam periods up to ten teachers are scheduled.

Keith confirmed, 'Teachers are appreciative of the time.'

Strategic resource management

The reliance on casual relief teachers from several agencies to cover PPDs is experienced at Hoppers Crossing. Teachers prepare lesson plans on the school's learning management portal. Casual relief teachers are also engaged to supervise students preparing for external exams.

Focus area – assessment of student learning

In Term 2, the Year 12 Health and Human Development teachers came together as a team to use their PPD to conduct moderated assessment of school assessed coursework (SACs). This enabled a consistent assessment approach and identified common improvement areas for teachers to focus on during Semester 2.

Teacher Kate Elmer agrees, 'The professional practice day provided an extended period for moderated assessment. It allowed us to drive improvement in individual classes.'

DEDICATED COLLABORATION

Principal Barbara Olsen shares the importance of collaboration on professional practice days.

East Gippsland Specialist School

East Gippsland Specialist School is located in Bairnsdale with approximately 110 students aged five to 18 years of age and 50 specialist education and support staff.

Shared priorities

East Gippsland Specialist School prioritised improving students' literacy and numeracy outcomes in their AIP; deciding to undertake specific professional development to improve high quality literacy and numeracy learning practice.

Strategic resource management

In 2018, East Gippsland Specialist School employed an additional staff member to cover teachers taking PPDs and personal leave. This additional teacher had a mathematics and science background and often supported students with their numeracy learning when covering teacher absences.

Principal Barbara Olsen said, 'The additional teacher was inducted into the school culture and provided reliable and consistent staffing coverage.'

Focus area - planning and collaboration

In 2018, many teachers opted to use their PPD to work alongside allied health staff, to develop safety plans for students and engage in resource development. Teachers also dedicated time to target and plan teaching strategies for the diverse needs of their students.

One teacher also visited a local primary school to learn about their mathematics program and observe teaching practice. This is a valuable opportunity to engage in focused activities and to connect with local schools.

Realised benefits

Post PPDs, time is taken to discuss the benefits of the day through informal conversations between school leaders and teachers.

Initially, teachers noted their increased knowledge and engagement in teaching and learning practice. As the year progressed, discussions highlighted the importance of PPDs to build professional connections between the staff of East Gippsland Specialist, other specialist schools, local primary schools and with allied health staff.

TRANSPARENT PLANNING

Teacher Henry Crofts shares the support from the schools consultative committee in planning professional practice days.

Oberon Primary School

Oberon Primary School is located in a suburb of Geelong, one hour south west of Melbourne, with approximately 190 students in 8 classes and 14 teaching staff including the principal and assistant principal.

Planning the focus

Oberon Primary is a PLC school that has developed a culture of collaboration in a non-judgemental environment where staff actively share ideas. Oberon Primary School teachers' focus during Terms 1, 2 and 3 is curriculum planning. The Term 4 focus is on assessment of student learning, and preparation for the year ahead.

Henry says, 'I personally plan to be as productive as possible. Reviewing curriculum, co-planning with colleagues, nutting out new ideas, and working out how to overcome blocks I might have with specific students.'

Strategic resource management

Potential dates and focus areas for PPDs are discussed at the consultative committee. Due to the location of the school, CRTs can be difficult to source so the committee recommended a planning model that made it easier for teachers to take a PPD on the same day. This supported working together on a particular focus area.

'Being a small school, the whole school sits on the consultative committee,' Henry said. At Oberon Primary, PPDs occur during one week of a term so CRTs are engaged for a week block. This also allows teacher teams to undertake the same PPD if they want, or individuals to deepen their practice independently.

Teachers do remain flexible with their scheduled PPD at Oberon Primary, swapping days within the allocated week with colleagues if needed. In the second year of PPDs being implemented, the committee reviewed this model and decided it worked well.

Strategic alignment

At Oberon Primary, the link of PPDs to teachers' professional development plans also aligns to the school's AIP. To support this alignment, the assistant principal created a succinct, user-friendly version of the AIP for teachers to pin up in the staff room.

Henry agreed, 'This document is a great support, teachers found it invaluable to help focus on where we are going as a group, and giving a clear line of sight on what the school was aiming for.'

Wellbeing benefit

In a small school, teachers can wear many hats and take on extra duties. Henry says, 'I feel more relaxed and enjoy my time in the classroom a lot more.'

PLANNING ALONGSIDE FISO

Principal Nathan Jogoe uses the improvement cycle to guide the focus of professional practice days.

Koo Wee Rup Primary School

Koo Wee Rup Primary School is located one hour south east of Melbourne's CBD and has almost 300 students and approximately 15 teachers.

'We support teachers to be open and honest about areas for improvement. We have a culture of trust and collective accountability,' Nathan said.

Sharing ambition and vision

Koo Wee Rup Primary Schools priorities in their 2018 AIP included the use of critical thinking to improve learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

The leadership team developed a vision to share with staff to improve numeracy outcomes as a school priority.

Professional learning culture

'We viewed the professional practice days as an opportunity', said Nathan.

Over a period of three years, the school implemented professional learning communities where teachers are encouraged to openly share challenges in practice, and support each other to learn.

During PPDs, primary maths and science specialists supported teachers to analyse their data and plan instructional approaches. Teachers then worked together on curriculum content and strengthening teaching practice.

Flexible planning

The school uses a flexible planning process for their PPDs. Teachers take PPDs at a time that aligns with the teaching team's improvement cycle; for example, it was helpful to take a PPD at the *develop and plan* stage to discuss instructional strategies.

