

YEAR 7 TO HIGH SCHOOL

Leading the way

Year 7 to High School Pilot Project

REPORT

This report outlines the Leading the Way Pilot Project undertaken in 2019-2020 to trial the transition of Year 7 in high school, ahead of the statewide move in 2022.



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education

INTRODUCTION

The South Australian public education system will be moving year 7 to high school in 2022. This will bring our state into line with schools from all Australian States and Territories and make it easier to align teaching to the Australian Curriculum.

This means that from 2022, year 6 will be the last year of primary school and year 7 will be the first year of high school in South Australian public schools.

The move will fulfil the state government's election commitment to move year 7 to high school in 2022.

The move brings new opportunities for our students, workforce and system. Year 7 students will benefit from access to specialist facilities and resources and exposure to different teaching styles, and the new high school environment will provide opportunities for more peer interactions and greater independence and responsibility.

As part of planning for the move, the Department for Education identified 3 government high schools with distinctly different school contexts to 'Lead the Way' and take part in a pilot program to introduce year 7 from 2020. Mitcham Girls High School, Wirreanda Secondary School and John Pirie Secondary School were selected as the pilot schools to offer insights into the transition process, to inform the statewide move in 2022.

The Queensland Government took a similar approach when preparing for the move of year 7 to high school. Their pilot program was highly successful and provided valuable information which supported their system wide rollout.

This report highlights the experiences of our pilot schools and provides early insights into workforce planning, funding arrangements, wellbeing, curriculum and transition processes between primary and high schools. These insights will be important in informing the statewide transition of year 7 to high school in 2022.

Participant names and details have been altered to maintain confidentiality.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The move of year 7 to high school brings opportunity for us to do things better at a system level. It supports our department's journey of continuous improvement and working towards delivering a world-class education.

Transitioning from primary school to high school is a normal process for schools and students. However, the move of year 7 to high school is a change that South Australia's public education system has not experienced. Two particular challenges for high schools will be tailoring their teaching and learning to young adolescents and managing the transition of a double cohort in a single year.

To support the statewide move and inform school leaders in their planning and preparation for 2022, the Department for Education identified schools to 'Lead the Way' as part of a pilot program which introduced year 7 in high school in 2020.

This report highlights the experiences of the pilot schools as they prepared for year 7 students to enter their school, and captures their insights following the year 7 students learning in high school for the first 2 school terms in 2020. The report provides early insights into preparing, planning and transitioning a double cohort of students. These insights will be important in informing the statewide transition of year 7 to high school in 2022.

Findings from the review indicate that year 7 students are ready for high school and have thrived in a secondary environment. The year 7 students are enjoying the independence, peer interactions and challenges of high school.

Families who participated in the review agreed that their child was ready for high school, but identified some seemingly small challenges that became significant concerns. Navigating a larger school, understanding the timetable and managing expectations regarding homework and course content were early concerns that created anxiety and stress for many of the year 7 students.

Secondary leaders participating in the review noted the clear differences between year 7 and year 8 students. The cognitive maturity of a year 7 student is different, as is their need to develop relationships with teachers to better connect to learning. Having year 7 students on site demonstrated to the high schools their need to modify expectations and explore differentiated teaching strategies to support student learning.

Participants in the review noted the significant work required to prepare for the move of a double cohort and acknowledged this work has been far greater than anticipated. Secondary leaders accredited the success of the move for both year 7 and year 8 students to the dedication from all staff, in particular key staff assigned specifically to managing and supporting transition.

Secondary leaders highlighted the importance of having well-defined leadership structures to assist transition and support the increased workload for principals. The review found that creating leadership positions in secondary schools to focus on the move of year 7 strengthened the relationships between primary schools and primary teachers.



and supported transitioning students and families. These leadership roles, which have become critical in our pilot high schools, include a focus on developing curriculum for young adolescent learners to support the continuity of learning throughout high school.

The review highlighted the importance of human resources profiling and the need for principals to have a clear vision about the value that primary trained teachers could contribute to their school. While having content knowledge was important, secondary leaders suggested that having staff who were able to develop relationships with young adolescents was critical to support student engagement and improve learning outcomes.

Having site specific financial and business management support while planning for the move of year 7 assisted the pilot schools to identify areas of risk or improvement relating to budget, administration and funding. Secondary school leaders felt additional financial planning support ensured their school had robust administration processes and a solid understanding of budgets to make sure financial resources were used efficiently and achieved whole school outcomes.

Secondary leaders raised concerns about the timing and allocation of retrospective funding. While this has previously had some funding impacts, the transition of a double cohort highlighted the financial risk of high schools inadequately funding the staff and support services they need by using budget lines based on the previous year's enrolments. Secondary leaders have recommended that retrospective funding models are reviewed prior to 2022.

While the pilot high schools suggested early curriculum planning was important, participants in the review believe dedicating time after year 7 students have started to change or modify plans and learning outcomes was highly important. Secondary leaders noted the importance of having a better understanding of young adolescents once staff were working and engaging with the students daily. Reviewing and adapting curriculum during the year has supported the individual schools journey of continuous improvement.

Secondary leaders participating in the review noted the importance of cross-collaboration when designing curriculum. One benefit the pilot high schools identified was the connections made with primary schools and primary teachers to develop curriculum and identify the learning needs of young adolescents. Developing these relationships also strengthened the continuity of learning from primary school to high school.

Another aspect of collaboration was within the high schools. Participants in the review noted the new connections and positive interactions between high school teachers. New primary recruits identified mentoring programs, co-curriculum design opportunities in specific learning areas and observing new pedagogies as actions that supported their transition to high school teaching. Secondary leaders and high school teachers noted the primary recruits' positive contributions to curriculum planning, sharing of pedagogies and ability to engage with young adolescents as key strengths that have benefited their high schools.

Findings from the review indicate that professional learning activities supported secondary schools to prepare for the move of year 7 students, particularly when there was a whole school focus dedicated to exploring the needs of young adolescents. Secondary



leaders and high school teachers benefited from opportunities to observe primary teachers in a primary setting, which further supported their continued understanding of young adolescents.

Participants in the review acknowledged the importance of providing a comprehensive transition to support the students to successfully move to high school. Secondary leaders noted the critical role of primary schools, primary teachers and families in providing valuable information which supported the high school's curriculum planning, resources allocation and understanding of individual learning needs.

Senior secondary leaders noted the increased work for high schools in providing all-inclusive transition activities for year 7 and year 8 students. To support the statewide move in 2022 and to assist high schools develop comprehensive student profiles, senior secondary leaders have suggested providing high schools early access to student school-based information, which is currently available on the Educational Dashboard. High schools felt this information, accompanied with the information provided by primary schools and families, would offer a complete picture of the enrolled student and strengthen the continuity of learning between primary school and high school.

Findings from the review highlighted the vital role that School Services Officers (SSOs) play in supporting the transition of vulnerable and at risk students, including students with disability. Secondary leaders felt the extended transition activities and early connections that SSOs made with families, students and primary schools enhanced the overall transition experience for students.

Families who contributed to the review were pleased with the level of communication received about transition. Secondary leaders anticipated greater engagement from parents or caregivers following the relationships they established during transition but they have found it challenging to keep parents engaged. While most families want to establish more dialogue with teachers, some identified working full-time as a barrier.

Concerns were raised by families regarding the unexpected costs associated with moving their student to high school. This created anxieties and financial pressures for families with more than 1 student moving to high school. Providing early and accurate information about technology and devices, materials and school fees, uniforms and extra-curricular sports activities would allow new families to prepare and financial plan for any additional costs.

Participants in the review were surprised at how well the year 7 students settled into their school communities. Secondary leaders found that placing a strong focus on building relationships early in term 1 helped the students to quickly feel comfortable and safe in their new environment. Creating dedicated safe spaces around the school also provided a level of reassurance for year 7 and year 8 students feeling anxious about interacting with older students.

The pilot high schools commented on how much the younger students still enjoyed running around and playing games. Secondary leaders participating in the review suggested that high schools consider providing outdoor recreational spaces and physical education equipment to nurture social interactions and wellbeing for young adolescents.



Secondary leaders participating in the review identified the move of year 7 as an opportunity for schools to think differently. Participants agreed the move of year 7 to high school was a significant change on a scale not experienced before and making this move a success for our students and the workforce requires everyone to work together, at every level.



Scope and Methodology

This report focuses on 3 South Australian high schools: John Pirie Secondary School (JPSS), Mitcham Girls High School (MGHS) and Wirreanda Secondary School (WSS). The schools were selected by the Department for Education (DfE) to participate in the *Leading the Way* pilot project.

The objective of the *Leading the Way* pilot project was to study the impact the move of year 7 will have for all primary schools and high schools with a specific focus on:

- transition and the wellbeing of students
- supporting staff and schools
- gathering insights (including reaffirming good practices already occurring and documenting new ideas and suggestions)

The statewide project is now in the implementation phase and planning at schools is intensifying as they prepare for the move. The early findings from the pilot review will inform the planning underway at other schools, so they can benefit and consider elements in their own preparations.

A series of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to review the project and data was collected through face to face discussions and online surveys. The methodology was adjusted due to physical distancing restrictions related to COVID-19. The formal questions developed for this report were used as a guide, and all face to face discussions with the high schools were informal and conversational.

The *Implementation Tool for High Schools* and the *Implementation Tool for Primary Schools* guided the questions developed for data collection. The pilot findings have been grouped into 4 key themes:

- Preparation
- Transition
- Orientation
- Engagement

Twenty three participants from the pilot high schools contributed to face-to-face discussions and online surveys. This included the high school principals and key staff from school leadership teams.

Thirty participants contributed to the online surveys. This comprised of 14 primary principals, 4 primary teachers recruited to a pilot high school, 8 primary teachers who taught year 6 students who moved to a pilot high school for year 7 and 4 high school teachers who mentored a recruited primary teacher, or now teach year 7 students. Completion of the online surveys was voluntary and selected participants were nominated by their current principal.

To capture the insights of the pilot school communities, Square Holes, a qualified market and social research provider was engaged. Square Holes conducted a series of focus groups and online surveys with future parents and year 7 students enrolled to attend a pilot high school in 2020. The key objective was to understand the experiences of families



and students by exploring issues and concerns of pilot school communities before and after students started at the pilot school.

The first wave of the Square Holes research was conducted in late 2019 and included 3 focus groups and a survey accessible online and on paper. A total of 103 participants (45 survey participants and 12 focus group families per high school), contributed to this research which focused on understanding the sentiments of students and their parents who were enrolled to attend a pilot high school for year 7 in 2020.

The second wave of research was conducted in May 2020 and included 3 focus groups and 2 online surveys, 1 targeting parents and 1 for students. A total of 142 participants (115 survey participants and 5 focus group families per high school), contributed to the second phase of research which evaluated the satisfaction of students and parents following the transition process. Physical distancing restrictions related to COVID-19 changed the methodology of the second wave of research. Virtual focus groups with up to 5 families were conducted and a student survey was included.

Information provided about the transition of students with a disability, and students who identified as vulnerable or at risk of disengagement, were reviewed separately and are out of scope for this report. The findings were summarised in 2 sections:

- Specialised Education Options
- Cirkidz Pilot Project

This report provides a summary of the information collated and analysed from the face-to-face discussions and online surveys and explores the learnings, challenges and opportunities that were common to at least 2 or all 3 pilot high schools.



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BACKGROUND

A small central project team oversees the various elements of the move of year 7 to high school. The initial phase of the project has focused on planning to ensure high schools have enough space to accommodate year 7, with enough teachers to deliver teaching and learning to students.

In 2018, to support planning, the department identified a unique opportunity to pilot year 7 in high school in the public education system, ahead of the 2022 statewide roll-out.

Following an Expression of Interest process in late 2018, 3 high schools were selected to participate in the *Leading the Way* pilot project: John Pirie Secondary School (JPSS), Mitcham Girls High School (MGHS) and Wirreanda Secondary School (WSS). The *Leading the Way* pilot project was designed to provide valuable information from different school contexts to inform the statewide move in 2022.

Two of the 3 pilot schools are located in the greater metropolitan area, and JPSS is located in a large regional centre. Each school was selected for their strong connections and positive working relationships with their Partnerships, their focus on transition between primary school and high school, and progressive approaches to teaching and learning and system readiness.

JPSS has 5 local primary schools, ranging from between 900 metres and 11.4 kilometres proximity to the high school. Based on historical patterns of enrolment, almost all of the students at these local primary schools transition to JPSS. The local primary schools participating in the pilot project were:

- Risdon Park Primary School
- Port Pirie West Primary School
- Solomontown Primary School
- Airdale Primary School
- Napperby Primary School

MGHS is the only unzoned, public girls school in South Australia, attracting students from up to 70 feeder primary schools annually. The school provides a unique opportunity for female students to benefit from a small and nurturing environment with a strong focus on the Arts and STEM. The primary schools that had 5 or more students attend MGHS for year 7 in 2020 were:

- Belair Primary School
- Eden Hills Primary School
- Mitcham Primary School
- Edwardstown Primary School
- Hallett Cove East Primary School
- Warradale Primary School
- Mount Barker Primary School

WSS has a small cohort of students who enrol from outlying primary schools, however there are 9 local primary schools that historically provide the majority of enrolments. These include:

- Coorara Primary School



- Flaxmill School P-7
- Hackham East Primary School
- Morphett Vale East School R-7
- Morphett Vale Primary School
- Reynella Primary School
- Reynella South Primary School
- Pimpala Primary School
- Woodcroft Primary School

In early term 1 2019, the 3 pilot high schools, with the support of the Year 7 to High School Project Team (7toHS team), undertook extensive community consultation to identify the level of interest for year 7 to enter high school in 2020. Families interested in participating in the pilot program were required to submit a Registration of Interest (ROI) from 6 March 2019 up until 24 May 2019.

The high schools were overwhelmed with interest from South Australian families keen for their year 7 student to attend high school. On 28 May 2019, the Minister for Education, the Honourable John Gardner MP and the Premier, the Honourable Steven Marshall MP, announced the successful community consultation process and confirmation of the *Leading the Way* Pilot Project for 2020.

The high schools and primary schools participating in the pilot project each received a modest grant from the 7toHS team budget. This one-off grant supported the schools' participation in the pilot program for 2020 and 2021.

For 2020 and 2021, year 7 students enrolling at the 3 pilot high schools continued to be funded at the primary rate of the Schooling Resource Standard. The pilot high schools were responsible for managing financial expenditures and maintaining appropriate class sizes and industrial entitlements for teachers.

A bespoke recruitment process was agreed to with the Australian Education Union and the pilot high schools began individual recruitment processes based on individual needs and extensive workforce profiling.

Following a merit and selection process, 7 primary teachers were recruited by a pilot high school:

- WSS – 2 primary recruits
- JPSS – 5 primary recruits

During terms 3 and 4 of 2019, the pilot high schools focused on transitioning students and inducting new staff. Each pilot high school undertook extensive transition activities with feeder primary schools and families to collect student information. This assisted the schools to identify individual student needs and support requirements before starting at the high schools.

