



LINK 15: Southbank Primary School Case Study Report

(Note: Pseudonyms are used throughout this case study)

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INTRODUCTION

Delving into a school's daily life, its history and its community can help educators and policy makers understand a school's unique identity, its educational priorities and how these priorities are enacted. Southbank Primary's historical journey, changing community demographics and daily life are a case in point. I spent 25 days in total at the school over the course of three terms in 2008, observing, interviewing and gathering data from a variety of school texts, trying to understand what makes the school work, particularly the purposes that inform its work.

In the case-study that follows, I identify those key aspects of Southbank's history, community and daily schooling experiences that have been instrumental in determining how it now 'does schooling'.

SECTION 1: CONTEXT

A historical snapshot

Southbank Primary School began in 1861 under a different name and situated on a different site in Adelaide's northern metropolitan fringe with just 31 students (Education Department records). In 1879 after several unsteady years the school became well established culminating in a new site. The new school was built and opened in 1880. The school catered primarily for immigrant children but also increased its numbers from the prison warders' families who lived in the cottages along Stockade Road. In November 1900 the school name was changed to Southbank Primary School. The present school opened as a class 111 school on the 10th of February, 1953. The old school building (see below) was used as a woodwork centre until demolished.

A unique feature of the school throughout its history to the present day has been the large proportion of new Australian arrivals featuring in its enrolment base and the school's priority to offer an inclusive and rigorous education for these children. For over 100 years, new immigrants have represented a significant component of the primary enrolment base and are still a defining feature of the school community. In recent years Southbank's enrolments of ESL (English as a second language) students make up 40% of the school's enrolments, many of whom are refugees from families dealing with loss, grief, emotional trauma, cultural upheaval and financial hardship.

During the 1950s the suburb of Southbank featured as a centrepiece of the federal government's migration policies. Many British migrants settled in the area or were housed in the Gepps Cross Hostel. At that time, the school became the biggest in South Australia. Many dignitaries visited including the then Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies. In 1965 a fire destroyed part of the school. Through the 70's and 80's numbers decreased slowly with an enrolment in 1986 of approximately 360.



School and grounds c. 1920

Change at Southbank

In 2002 Southbank Primary was the subject of a school review process. The lead up to the review and the review itself was cited by staff as a significant and defining moment in the school's history. The review report recommended a number of areas for action. This coincided with the appointment of a new leadership team which was charged with taking up the review's recommendations. The leadership team referred to the 'review days' as having been a key influence upon the school's approach to public marketing both in the community and beyond. The leadership were not apologetic about this approach. They argued that they wanted to project Southbank as a vibrant, caring, successful and multicultural school offering quality education programs for all students. They are also keen to highlight the quality of public education to the community.

In 2003 Southbank Primary School marked 50 years on its current site with celebrations that enabled the school to reinforce its image as a school with an exciting future. An analysis of the school newsletters since that time demonstrates how the school has taken every opportunity to feature regularly in the media (newspapers, radio and television) by communicating through a Southbank stakeholder network comprising the leadership team, the local parliamentarian and school council members. This media coverage consistently attests to the accomplishments of the school (academic, sporting, welfare, cultural) and is always reported in the school newsletters to ensure the community is well informed about the school's accomplishments.

An analysis of the media coverage about Southbank over a five year period reveals an underlying narrative of a *winner* school offering a *quality* education through enacting an *inclusive* educational approach. In the public eye through various media articles and school newsletters, Southbank Primary School is projected as successful, proud of its cultural diversity, and striving to implement its motto: 'working together for a quality education' for all.

Community context

The suburb of Southbank comprises a culturally diverse community that is undergoing urban renewal at a frantic pace. An observer of the suburb would notice the rapid demolition of housing trust homes, the speedily prepared building blocks and the new urban dwellings. What was once a traditional housing trust area serving a low socio-economic community is now fast becoming a middle class suburb.

Aligned with this urban renewal around Southbank Primary are changes to the affordability of housing rental. Accommodation is becoming unaffordable for the poor, many of whom are being forced out of the community. According to the Principal the majority of the poorer families are settling further north into more affordable rental accommodation or in some cases,

moving to the country township of Murray Bridge, a drive of more than an hour south of the city centre.

