

South Australia  
**Bridgewater Primary School**

*In this primary school, students aged 5 to 12 participate in the design of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment by means of personal learning plans that the students set up in negotiation with teachers, and structured by a booklet for the planning of activities. Multi-age student groups are flexibly formed according to individual support needs, students are encouraged to move between groups, and they can sign up or be invited to attend short focus sessions of a small group of learners with a teacher. The school employs an artist and two specialist teachers who take care of art and craft workshops and the student-run school garden and kitchen, and support students with special needs. Many volunteers are involved in the school, contributing to enrichment topics with optional attendance, and students can also organize sessions for other students. Each student has a mentor, with whom they meet regularly to monitor and reflect on their learning. Assessments involve an evaluation meeting, where students are often encouraged to self-assess their work.*

**Main focus of innovation:** CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION, TEACHERS

**Other keywords:** alternative philosophy, blended/non-formal, equity

### General Information

**Name of the ILE:** Bridgewater Primary School

**Location/Address:** Morella Grove Bridgewater. South Australia 5154

**Website:** [www.bridgeps.sa.edu.au](http://www.bridgeps.sa.edu.au)

**ILE submitted by:** South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services

**Rationale**

*Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning challenges?*

During the past decade, *Bridgewater Primary School* has engaged in transformative change, becoming not only more focused on the children they teach, but more aware of the ways in which their students most effectively learn. A personalised approach to learning, a raft of strategies to improve student engagement, and a focus on skills for lifelong learning has enabled the school's students to develop their sense of identity, their sense of belonging and their learning abilities.

In search of a better understanding of learning, the school staff engaged as a group in professional learning about:

- discoveries in the learning sciences, including neuroscience;
- incorporating constructivist practices into pedagogy;
- the role of assessment strategies in the learning process; and,
- the potential of contemporary technologies to contribute to children's learning and their lives.

The innovation to learning undertaken by *Bridgewater Primary School* significantly transformed previous teaching practices. Now a decade later, the school continues to evolve, building on their successes and deliberately addressing challenges. The school's innovation is sustainable, having adapted and grown through a range of departmental expectations, changes of staff and family clientele.

The innovation program at *Bridgewater Primary School* extends throughout the whole school, and consists of six key strategies.

- Multi-age organisational grouping of students, according to their individual learning support needs.
- Personal learning plans incorporating core skills (literacy, maths, science and ICT) negotiated by each student according to their interests.
- Enrichment topics called 'Widening Horizons', coordinated by parents, teachers and other specialists with optional attendance.
- Peer facilitated sessions called 'Creative Ideas' intended to provide opportunities to develop leadership skills.
- Focus group sessions between students and teachers for the purpose of engaging in explicit learning, according to student needs.
- Planning meetings with mentors who assist students in understanding their learning progress and providing planning advice.

*Bridgewater Primary School* has demonstrated a robust approach to real innovation that brings sound knowledge of learning into educational practices to ensure they meet the challenges of twenty-first century learning.

### **Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE**

*What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)*

The *Bridgewater Primary School* vision is to 'develop and sustain dynamic Learning Community involving and sustaining positive, respectful relationships with each individual learner through Communities of Inquiry'. All planning, thinking, decision making and actions taken by members of the school's community are guided by respect, balance, excellence, resilience, integrity and commitment. These values are underpinned by the belief that learners need to experience a wide range of learning opportunities and to be provided with sufficient time to build their understanding. In order to do this, children at *Bridgewater* are actively and authentically involved in personally planning, monitoring and tracking their learning.

Learning outcomes for students at *Bridgewater Primary School* are individually tailored and based upon the 'key ideas' and 'outcomes' described within the state's curriculum framework, known as the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework. The school's commitment to student-initiated learning is primarily enacted through the development of Personalised Learning Plans by negotiation between students and teachers. The process allows students to express their interests and learn to understand their abilities and strengths, while teachers contribute to ensuring students experience a broad range of learning opportunities consistent with the state's curriculum requirements. The negotiation is a mutual process occurring through discussion and brainstorming to develop a unique and rigorous plan of work.