Later in the cycle, teachers examine student learning data against established SMART goals. This offers teachers the opportunity to acknowledge achievements before they move to set the next goals and priorities for new or continuing student learning needs.

SUPPORTED PLANNING

Principal Gino Catalano discusses the planning required for a large school to implement professional practice days.

Williamstown High School

Williamstown High School is located across two sites in a western bayside suburb of Melbourne. The school's junior (Year 7 to 9) and senior (Year 10 to 12) campuses host approximately 750 students each. There are over 100 teachers across the two campuses.

Shared goals

Williamstown High School's 2018 AIP includes a key improvement in student advocacy, to design and implement ways of increasing ownership of the direction of students' own learning.

'The school set up an online process with an e-form for staff to identify their PPD focus, their team and their preferred time,' Gino explained.

With more than 100 teaching staff, a leading teacher at Williamstown coordinates the PPDs. The leading teacher liaises with teachers, the principal and the daily organiser to plan for teacher coverage.

Choosing how to work

Gino said, 'It's better to plan according to the needs of the teachers, and so we are flexible with accepting advance requests.'

Teachers share their goals for PPDs with the principal and school leaders when discussing the focus of their days. Teachers are also encouraged to work collaboratively and share learnings.

In 2018, some teachers used their PPDs to work in teams to create assessment rubrics. These rubrics supported students to understand their abilities and to direct and take responsibility for their own learning.

Other teachers worked together on their PPDs to complete moderated assessment of school assessed coursework (SAC) and to plan future SACs.

Recognising benefits

Focus areas and activities undertaken by teachers on their PPDs were recorded and considered. 'Teachers seem to appreciate the opportunity to collaborate during a school day, particularly when they have the opportunity to complete moderated assessment of student work,' Gino confirmed.

CONSULTATIVE REFINEMENT

Teacher Stacey Doleman acknowledges that sometimes reviewing how professional practice days are implemented is important.

Boneo Primary School

Boneo Primary School is located on the Mornington Peninsula, south of Melbourne. The school has a student enrolment of around 350, and approximately 25 teaching staff.

Constant refinement

The consultative committee at Boneo is responsive to needs, adapting the model for the timing and focus of PPDs. The school had used paper pro-formas, and has since moved to online e-forms.

‘There is constant refining of the timetable process, even in a small school, so it works for everybody,’ Stacey said.

Various days and schedules were tested for PPDs. The school’s consultative committee worked to identify a five week period where staff could take their PPDs, but remained flexible with the model if staff wanted to attend a specific professional development session.

The decision that no more than three teachers settle on the same date was made, and it was suggested that Mondays were not taken as a PPD to ensure least disruption to the school.

Planning with flexibility

Stacey explained, ‘Staff feel lucky with how PPDs have been implemented and how they use the days; it is very flexible.’

At the beginning of each term, Boneo’s consultative committee discusses PPDs. What worked well, what didn’t, and how the school could run PPDs in the upcoming term. Once an agreement is reached, staff are given advance notice to book their days. If teams choose to, they can take their PPDs together. Most teams choose to plan collaboratively once or twice a year. Staff are given autonomy as to how to use these days to best focus on quality delivery of teaching and learning.

A professional focus

Teachers use the PPD in Term 1 to look at school data and consider links with the AIP. Teachers have said that this particular PPD allowed time to properly develop genuine Performance and Development goals to work towards. Graduate teachers and their mentors chose to take some of their PPDs together to work through planning or to build evidence to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

Using time effectively

Stacey confirmed, ‘Teachers love it, they love being able to have a day completely uninterrupted, feeling very productive with how much work they can get done.’ Stacey went on to say, ‘Teachers feel the key to success on PPDs is to have a list to work through on the day, this reduces distractions and the need to undertake the day to day work a teacher does like responding to emails.’

SUPPORTED TEAMS

Principal Jesse Hand has experienced the power of collaborative team work and learning taking place on professional practice days.

Footscray City Primary School

Footscray City Primary School is located in Melbourne's inner west, and has approximately 420 students and 22 teachers.

Priorities

Footscray City's priorities in their 2018 AIP include working to maximise student learning growth across the curriculum with a focus on writing and mathematics.

Consistent class coverage

Over time, the school has built a consistent group of CRTs who cover PPDs. These relief teachers are drawn from an agency and are supported in ensuring consistency and continuance of the classroom program with work program documentation made accessible on an online platform.

Integrated and supported

Footscray City established a plan for their PPDs for the whole of 2018, but were also flexible in changing the timing of days to fit their teaching and improvement cycle.

Principal Jessie Hand says, 'Teachers have experienced the power of collaborative teamwork and collaborative learning.'

Teachers are encouraged to use PPDs to contribute to their performance and development goals. Learning specialists make themselves available to support individuals with their professional learning.

If teachers choose to take their days in teams, they can request a learning specialist to lead the team on a particular instructional practice or collaborative planning for student learning.

Professional learning experiences

Learning specialists have provided opportunities for colleagues to participate in structured observation sessions, followed by debriefing and feedback. In-class coaching is then tailored to support new learnings.

In 2018, the prep team focused on how language experience supports literacy outcomes using the Department's Literacy Teaching Toolkit. The team visited a local P-9 College for an observation session, then spent the rest of the day working on their own plans to adapt and adopt the practices in their classroom.