Southbank is a suburb with greater cultural diversity than the Adelaide and national metropolitan means (ABS 2006). For example, the percentage of Vietnamese people living in Southbank is over twice the Australian average; and the percentage of Afghan residents is ten times the national average. There are 137 indigenous people living in Southbank with 111 aged 18 years and over. According to the aboriginal education worker (AEW) at the school, these numbers are increasing rapidly, especially over the last three years with a number of indigenous families from the 'Lands' moving into the Southbank area. 37% of dwellings in the area are rented, which is 10% above the Adelaide rental average.



New residential dwellings overlooking the school's grounds (2008)

Contemporary school context

Southbank is run as a C.P.C. (Child Parent Centre) to year seven school and is not zoned. Total school enrolments have slowly increased – from 205 in 2004 to 241 students in 2007. The students attending Southbank Primary School reflect the multicultural nature of the surrounding community: 60% of the students have English as a second language (ESL) and 70% of the students are on school card (indicating that many families are living in poverty); 20% of the students are diagnosed as students with a disability (SWD); and 15% are indigenous students - a dozen of whom are transient students from the 'Lands' region of South Australia who know just a few words of English and often present with significant health care needs. Enrolment trends have seen increases over the last five years in the school card percentage, the percentage of ESL students and aboriginal enrolment figures.

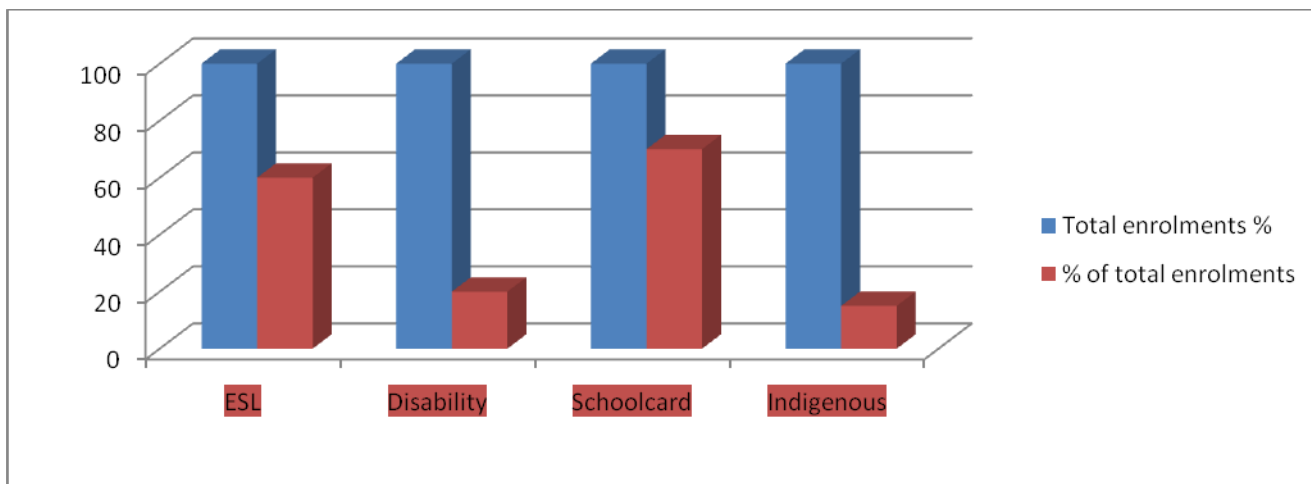


Diagram illustrating SPS school complexity

Another complexity hidden within the school's enrolment base was cited by the principal when addressing two international educational delegations – 'we are a school with a high level *churn* factor.' Churn is a departmental term that refers to students from families that are transient and as a consequence represent uncertain long term enrolments within the school. Often these families remain at the school for only a term or less and arrive without notice from another school. According to the Southbank leadership team, these students can present with learning difficulties that go undiagnosed because of their transient lifestyle.

Some of these children may fall through the gaps for example we had a family that enrolled here at the beginning of the year. They only stayed six weeks and then they moved to another school, and it takes a while to work out whether it's disability or a learning difficulty... (Principal, p.8, 2008)

Being at one school for just a short time and then moving to the next often means that Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) referral and diagnosis processes remain incomplete. Consequently funding support, appropriate program development and implementation are unable to be put in place. The leadership team argue that many of these families are embedded in a cycle of chronic financial stress, domestic violence and mental health issues. These issues continue to remain unaddressed systemically because of the high levels of transience.