There was a focus on professional learning for the new primary recruits and for the whole school, focusing on young adolescent learners. The pilot high schools either participated in whole school professional learning opportunities with all teachers and new primary



recruits, or focused on differentiated teaching and learning practices, data analysis and intentional learning.

In term 1 2020, the pilot high schools welcomed their first cohort of year 7 students. Based on term 1 census data, a total of 353 year 7 students enrolled at a pilot school:

- MGHS – 158
- JPSS – 109
- WSS – 86

At the time this report was completed, only 1 year 7 student enrolled at a pilot high school for 2020 returned to their primary school. The reason for returning back to primary school is due to personal factors unrelated to the transition to high school. The remaining students have successfully transitioned to high school.

This report reflects on the planning for the move that was undertaken in 2019, and the challenges, learnings and opportunities following the transition of year 7 into the high school environment in 2020.



DETAILED PROJECT FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the detailed findings from the pilot review which aligns to the sub-headings of the *Year 7 to High School Implementation Tool*.

Resources to support planning

The *Year 7 to High School Implementation Tool for High Schools* (the tool) is a guide to support high school leaders in their planning and preparation for the move of year 7. The tool was designed to support leaders to plan for a successful transition and identify important indicators relevant to their school.

The pilot schools each contributed to the formation of the tool. While the tool was not officially endorsed before the pilot high schools started their planning for year 7 students, each pilot principal noted the tool's value in preparing for the move and used the tool as a checklist to ensure key staff were across all crucial areas of planning.

The Implementation Tool is crucial for Principals. [WSS]

The *Year 7 to High School Implementation Tool for Primary Schools* was developed to support primary leaders with the move of year 7. Our pilot primary schools were encouraged to use the tool to assist their planning for the move of their transitioning year 6 students. Over half of the primary principals who contributed to the pilot review's on-line survey identified as having used the tool to support their planning.

Another resource made available to the pilot schools was the *Teaching and Learning Guide*. This evidence-based resource was designed to inform schools' support for year 7 throughout their early years of secondary schooling and to inform curriculum planning.



PREPARATION

Curriculum Planning and Student Learning

In preparing to welcome year 7 students each pilot high school commented that finding time to plan units of work with multiple teachers, across multiple learning areas was challenging. There was also the added complexity of planning curriculum and learning outcomes for a cohort of unknown learners.

Before the students were at the school there wasn't that understanding and there was an assumption that the year 7s will be the same as the year 8s. But they are very different. [JPSS]

Timetable structures

Before starting the pilot project, each pilot high school was at varying stages of understanding and developing their curriculum, pedagogy, methodology and knowledge of young adolescent learners.

Due to time constraints, JPSS and MGHS focused on developing year 7 units of work and preparing a year 7 timetable structure similar to their existing year 8 models. WSS had been developing their curriculum for young adolescent learners through targeted and personalised approaches since 2016. WSS deliver their year 7 curriculum through a Project-Based Learning model (PBL). This interdisciplinary model aims for students to develop skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, empathy, self-awareness, entrepreneurship and the ability to give and receive feedback for improvement. WSS's existing structure supported the integration of the year 7 PBL model and now complements the current year 8 and 9 models.

Curriculum Planning for year 7

All 3 pilot high schools found engaging with primary schools and primary teachers invaluable in designing and preparing curriculum and learning outcomes for their year 7 students.

In term 3, 2019 WSS collaborated with primary schools from the Panalatinga Partnership to co-plan projects with primary teachers. This sharing of knowledge and expertise was highly valued by both primary and high school teachers. It also provided WSS the opportunity to share information with primary teachers about their high school, which helped primary teachers answer future questions from families about the pilot.

Staff from MGHS visited local primary schools and observed primary teachers engaging with year 7 students. The high school found this to be an insightful experience and are now applying this knowledge as they design future curriculum, learning and assessment opportunities for young adolescent learners. MGHS also found the *Teaching and Learning Guide* a useful tool, noting particular reference to the research based high impact teaching strategies, which focused on student engagement and achievement.



Visiting primary schools was very useful for teachers to see what is happening at a primary level, and curriculum does need to change, not in terms of content but the style of teaching. For students to really learn they don't want the traditional model of teacher directed learning, they want the participation. So we are in the process of changing, not only the curriculum but also what is going on at a classroom level. [MGHS]

JPSS and WSS found that recruiting primary teachers early significantly contributed to the success of their pilot projects and positively influenced the initial development of year 7 curriculum and learning programs. Providing time for new staff and existing staff to come together and plan curriculum alleviated challenges and assisted the high schools begin to understand how year 7 students learn.

I think we have a lot to learn from our primary schools. The way they teach their year 7s is vastly different to the way we teach our year 8s and 9s, but it shouldn't be. [JPSS]

The pilot schools that recruited primary teachers in 2019 noted the importance of having those primary teachers contribute to the curriculum planning for core curriculum and elective subjects. For these schools, the primary teachers provided a level of understanding and knowledge of what the students would have experienced in years 5 and 6, ensuring a continuity of learning when transitioning to high school. The primary teachers were also able to quality control and challenge curriculum planning and ensure the learning was targeted appropriately for the year 7 learner.

Without that primary expertise and pedagogical knowledge some elements of curriculum planning was challenging. [WSS]

Two of the pilot high schools found the curriculum delivery for elective subjects such as technologies (wood work) and the Arts challenging. They indicated they would have benefitted from primary expertise and additional differentiated teaching strategies in this curriculum planning. MGHS also identified challenges in designing innovative learning opportunities for core subjects, such as English and HASS.

If you go to a primary school, teachers know how to teach these subjects in an innovative way, but in high school, teachers are more wedded to an old school model, focusing on text books for history and geography. So the gap is in PD for our staff how to engage these younger learners and teach these subjects rather than just giving them worksheets and text books. [MGHS]



Student learning outcomes

When asked what areas of learning the high schools thought had been most challenging for year 7 students, each pilot high school identified similar but also unique challenges within the context and complexity of their school.

All pilot high schools faced initial challenges with students using DayMap and other online learning platforms, understanding the school timetables and managing the increased expectations of homework and assignments. For most students, these initial challenges and anxieties diminished in the first few days of term 1. Some students took a little longer to settle in. The pilot high schools found that with greater familiarisation and time, the students were able to confidently navigate their way around the school and start to develop time management strategies to balance new demands and pressures.

Teachers at MGHS initially found working with year 7 students challenging, particularly in relation to meeting expectations. The achievable goals and expectations set for their year 8 students were unrealistic for all year 7 learners, so the teachers had to make adjustments to their teaching styles to help build student confidence to become successful learners.

Our teachers had to adjust how many instructions they could give at once. They thought it would be a linear drop from year 8, but it's a significant step down for some students, especially the younger students (11 years old). They need a lot more care, they need clear instructions. Year 8s have a little more maturity and cognitive development and this allows them to be a little more flexible in understanding what teachers might want. Our teachers needed to switch up what that looked like. [MGHS]

The 3 high schools also identified challenges due to the vast range of literacy and numeracy abilities of individual students. This has not been a challenge unique to the year 7 cohort, as the pilot high schools acknowledged this was a challenge for both year 7 and year 8 students. Each high school is currently exploring site specific professional development opportunities for staff regarding differentiated teaching strategies and approaches to teaching reading.

Existing pilot high school teachers of year 7 students who took part in the pilot review's online survey identified numeracy as the most challenging area of learning for year 7. Problem solving skills and number sense were viewed as most problematic for students.



I feel like this can get lost in high school as in later years there is an emphasis on tasks to meet an achievement standard within a time frame rather than going deeper and slower so that students know something rather than covering a lot and them understanding not much of it. BIIN (Big Ideas in Numbers) has been a focus for me to try and get students back on track. [Primary recruit online survey]

Future curriculum development and student learning considerations

While all 3 pilot high schools undertook considerable curriculum planning before the 2020 school year, they all identified a need to further refine their year 7 curriculum and learning outcomes during the year.

JPSS have been investing time to develop a PBL structure and implemented this model into their year 7 program for semester 2, 2020. WSS have allocated additional curriculum planning time throughout the year to further support their understanding of the year 7 students. For 2021, WSS will be introducing a language into their timetable for their year 7 students and providing year 8 students with the option of a second language.

MGHS have been focusing on professional development opportunities to further enhance their teachers' pedagogical expertise in innovative and differentiated teaching strategies.

The clear advice from our pilot high schools to other high schools is to start curriculum planning early, with allocated time and budget in 2022 to review and modify plans. Teachers will learn and strengthen their knowledge of the year 7 learner when they have them as part of their school community. Strategic planning throughout the year will further support curriculum development.

Connecting with primary schools and primary teachers was also extremely beneficial when designing curriculum and learning outcomes. It also assisted the continuity of learning from primary school to high school.



Staff Planning

Having an early understanding of projected enrolment numbers assisted with workforce planning, mapping of practical and non-practical classes, class sizes, timetabling and designing leadership structures to support successful outcomes for teachers and students.

For the pilot high schools, staff planning was similar to the normal planning process of predicting enrolment numbers, reviewing timetables, identifying shortfalls and determining what teaching expertise schools have and what skills or expertise schools need.

All 3 high schools identified the need to appoint key staff in dedicated leadership positions to support the transition of the year 7 students.

Leadership structures

Before starting the pilot project, WSS had previously restructured their leadership team as part of their whole school transformation work. This review also included developing strategic ancillary structures that supported the additional workload created as a result of the transition of a double cohort. These structures provided support to the school's middle school leader, focusing on transition for vulnerable students and families.

Providing the leadership structures and support, ensuring the middle school transformation is resourced appropriately and is underpinned by both improvement and innovation. [WSS]

MGHS appointed an assistant principal pilot programs to manage the pilot project. This role is now leading the middle school transformation as the assistant principal middle school. JPSS also found that having a dedicated leadership role to focus purely on the transition of year 7 was crucial to the success of the project. This leader worked closely with the JPSS assistant principal middle school and was key to supporting the school's leadership wellbeing during the transition of the double cohort. As with MGHS, this role is still an important part of the JPSS leadership team as the year 7 leader.

Schools may need someone dedicated to support the transition of the year 7s for 2021. There is a lot more work to coordinate and oversee, but following the statewide move the focus will be on middle school. This is how (staff name)'s role has evolved. Having someone assigned leadership time to priorities the move of year 7s is critical. [MGHS]

Identifying staff to teach year 7

Each pilot high school found there was minimal resistance from their existing teachers to work with the year 7 students. The schools either identified staff interested in teaching year 7, or the school had already developed a culture where staff embraced the new



students and saw this as an opportunity to engage in a range of innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

While selecting interested staff and having content knowledge was important, the most important factor recognised by the pilot high schools when identifying year 7 teachers was selecting staff who were able to develop positive relationships.

Aside from selecting people with the content knowledge, it's about selecting the right person, the person who can develop relationships with those younger students. Relationships are key. Finding those teachers that can connect with younger students is paramount. [MGHS]

And while those identified teachers were keen to teach year 7 students, there were some that took some time to feel confident with the younger students.

People don't know what they want or don't want until they have experienced it. One of our year 7 care group teachers, the only one not with a primary background said she didn't feel year 7 was her space, but has recently said the 7s have grown on her and she wouldn't mind staying in this space next year. [JPSS]

Changes to ancillary structures

While the transition of the double cohort created additional administrative work for ancillary staff, MGHS and JPSS did not identify any specific positions as being created or ancillary structural changes made to support the move. As indicated earlier, WSS restructured their ancillary teams before the pilot project by developing strategic profiles and strong networks which supported the school during the transition of the double cohort. The focus was on vulnerable and at risk students and families.

That HR piece is crucial in preparing for the year 7 move and support staff are crucial in that. This is a perfect time for site leaders to review how they can set up their support teams and staff strategically and to make sure all students and staff are being supported. [WSS]

The pilot high schools each identified the role of their middle level leaders as being crucial in the move of year 7 and fundamental in the development of the schools' leadership culture. Middle level leaders led transition activities and were pivotal in curriculum planning for their young adolescent learners. Having these dedicated roles was critical to the success of the move, given the amount of work to co-ordinate and oversee.

Staff who were able to develop relationships with younger students was a factor that all pilot schools identified as critical when selecting teaching and support staff to work with young adolescents. The pilot schools shared the view that year 7 students still like to feel



connected with their teachers. They want to share information about their lives and they want to know about their teacher's lives. Having the right teachers who can make those connections supported transition and helped create safe learning environments for the students.



Recruitment of primary teachers

As part of the pilot project, a bespoke recruitment process was developed with the Australian Education Union (AEU), and in partnership with key stakeholders such as South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA), South Australian Secondary Principal's Association (SASPA) and South Australian State Schools Leaders Association (SASSLA).

This process was an exception to the *Recruitment and Selection of Teaching Staff in Schools Policy* and *Recruitment and Selection of Teaching Staff in Schools Procedure*. As agreed with the AEU, the pilot high schools had the opportunity to recruit qualified primary teachers without the specialist subject qualifications normally required for secondary teaching.

The year 7 to high school 2020 pilot recruitment process had 3 main objectives:

- Filling 100% of high school vacancies.
- Reducing surplus primary school teachers in pilot primary schools.
- Demonstrating the ability of primary school teachers to move to high school to successfully undertake a range of high school (including senior secondary) roles.

As part of the workforce planning process, each school identified vacant positions and began recruitment of these roles in term 3, 2019. A total of 13 vacant positions were identified as specific pilot vacancies, with an average of 25 applications received for each vacancy. Following a merit and selection process, JPSS recruited 5 primary teachers and 1 teacher who was appointed to a leadership role. WSS appointed 2 primary teachers. MGHS filled all vacant positions, but did not recruit any primary trained teachers.

WSS and JPSS have developed very clear viewpoints about the skills and expertise that primary teachers contribute to a high school environment. During their respective merit selection processes, both schools spent considerable time identifying the primary teachers that best demonstrated strong collaborative skills and a willingness to contribute to their school's values.

Since their appointment the primary teachers recruited by JPSS have predominately worked with students from years 7 to 9, while the primary teachers recruited by WSS currently teach students from years 7 to 10, with an expectation the primary teachers will eventually be able to teach to SACE level in their specialist subject fields.

Principals need to be clear about and believe strongly in why they want to employ (primary teachers) and what they want this to look like in their school, and plan and develop HR profiles to reflect this. Primary school teachers know things and approaches that secondary school teachers don't. [WSS]

JPSS and WSS believe the primary teachers recruited as part of the pilot project have contributed strategies and thinking that has greatly benefited their curriculum planning and student learning. Of particular interest, both schools made mention of the primary teachers' understanding of lesson structure, their ability to break down lessons into key



learning fundamentals, and foundational knowledge of numeracy and literacy. Both schools also identified the primary teachers' abilities to keep students engaged and interested in learning, especially during longer lessons.