Consistent with the demands of the SACSA Framework, mathematical and English learning outcomes form an integral part of all student learning. The Personal Learning Plans also incorporate outcomes from other learning areas from the Framework, including the social and natural sciences. *Bridgewater Primary School* provides a series of elective programs broadly referred to as Widening Horizons to help students experience learning from areas such as Arts, Technology, Philosophy and Physical Activities.

A central feature of the student initiated learning strategy adopted by *Bridgewater* is the involvement of students in the design of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. While this would traditionally be the role of the teacher, students can feel empowered if they are invited into the process and often participate enthusiastically. At *Bridgewater Primary School* the SACSA Framework is deconstructed and explained to students. They are asked to consider not only the key ideas and outcomes they wish to learn, but how their learning will be measured and how their demonstrated proficiency level could then be described.

The process of student planning of their learning allows teachers to focus on enriching the learning of each individual child and assisting their students to choose pathways and activities that are appropriate and relevant. The process contributes to student development of confidence and assertiveness, widens student interests and expands their ideas about what is possible.

Personal Learning Plans at *Bridgewater* are innovative because they enhance the development of competencies and outcomes from the SACSA Framework within an integrated, interest-based learning process, while also supporting students' social and emotional wellbeing.

**Learners**

*Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?*

*Bridgewater Primary School* is a government (public) school with 150 students. The school offers a curriculum for children from Reception (5 years of age) through to Year 7 (up to 13 years of age). Approximately two thirds of the school's students live within the local area, while the remainder travel up to 30 kilometres to attend. The school's students are of varied socio-economic backgrounds and academic abilities. Some students have come to Bridgewater after unsuccessful experiences at other schools. A significant group of the school's students are from Iran, Iraq and Sri Lanka. A class of ten children from the Inverbrackie Detention Centre, a facility housing families seeking asylum in Australia, is also part of the school community. These students are from Iran, Iraq and Sri Lanka.

**Facilitators**

*Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?*

There are a total of 11 teaching staff at *Bridgewater Primary School*. An additional 9 ancillary staff are directly involved with students and their learning. All teaching staff are registered teachers in South Australia with appropriate qualifications in education and teaching, ranging from Diplomas of Teaching to Masters Degrees in Education. All staff work as co-constructors' of learning programs, devising curriculum and pedagogy by negotiation in partnership with the children.

In addition to these staff employed through the state education system, the school has an Artist in Residence managing a technical program including painting, crafts, sewing, mosaics, wood and metal work. This program assists all students and is particularly successful for students with sensory issues, such as Asperger's Syndrome, or behavioural issues. Work in the Tech Room and helps these students build resilience and strategies for coping in regular class programs. Another specialist teacher coordinates the school's Kitchen Garden, involving children in growing, harvesting and cooking healthy, restaurant quality meals to share. This program has produced wider benefits for families and children at Bridgewater. Another specialised teacher assists students with sensory issues, such as Asperger's Syndrome, or behavioural issues. They work in the Tech Room and help students build resilience and strategies for coping in regular class programs.

**Organization of the ILE**

*How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?*

*Bridgewater Primary School* is organised around a Learning Community model, where planning, thinking, decision making and actions are guided by values of respect, balance, excellence, resilience, integrity and commitment. Learners work in multi-age organisational groupings and individual learner-centred approaches are also used. Students develop personalised learning plans incorporating core skills and they also undertake enrichment in interest areas or participate in targeted focus group sessions for explicit learning in identified areas. Staff, students and parents work to develop and sustain positive respectful relationships, with teachers working as individual mentors and with students arranging planning meetings with mentors, with a focus on matching learning areas to state curriculum outcomes and also to Bloom's taxonomy. Learning resources include a kitchen garden and kitchen, with children working with community volunteers in growing and cooking and also in the enrichment program in areas of interest.

*Bridgewater Primary School* teachers and students are committed to lifelong learning that is relevant, enriched and passionate, and which uses the best of learning energies for everybody. All learners at *Bridgewater* are invited to explicitly question pedagogy. They may, for example, want to ask: *What is the purpose of school? Or, What do we need to learn?*

This commitment and provision for open questioning not only helps to create a community of learners, but it also demonstrates a sharing of power and a respect for all stakeholders.