Future enrolment trends according to the Principal are difficult to predict. However, with community urban renewal well underway and rental costs rising, it is likely that the poorer families will be forced to move away from the suburb to be replaced by more middle class families. There are already some signs that this is happening. This could mean a significant change to the demographics of the school and a reduction in the DECS support funding category that the school currently receives. Southbank is currently categorised by DECS as a Category 2 school meaning that it is eligible for more support monies than more affluent public primary schools. ¹In addition to the Category 2 funding, there are other complexity categories which also translate into different departmental resourcing support, such as the 0.5 staffing (one half fulltime staffing) the school receives for supporting students with disabilities.

The school prides itself on its multicultural student body. With over 25 different countries represented and with an increasing number of enrolments from refugee children (most recently Afghan and Somali) the teachers at the school face a number of pedagogical challenges. Many of the refugee children have endured significant trauma and stress in their short lives. Teachers' work is therefore complex and involves not only work that meets the learning needs of the child but also that attends to the emotional, financial, medical and nutritional needs of some students and also their families. Some young people who attend have lost both parents in their previously

¹ On the category scales used by DECS, category 1 is designated as most complex and therefore entitled to receive the most support funding while Category 7 is considered to be advantaged socio-economically and consequently not eligible for any extra top-up funding.

war ravaged homelands.



Student work highlighting the international makeup of the school community

The school employs approximately 35 staff who work as teachers or provide support services in a fulltime or part-time capacity. Staff are deployed as follows:

A leadership team comprising a Principal, Deputy Principal and School Counsellor

12 full-time equivalent classroom teaching positions

Specialist teachers including Art, Physical Education, Reading Recovery, English as a Second Language, Special Education, Aboriginal Education, Literacy Co-ordinator, Teacher librarian

School Service officers who provide administration, financial, curriculum, early childhood and bilingual support

A Grounds maintenance officer

A Canteen Manager

The school makes literacy and numeracy development a high priority with better than the state average goals in place. Southbank also fosters cultural understandings, thematic teaching approaches and global citizenship understandings in all of its teaching work. Inclusive teaching practices and a constant consideration of health and wellbeing concerns are in evidence across all year levels. The school has strong learning support strategies in place which are, according to the principal, appropriately resourced through the top-up funding gained through the school's complexity entitlements with DECS and the school's ability to win sizable project grants. School infrastructure is adequate with near new computers available in a dedicated computing suite and interactive whiteboards available in most classrooms.