When observing the primary teachers in our high school the lessons are more hands on and engaging and it's what we should really be doing with our 8s and 9s, but there are some challenges with bringing that teaching style into the high school setting because of facilities and resources and moving of classes, so there is still a lot for us to learn from that. We should be implementing some of those strategies and pedagogies at year 8 and year 9 levels. [JPSS]

The pilot high schools who recruited primary teachers understand the apprehensions and reservations that some leaders will have when considering the recruitment of primary teachers to a high school environment. WSS and JPSS feel the primary teachers who were recruited as part of the pilot project have contributed invaluable skills and knowledge about young adolescent learners that each of the schools believed was previously missing. The schools indicated that the key element when recruiting primary staff into a secondary setting is to have a clear vision of why you want to recruit primary teachers.

If we hadn't recruited talented primary teachers we would have struggled with curriculum. Quality people with a primary background. And appointing a primary person in a leadership role was one of our biggest success factors. We were really running blind until (staff name) came on-board. Her primary knowledge has been invaluable. [JPSS]



Facilities Planning

Having an early understanding of projected enrolment numbers assisted the pilot high schools with future facilities planning and the design of teaching and learning spaces. The enrolment projection calculator allowed the pilot high schools to forecast future enrolments and identify potential capacity shift and demand.

It has also enabled the schools to plan for future ICT hardware and software requirements, dedicate adequate spaces for lockers and storage allocation, and in some instances assist with the planning of future builds.

The projected enrolment numbers have helped with capacity and design. This was crucial when designing facilities to enhance our teaching and learning.
[WSS]

Additional capacity pressures

Understanding the projected enrolment numbers didn't always assist with managing the complexities of the additional capacity. Some of the facilities pressures identified by the pilot high schools included concerns about the number of student toilets available, increased pressure on school canteen facilities, less room in the staff room due to the increased number of staff, less office spaces and increased school maintenance and yard cleaning due to the increased volume of students.

The increase in student foot traffic was identified at 2 of the pilot high schools as a facilities pressure not previously considered. The additional students moving to lockers at the same time created significant congestion pressures. While the schools didn't initiate any specific changes to mitigate the congestion, the schools found that providing year 7 students additional time at the end of lessons to access lockers and having staff and older students help redirect students and provide alternative exit points in the first few weeks assisted the new students to self-regulate and manage this issue themselves.

I think their uncertainty help to create some of the congestion. In the early days schools will need to be aware of what extra help students will need finding their way around. [MGHS]

Traffic congestion, parking and 'kiss and drop' zones have been of concern for some of our pilot high schools and those schools with limited parking spaces for teachers and students have found car parking spaces an issue. Increasing car parking capacity at 2 of these schools is not an option, so they will continue to monitor future demand and potentially limit the number of car parks available to students.

Road traffic congestion was highlighted as a concern by the pilot high schools. While not all schools identified the same level of complexity and road safety issues, the additional pressure traffic congestion has created around the high schools at peak times continues to



generate additional work for leaders. The pilot high schools significantly impacted by these issues will continue to work with local councils and their school community to identify appropriate solutions.

Outdoor spaces (safe spaces and recreational spaces)

Each of the pilot high schools considered outdoor spaces and landscape designs that encouraged student social interactions and bonding. While students and parents were looking forward to all of the new opportunities that high school had to offer, families who participated in the Square Holes focus groups and surveys in 2019 were anxious about their child interacting with older students.

My daughter is a young girl. She doesn't have Facebook, isn't interested in boys, she just wants to do her own thing. There's going to be a lot of people who are a lot more mature than she is, which can then make them a big target. [Square Holes parent participant]

To alleviate the concerns of parents and students, JPSS and WSS created dedicated safe spaces for their year 7 and year 8 students. The spaces were separate from older students and staffed during recess and lunch. Both schools found that once students became familiar and comfortable at the school they no longer felt the need to remain in the 'safe zones' and were happy to find their own spaces around the school.

I really did think they (older students) were scary, but after a while, they're literally just like everyone else. So they may be older, but then are just as nice as everyone else, which is a really good thing. [Square Holes student participant]

When asked about dedicated recreational spaces, the pilot high schools indicated they had not previously considered creating any dedicated play areas, but all 3 schools noted the importance of making sure the year 7 and year 8 students had access to outdoor spaces and lunchtime activities. It surprised the pilot high schools how much the younger students still enjoyed running around and playing games. All 3 high schools are currently exploring outdoor recreational spaces and physical education equipment they can introduce for future cohorts of students.

We don't have play spaces and the 7s and 8s get a bit bored. Schools need to consider lunch time activities. We will have to rethink our outdoor play spaces, they still like to run and play. [JPSS]



Additional considerations

To accommodate increased capacity across all year levels, MGHS erected Sensum modular buildings onsite, pending the completion of the school's future capital works at the end of 2020. The temporary accommodation gave the school an opportunity to move away from the traditional tables and chairs and explore contemporary fixtures and fittings that encouraged flexible learning options.

Our younger students love this type of furniture, but we found the older students don't necessarily like this style. When planning for internal fixtures and fittings be mindful of the age of the students and their changing needs.
[MGHS]

All 3 pilot high schools agreed that flexible and collaborative learning spaces were important for creating an environment where the year 7 students could explore concepts, engage with content and promote curiosity. It was also important to consider furniture that had dual or multiple uses and could be modified to suit different learning experiences.

Managing the complexities of additional capacity will create a range of facility pressures for some high schools. The pilot high schools agreed that while some pressures will naturally be resolved as students become familiar with the school, others matters such as canteen facilities and capacity, locker placement and access, parking and traffic congestion may require additional building or school policy considerations.

The pilot high schools learnt that year 7 students still enjoy running around and playing games, so they encourage other high schools to consider providing outdoor and recreational spaces. To alleviate concerns that parents and new students may have about being at school with older students, the pilot high schools found that creating dedicated safe spaces were important for creating a safe and reassuring environment. As students become familiar with their new surroundings and more confident, the pilot schools believe the students will naturally find their own spaces.



Budget Planning

Budget planning was different for each of the pilot high schools, but forecasting future funding and expenditures using the Site Budget Planning Tool (SBPT) and the class size and timetable tool enabled the pilot schools to plan and anticipate future entitlements.

Specialised Support

To assist the pilot schools with budget preparation and planning, the 7toHS team engaged the support of Roselie Dohnt, School and Preschool Financial Services, to undertake specialised analysis of school budgets and review forward planning considerations for staffing and class sizes.

When asked if this dedicated financial support was beneficial in preparing for the move of year 7, 2 of the pilot high schools considered Roselie's support extremely beneficial. While both schools considered their business managers to be highly capable with a clear understanding of school budgets and strong business processes, Roselie's unique financial skills and understanding of school budgets and workforce profiles provided particular assistance in identifying funding shortfalls, retrospective areas that required adjustment, and planning for future workforce and budget considerations based on future projections.

For schools moving into 2022 that either don't have a tight understanding (of their budget) or processes, Roselie would be an absolute lifesaver. [WSS]

To complement the financial assistance provided by Roselie, the 7toHS team engaged the support of Ibi Kanellos from Unley High School, who is an experienced school business manager. Ibi met with the pilot schools to understand what other types of financial support schools may benefit from.

Ibi worked with the business managers from all 3 pilot high schools and engaged with ancillary staff from some of the Pirie Partnership primary schools. Ibi's most significant learning was regarding communication and the need for business managers to be included in all aspects of planning for the move. The support that business managers can provide to principals and leaders offers another level of confidence, particularly for facilities planning, management of future capital works projects and identifying potential financial or ancillary staffing risks.

(Business Managers) being included in the planning is critical. [Ibi Kanellos, Unley High School Business Manager]

For less experienced business managers or school-based finance staff, Ibi identified the potential need for a training and support framework. This framework may include mentoring opportunities for less experienced business managers or upskilling ancillary staff ensuring they have up-to-date information regarding budgets and funding entitlements.



All 3 pilot high schools agreed that having a skilled business manager was crucial in the success of the move of the double cohort, ensuring schools have strong business processes and a clear financial understanding of the budgets and how to best use entitlements to achieve whole school outcomes. Ibi's interactions and business management support was highly regarded by the leadership and ancillary staff at JPSS.

Ibi's support was really good. It would have been great to have her work more closely with our staff. Ibi brings the on-the-ground business manager experience we would appreciate. For our school and where are school is at, this (support) would have been highly beneficial. [JPSS]

In preparing for the move of year 7, it was evident that sound financial management and considered forecasting significantly improved the pilot high schools' ability to identify and manage financial risks, highlight areas of improvement and make staffing decisions without negatively impacting future SASIF balances and staffing appointments. Schools that already have strong financial support may benefit from the financial expertise provided by School and Preschool Financial Services. Schools that require additional assistance in the day-to-day business operations may benefit from connecting with experienced business managers across the system.

Schools that don't hold good SASIF balances and don't do some smart forward projecting could put themselves into serious financial trouble. [WSS]

Retrospective Funding

As part of the intense planning undertaken in preparing for the move, risks were identified with retrospective funding models and in particular the resources allocated through the School Resource Entitlement Statement (RES) for Aboriginal students based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) enrolments from the previous school year.

These risks were identified specifically by JPSS and WSS, as both schools have high enrolments of Aboriginal students.

While retrospective funding allocations have had minimal impact on staffing and support historically, the transition of a double cohort highlighted the financial risk with the funding and allocation of staffing for Aboriginal Education Teachers (AETs) and hours allocated for Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs).

With the support of the Director Aboriginal Education, Bronwyn Milera, approval was given to re-distribute identified AET and ACEO funds for the Aboriginal students attending a pilot high school in 2020. These funds were transferred to the identified pilot high schools in the February 2020 RES allocation.



When asked what impact this change in retrospective funding had for our pilot high schools, JPSS and WSS noted the significant impact the change in funding had on resource allocation and support for ATSI students. Both schools had previously identified future financial shortfalls if the funding had not moved with the students.

This funding comes into the school and 100% goes back into that area, so we would have had less resources directed to ATSI students who require support and less ASETO hours for our staffing profile. [WSS]

The pilot high schools also identified additional retrospective funding policy models that are allocated based on the previous year's census data. These include (but are not limited to) the funding to support Inclusive Education Support Programs (IESP), English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) funding and complexity funding. To support the transition of the double cohort, the pilot high schools recommended the timing and allocation of these funds be amended prior to the start of 2022, to reflect actual enrolments.

This funding carries significant staffing figures. If they (the department) don't do this (change the funding model) before the statewide move, schools and students will be impacted. [JPSS]

It was found that having dedicated financial support for budget planning was highly beneficial, but the type of support required will depend on the experience of the school business manager and the schools' willingness for dedicated financial support. Schools with experienced business managers may want to explore efficiencies, while other schools may need assistance with day-to-day operations.

The move of the double cohort also highlighted the need to review resource allocations and retrospective funding models. Ensuring funding follows at risk and vulnerable students will allow high schools to appropriately resource and budget to achieve successful learning outcomes for students.

School Community

All 3 pilot schools highlighted the importance of engaging with their wider school communities and the positive impact that good communication practices with families has on supporting student learning, wellbeing and development. They also acknowledged the value of strong collaboration with schools in their Partnerships.

Supporting new students to settle into the school community

When asked how the year 7 students assimilated into the school community, all 3 pilot high schools agreed that generally all students settled in extremely well and enjoy being part of the high school community. WSS felt their strong transition practices and the introduction of vertically aligned home groups in 2018-19 have supported students to build strong connections within year 7 groups and encouraged positive interactions with year 8 and year 9 students.

MGHS were very pleased with how quickly their students built connections and developed relationships within the school. In 2019, the school spent time developing and training year 10 students to become peer group leaders. These students played a vital role during transition days and attended the year 7 camp in term 1. Year 9 students were also an integral part of transition days and attended primary school visits.

JPSS were initially concerned that welcoming a large cohort of new students would impact the school's existing culture, but staff were pleasantly surprised at how well the students embraced the school community and adapted to their new surroundings, new technologies and systems. What surprised the teachers the most was how confident the year 7 students were.

Most say they enjoy high school more than primary school. They all wear the uniform. To me this shows they take pride in the school, they love it. [JPSS]

Seventy five per cent of high school teachers who participated in the pilot review online surveys believed that the year 7 students were ready for high school and settled in well to the school community. When asked what they thought their school did well to support the new students, high school teachers thought the multiple transition days helped students become familiar with the school and staff, and having highly supervised dedicated safe outdoor spaces and toilets helped students feel safe.

Parents who participated in the Square Holes focus groups and online surveys were satisfied overall with the communication they received from the pilot high schools before and after their child started at the school. Information received through Emails and newsletters was highly regarded, as this was similar to the way they had received information from their local primary school.

Students entering a new school for the first time may be anxious about making new friends, wondering what their new teachers will be like, and wondering if they will be safe in their new school. To support the year 7 students and their families settle into the school community, all pilot high schools agreed that providing different opportunities for the



students and families to get to know one another and meet their teachers and key staff was extremely important. Developing these early connections helped to relieve anxieties, make new friends and help build excitement for the move to high school.

There was a day to meet the teachers' (at the) end of last term and that was another really great opportunity to share. I think they had a barbeque. Just the energy, enthusiasm of the teachers and the middle school head and principal. It was infectious. So it was exciting to see they were as excited as the kids were. And I think that helped. [Square Holes – parent participant]

Preparing the school community for the move

When preparing other year levels to welcome the year 7 students into the school community, each pilot high school managed this contextually. Staff at JPSS were initially concerned that year 7 students would be considered targets, particularly for wearing their dedicated year 7 shirts. However, having the separate shirts actually made it easier for staff and students to learn names and make connections. The year 7 students continue to wear the shirts and wear them with pride.

There was also concern for the very small year 7 students at JPSS, however the older students have made positive connections with these students and taken on supportive and nurturing roles, which has surprised many of the staff. Upon reflection, the school is considering how they could further develop leadership roles with older students and make them part of future transition activities.

What we've seen is the year 12s in particular enjoy looking after and nurturing the younger students and making sure they are okay. We haven't had any parents come back and say to us that they were concerned about their kids. [JPSS]

While staff at MGHS worked closely to develop leadership opportunities with year 9 and year 10 students, the greatest angst came from their year 11 and 12 cohort prior to the year 7 students starting at the school. Given the importance of the final years of high school, the year 11 and 12 students and their families were concerned that the school's focus would not be on the senior students and their final years of high school. MGHS have learnt that it is important for all year levels to be included in transition processes and provide senior secondary students opportunities to discuss the change.

