

Student-led teams help kids blossom at Elderslie Public School



Campbelltown, NSW

Achievements

NSW Secretary's Award for Excellence in School Achievement (2020)

Recently became an [Apple Distinguished School](#) for supporting learning through technology

Inspired by what she saw on a trip to Prospect North Primary School in South Australia, organised by The Connection, a classroom teacher transformed Elderslie's student leadership model to provide authentic opportunities for community leadership for all Stage Three students (in years 5 and 6).

With student voice at the core of all decision making at Elderslie Public School, the school created 'Ministries' in a model that allows all the students to be a part of groups that lead initiatives for school improvement. This model supports the wellbeing of all students so they can connect, succeed, thrive and learn.

The Ministry Teams meet weekly with an identified staff member who provides advice, support and assistance to help each student and team fulfil their potential.



Students at Elderslie Public School work with the Go Go Gritty Learner Quality character to develop determination.

The work of the Ministry Teams is highly visible and valued by the whole school community. Initiatives include fundraising for [Cure for Cancer](#) and Clubfoot Warrior- Miracle Foot that directly supports two of the school's students, election day barbeques for the Year 6 farewell and supporting Kindergarten Orientation sessions. The Technology Ministry Team led professional learning opportunities for staff to engage with technology and support the integration of technology in the classroom and were recently awarded the 2019 Technology for Learning award for the Holistic use of Information & Communication Technology in a Primary School Setting. Watch this [3min video](#) made by the Tech Ministry students.

An exciting new project by the students in the Technology Ministry is being part of a [Kids Teach Stem](#) youtube podcast with 6 other schools to create [video interviews with STEM professionals](#) to share with other students to ignite a passion for STEM.

The feedback from parents and students indicated a 100% preference for the new model. One parent said, "I have seen my child blossom this year. This model allows for students to take on leadership roles where those opportunities in the past were limited to the school leaders".

"The new leadership model has been really good as students in year 5 and year 6 get to have a voice around the school and share their ideas."

Bella, Leader Fundraising Ministry

"I really like Ministries because everyone gets to have a voice which means everyone gets to feel like they belong."

Marley, Leader Environment Ministry

Students lead on how to become a better learner

"The secret to improve our impact as classroom teachers, was to simply ask our students what they need, that then led to the Think Team where students actually teach lessons in our classrooms, planning and co-designing lessons with the teachers. Once children are given permission to make a difference, we actually are preparing them for the world they are going into."

Principal Melissa Clarke

On another trip to South Australia, facilitated by The Connection in 2017, a different teacher was inspired by the strong presence of 'student voice' at Morphett Vale Primary School. She created a student driven group that ensures student voice is leading school planning and programming.

Students were nominated by teachers to join the new **Think Team**, with the goal to develop expert learners at Elderslie and enhance student voice for students to make a difference in the decision-making process about their school and their learning.

Inspired by the innovative work developed by the SA Department of Education Elderslie Public School implemented a student survey. The highest priority was to develop a 'learner identity' through the creation of 'learner dispositions'.

The Think Team looked at which Learning Dispositions would be most effective to develop expert learners at Elderslie. To bring these Learner Qualities to life they created unique characters. The students worked with a designer to turn their illustrations into digital designs. A parent of one of the students then worked in partnership with the students to develop life size costumes. These costumes are worn by students at all special events and during the 'Disposition Days'. Plush toys were created and are sent home with students each week to ensure the language of learning is transferred in to our homes.

Our characters include: Retro – Reflection; Cosmo Collaborative – collaboration; Captain Curious – curiosity; Blazer Brave– bravery'; Go Go Gritty– Gritty; Mare' – Mindfulness; Pop Pop - problem solving

¹ The Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a scale developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Relative disadvantage is defined as below the average ICSEA score of 1,000.