*“We don't believe there should be two sets of rules - one for teachers and one for kids. None of this could work if you didn't have two-way respect. It's up to us as teachers to demonstrate that. We are the ones that need to break down the barriers.”*

Students at *Bridgewater Primary* are engaged in a process of learning for life. They direct their own learning with guidance from teachers, and they are expected to learn and apply complex skills, which many adults continue to find difficult.

These skills include:

- setting deadlines;
- developing criteria for success;
- engaging in self-reflection and critique;
- remaining focused;
- being able to work in a range of places; and,
- working with a range of different people, including adults.

*“Students are acquiring skills for lifelong learning and lifelong living, rather than just ticking off boxes. We could call this Natural Learning.”*

The innovative program at *Bridgewater Primary School* consists of six key strategies.

- Multi-age organisational grouping of students, according to their individual learning support needs.
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- Enrichment topics called ‘Widening Horizons’, coordinated by parents, teachers and other specialists with optional attendance.
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- Focus group sessions between students and teachers for the purpose of engaging in explicit learning, according to student needs.
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### **Multi-age organisational groupings according to individual needs**

Students at *Bridgewater Primary* are grouped according to their individual learning support needs, including their ability to plan and organise and their confidence in learning situations.

The school currently has three Learning Areas, with two home groups within each. Students are often encouraged to move between the groups, depending on the level of assistance they need and their confidence in the in work being undertaken.

Students understand that their needs may vary even within a subject. For example they may be a novice learner in one aspect of Maths, triangles, but an advanced learner in number calculations. This strategy strengthens students' ownership of their learning, and supports them to continually assess themselves and plan for improvement.

Each of these home groups conducts 'Circle Meetings' each morning. Agenda items contributed by both students and teachers are discussed during these meetings, with the students taking a lead role in the direction and pace of the meeting. The meetings are focused on learning, leadership and management.

### **Personal Learning Plans incorporating core skills**

The central feature of the innovative learning environment at *Bridgewater Primary School* is the development of Personal Learning Plans, around which all learning revolves. The Plans are structured sufficiently to include learning outcomes from mathematics, language and ICT. But, students can choose which topics they would like. Students complete a booklet about 'Planning A New Learning Unit' (these are differently structured, according to which organisational groups the student belongs). The booklet guides a process which includes choosing a topic, demonstrating what they already know, developing some questions or issues, developing questions or issues, demonstrating how new learning will occur, considering methodology and resources, planning the final presentation of learning and setting success criteria.

**Figure 1:** *Bridgewater Primary School* Personal Learning Plans – Planning A New Unit Booklet

<p><b>Personal Learning Planning Booklet</b></p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Topic: _____</p> <p>Date Started: _____</p> <p>Focus Meetings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Presentation Date: _____</p>	<p>Things I already know about my topic:</p> <p>* * *</p> <p>Information Sources:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Excursion:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Presentation Method: _____</p> <p>Learning Areas included:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>English</td> <td>Society &amp; Environment</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Arts</td> <td>LOTE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Science</td> <td>Mathematics</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Health &amp; PE</td> <td>Design &amp; Technology</td> </tr> </table>	English	Society & Environment	The Arts	LOTE	Science	Mathematics	Health & PE	Design & Technology
English	Society & Environment								
The Arts	LOTE								
Science	Mathematics								
Health & PE	Design & Technology								
<p><b>PLAN - Questions &amp; Activities</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 200px; width: 100%;"></div>	<p><b>REFLECTION</b></p> <p>Planning: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Research: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Presentation: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Organisation: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Successes: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Challenges: _____</p> <p>_____</p>								

**Widening Horizons enrichment program**

This enrichment program allows students to undertake learning in specialist areas about which they are passionate. Students register their interest in attending specialist courses offered by adults, teachers, parents and external specialists. The courses will differ in their time, place and length of commitment. Past topics have included art, square dancing, creative cookery and how to use a video camera.