WSS discussed the move of year 7 with their students on multiple occasions and how the introduction of the new students was going to be an exciting opportunity to expand the richness of the school's community. The school re-introduced peer mentoring programs and had students from their specialist sports course (SSC) attended local primary schools and supported primary school Sports Days. The school also engaged students from years 8



to 12 to lead school open nights and staggered the first day of school by welcoming years 7, 8 and 12 students together with a barbeque lunch.

The pilot high schools all agreed welcoming a double cohort of new students did not negatively impact the schools' existing culture. For some pilot high schools, it has strengthened their culture and for others it has uncovered future leadership opportunities for students. The pilot schools believe it is important to ensure all year levels are part of the change by creating peer and leadership roles and having an opportunity for all students to voice their opinions. These are important elements in ensuring year 7 students are welcomed by the existing school community.

We predicted that a double cohort of years 7s and 8s in the 1 year would challenge predominant culture in our school. With all the challenges we've had, without being able to have camps and team building activities and assemblies that might reinforce culture, it hasn't been an issue for us. In fact it's been a strength. [JPSS]



Professional Learning

The professional learning and school readiness approaches for the 3 pilot high schools was responsive to site specific needs including local context, community and staff profile. All 3 pilot high schools received funding to support professional learning activities for the primary teachers moving to high school and for their existing teachers, focusing on junior secondary years.

Professional learning for primary recruits

At WSS, the primary recruits attended specific planning days in term 4, 2019 that provided an opportunity to connect with staff and contribute to the school's curriculum planning. The new recruits attended a 'Professional Learning Open Day' where WSS presented the school's middle school journey and attended a new staff induction day. During the first 2 terms of 2020, the primary recruits also participated in:

- Behaviour for Learning – behaviour management strategies for older students
- Reporting and assessment processes
- Time and support for planning semester 2 subjects
- Professor Donna Pendergast: *Teaching & Learning in Middle Years*

In term 4 2019, the primary teachers at JPSS were invited to participate in a whole school professional development session with Professor Donna Pendergast: *Teaching & Learning in Middle Years*. They attended a full day induction at the school where they had the opportunity to meet with learning coordinators and start to learn the school's systems. New staff were provided with school laptops by week 2, term 4 which gave them access to the school's network. This allowed time for teachers to familiarise themselves with new systems. The primary recruits were offered additional transition days before week 0 as another opportunity to help settle into the school community. Professional learning has continued for all staff, which has included continued sessions with Donna Pendergast and attending the Orbis Literacy 7-9 course.

Initially everyone is concerned about the curriculum and knowing the content, but it's not the most important thing. Learning the processes and getting to know the kids – that is the most urgent thing. [JPSS]

Both WSS and JPSS have attempted to make the transition from primary school to high school as easy as possible for their primary recruits. According to the primary recruits surveyed, most felt the professional learning activities provided in late 2019 helped to build their knowledge and confidence prior to teaching in a high school environment. The activities that had the greatest impact included:

- *Teaching & Learning in the Middle Years* sessions with Donna Pendergast;
- Group collaborative planning; and
- Orbis – Literacy 7-9 course.

When asked what professional learning activities should be offered to better prepare transitioning primary teachers for the high school environment, the primary recruits suggested:



- Specialised subject training
- Shadowing opportunities in specific subject-year levels
- Understanding SACE
- Site specific processes
- Reviewing past teaching curriculum notes from learning areas
- Opportunities to upskill in specific learning areas

Teaching in high school was very daunting to begin with. A lot of new processes and student behaviours, plus a new curriculum. The school was highly supportive and structured in their approach to ensure that I have everything I need to be successful. [Primary recruit online survey]

Mentoring programs

While support to conduct mentoring programs for the new primary recruits was offered to all pilot high schools, based on site specific context and culture, not all schools conducted formalised mentoring programs. Staff at WSS participated in the school's formal mentoring program. Primary teachers were matched with mentors from their specialised subject area of expertise and participated in WSS's Professional Practice Mentors program. This program provided 0.2 release time for the primary teacher recruits to work with selected teachers to further support and facilitate their professional learning and development.

When asked if they thought they had benefited from developing relationships with mentees, the primary teachers found these connections to be very useful in helping to understand the secondary curriculum and developing practical tools in conjunction with implementing teaching and assessment tasks.

The leadership team at JPSS did not arrange formalised mentoring programs for their primary recruits. The school encouraged new staff to make their own connections with staff or teams. JPSS believes the strong collaborative culture developed at the school fosters positive interactions and believes natural connections and relationships are more meaningful and provide greater growth and collaboration.

Time with curriculum leaders in a school is more beneficial than professional learning. You (schools) are not going to find a professional learning program where they (teachers) can go and learn year 8 science in a day. That's not going to happen. It would be more beneficial to give them (teachers) time to meet with key people and curriculum leaders who will help them get started to develop lesson plans. [JPSS]



As a newbie there is a culture here where everyone is happy to help. If you don't have a collaborative culture at the school then maybe a formal mentoring program would be required. [Primary recruit online survey]

According to the primary recruits surveyed, some felt having an assigned mentor may have benefited their transition to high school teaching. Both WSS and JPSS agreed that some primary recruits did need additional support structures as they initially felt overwhelmed, but having access to quality teachers and developing strong relationships supported the teachers to progress their skills in other learning areas.

Across the state you will have a mixture of personalities coming from primary to secondary school. Some will blaze their own trail and make things happen, others will require additional support and time, but that has been part of the learning curve for us. [WSS]

While MGHS did not recruit any primary teachers, the school did recruit 20 new high school teachers. This significant increase in staff positively impacted the staff's existing culture. The leadership team was surprised at how existing teachers developed new connections, collaborations and positive interactions. Introducing such a large cohort of new teachers to the school has brought new ideas and new experiences. Existing staff have been observing new methods and pedagogies and are starting to reflect and question their own teaching practices, not just for year 7 students, but across the middle school.

The biggest change has been the operation of the science facility. We have a number of teachers who have been teaching for a long time, and as the saying goes 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'. Well they (the staff) have proven it can be done. They have been able to change their pedagogies because it's been a team approach with a mixed staffing profile. They have been able to share their curriculum expertise and subject knowledge with the younger teachers, but the younger teachers have been able to share their pedagogies and there has been a real team effort not just on task design but moderating student work. [MGHS]

Professional learning for the whole school

As a whole school, JPSS and WSS engaged in early professional learning opportunities with all teachers and new primary recruits. The schools connected with Professor Donna Pendergast from Griffith University, focusing on developing their understanding of middle years learners. Both JPSS and WSS agreed the sessions with Professor Pendergast



enhanced the learning outcomes for students and reinvigorated their high school teachers who were keen to change or improve their teaching and learning style for junior secondary students.

In preparing for the move, MGHS identified a need for specialised support to better prepare the leadership team and staff for the transition of 351 year 7 and year 8 students. This specific professional learning support was identified to prepare the school's existing staff for the future pedagogical changes that would need to occur in preparing for the transition and curriculum planning for the future year 7 and 8 cohorts. In particular, the professional learning focused on differentiated teaching and learning practices, data analysis and intentional learning.

MGHS will continue to focus on professional development opportunities to help staff create innovative and differentiated teaching strategies. The school worked with Professor Donna Pendergast in term 3, 2020 to further develop their middle school vision and understanding of young adolescent learners.

The best professional learning happens on your own site amongst existing teachers and new recruits so they have time to co-plan units and prepare for the next school year. [JPSS]

Preparing for 2022

When asked what advice the pilot high schools would share with other schools about professional learning in preparation for 2022, 2 of the pilot high schools identified the benefits of connecting with high schools in other states that already teach year 7 students. Over the past few years, WSS have developed strong connections with Campbelltown Performing Arts and Rooty Hill High School in New South Wales. These schools have shared key learnings that WSS have used to develop and enhance their understanding of early adolescents. MGHS made similar connections with high schools in Brisbane.

All staff, new and existing, primary or high school trained, will benefit from a school culture that encourages collaboration and sharing of pedagogies, curriculum expertise and subject knowledge. Primary teachers moving into a secondary setting will all require support, and some staff may require more guidance than others.

I think as a primary teaching coming into a high school the biggest challenge for me was my head set and the expectations I put on myself. I put a lot of pressure on myself to know everything...but I needed to remember that I have already taught year 7 science and I'll be okay. But it took at least half a term for me to change my thinking, take a breath and go this is not different, it's just a different setting. [JPSS, primary recruit]



TRANSITION

The transition to high school is a normal process for schools and students. The pilot high schools undertook extensive transition activities to ensure their year 7 students had multiple opportunities to become familiar with new surroundings, new teachers, peers, and new rules and routines within the high school. However, managing the transition of a double cohort in a single year and understanding how young adolescents learn were 2 particular challenges identified by the pilot high schools.

Collaboration with local Primary Schools

Staff at both primary schools and high schools have important roles in supporting the transition of all students. All 3 pilot high schools spent considerable time and resources engaging with primary schools to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of transition across primary and secondary sectors, and how crucial collaboration was in the continuity of learning for students. The transition team at MGHS worked hard to make connections with over 60 feeder primary schools and spoke with individual teachers to identify how the high school could best support student transition. While making connections with feeder primary schools was somewhat easier for transition teams at WSS and JPSS, both schools still found it challenging to arrange times for primary teachers to visit their sites.

We have difficulty getting primary teachers on site. They (primary teachers) have traditional meeting structures, with meetings after school. Asking them to give something more is challenging. Could we move this into the afternoon or have half-day TRT release? There needs to be a purpose for them (primary teachers) coming. [WSS]

To lessen the burden on primary teachers visiting the school, the transition team at WSS have recently implemented a new transition approach called 'Transition Turbo Charge'. Transition Turbo Charge allows key transition staff time to observe primary classes and interact with primary teachers during school hours. The high school provides 0.2 release time for a high school STEM teacher to work with the primary students to develop a legacy project. While the students are developing this project and learning new skills that will support their transition to high school, the transition staff observe the students in the primary setting, speak with primary teachers and start compiling information about the students, developing learner profiles and sharing information about the high school with the primary teachers.

Early discussions are valuable. We are getting anecdotal information about the family and the child and are starting to compile learner profiles, and the primary school teachers have a voice. I think this has helped restore the relationship with the primary schools. [WSS]



When asked what advice the pilot schools would provide other schools to ensure primary and high school collaboration is effective, the pilot schools suggested the need for high schools to be open to collaborative planning for learning. This would include additional face-to-face meetings, visiting primary school sites and holding information sessions for primary staff to learn about high school transition programs and activities.

JPSS found collaboration with primary schools critical in ensuring a successful transition for their incoming year 7 and year 8 students. This included providing early communications to primary schools (letters, Emails and newsletters), visiting the primary schools, meeting with leaders and teachers, and inviting primary staff to visit the high school to learn what the high school would be offering students. This early engagement helped JPSS establish key contacts; it helped primary teachers understand what they could do to support students moving to high school and strengthened the communication primary teachers could provide to families.

Primary principals and primary teachers who participated in the pilot review online surveys agreed that primary schools and class teachers were pivotal in communicating transition information to families. Having first-hand knowledge of the high school and a shared understanding of transition activities better supported anxious families and provided reassurances to families with vulnerable students and students with special learning needs.

Primary principals and teachers felt the transition activities that best supported their primary students' transition to high school for year 7 included:

- Transition days
- Open nights
- One-on-one interviews
- High school teachers visiting the primary school
- Ongoing communication from the high school

For families who participated in the Square Holes focus groups and online surveys, open nights and orientation days were identified as been very important for receiving information about transition activities. Parents who work full-time raised some challenges about available times to attend orientation visits. Some parents felt their primary schools did not share enough information about the high schools with families.

I know that the high school was giving the information to the primary school, but I don't think it was being relayed the best that it could have been. The information from the high school was definitely there. I don't think they could have done much more, really. [Square Holes – parent participant]

Knowing the enrolled students and their needs

All 3 pilot high schools put significant time and resources into knowing the enrolled students and their needs before they started at high school. This included primary school site visits, hosting one-on-one meetings with families and conducting a minimum of 2 dedicated transition events for incoming year 7 and year 8 students. Gathering



information collaboratively with primary schools and families on how individual students learn, family backgrounds and current referrals to support services was crucial in establishing appropriate support structures, developing curriculum and configuring care groups or home groups.

We met with every student and parent. It was lots of work and very intensive, but it was an excellent way to collect information. [MGHS]

Most of the one-on-one meetings with families were conducted during evenings or on weekends. When asked how the high schools encouraged staff to participate in these activities outside school hours, the pilot high schools agreed that while the data collection process was intense, staff understood the importance of collecting this information and agreed that knowing as much information as possible about the students better prepared the school and supported the student.

Staff have a vested interest in doing this, they see the value, how it impacts the learning. We are also smart about rotating teachers and we've had lots of interested teachers want to be involved in the profiles (Learner Profile Interviews) this Year. [WSS]

Transitioning vulnerable students

Information provided by families and primary schools also assisted the high schools to identify ATSI students, vulnerable students and students with a disability. Of the 26 Aboriginal students starting year 7 at a pilot high school in 2020, 17 ATSI students enrolled at JPSS and 9 ATSI students enrolled at WSS. The schools provided separate transition visits for their ATSI families and ensured AETs attended all transition visits to support the students and their families.

JPSS and WSS conducted extended transition visits for their identified ATSI students, vulnerable students and students with a disability. At JPSS, this included 4 or more weeks of 2 lessons per week, where students were able to meet with key staff, be introduced to the different learning areas and meet teachers and leaders. Identified students also participated in the school's 2 'Taste of High School' transition days with other transitioning students.

Students enrolled at MGHS who were identified by a teacher or parent as being particularly anxious about moving to high school were offered additional transition visits before and after the scheduled transition programs. These additional visits allowed students to familiarise themselves with the school while having less students on site, and to connect with wellbeing staff.

As part of the Year 7 to High School Pilot Project, WSS engaged the services of SA Circus Centre to conduct the 'Cirkidz' circus program. The Cirkidz program is designed for



students who may be identified as having difficulty engaging with school and are taught a variety of circus and performance skills that build confidence and develop interpersonal relationships. A detail review of the Cirkidz Pilot Program at WSS is outlined further in this report.

School Services Officers (SSOs) also played a vital role for the pilot high schools in the transition of vulnerable or at risk students. Having SSOs involved in term 4 transition activities and meetings with families and primary schools provided staff with the unique opportunity to assist developing student profiles, cultivate early relationships with challenging or at risk students and help support the overall transition for students.

Support staff are crucial in the move. [WSS]

Access to data

While the pilot high schools gathered as much information as possible to develop individual learner profiles about their enrolled students, having early access to central data was identified as a more efficient way to collect information. It also allowed the high schools additional time to prepare more accurate structures for care groups, timetabling, wellbeing programs and curriculum planning. Information such as achievement data, behaviour data and attendance rates, combined with the data collected from primary teachers and families, would have provided the pilot high schools with a more complete picture of the enrolled student and strengthened the continuity of learning between primary and secondary.