The Think Team with Cosmo Collaborative, Go Go Gritty, Retro Reflective, Blazer Brave, Pop Pop Problem Solver, Captain Curious and Mare' Mindfulness

"The Think Team' led everything in the development of Learner Qualities - from the vision, the planning, the implementation, launches and community consultation," says Principal Melissa Clarke. "They engaged with the school community through costume creations and special events. Parents helped stage a 'space landing' of the characters which was the launch day of the costumes.

Once a term, staff and parents work together to celebrate a 'Disposition Day', when the whole school dedicates the day to an activity for each learning disposition. This has included everything from giant slides to a school scavenger hunt. Through this process the students are shown how they use the dispositions in real life activities. For example – to be brave on the giant slide

The Think Team also regularly collect and analyse data, design and implement engaging lessons and seek feedback to embed a culture of Learning Dispositions at Elderslie Public School. The data has shown that their work has created a strong 'metalanguage' of learning and has supported staff in ensuring students display learning dispositions, skills, values and attitudes to be successful future oriented lifelong learners.

In 2017 The Think Team engaged all stakeholders to lead the 2020 school vision. They have presented their initiative at the State Wellbeing Conference, closely aligned to the Wellbeing Framework where every student is 'known, valued and cared for'. They have also been nominated and presented at Principal's conferences showcasing innovative practices. The students received a Secretary's Award as an Outstanding School Initiative.

"What began as an engaging way to build great learners has transformed the whole school's approach to teaching and learning. The Learner Dispositions have moved into a way of being for students and their families. They have set the foundation for the school to build a framework to implement the 'general capabilities' into classrooms and will support students in all aspects of becoming a citizen of the present and future."

The Elderslie Public School Think Team was invited to feature in this [Education Week video](#) about Student Voice by the NSW Education Department

Follow @EPSThinkTeam on [twitter](#)

Key characteristics, challenges and goals

Established in 2009, Elderslie Public School is located in a rapidly growing area near Campbelltown in South West Sydney. In 2020, the school enrolment was 564 students in 25 classes including three support classes catering for the needs of students with Autism and one class that supports students with Emotional Disturbances. 5% of students are Indigenous and 18% come from a language background other than English.

The students of Elderslie Public School come from a very heavy trade background, parent's education is limited and our families have suffered loss of income and jobs through the pandemic. We've developed a love for learning and a language of learning amongst students and parents.

The school motto of Enjoy, Participate and Succeed underpins our core business of high quality teaching and successful learning. This is achieved when everyone takes responsibility for a child's well being and when all members of the learning community expect every child to be a successful learner.

The school culture focuses on high expectations, caring for and respecting each other and celebrating diversity. The staff are committed to continual improvement and working with the community to implement innovative and differentiated learning programs, strong and consistent support programs and a wide range of extra curricula initiatives which assist in the development of the 'whole child'.

Coping with Covid-19

"The Covid crisis has been a driver of change in the way that we engage with our community," says Melissa Clarke. "At our centre is a strong partnership with parents in shaping the students of our school and with parents off-site, this has presented challenges."

Even through this process the students, parents and teachers continued to demonstrate how they use the dispositions as they undertook new learning.

"We continue to engage with parents in any way we can, using as many technological approaches as possible. We film and share footage of school events, like our recent cross country carnival and we recently held a family connection evening where parents had a 10min Zoom with their child and child's teacher to catch-up about their child's learning. We have increased the usage of our online learning platform 'Seesaw' to share student learning."

"We recently surveyed our parents about their connection with the school in these extraordinary times and the results were full of praise. They were understanding of the restrictions and were full of compliments for the teachers and staff."

The Connection is a Collaborative Leadership Development Network, created and facilitated by Social Ventures Australia, that has achieved educational improvements in 50 Australian schools, across NSW, SA and Victoria. This network has connected 2900 educators and benefited approximately 50,000 students over five years from 2014-2019.

Participating schools in areas experiencing disadvantage are connected to other primary and secondary schools in the network and learn from each other. They are supported to implement new and innovative teaching practices and approaches to improve learning outcomes for their students.