**Creative Ideas peer facilitated sessions**

*Bridgewater Primary School* has developed a variety of strategies to contribute to students’ leadership skills and increase their sense of ownership of their learning.

These include our Creative Ideas program; Kids Club and Chill-out time; and, the opportunity to undertake productive work centre roles to contribute to the running of the school. These roles may include answering phone calls, dealing with mail and greeting visitors, and provide students with a sense of responsibility for, and ownership in their school. The Kids Club program has been useful in helping students take ownership of their behaviour.

The Creative Ideas program is a series of sessions organised and facilitated by students for their peers. In order to coordinate one of these sessions, the students must complete an application which includes details of the activities to be undertaken, a limit to the number of students taking part, the resources required, request for any adult assistance, and a location request. Students can offer any topic teachers consider to be reasonable and appropriate. The topics to date have included computer gaming, monopoly, still-life drawing, and plant propagation.

### **Focus group sessions between students and teachers**

Small groups of learners with a common need come together with teachers for focus group sessions referred to as 'Focus Meetings' in order to engage in explicit learning. The students participating in any particular group change depending on their needs for the learning topic. Although teachers engage in some instruction, students are involved in the decision about which Meeting they attend, why they are doing it and how they will know if it helps them make progress in their learning. Focus groups offer explicit learning opportunities, such as gaining a better understanding of fractions or writing more colourful fiction characters. The meetings are quite short, often only ten minutes duration as they are intended to meet immediate and specific needs. Only 6 to 10 students participate in any particular session and 2 to 3 sessions may be offered on any given topic. Students may sign themselves in to focus groups or they may be identified by a teacher. Sign up sheets identify the subject of the focus group and whether the identified group is novice, learner or advanced student in this context.

### **Planning meetings with mentors**

Students arrange planning meetings with an adult who acts as their mentor. The role of the mentor is to ensure student learning is rigorous, clearly matched with Outcomes from the SACSA Framework and aligned with the school's modified version of Bloom's Taxonomy. This taxonomy can 'storey' the students' current stage of learning and help plan the students' journey to the next 'storey'. At the planning meeting, the mentor ensures depth and breadth of learning and provides opportunities for students to explore and explain the challenges involved in their plan. The meetings may also include other students and, where appropriate discussions may occur about multiculturalism or gender issues. Students are responsible for setting timelines and deadlines for completing the planning unit. They will add their own fixed dates, such as excursions or visiting speakers, to their term planners and timetables.

### **Learning Context**

*In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?*

*Bridgewater Primary School* has an original building from 1882, with a major extension from 1973. The learning areas are quite unusual, hexagonal in design and following the natural slope of the hillside. The school is located in the Adelaide Hills area about 25km from the centre of Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia. The grounds are large, sloping and include natural bush land. Adjoining classrooms open up to make flexible spaces and the school has a dedicated Mathematics room and Tech room.

*Bridgewater Primary School* also boasts a substantial Kitchen Garden, four-station kitchen and dining room. Children work with community volunteers to grow, harvest and cook vegetables.

The school has a large group of parent volunteers who work in various programs including reading, Personal Learning, the Kitchen and Garden, Widening Horizons, or personal time, where children as young as five years of age choose from a selection of learning experiences that may include construction, photography, singing, gardening, free play, animal husbandry (in our chicken shed), recycling or metal work.

### **History of ILE**

*Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?*

Through initiating a conversation about learning with the school staff, a previous principal set in motion a review of educational practices at *Bridgewater Primary School* in the year 2000. Staffs were prompted to investigate student views of learning at the school, in particular their control of its organisation and content. Students generally expressed the view that they were not listened to by teaching staff, nor were they asked to provide any input into choices about learning. Following these results, staff at *Bridgewater* explored the notion of student initiated versus teacher directed learning by developing Personal Learning Plans for themselves and discussing these as a group.