We (the school) need to know as much as possible from day 1 about the students to set them up for success. [MGHS]

Double cohort transition

The pilot high schools were very conscious of not forgetting the importance of transition for their new incoming year 8 students. Each pilot high school conducted separate transition visits and data gathering sessions for the incoming year 7 and year 8 students. Transition visits were planned after year 11 and 12 students had finished formal lessons allowing senior secondary teachers to assist with transition activities.



Our 'Taste of High School' is done after the 11s and 12s have finished, so we have some extra staff who can help and we try and keep people in their learning areas. [JPSS]

2020 at Wirreanda Secondary School was a very exciting and milestone year. We had our biggest year 8 cohort for some time, which was our first ever year 8 cohort that was not the youngest in the school! We really celebrated that fact, and ensured that the focus was not just on the year 7 "Ready to Go" pilot move. [WSS]

Although some transitioning activities were aligned and some were conducted back-to-back which supported balancing workload and financial impacts, there were times when it was important to establish separate visits or events. This allowed schools to answer specific questions for a particular year level, or showcase what was unique for a particular cohort coming to the high school.

We did do some specific transition activities and visits that were specific to just the year 7's. This was important as it provided a sense of group identity and allowed parents and students to ask questions or seek information specific to their age and maturity level. [WSS]

While the pilot high schools found the work leading up to the move of the double cohort intense, the work since having the year 7 and year 8 students has, in some ways, been far greater than anticipated. One of the most challenging elements for JPSS has been the time required to support students who required One Plans. For 1 cohort of students, this may have been manageable. However, for 2 cohorts the work has been, and continues to be, demanding.

The pilot high schools suggest (where possible) that relevant students have One Plans developed before leaving primary school. This allows high schools to be better prepared and have the required staffing and support structures in place, allowing schools to focus on the students and their learning.

I'm not sure we could have done anymore around gathering information and data about the students. We've had this collision with the double cohort and the new system and that's been problematic for us. Schools (primary schools) need to be developing One Plans now, and identifying needs now so we (high schools) can plan for staffing for next year. At this stage, we'll be struggling to do that as we are still catching up with this year. [JPSS]

While the additional workload has been significant, the pilot high schools did not recruit additional administrative support as a result of the double cohort. WSS had previously reviewed and restructured their ancillary support model 3 years before the pilot program. This review identified a small increase in administration positions to reflect the year 7 students moving to the school, but was considered outside of the scope of the double cohort. MGHS and JPSS increased hours of existing SSOs, but found their middle school leaders accepted additional administrative responsibilities.

We have put extra hours into student services, but we have just had staff get in and do it. (year 7 leaders), picked up a lot of the extra administration and helped the SSOs, and that was our saviour. Getting someone on early is the best advice. [JPSS]

Overwhelmingly, the pilot high schools agreed that cross-collaboration with primary schools was fundamental to ensure the effective continuity of learning for students. Connecting with primary teachers and families to gather as much information as possible about the incoming students is vital. It assists with curriculum planning, care group and home group allocations and preparing the required support services and resources before students move to high school.

To better support the transition process for both year 7 and 8 students, the pilot high schools felt early access to data from the Educational Dashboard would provide high schools with a more complete picture of the enrolled students and streamline the learning between primary and secondary. They also identified the need for students to have One Plans completed before leaving primary school. This would enable high schools to be better prepared and have the required staffing and support structures in place, to fully support the students' learning.

The pilot high schools thought all schools (primary and secondary) should not underestimate the work required to transition a double cohort of students. For the pilot high schools, transitioning a double cohort of students has been a team effort, not just from within the high school, but across primary schools and Partnerships. The pilot schools say that despite the challenges, the overall success of the move of year 7 has been worth the additional effort.



ORIENTATION

Moving from primary school to high school is a major step. The pilot high schools worked closely with their local primary schools to make the move as easy as possible for the transitioning students and provide orientation experiences for new primary teacher recruits.

Orientation for students

When asked what transition activities had the greatest impact with the transitioning students, the high schools found activities that provided opportunities for students to interact with their new teachers and make new friendships resonated the most.

JPSS ran a 'Taste of High School' program where transitioning year 6 students visited the school over 2 days and experienced life as a high school student. They spent the 2 days with their new teachers and in their new care groups. The new primary recruits also took part in these days. During this time, students and teachers visited different learning areas, saw the specialist facilities across the school and moved around the school to different classes, connecting with different teachers and SSOs and familiarising themselves with the school.

The school felt this was one of the most valuable experiences for the students because they began to make connections and build relationships with teachers, support staff and other students. It was also beneficial for teachers and SSOs as it allowed them to gather information about the students. It also provided another opportunity for the new primary recruits to familiarise themselves with the school.

MGHS ran a similar program for their transitioning cohort, where students had the opportunity to meet other students in their care groups, and where possible, meet their new care group teachers. The school held a pool party and family barbeque as part of their transition program which was highly successful and enabled families to start developing new friendship groups. Given the spread of primary feeder schools, the high school felt this activity was a fun and relaxed way for students and families to start building relationships and making new connections.

WSS felt their 'Leading the Way Day' resonated most with their transitioning year 6 students. This transition activity was an opportunity for students to come together in term 3, 2019, mix with students from other primary schools and work together to co-design their year 7 jumper. This day made the students feel important and provided opportunities for their voice to be heard, especially in the design of the new jumper. It also provided opportunities for students to develop new friendships and connections, which further developed when students next came together at the 'Day in the Life of a Wirreanda Student' transition activity.

Although all 3 pilot high schools spent considerable time and effort ensuring the year 7 students were prepared for high school, students who participated in the Square Holes focus group sessions identified some additional challenges they faced in the first few weeks of starting at their high school. One of those challenges was navigating a larger school and understanding the timetable. At primary school, students are accustomed to extra support and guidance when moving between classes, often with a teacher present, so the new high school environment was challenging for some to navigate.



Initially, many students found moving between classes stressful as they were unfamiliar with the layout of the school and could not understand the timetable. Year 7 students suggested that schools should provide more support to new students to help them navigate their way around the school and provide more opportunities to walk through their new timetable with home group and care group teachers during transition visits. Making this seemingly small change will have a big impact on alleviating student anxiety around navigating a larger school.

I didn't really understand the piece of paper that told us where to go. It had numbers and letters all over it and I had no idea what it meant, and they didn't explain it very well. [Square Holes – student participant]

I don't think that they did really show us around the school. They did give us like a scavenger hunt thing. But (it would help) also if the peer leaders or teachers could give the new year 7s and 8s a little tour around the school to give them a general idea of where things are, because I remember being very lost in the first few days. [Square Holes – student participant]

What surprised us was the number of students getting lost, and we are a small school and we thought we did a really good job at transition of showing the girls the school. We held competitions about finding classrooms, but it didn't help. We were not used to students crying because they couldn't find their classroom. [MGHS]

Another significant stressor for students, particularly for the families at MGHS and JPSS, was the student's difficulty adjusting to the amount of homework they received and the increased complexity of subjects in high school. Parents and students who participated in the Square Holes focus group sessions and online surveys all mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the increased workload.

I didn't have any homework in primary school, so that's been a big challenge. [Square Holes – student participant]

MGHS in particular found the students' struggles with homework and course content to be a challenge for teachers. This was further highlighted during the online learning that occurred during COVID-19. To alleviate anxieties felt by the year 7 students, MGHS worked closely with teachers to adjust their teaching styles and manage teacher expectations. The school imposed restrictions on homework so students could focus on relationship building and supporting the wellbeing of their students.

A blind spot for us was homework. It took us by surprise how hard the year 7s have adapted to homework, compared to the year 8s. We have had to make some changes and will be implementing further changes next year. [MGHS]

Although parents understood the transition from primary school to high school would be challenging, they felt primary schools had a greater role to play in better preparing year 6 students for the increased responsibilities and pressures of high school. Parents who participated in the Square Holes online surveys felt primary schools should start teaching organisational and time-management skills and if not already, start assigning homework so the move to high school is less stressful. They also felt high schools needed to be mindful that the year 7 students are still only 11 to 12 years of age, and that some can be overwhelmed with new routines and higher expectations.

They are still getting used to deadlines and new buses and moving classes and teachers, there's a lot to worry about besides tonnes of school work as well. [Square Holes – parent participant]

Primary teacher recruits who taught year 7 students in the pilot high schools felt the skills critical for students to develop before starting high school were:

- Responsibility for learning and self-regulation
- Use of technology
- Problem solving skills
- Social skills
- Time management – managing deadlines

While most students and families experienced some challenges moving from primary school to high school, most parents were satisfied with their child's growth and development since moving into a secondary setting. Families were satisfied with the year 7 experience and in particular the quality of teachers, the learning programs, how the schools catered for specific needs, the schools' leadership and the general support made available.

(Student name) struggled at primary school academically and socially. Was getting bad grades. He was anxious and had just been diagnosed with ADHD. I was so worried that (student name) wouldn't cope with not being in 1 classroom. I was worried he wasn't emotionally ready. JPSS has been the making of (student name). He is succeeding, his report had 2 As and 5 Bs. I never thought that would happen. He wants to learn. He loves his teachers. He loves school. [Square Holes – parent participant]



Orientation for teachers

WSS and JPSS spent considerable time and effort ensuring their primary teacher recruits were prepared to move from their primary school classrooms into a high school teaching environment.

JPSS worked closely with their primary teachers when developing the year 7 curriculum, provided school laptops and early access to school systems. The school invited the new teachers to attend professional development sessions and student transition days, and provided additional school visits before week 0.

WSS ensured their primary teacher recruits were well informed about the school, including information about structures, culture, and identifying what was unique about the school and unique to high school. The school made sure both primary teacher recruits were heavily supported from the moment they started at the school.

When asked if they felt supported by the principal and leadership teams, all primary teacher recruits agreed they were welcomed and supported by their schools, however all but 1 primary teacher felt the support for transitioning teachers could have been improved. What the primary teachers identified as the most challenging part of transitioning to high school was understanding the new systems, managing the behaviours of older students and developing and modifying curriculum.

While there is no evidence to suggest that structured mentoring programs are more beneficial compared with teachers making their own connections, analysis of the responses provided by primary teacher recruits indicated transitioning primary teachers may have felt more supported with a dedicated mentor.

When asked to describe their first impressions of teaching in a high school, the primary teacher recruits felt overwhelmed and daunted by the new setting, new processes and expectations, but with time and excellent support, they all felt a sense of achievement and developed the skills to operate successfully in their secondary environments.

I was extremely nervous to begin with. I felt like I wasn't coping and like I was constantly behind. However, as time went on it became better. I'm now feeling more confident and effective in my teaching. [Pilot review, primary teacher recruit]

While it's incredibly important for high schools to invest time to thoroughly induct transitioning primary teachers into secondary school processes, primary teacher recruits will still require significant support and guidance once they are teaching at the school. The support that is required will vary depending on the different personalities, skills and experiences of the staff, but what was evident was that all new teachers will benefit and develop if high schools invest time and resources into supporting the transition.



They (new primary teacher recruits) do require a lot of support. They needed some help to delve into some of the curriculum areas, but that would be the same for high school teachers. They felt overwhelmed at the start, but we had quality people that came in and connected with the teachers they needed to learn from. Schools will need to make sure they provide adequate support to the teachers to help them develop skills in other learning areas. [JPSS]



ENGAGEMENT

For our pilot high schools, the connections and supportive relationships developed with students, their families and other support agencies was vital in ensuring students established and maintained the feeling that they would succeed at school. Successful engagement strategies enabled students to connect, succeed and thrive at school encouraging high attendance rates and positive behaviours.

Student Learning

When asked if the pilot schools thought the year 7 students were engaged in their learning, they all agreed that for the most part, all students had settled in extremely well to the high school environment and were enjoying new experiences and opportunities. The schools all felt the variety of transition activities undertaken the previous year had supported the students to feel comfortable and safe, which enhanced their learning. The pilot schools believed the students enjoyed studying specialised disciplines, extending their passions and interest areas and using the specialist facilities.

Developing relationships

All 3 high schools identified the need to make early connections with students a priority. The pilot high schools learnt that spending the first few weeks talking with students and building relationships was more important than learning content. This was especially true for the leadership team and staff at MGHS.

High school teachers need to prioritise relationships over curriculum. We've had so many high school teachers trying to get through the course content. That's why the homework has been so full-on. They (teachers) cannot get all the learning done during class-time and have not focused on the relationships. [MGHS]

During the first 2 to 3 weeks of the school year, when a teacher had their care group for science or maths we said don't worry about teaching the curriculum for the first couple of weeks, focus on developing the relationships and school values. [JPSS]

JPSS found their timetable structures and traditional teaching blocks inhibited the primary teacher recruits to be flexible with their teaching, especially when students were engaged and immersed with a particular topic. As much as possible, the year 7 teachers were supported and encouraged to be flexible with lessons, within the constraints of the existing timetable. As a school, they have decided to trial PBL in semester 2, 2020 and are considering opportunities for year 7 teachers to have 3 subject lines, rather than the standard 2.



The more time students can have with limited teachers in a middle school environment is more beneficial to the students and their learning. We are trying to aim for that as much as possible. [JPSS]

As previously mentioned in curriculum planning and student learning, the middle school curriculum structure at WSS is delivered through a PBL model. This allows students to develop knowledge and skills through engaging projects set around challenges and problems students may face in the real world. This model provides longer learning blocks for teachers and allows students to build strong relationships with core teachers and connect authentically with all areas of the curriculum. This has been a very important aspect of the school's middle school transformation. The school has observed that it provides teachers with flexibility within the curriculum and encourages students to develop strong connections with their teachers and the content.

Student engagement is about focusing on authentic topics that allow students to explore areas of passion and interest. And embedding opportunities for students to be physically active in their learning. [WSS]

Co-design and pedagogy

A key element of the PBL model at WSS is student agency in shaping their learning. Students are provided with a range of opportunities to shape, initiate and demonstrate their learning. WSS believes it is important for young adolescents to develop a voice, which assists in their ability to negotiate and choose aspects of their learning and improve engagement.

Year 7 students have opportunities to shape their learning in the PBL model. They have a range of voice and choice opportunities including shaping how they drive and demonstrate their learning. [WSS]

JPSS structured their year 7 timetable to mirror the year 8 model, but the school soon discovered that year 7 students learn very differently. The main differences identified by JPSS included the students' maturity and their need to connect with teachers. JPSS are currently exploring opportunities to enhance their middle school curriculum design and structures and felt other schools needed to be mindful of these differences when curriculum planning and developing outcomes and expectations for incoming year 7 students.



Before the students were at the school there wasn't that understanding and there was an assumption that the year 7s will be the same as the year 8s. But they are very different. [JPSS]

Similarly, MGHS operate a more traditional timetable. Some of their teachers found it challenging to adjust traditional lesson content and engage or connect with the year 7 students. Like JPSS, MGHS found their year 7 students connected to learning when lessons were more interactive and constructed into different activities. When the school asked year 7 students what helped them with their learning, the top 3 responses were hands on tasks, short tasks and having choice in the task, activity or learning.

