

## **The Social Values Education Project at Wantirna South Primary School**

*Our Social Values Education Project takes a multifaceted, whole school approach to making our school a 'great school!' At the end of 2006, it came to our attention that we could be doing better, in terms of improving student attitudes to school in terms of their feelings of connectedness to school and peers, their feelings of safety at school and their confidence (Students Attitudes to School Survey, 2006). We knew it wasn't all bad, but we wanted to make a significant improvement in these outcomes for our students. We decided to begin a community consultation process, asking the whole school community 'What makes a great school?' By the end of Term One, after a variety of consultation activities, we had the answer from our school community – 'We do!'*

*Wow! That was encouraging! Being a 'great school' was within our reach and the power was in our hands!*

### **Background**

Wantirna South Primary School community is located in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Beginning life as a one teacher rural school almost sixty-seven years ago, it currently has an enrolment of just over three hundred students. Over the years, our school has developed a strong sense of community through the commitment of many long term staff members and an active and highly supportive parent body. More recently, the appointment of a number of graduate teachers has further energised and enriched our school's programs. Our principal Andrew Crossett was appointed in 2005 and has brought with him the desire to continue the development of values education within our teaching and learning programs.

During 2006, our Year of Review, we had many conversations about what we as a community wanted the school to look like in the future. Arising from these conversations we made a number of recommendations that were written into our *Strategic Plan 2007-2010* and have formed the basis for our Values Education program. The Strategic Plan identified the need to build community, leadership and values among our own students, and then to lead them out beyond the fences of the school into the broader community. We have also established links with the Knox Council and in particular their 'Vision 2025' which outlines the aspirations of Knox residents into the future. In this document we found a number of parallel objectives between their vision for the future, and our Strategic Plan. The big picture plan was beginning to emerge, but we needed to bring the whole school community on board. The question was, how?

### **Community Consultation**

We began our Social Values Education Project through a community consultation approach, sharing the journey toward defining our values. Firstly, staff decided that in order to engage the school community in this process, our key question would be, 'What makes a great school?' Year Five and Six students discussed the question using a think-pair-share activity in class and then shared their thoughts at our first assembly of the new school year.

Over the next few weeks, the school community was engaged in an exploration of what we wanted our school to be. Through art activities at lunch times, the school newsletter and a community notice board, parents, students and other

community members posted their thoughts on 'What makes a great school?'. Within classes, teachers and students used a variety of thinking tools to explore the question. People didn't talk a lot about the physical resources that we had or didn't have at our school. They talked overwhelmingly, about who we are or could be, and what we all bring or could bring to make our school a 'great' school. We discovered the answer to 'What makes a great school?' was '*We do!*'

The power to make our school a great school was in the attitudes, words and actions of each member of the school community. Continuing the consultation process, a values survey was distributed to parents and teachers, from which we identified five shared values that were strongly supported by all: care, honesty, inclusion, responsibility and respect.

Our Social Values Education Project encompasses three aspects:

1. Values Education Curriculum
2. Cultural Development
3. Parent Education

## **Values Education Curriculum**

After identifying five core values, we began the process of talking about them and defining what they really mean in thought, word and deed. This involved teaching the values explicitly to our students, and discussing them within the context of our everyday activities and interactions at school. As a whole school, we began with 'care' and then focussed on a different value every fortnight. Students and teachers also used thinking curriculum tools to unpack, understand and apply the values.

For example:

- Y-Chart: What does *care* sound like/look like/feel like?
- Reverse key thinking: What would our school look like/sound like/feel like if no one *cared*?
- 5 W's and H: How, when, where, what, why and which of *caring*.

Displays, assembly items and newsletter articles raise the profile of our values and show explicitly what the value is and how to live by it.

## **M-power and Coaching Programs in the senior school**

Within the senior school, teachers considered it vital to address issues specifically raised in the 2006 Student Attitudes to School Survey, such as improving: feelings of connectedness to school and peers, feelings of safety at school and confidence. It was decided to implement two programs, one for boys, based on basketball coaching and one for girls, M-Power. These programs incorporate active learning and group processes, involving the children in cooperative problem solving and role play. The teaching and learning approach is in line with Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and Principles of Learning and Teaching (PoLT), with both content and process covering interpersonal development (social skills) and personal learning (self-reflection).

## **Cultural Development**

In our initial planning, we explored the appointment of a School Chaplain who would make a strong contribution to our values education and community building initiatives, and work along side teachers, students and families in support of the goals outlined in our Strategic Plan. We have been very fortunate to have Chris Littlechild appointed as Chaplain of our school and he has been pivotal in

establishing the WINGS project. WINGS stands for; *Wisdom, Initiative, Needs, Gentleness, Sensitivity.*

An exciting component of WINGS has been establishing links with an aged care facility 'Villa Maria', which shares a boundary with our school. With the help and guidance of Chris Littlechild we began planning the pilot of an intergenerational program that would see our students interacting with the Villa Maria residents on a regular basis. This initiative began with a great deal of positive energy in 2007 and has provided a very special place where we can live out our values and make a difference in the lives of others in our community.

In Term Two of 2007 we began creating a school mural with the theme, 'What do we grow at school?' All Wantirna South Primary School students worked in the art room to develop ideas and then 28 children worked in multi-age teams to complete the mural. This activity was about valuing each others ideas and talents, and gave the students many opportunities to practice social skills, such as listening, negotiating, evaluating, and taking turns.

Our values continue to be promoted by our Principal in the weekly newsletter and at assemblies. One of our graduate teachers has created a Friday assembly award for three students who have been seen in the classroom or playground, living out our values. This initiative has been well supported by parents, with a larger prize box being made because of all the donations!

## **Parent Education**

### **Semester One**

Our Chaplain, Chris Littlechild, has been involved in coaching parents and children through issues such as 'How to speak to one other' and 'Does your child feel loved?', After identifying the best way to approach the student's needs, Chris works to empower the parents of the student to provide the reassurance and expression of love, needed by the individual child.

Chris has found, in counselling students who experience more frequent social difficulties, such as bullying or teasing, that students establish a few facts about a situation and then assume the worst, leading to a rapid escalation of negative emotions and subsequent loss of control over themselves and the situation. In this upset state, students are disempowered and make fewer positive choices. Chris coaches these students to practice positive self-talk and problem solving techniques in order to deal with their feelings, particularly in challenging situations.

Chris has noted that for all children in our school the biggest reason for acting out in anger, was from a sense that they felt isolated and unaccepted. He has also identified that many students believe that it is other's role to make them happy; rather than something they can influence. Chris' insight, care and counsel contribute enormously to the well-being of individuals and the school community as a whole.

### **Semester Two**

The opening of a new extension to our Multi-Purpose Room in September, offers us an excellent opportunity to invite parents to take part in a parenting seminar. Chris Daicos will address issues to do with positive parenting and creating resilient families. Baby sitting and supper will be provided, so that parents have

the opportunity to further develop social support networks within the school community.

## **Looking Ahead**

Here at Wantirna South Primary School, we are on a journey to being a 'great' school and we are working together to find the way. Being a 'great school' is not just a destination, it's a way of being. In terms of classroom lessons, values education is embedded explicitly in the curriculum, however, the timely conversations we have with children about real situations in the classroom or playground, provide potent teaching moments. More subtly and perhaps more powerfully, there is the 'hidden curriculum' we teach, in the ways we model positive personal and social behaviours, such as optimism, forgiveness, self-respect, care for others, how we greet others, speak to each other and treat each other. Our way ahead is signposted by our shared values. It is not prescribed in a package but demands that we continue to sensitively interact and consult with our school community, and that we strategically respond to identified needs.