In this same year, the school became involved in a South Australian initiative called *Learning to Learn*. This program focused on changing understandings of teaching and learning through providing extended learning opportunities which focused on learning how to learn. Participants were encouraged to critically reflect on current teaching practices by immersing themselves in the latest research on learning and curriculum, while conducting locally based inquiry. *Bridgewater Primary School* was closely involved in the *Learning to Learn* program, trialling a new state curriculum intended to clearly outline outcomes from student learning in South Australia by age group and discipline area.

In order to allow change to occur, several strategies were employed to ensure all teachers were committed to the planned innovations. While there is now a different principal and there have been numerous staffing changes, the new learning culture of the school has been maintained. More recently, innovation and improvement has continued, with greater personalisation of learning programs and a stronger focus on the use of technology for enhancing learning.

### **Funding of the ILE**

*How is it funded?*

*Bridgewater Primary School* operates within the standard funding received from the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS). These funds are supplemented by parent contributions that cover stationery and consumable materials.

The Tech program uses recycled materials (from garage sales), donated goods and discarded product from manufacturers. The total budget for the Tech Room project is around \$400, and fundraising has occurred to build a shed to store the materials and ensure that whatever the children can imagine, they can build.

The Kitchen Garden has a \$4000 budget to cover the ingredients not able to be grown in our garden and seedlings. This year the school expects an additional \$50,000 federal government grant for Solar Panels to reduce the use of the power grid and water tanks for the Kitchen Garden.

**Learning Outcomes**

*What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?*

Student involvement in planning and undertaking assessment is particularly important at *Bridgewater Primary School*. Learning is considered to be a continuous process and students are encouraged to be comfortable in demonstrating what they know and to challenge themselves through the goals they set.

The process of assessment begins with an evaluation meeting, where students may be assessed by teachers or their peers. They may also self-assess their work. In some instances, students will present their work to a large group of students and seek specific feedback about the evidence of learning. Self-assessment as a ‘novice’ is celebrated as much as it is for an ‘advanced learner’, as recognising the starting points is usually the beginning of real learning.

Through assessment, students not only produce some kind of presentation of the learning unit, but they also demonstrate their planning and mind mapping; any challenging and relevant questions identified; literacy, numeracy and ICT skills developed; and, any arts components of their work.

Assessment at *Bridgewater Primary School* may suggest areas for future study through the identification of gaps in student learning, which may then be addressed through participation in a Focus Meeting. Students engage in identifying these gaps, which ensures they have greater connection with the learning, enables them to see the relevance of what they have learnt and highlights their progress as a learner.

*Bridgewater Primary School* has a consistently high score in the nationally tested areas. Rankings of *substantially above average*, *above average* and *average* are as follows:

Average achievement of students in Bridgewater Primary School compared to the average of ALL Australian schools			
The 15 areas of comparison are Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation and Numeracy for Years 3, 5 and 7			
Year	Average	Above average	Substantially above average
2008	5	3	7
2009	3	7	4
2010	5	2	6

Positive outcomes of the Bridgewater program are also evident from student feedback. For instance, a Year 6 student commented in relation to the focus sessions, that:

*‘Because you're in a smaller group, and everybody is there for the same reason as you, you don't get embarrassed. In a large group you could get embarrassed also that you were holding back the whole class’.*

**Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE**

*Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)*

Please refer to the school's website for further information at [www.bridgewps.sa.edu.au](http://www.bridgewps.sa.edu.au)

The site contains a number of documents and images that may be of interest, including the Bridgewater Primary School Context Statement 2010, Annual Report 2010, and descriptions of learning programs offered.

**Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE**

*Bridgewater Primary School* has a solid reputation within South Australia, nationally and internationally as a school of innovation and excellence in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment practice. This is acknowledged by peers, as evidenced by the visitors received and their interest in the school as an innovative learning environment. Professional learning for other schools and regions is provided by Bridgewater in a range of areas. The Maths specialist teacher is also employed by the Regional Office to run professional learning for other schools.

The Kitchen Garden program is visited by other educators. The Community of Inquiry Philosophy sessions are focussed on Mathematics and Science, and are regularly observed by other educators and university colleagues, with frequent visits from school leaders. For example, the school received visitors from the United Kingdom in February this year and from the Australian state of Tasmania in April.