MGHS are continuing to explore differentiated teaching strategies and pedagogies so that all students experience challenge, success and improved learning.

We don't think all of our teachers have really understood this (engaging students) and how this will impact the lesson and their (the students) learning. We have some teachers that say, well they're in high school now and they (year 7 students) need to get use to the high school model. But these are teachers that have a more traditional view of high school, not a contemporary, 2020 model. [MGHS].

Student Leadership

At WSS, student leadership opportunities have strengthened the school's culture and provided students with a sense of belonging to the school. The school encourages and supports year 7 students to be involved in leadership opportunities and has established captaincy structures in the middle school which enable students from years 7 to 9 to become house captains. Previously, leadership opportunities were reserved for students within the senior school.

The year 7 students involved in leadership opportunities in 2020 have absolutely value-added to conversations. These students (along with year 8s during the double transition) bring fresh eyes to ongoing areas for improvement which has been beneficial for all. [WSS]

MGHS and JPSS are still in the process of exploring and developing leadership opportunities for their year 7 students. MGHS acknowledged this was an element they overlooked in their planning and students have commented how they have missed these student leadership opportunities since moving from primary school. While the school



have house captain and Student Representative Council (SRC) structures for other year levels, the school will be exploring new leadership opportunities the year 7 students. JPSS have similar leadership opportunities for students and in the future will be trialling student led assemblies to promote student leadership and voice.

Parent Engagement

The pilot high schools spent considerable time and resources ensuring parents and care givers of transitioning year 6 students were well informed about high school in general and how the transitioning activities prepared students for the move to high school. All 3 pilot high schools conducted information sessions and open nights in early 2019, which families found alleviated their initial concerns and anxieties about the move to high school.

MGHS and WSS hosted morning teas and barbeques to welcome families to the school, which also provided parents and care givers opportunities to meet families from other primary schools and speak with leaders and teachers.

Approximately 35 to 40 parents attended which was a great opportunity to introduce key leaders within the school and share information about the school including our processes, systems and learner management system. Parents and caregivers asked some great questions which we otherwise may not have had the opportunity to address. [WSS]

The high schools use a variety of communication channels to engage with the broader school community, such as social media platforms, newsletters and Emails. WSS used their social media platforms to communicate with families, celebrate the learnings across the school and promote the reflections of their first year 7 cohort.

Given the significant number of feeder primary schools, MGHS used the school's website to provide regular updates to families about key dates and year 7 transition activities, and early updates on the successful transition of the year 7 students.

As part of their normal processes, JPSS used the school's Facebook page to communicate key dates and events to families. Families new to the school were not familiar with this method of communication, which created some issues for parents and students. JPSS have spent time this year improving the information on the school's website and school calendar to better communicate key dates and future events with families.



We have made some mistakes and assumptions regarding communications and families. For example, the swimming carnival. The communication to families was via Facebook. This is how we normally communicate, but parents from primary school would normally be getting letters sent home. So we learnt that we needed to make sure we take into consideration what parents are used to, and take time to teach them and move them from primary school style communications to high schools style communications. [JPSS]

What surprised all the pilot high schools was how challenging it has been to keep parents engaged. All 3 high schools had anticipated greater numbers of parents wanting to be more engaged with the school and involved in their child's learning, but this was not the case.

Primary principals said year 7 parents would hang around. They (the parents) did at the start of the year, but that has now dropped off. How do we keep them connected? It's still the same struggle that we have with the other years. [WSS]

MGHS encourages their year 7 care group teachers to send regular Emails home to parents and provide notes via Daymap. The school conducted Daymap information sessions for parents, hoping to encourage greater interactions with parents, but the school is unaware of how many parents are using this platform to check on their students' progress and engage with the school.

Parents who participated in the Square Holes focus group sessions and online surveys were mostly satisfied with the communications they received from the pilot high schools, however there were some challenges identified by parents and caregivers that created common frustration across the 3 schools. The most common communication and engagement concerns identified by pilot families included:

- Clearly articulating required materials and costs
- Information about technology
- Accuracy and streamlining of communication

Clearly articulating required materials and costs

Parents found that information about the various additional school fees, including uniforms, technology, materials and school fees, had not been clearly communicated during transition activities and open nights. Parents knew there would be some additional costs with moving to high school, but many were not prepared for the additional financial pressures related to laptops, school camps, school sports and other school activities. This was especially concerning for families that had 2 students transitioning to high school.

Parents have suggested that schools should provide estimated costs to transitioning families as soon as possible, allowing time to budget and plan for the additional expenses.



They thought clear communication about payment plans or alternative payment options such as laptop rentals would also be highly beneficial.

One of the main challenges we had earlier last year was the cost involved for getting all the uniforms and they (my children) needed a laptop as well. And because we had 2 (students) going, we had to get 2 laptops and 2 lots of uniforms. That was difficult for us. [Square Holes, parent participant]

Technology-specific information sessions

Parents indicated the information about technology and communication platforms used by the schools was insufficient. They would have appreciated more clarity around the types of devices required, where to purchase devices, financing options and time to ensure school software was working properly. Many parents identified that learning Daymap was a challenge, which inhibited their ability to engage with the school and in their child's learning.

Parents have suggested hosting technology-specific sessions for parents and students and providing families with user-guides they can refer back to. While MGHS conducted these sessions, schools may consider conducting these sessions after the students have started at the high school.

Accurate and streamlined information

Missed notifications and inaccurate or irrelevant information was a major concern from all pilot families. Parents and caregivers were often confused by the different platforms used by their school to communicate relevant information.

At times, parents said the different communication platforms created confusion and they may have missed direct communication about events or opportunities for their child. Where possible, parents of year 7 students have suggested streamlining the various communication platforms and teaching families how the school prefers to share key information. Parents still appreciate being made aware of this information to help guide their student. They felt the year 7 students were not used to taking initiative relating to upcoming opportunities and events, and parents indicated they could support this if they were better informed.

Parents also identified concerns about up-to-date information on school websites. Some parents said there as inadequate information related to elective subjects, sports, extra-curricular and specialised learning programs. Families have suggested other schools review their current online content and ensure all information, especially related to enrolment and transition, is relevant and accurate.



There was a lot of questions on the orientation days about the laptops. When you logged into the website, the prices were different, and the information was a bit different to what they'd given you. That was a bit confusing. [Square Holes, parent participant]

The parents of year 7 students would like more opportunities to meet with teachers beyond the care group or home group teacher. They observed high school offered fewer opportunities for parent visits, but parents would still like to meet teachers. It will be important for high schools to provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to engage with the school, to meet teachers and leaders and to learn about the unique programs, systems and structures of the school.

It's also important for high schools to celebrate successes with parents and caregivers by promoting the learning that's happening in the classroom, and where possible, inviting families to the school to engage in positive experiences with learning and high school.

It would have been nice to have met with the teachers at the start of the term to put faces to the names, especially before camp. [Square Holes, parent participant]



SPECIALISED EDUCATION OPTIONS

Overview

For the year 7 to high school move in 2022, additional specialised education classes have been funded to meet projected need. As part of the pilot project, WSS and JPSS were each approved to welcome an additional specialised education options class in 2020. The purpose of creating additional special classes as part of the pilot project was to provide early insights into transitioning students with disabilities (SwD) and highlight potential areas of risk and opportunity to inform the management of the 2022 double cohort intake.

Preparation

During the planning process, the pilot high schools found the support and communication between the school and staff from Student Support Services and Disability Policy and Programs was responsive and efficient. The support found to be most beneficial was the additional funding the schools received to support staff release time and having access to information about the students. This included information about their functional needs and individual specific requirements which helped the schools to understand and prepare for the student's social and learning needs.

When asked what key elements of planning for the new specialised education options class differed to the planning taking place for move of mainstream year 7 students, the pilot schools identified:

- The creation of safe spaces and break-out spaces within an inclusive school
- Specialised equipment and resources
- Additional technology expenses and appropriate assistive technology
- Recruitment of appropriately trained and skilled class teachers

Appropriate facilities were also considered as part of the planning, with minor building works required to accommodate an additional class. Due to time constraints, the schools refurbished existing spaces. For schools currently designing spaces for future specialised education option classes, the pilot schools suggested that schools should consider:

- Outdoor spaces
- Sound proofing
- Location of rooms and connections to mainstream classes
- Resources
- Technologies that work effectively and are supported by school ICT networks

Ensure you have the information regarding the needs of the students. Resources and lots of them. Different kinds of resources - hands-on, visual. Range of assistive technologies that work effectively and school ICT network can cope with. Skilled and knowledgeable staff leading the learning program and supporting the classroom. [Pilot school survey response]



Curriculum Planning

Knowing information about individual students and their needs as early as possible supported the pilot schools with their curriculum planning. The pilot high schools were notified of which students were enrolling in the specialised education options classes in late term 3 and early term 4 of 2019. The schools immediately began developing student profiles, engaging with parents and caregivers and meeting with primary teachers and support staff. These meetings were crucial in developing an understanding of the individual students and their learning and developmental needs.

When designing curriculum for SwD, the pilot high schools used a range of data sets to gather and analyse information about the students, their needs and specific requirements. This included information from:

- One Plans
- Year 5 NAPLAN data
- PAT-M
- PAT-R
- Brightpath
- IESP
- School support data systems

Analysis of this data, along with the information provided by parents and caregivers as well as primary teachers, provided reliable evidence of learning. The schools were able to use this to understand the needs of individual learners, establish curriculum that supported continuity in the students' learning and set goals for future success.

Another important element for both pilot high schools in their curriculum planning was the integration of technology into curriculum design for SwD. They reported that students responded positively to the use of technology in the classroom which strengthened their learning, as the students were more engaged. The schools noted that it assisted the students to connect with the 'real-world' and facilitated students becoming more independent.

(Technology) enabled continuous assessment of student progress using evidence based online programs. Enables students to review and master skills independently. [Pilot school survey response]

When asked what advice the pilot schools would provide to other schools when curriculum planning for their future specialised education options classes, they said it was important for schools to know their students well, be highly flexible when designing curriculum for SwD, connect the curriculum to life skills and develop independence.

Staffing

As part of the planning process, WSS and JPSS recruited new specialised education options teachers for their additional classes. Both high schools noted having difficulty recruiting for these specific positions. What made the recruitment difficult was the lack of suitable qualifications in candidates, developed professional learning to support teacher upskill



and the quality of applicants. Fortunately for both schools, they were able to find well-qualified teachers to support the new classes. All new staff participated in teacher induction days and professional learning activities, specific to the development of adolescent learners.

Both WSS and JPSS recruited additional SSOs to support the students moving into the new specialised education options classes. Newly recruited SSOs participated in induction sessions and professional learning activities, specific to adolescent learners, along with the new specialised education options teachers.

SSOs played a vital role for the pilot high schools in the transition of vulnerable or at risk students, as previously mentioned in transition (knowing the enrolled student and their needs). SSOs were involved in transition activities, meetings with families and students. This helped SSOs to develop an early understanding of the students, develop relationships and support the overall transition for students.

Transition

For WSS and JPSS, transition activities for SwD was comprehensive and extensive. Both high schools visited and communicated with the primary schools to learn more about the students and their specific needs. This included individual site visits, observing the student in the primary environment and meeting with teachers and support staff. The information gathered during these sessions assisted the high schools in designing appropriate curriculum and transition activities according to need.

The pilot high schools felt the support that best helped SwD to settle into the high school environment were the extensive and extended transition activities and making early connections with key staff who dedicated time to develop these relationships.

Support staff are exceptional at their jobs in developing relationships and making adjustments to support students to feel connected and have access to their learning. [Pilot school survey response]

Double cohort

The most significant consideration in transitioning a double cohort of SwD was the time required to develop meaningful and valuable student profiles. For JPSS and WSS, the transition of a double cohort of SwD was successful because of the dedicated staff who supported transition activities.

Careful planning in transitioning a double cohort of SwD was necessary to prepare for the transition, especially considering the additional workload for teachers still trying to teach full loads, complete SACE programs, prepare for moderations and finalise end of year activities.

Preparing for 2022

When asked what key piece of advice the pilot high schools would like to share with other schools preparing to transition SwD, they highlighted the importance of building strong



partnerships between primary schools and high school, and making sure collaboration is effective for SwD. The pilot schools suggested that primary and high schools should be talking and working together early and engaging parents, caregivers and all key support staff when sharing information and developing student profiles. This cross-collaboration is critical when transitioning SwD.

Plan ahead- push for at least 2 terms of transition. [Pilot school survey response]

The pilot high schools have also suggested that leaders need to provide adequate release time for teachers and support staff to engage in meetings and develop these key relationships. Having supportive leaders that assisted the staff to transition the students, and who supported the establishment of routines and expectations was vital to the success of the pilot project.

Staff are critical, curriculum resources that support the learning program is vital, creating the right learning space and environment is very important. [Pilot school survey response]



CIRKIDZ PILOT PROJECT

The Cirkidz Pilot Project was implemented at Wirreanda Secondary School (WSS) to support the transition of primary students into high school who identified as having difficulty engaging with their schooling and those who may need extra support and confidence.

Background

SA Circus Centre contacted the DfE in early 2019 with a proposal to conduct a program as part of the WSS Year 7 to High School Pilot Project to support the transition of selected primary students.

In an educational setting, Cirkidz works with students to re-engage, build confidence and improve students' motivation and engagement in their lives and learning environment. Based on the foundations of social circus, students are taught a variety of circus and performance skills that build confidence and develop interpersonal relationships.

SA Circus Centre have developed a program to support the transition of primary students into a high school environment, who may be identified as having difficulty engaging with school in a variety of ways. The program seeks to strongly anchor students in their chosen high school, build strong peer relationships and provide opportunities for mentorship of and leadership by students.

Previous examples of successful transition programs conducted by SA Circus Centre include the Para Vista and Wandana Primary School joint circus program in 2014, the Ocean View College student motivation and engagement program for years 4 through to 7, and most recently the 'Transition to High School' program currently being delivered at Playford International College.¹

Program Overview

The program for 2019-20 was funded through 7toHS grant money and managed by WSS. Students were identified from 7 local primary schools with 4 students participating from each primary school: 2 year 6 students and 2 year 7 students.

Selection of the students was made by primary school staff and was based on students who partially or wholly satisfy the following criteria:

- Year 6 and year 7 students enrolled at WSS for 2020
- Socially isolated
- Disengaged from their schooling or the potential to be disengaged
- Lack opportunities for extra curricula activities
- Under confident

The primary schools involved were those with the highest numbers of registrations of interest, as at 24 May 2019.

¹ <http://www.cirkidz.org.au/>

Program Outline

2019	
Term 3	Primary students identified by week 1
	Teacher-Parent orientation session at Cirkidz Bowden facility, 5.00 – 6.30pm, week 5 Monday 19 August
	Primary student workshop at Cirkidz Bowden facility, toward the end of term 3
Term 4	Primary students commence weekly sessions at WSS from weeks 1 to 7, travelling to WSS for each session. WSS organised transport for term 4
2020	
Term 1	Student cohort (from 2019) attend weekly sessions at the high school till term 3 2020
Term 3	Review of Cirkidz Program

- Circus trainer to student ratio of the identified cohort was 1 trainer to 10 students
- Teacher supervision was necessary. TRT funding was factored into the grant which was managed by WSS.
- All programs incorporated professional circus staff and UniSA researchers.

Cirkidz Program Review

WSS experienced mixed success from the Cirkidz program. The school found the program was beneficial for connecting with vulnerable students before they started at the high school. It enabled participating students to create stronger networks with other Cirkidz students and deeper connections with staff leading the sessions. However, for many students with significant behaviour challenges, the program intensified some of these behaviours and encouraged students to form unhealthy friendship groups, which at times created additional behaviour issues. Identifying vulnerable students who are at risk of being disengaged was a key aspect to the success of the Cirkidz program.

The program allowed staff to spend additional time with vulnerable students before they started at the school and provided more opportunities to interact with the students in an informal setting. Having a greater understanding of the students' needs has assisted with class placement and the early development of individualised engagement strategies.

While participation in the program was slightly impacted due to COVID-19 restrictions, the majority of students who participated in the program were able to re-engage in their learning and continue to develop social and confidence building skills.

Overall, WSS were encouraged by the positive growth demonstrated by some of the students and the potential leadership they demonstrated early in term 1.

Identifying students to participate

Primary schools were asked to identify students to participate in the program. The students who were identified came from a broad range of backgrounds with different vulnerabilities. Some students were disengaged from schooling due to behaviour and some were intensely introvert. Unfortunately, some of the students identified by the primary schools were not entirely appropriate for the program.

When establishing similar programs in the future, WSS would be more strategic in the selection of participating students, with the final participants selected by the high school.



The school's focus would be to identify those students that don't have extreme behaviour issues or severe anxieties. The school already has programs and support systems to engage with these students. The greatest amount of growth was identified in students who were under confident and shy. Through this program, these students were able to build peer relationships, develop friendship groups and build their confidence to interact with each other.

Supporting Transition

WSS found the Cirkidz program somewhat easy to establish as the school has facilities available and accessible, however the leadership time dedicated to supervising the transportation of students to and from their primary school was expensive. The school released 2 leaders to collect, supervise and drop-off the students. As this program had been clearly communicated with all staff, the school found there were no identified issues with these arrangements.

As part of the school's already established transition programs, Cirkidz provided another avenue for the school to collect information about students and their families. It assisted the school to further recognise students who were particularly socially isolated and under confident and identified students and families the school could potentially work with or interact with more.

When asked if the program had any positive or negative implications for other year 7 and year 8 students, WSS were surprised at how the Cirkidz students became the 'go to' students when a task needed to be done or helping other students navigate their way around the school. Their early exposure to the site and familiarisation with processes provided opportunities for these students to demonstrate early leadership qualities and a feeling of belonging to the school.

Developing these early connections and relationships assisted staff involved in the program to have a greater understanding of each student and their specific needs or vulnerabilities. However, the school found it was detrimental to have only 1 leader develop deep connections and knowledge of the students at the start of the following year. While that leader could assist with updating student profiles, suggesting class placement options and individualised engagement strategies, other teachers still needed to take time to establish their own connections and relationships.

Overall, the program allowed staff to spend additional time with vulnerable students and helped the students feel more connected with WSS and made transition into the high school easier.

Engagement

The school already has a number of programs and opportunities to engage with vulnerable students, including the use of the Learner Wellbeing Centre and peer mentoring programs. WSS staff indicated the Cirkidz program created an additional opportunity for staff to form closer connections with students and provided opportunities for the students to feel successful.

When asked if parents of participating students were engaged with the program and what their child was learning, WSS found that although they attempted to communicate with



families, make phone calls, send letters and welcome packs, families were not interested in participating. If WSS were to run a similar program in the future, they would encourage parents to attend a 'meet and greet' session and conduct a family's skills session or hold a performance at the end of the program.

Since the remote learning phase of COVID-19 restrictions, all but 2 students have re-engaged with the program. Students were obviously impacted by the social distancing restrictions and found it difficult to participate using online meeting platforms, as there were limitations with what physical activities students could undertake.

However, whether it's the success of the Cirkidz program or the range of wellbeing programs conducted at WSS, the Cirkidz students have been able to re-engage in their learning and continue to develop some of the skills they have learnt in the program. This includes a willingness to try new things or presenting to peers with increased self-confidence.

Additional considerations

While WSS were grateful for the opportunity to conduct this unique program and identified clear benefits for the transition and engagement of vulnerable students, the school were concerned with the affordability of the package and capacity for other schools to fund a similar program.

WSS identified concerns about vulnerable students missing key learning opportunities in core subjects due to their participation in the Cirkidz program. This was because the program was conducted during lesson time staff and leaders questioned the value of the program if students were missing out on learning key concepts. Future consideration would need to be given to timetabling or how the program could be integrated into lesson planning.

WSS will not be conducting the Cirkidz program in 2020-21, but will explore other transition activities that support and engage vulnerable students.



KEY FINDINGS

This section of the report highlights the key findings that emerged from the consultations undertaken for the review.

Year 7 students are ready for high school: Students are enjoying the independence, peer interactions and challenges of high school. Year 7 students like accessing specialist resources and teachers, and parents are proud of their child's increased maturity.

Moving a double cohort is challenging: Preparing for the move of year 7 and year 8 students is best supported when schools have well-defined leadership structures and key transition staff to support the increased workload.

Cross-collaboration with primary schools strengthens transition and continuity of learning: Developing positive relationships with primary schools and primary teachers supports high schools when designing curriculum and learning outcomes suitable for young adolescents. It supports opportunities to share pedagogies, observe differentiated teaching strategies and encourages self-reflection for improvement.

Prioritise relationships alongside learning content: Year 7 students engage in learning when they have developed positive relationships with teachers. Staff who positively connect with young adolescents and provide safe learning environments inspire strong student engagement and improved learning outcomes.

Consider how primary teachers can add value to your school: Be clear about, and believe strongly in, why you want to employ primary teachers. Understanding what skills and expertise a primary trained teacher could contribute to a secondary setting will better support the development of workforce profiling.

Primary teachers moving to high school will need support: Primary teachers will need help to understand and navigate new high school systems, support to manage the behaviours of older students and guidance when developing curriculum.

Explore whole school professional learning opportunities: Engage in whole school professional learning opportunities that focus on understanding young adolescents and develop a school culture that encourages collaboration and sharing of pedagogies, curriculum expertise and subject knowledge to inspire change.

Families and caregivers want to engage with the high school: Provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to engage with the school and consider activities and interactions that incorporate parents who work full-time.



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The Year 7 to High School Project team acknowledges the contributions of all participants to the review and would like to express sincere thanks to:

The high school principals and leadership teams from the 3 pilot schools who have so willingly supported the project team and assisted with numerous site visits, data collection activities and media or communication opportunities. Their enthusiasm and dedication to their schools and students is infectious and it has been an honour to be part of this exciting journey with them:

- Caroline Fishpool – Wirreanda Secondary School
- Linda Baird – Mitcham Girls High School
- Roger Nottage – John Pirie Secondary School

The families and students from the 3 pilot high schools who were kind enough to take time from their busy lives to share their thoughts, excitement and concerns. We recognise the additional challenges the students have managed this year and are so proud of their achievements.

The primary principals and teachers who supported the transition of year 7 students into a pilot high school. We understand the move of year 7 has been challenging and we have been so impressed by the professional and caring manner in which you have all worked with the project team and the pilot high schools. Your commitment to your students and their wellbeing is unmistakable.



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Department for Education

Year 7 to High School Pilot Evaluation – Square Holes Pty Ltd

November 2019

Department for Education

Year 7 to High School Pilot Evaluation – Square Holes Pty Ltd

May 2020



YEAR 7 TO HIGH SCHOOL

APPENDIX 1 – Pilot School Review Questions

Year 7 to High School – High School Pilot Review Questions

Target Audience: Principals and their leadership teams from the 3 pilot high schools

Purpose: To provide early insights into workforce planning, funding arrangements, wellbeing, curriculum and transition processes between primary and high schools. These insights will inform the statewide transition of Year 7 to high school in 2022.

The Implementation Tool was made available after your initial planning. Was this resources helpful in your ongoing preparation?

PREPARATION

CURRICULUM PLANNING AND STUDENT LEARNING

On a scale of 1-10, how useful did leaders and curriculum coordinators find the Teaching and Learning Guide in preparing and designing the school's curriculum for Year 7s?

Was your curriculum planning focused on?

Can you identify any curriculum planning challenges you faced?

Will you be making any modifications to your curriculum delivery for 2021?

What modifications will you be making and what new outcomes are you hoping to achieve?

What areas of learning have been the most challenging for your Year 7 students?

If there have been challenges, do you think this is unique to Year 7 students, or have you identified this previously with Year 8 cohorts?

How have you been deliberate in creating safe learning environments for Year 7's?

In your opinion, would specific curriculum planning support from central office benefited your curriculum planning? (E.g. PL sessions run by LID in applying elements of the Guide, additional resources etc.)

What would be your advice to other principals and/or leaders in relation to curriculum planning for 2022?

STAFF PLANNING

How were decisions made about the extra teaching vacancies required?

Were any new leadership positions created in preparation for the move of Year 7?

Why was it important for your school to create these new roles?

Have these roles enhanced the move of the Year 7s and the school's leadership team?

Did you experience any resistance from your existing teaching staff with the move of Year 7?

How did you identify existing staff that were interested in teaching the Year 7 students?

What were the challenges you faced with your workforce planning to accommodate Year 7s?

What advice would you give other schools who are starting to think now about staffing requirements for the move of Year 7?

RECRUITMENT OF PRIMARY TEACHERS

How many primary teachers did you appoint to your high school through the agreed pilot school recruitment process?

If you did not appoint any primary teaching staff, why? What skills or expertise were the primary teacher applicants missing?

What were your first impressions of the primary teachers recruited to your high school?

What skills have your primary teachers brought to your school?

How have the primary teachers' skills been utilised within your school?

In your opinion are your school leaders, and parents confident and comfortable that these teachers have the skills and knowledge to successfully teach in a secondary setting?

Reflecting on your experience of this recruitment process, is there anything you would do differently?

FACILITIES PLANNING

From a facilities planning perspective, what were the main benefits of having the projected enrolment numbers early?

Would more time for facilities planning been beneficial prior to the Year 7s joining your school?

Did you create dedicated physical spaces for the Year 7s when they first started at your school?

Have the use of these spaces changed since term 1?

What advice would you give other schools currently designing spaces for their future Year 7s?

Has traffic or car parking been an issue for the school?

What advice would you provide to other schools about traffic management and car parking for parents/caregivers and staff?

Are there any facilities issues that surfaced after the Year 7s joined your school that you hadn't anticipated, which might be useful to share with other schools to support their planning?

BUDGET PLANNING

How important was the additional support provided by Roselie Dohnt to the school's financial planning for the move?

What specific financial planning support was provided to your school?

Did you feel this support was sufficient to help you prepare financially for Year 7s?

Was this support provided at the right time, or would you have preferred the support earlier in your planning process?

How has the timing of funding allocations impacted your curriculum planning and resources for student learning?

What specific funding lines created the most impact to student learning?

What impact did the changes made to the retrospective funding policy of Aboriginal students to reflect the current ATSI enrolments in your school?

Are there any other retrospective funding policies that you believe need to change?

What information/data do high schools need to better prepare projected budgets for the double cohort?

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

How have your new Year 7 students assimilated into your school?

Are there any specific strategies you used to streamline this transition?

How did you prepare other Year levels for welcoming the Year 7s into the school community?

Did students participate in any transition activities prior to 2020 to prepare them for this change? If so, what did they do?

Do your new students feel connected to the school? If so, how do you know?

What support did you find was best received by Year 7s to help them settle in?

Is there anything that has surprised you about the way Year 7s have adapted to their high school setting?

What communication strategies has the school used to keep parents/caregivers informed and engaged in the school?

What practices have worked to support communication between the school and parents from diverse backgrounds?

(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, parents with a disability, non-English speaking families)

What opportunities have been given to parents/care givers to be kept informed of their child's progress at their new school?

What advice or suggestions could you share with other schools about welcoming Year 7s to high school?

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

What professional learning or skills, capability and readiness support did the recruited primary teachers participate in?

In your opinion, have these activities improved or enhanced the skills, capability and readiness of your recruited primary teachers?

Have your new primary teachers been supported by mentors?

Did the mentors receive any specific mentor training before working with the primary teachers?

How did you match the mentor to the mentee?

Have you or your staff identified any changes that need to be made to this program?

In your opinion, what mentoring activities have had the greatest impact?

Has the mentoring program changed how the new teachers interact with existing teachers?

Given the value of hindsight, what would you do differently to better prepare new primary teachers moving into a high school setting?

What wouldn't you change?

Have other teachers at your school engaged in any professional learning activities for early adolescent learners?

Do you believe this PL has enhanced the learning outcomes for students?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about professional learning in preparation for 2022?

TRANSITION

COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

In your opinion, was there a collegiate and supportive relationship with your feeder primary schools prior to this project?

During the project has there been a collaborative approach regarding transition activities with the leaders and teachers from the feeder primary schools?

What could be done to further develop positive and collaborative relationships between primary schools and high schools to support transition?

What transition practices did you undertake with the local primary schools?

Have these activities helped prepare the students for high school?

In your opinion, has your relationship with the primary schools changed following this project? Please explain.

Did you obtain student learning data and relevant information about the needs of students from primary schools prior to 2020?

Would do anything differently to support your primary school relationships and maximise the experience for students and teachers?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about ensuring the primary/high school collaboration is effective?

YEAR 7 TO HIGH SCHOOL

KNOWING THE ENROLLED STUDENTS AND THEIR NEEDS BEFORE THEY BEGIN

Were your teachers aware of the student needs and learning levels prior to 2020?

What was the main challenge in acquiring important information to your students prior to 2020?

What transition activities helped further develop your knowledge of individual students and their specific needs before they commenced at the high school?

What transition activities have supported vulnerable students?

Did you conduct parent/teacher meetings prior to 2020 to learn more about individual students' learning needs?

Were you able to identify students at risk prior to 2020?

How have you continued to support these students since moving to high school?

Did you experience any challenges during the transition process with primary schools?

What could be done differently to overcome any barriers?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about knowing the students' needs before they commence at high school?

DOUBLE COHORT TRANSITION

What were some of the benefits of providing separate transition visits for Year 6 and Year 7 students?

What advice would you provide other high schools in planning separate transition visits? (workload, financial cost impacts)

How have you ensured the Year 8 cohort have felt supported and included?

Has the transition of the double cohort impacted your administration staff?

Has your school increased administrative support as a result of the 2020 double cohort?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about preparing for a double cohort of students in 2022?

ORIENTATION

ORIENTATION FOR STUDENTS

As part of your student orientation activities, which activity resonated the most with the transitioning Year 6 students?

Did the orientation activities provide enough reassurance to students so they felt ready for their first day of high school?

Did you provide alternative orientation visits for Aboriginal students and students with special needs?

How have these alternative visits supported their wellbeing and connection with the school community?

Now that you are planning for the next cohort to transition, will you be changing your approach to student orientation?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about student orientation for 2022?

ORIENTATION FOR TEACHERS

If you recruited a primary teacher to your school for 2020, what orientation activities were provided to these teachers?

How often did the teachers interact/visit with the high school before week 0?

What were the benefits of these early teacher visits?

Have these activities been different to your normal teacher orientation processes?

Would you do anything differently for these teachers in retrospect?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about teacher orientation?

ENGAGEMENT

STUDENT LEARNING

Are the Year 7 students engaged in their learning?

How do you know they are engaged?

What opportunities have you created for student agency in shaping their learning?

Has your curriculum planning valued diversity and cultural identity?

What strategies have you used to engage, support and monitor vulnerable learners?

How have you catered for the social and emotional needs of your Year 7 students?

Have the relevant staff met with support services to discuss your students' specific needs to maximise their engagement in learning?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about student engagement?

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Have student leadership structures have been created for the Year 7s?

Were these structures in place before the move of Year 7, or were they implemented as part of the move?

Do you believe the students value leadership opportunities?

How do you encourage and support the Year 7 students to develop their own identity within the wider school?

Have student leadership opportunities strengthened the school's culture and provided students with a sense of belonging to their school?

Have the leadership opportunities differed to those provided to Year 8s?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about student leadership/student agency?

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Was the engagement process for the Year 6 cohort different to the normal engagement strategies with families transitioning from Years 7 to 8?

How have you continued to engage with parents?

Did parents raise any specific concerns about the move of Year 7 to high school that would be useful to highlight?

Can you share some of the positive feedback received by parents about the move?

What key engagement strategies have you found important when communicating with a family who has a child with special learning needs?

How has this engagement supported their child's transition and development?

How have you engaged with Aboriginal parents to support them during the transition process?

Did you receive support from your local AEWs?

How can these teams further assist schools and families transition Aboriginal students?

In general, are your parents confident and relaxed about having their student in high school?

What advice or suggestions would you share with other schools about parent engagement?

YEAR 7 TO HIGH SCHOOL

Questions for Pilot High Schools (with Specialised Education Options)

Target Audience: Principals and their leadership teams from the pilot high schools that were approved to have an additional Specialised Education Options Class from 2020.

Purpose: To provide early insights into transitioning students with disabilities (SwD) moving from/into a special class. Highlight potential areas of risk and opportunities to inform the management of the 2021/2022 double cohort intake.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

What were the key elements of planning for the new specialised education options class that were different to the planning taking place for Year 7?

What term did you receive notification of student numbers for this class?

What term did you find out which students would be enrolled in the specialised education options class?

Did this include information about individual student needs?

How important is knowing information about individual students' and their needs early to support the school's planning (curriculum, facilities, staffing and resources)?

Did you receive any support from the department during this planning process?

During the planning process, how efficiently was the communication between the department (Student Support Services / Disability Policy and Programs) and the school?

Were all relevant stakeholders aware of the processes and part of the consultation?

Were there students recommended for a specialised education options who were placed in your mainstream?

Have you been required to provide any additional facilities since the SwD commenced at your school?

What advice would you give other schools currently designing spaces for their future specialised education options classes?

CURRICULUM DESIGN

What information did the school use to design the curriculum for your SwD?

Has curriculum planning for SwD been integrated into the mainstream curriculum design?

What is the key aspect of integrating curriculum planning for SwD into mainstream curriculum?

Was the use of technology integrated into SwD curriculum design?

What advice would you give other schools when curriculum planning for their future specialised education options classes?

RECRUITMENT

Did you recruit new specialised education options teachers for 2020?

Did you have difficulty recruiting for these specific positions?

Did they participate in any teacher induction days before commencing at the school?

Have your specialised education options teachers participated in any professional learning activities, specific to adolescent learners?

What professional learning did they participate in?

Are Student Support Officers (SSOs) employed at your school to support teachers and student learning?

With the double cohort, were you required to appoint new SSOs?

Who supports the teachers and students in the classroom?

Did they participate in any induction days before commencing at the school?

Have your SSOs participated in any professional learning activities, specific to adolescent learners?

FUNDING

Did the school receive enough information about Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) funding for SwD in mainstream classes and specialised education options?

Has your school been required to seek more targeted support and intervention from IESP's state-wide centralised panel?

Did the change in interim supplementary funding to support students transition into high school have a financial impact on the school?

Was the school required to purchase any additional resources, previously unidentified to support the teachers and/or the SwD?

Do you have any students eligible for the Transport Assistance Program?

Did you receive enough information from the respective feeder primary school to finalise the transport assistance application form?

Does the current process provide high schools with enough time to inform parents of transport detail and information?

Has there been a key financial concern for the school related specifically to the administration of the specialised education options class?

TRANSITION OF DOUBLE COHORT

What are the most significant considerations in transitioning a double cohort of SwD?

Did the school conduct separate information sessions with parents of SwD?

Were there key concerns raised by parents?

Did the school conduct separate transition visits for Year 7 and Year 8 SwD?

Who attended these visits?

STUDENTS

How has your school community supported your new specialised education option(s)?

How has your school community supported enrolment of students with disability in a mainstream class?

Do your SwD feel included in the school community?

What support did you find was best received by the students to help them settle in?

What transition practices did you undertake with the primary schools to learn more about the students and their specific needs?

Did this information assist in curriculum design and transition?

Were students One Plans reviewed prior to commencing?

Did you record higher suspension or exclusion rates for SwD during transition?

What key piece of advice would you share with other schools about ensuring the primary/high school collaboration is effective for SwD?

Do you have any other advice you would like to share with schools that will be establishing a specialised education options class for 2022?

YEAR 7 TO HIGH SCHOOL

Questions for Primary School Principals

Purpose: To understand how the move of Year 7s has impacted their school, the challenges the school and staff have faced, communication and collaboration strategies across the school community and across the partnership, workforce, budget impacts and school culture.

Preparation for the project

Have you used the primary school implementation tool to plan for 2021?
Was there anything missing from this tool, or how could it be improved?
Did you identify any immediate impacts for your school in preparing for the move of the Year 7 students to the pilot high school?
What was one of those impacts?
Briefly describe some of the challenges in preparing for the move of Year 7?
What have been some of the benefits of high school for Year 7s?

School and staff wellbeing

How would you rate the overall experience of transitioning a cohort of students?
Briefly describe some of the challenges for you as a leader?
Have you been required to implement any changes specifically related to the move of Year 7s?
What was one change that you have implemented as a result of the move of Year 7?
Please identify any specific support that you would have found beneficial during the transition period?

Communication

How have you communicated updates and changes to staff?
How have you communicated information about the move to families/caregivers?
Briefly describe what strategies the school has used to provide reassurances to families/caregivers with children who may have special needs?
Briefly describe how you engaged with your Aboriginal families?
Were there any concerns from parents/caregivers that were anxieties or worries you did not anticipate?
What were these concerns and how did you manage them?

Collaboration and transition

Do you believe your school had a collaborative relationship with the pilot high school prior to the commencement of the project?
Has the relationship with the pilot high school improved following the project?
Within your partnership, have relationships amongst leaders strengthened following the project?
Did your Education Director support you during the project?
What additional support could they have provided?
Do you believe your Year 6 students were well prepared for high school?
What transition activities proved to be most beneficial for your students?
Did you or your staff have any concerns for particular students moving to high school?
Did you or the class teacher address these concerns with the pilot high school?
Were these concerns acknowledged by the pilot high school?
Could your primary school better prepare future Year 6 cohorts transitioning to high school?
What might the school do differently to support transition?
Given the pilot schools' focus on effective transition practices from primary to high school, briefly describe how Continuity of Learning has improved through better collaboration with the high school?

Staff planning and budgets

Have you been required to make any changes to teacher resource allocations and/or administrative structures?
What changes have you made?
Can you foresee any specific changes that will need to be made following the statewide move in 2020?
Have you experienced a surplus of teaching staff following the move of Year 7?
How have you managed this surplus?
Do you envisage a teacher surplus following the statewide move in 2022?
Has the move of the Year 7 cohort impacted the school's budget?
What specific resources/areas of the budget have been impacted?
Did you undertake any forward planning to forecast the financial impact on the school?

Would any additional financial information or dedicated financial support have assisted you with this process?

School Culture

Has the move of the Year 7 cohort impacted on the sustainability of your primary school?
Has the move of Year 7 impacted the remaining students and the school's culture (R-6)?
Have there been any specific benefits for the Year 6 students that you did not identify previously?
What's one thing that you did not identify previously?
Have you begun to implement any new strategies to help redefine your school?
What's one new strategy you're implementing?
Is there any additional advice would you like to provide other primary schools in preparing for the move of Year 7 to high school?

Questions for Primary teachers in High Schools

Purpose: To capture their first impressions and experiences of teaching in a high school, how they have managed the different curriculum and student behaviours and if the professional learning activities they did prior to commencing at the pilot high school prepared them for day one.

First impressions

Briefly describe your first impressions of teaching in high school?
Was it what you expected?
What has surprised you most about teaching in a high school?
What has been the most challenging part of transitioning from primary school to high school teaching?
What have you enjoyed most about teaching in high school?
Have you felt supported by your principal and the leadership team?
What have they done to make you feel supported?
Could the support for new primary teachers transitioning into high school teaching be improved?
Have the existing high school staff welcomed you into their school community?

The students

Did you feel the Year 7 students were ready for high school?
Do you feel the Year 7s have settled quickly into the school community?
What has been the most challenging aspect of high school for Year 7s?
From your point-of-view what areas of learning have been the most challenging for your Year 7 students?
Are there any specific skills that are critical for Year 6 students to learn prior to transitioning to high school?
Have you been able to develop positive relationships with your students?
How have you done this?
Briefly describe how you have handled challenging behaviours? Is this different to the way you would manage these behaviours in a primary classroom?
Have you enjoyed teaching older students?
Was it what you expected?
What is the most rewarding aspect of teaching high school students?

Curriculum Planning

From a curriculum planning perspective, did you feel prepared to teach high school students?
What helped you feel prepared?
If you didn't feel prepared, what resources or assistance would have been beneficial to you before commencing at the high school?
What has been the most valuable lessons you have learnt so far about curriculum planning for high school students?
Have you changed or modified any of your teaching practices following the move to high school teaching?
Are there any resources or transitioning activities you would suggest new transitioning teachers have access to, to support their move to high school teaching?

Professional learning

What professional learning activities did you undertake prior to term 1 2020?
Do you feel these activities provided you with a level of confidence prior to teaching in a high school?
What professional learning activities have you undertaken since commencing at the high school?
Have the professional learning activities helped build your knowledge and confidence?

YEAR 7 TO HIGH SCHOOL

In your opinion, what professional learning and/or induction opportunities should be offered to transitioning primary teachers to better prepare them for high school teaching?
Have you been working with a mentor?
What have been the benefits of this relationship?
Do you feel you would have benefited from having a mentor?

Reflection

Have you enjoyed teaching in a high school?
What have you missed most about teaching in a primary classroom?
What haven't you missed?
What is one aspect of primary teaching you would like to introduce into a high school and why?
Do you think you will continue teaching in high school?
What advice would you give a primary teacher thinking about moving to a high school?
What have you enjoyed most about teaching high school students?

Questions for High School teachers in High Schools

Purpose: To capture their thoughts so we can identify how to improve the experience of primary school teachers entering high school when Year 7s move in 2022, and ensure existing high school teachers are supported with this change.

Primary teachers

What has surprised you most about the primary teachers?
What do you think would be the most challenging part of transitioning from primary to high school teaching?
How well do you feel the new teachers have settled into the school community?
In a few words tell us what have you done to support the new teachers and to make them feel welcome?

The students

Briefly describe your first impressions of the Year 7 students who are now part of your school community.
How ready were the Year 7 students for high school?
How well do you feel the Year 7s have settled into the school community?
What has been the most challenging aspect of high school for Year 7s?
What have been some of the benefits of high school for Year 7s?
In a few words, tell us what you think is the best thing that your school has done to support How have the Year 7s managed the new routines and moving between classrooms and teachers?
Did you feel prepared to teach Year 7s?
What professional learning opportunities/activities best prepare high school teachers to work with a younger students?

School culture

How has the move of Year 7 changed the school's culture?
How have the older students managed with the introduction of a new cohort?

Have high school and primary school teachers collaborated well, is there a sense of community?
In a few words, tell us what could be done differently to support a cohesive school culture, whether this is among students or collegiately?

Questions for Year 6 Primary School teachers

Purpose: To capture their thoughts about transition, how their role in preparing Year 6 students for high school may change and if their social identification and sense of self may change with the loss of the Year 7 cohort in primary schools. This provides us an opportunity to understand their future intentions regarding moving into a high school and what they might need to do this.

Transition

Briefly describe how you prepared your Year 6 student(s) for the transition into high school?
What support did parents/caregivers need during this transition?
What preparation experiences best supported your student(s) and their families for transition to high school for Year 7 in 2020?
Was there enough collaboration between the primary school and the pilot high school to sufficiently prepare your Year 6 student(s) transitioning to high school?
Could more be done to improve transition for students moving to high school?
What's one thing that could be done?
Will you be changing or modifying any of your future teaching practices to better prepare Year 6 students for high school?
What's one thing that you'll be changing?

Teacher Wellbeing

With the move of the Year 7 cohort in primary school, will your enjoyment of teaching in the primary school change?
Will the move of Year 7 to high school affect your professional identity, both in regards to your practice in a primary school and future opportunities of teaching Year 7 in a high school setting?
Would you consider teaching in a high school?
If you were to consider moving to a high school setting, what professional learning opportunities do you think would help you best prepare for high school teaching?
Do you think there's enough information about your options to move to high school, or is there any information you wish was available that isn't currently?
If you've answered no to this question, what's one piece of information not currently available to you?

School Culture

Did your principal keep you informed of the future changes or impacts that may directly or indirectly affect you with the move of the Year 7 cohort? eg. Staffing, NIT changes, yard duty changes etc.
Has the move of the Year 7 cohort impacted the remaining students and the school's culture (R-6)?
Have there been any specific benefits for the Year 6 students that you did not identify previously?
What's one thing that you did not identify previously?