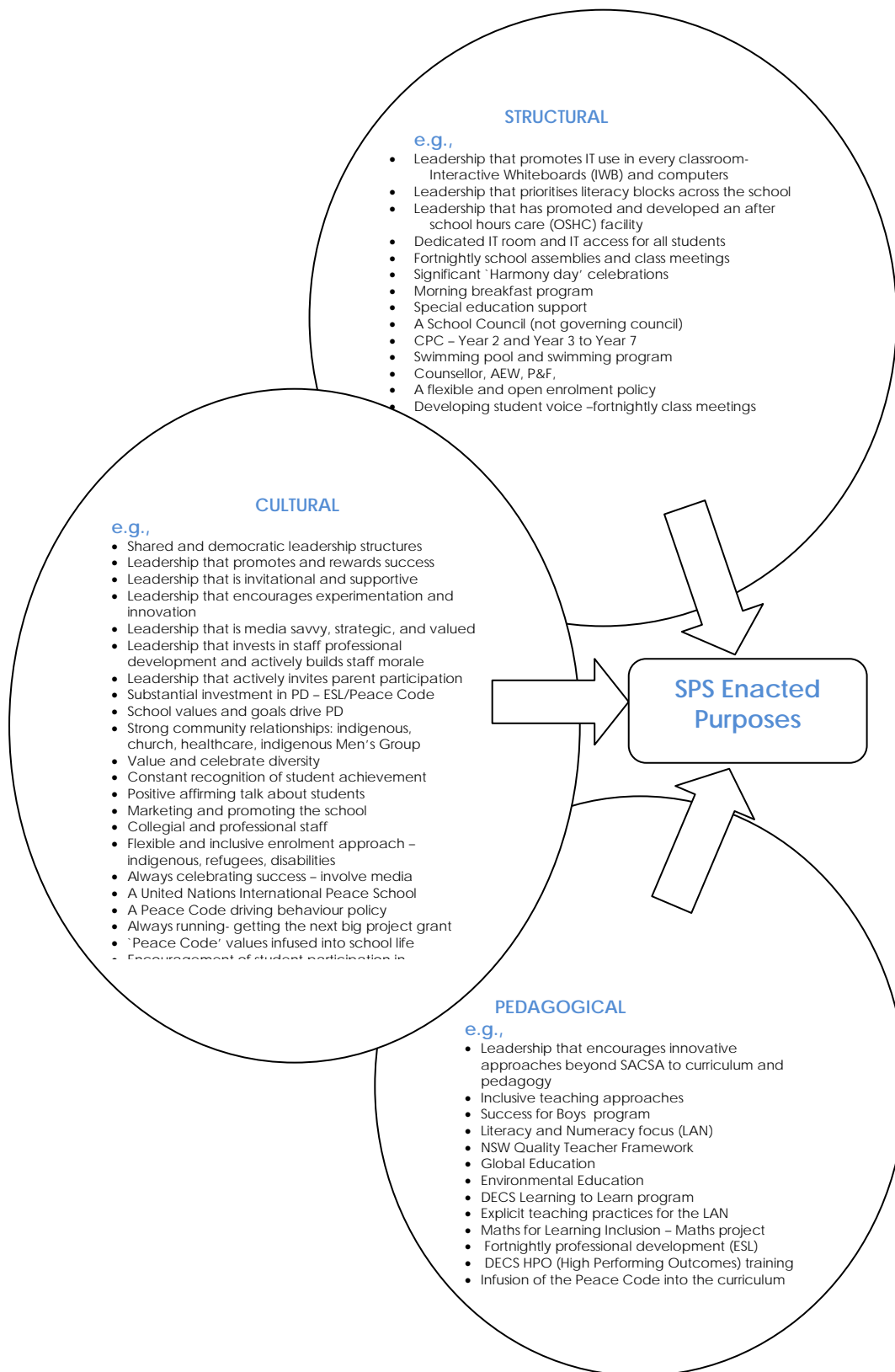
My interviews and observations revealed a professional, happy and collegiate staff who were glad to be there, evidenced by the frequent positive comments made about the school, its leadership and its students. There was always a regular mix of humour and frivolity infused into the many professional collegial conversations occurring at the weekly staff meetings and teacher planning/project activities. The staffroom in the morning was always 'a fun place to be'; and professional teacher conversation about how to best meet the needs of the students was ever-present, whether during formal meetings or informal chat throughout the day.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL LIFE CHARACTERISTICS AND THE PURPOSES OF SCHOOLING

A summary overview of school life characteristics in this case study is provided using a schematic adapted from the National Schools Network (Harradine, 1996; Ladwig, Currie & Chadbourne, 1994) employing three modalities – structural, cultural and pedagogical.

The structural modality includes school infrastructure, timetabling, staffing, administrative procedures, committees and assemblies. The cultural modality reflects the culture of the school including the kinds of social relations that exist. The pedagogical modality covers approaches to teaching and learning at the school, including assessment approaches, curricular priorities, leadership involvement, student and parent involvement in curriculum and other curricular programs used outside of the ²SACSA. In the case study that follows, I describe the kinds of programs and activities that fall within each of the modalities before assessing the purposes of education these are designed to achieve. The figure below gives a diagrammatic representation of the three modalities with examples of school programs or activities for each.

² The SACSA is the official South Australian Curriculum and Standards Assessment framework



SOUTHBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL: key school life characteristics

The structural modality

The structural modality includes the physical facilities of the school and those policies which determine school practice, such as the ways in which the curriculum is organised and administrative requirements are established. These strongly influence the nature of education at any school. I will provide three examples at Southbank.

Curricular structures

Most government primary schools in South Australia share considerable commonality in relation to the curricular structures they put in place. For example, most primary schools have one dedicated teacher to a class or have a reading recovery program in place. However, the unique characteristics and contexts of each school constructs school-specific curricular structures. In the case of Southbank, two of these are:

- *Literacy and numeracy:* There is a high priority on improving literacy and numeracy across the school. Literacy and numeracy are listed as two of the three key school priorities. In the 2006 Annual Report under school priorities it reads;

Improving standards in literacy and numeracy – this is a focus on continuous improvement and using school data to inform future directions. (2006 Annual report, p.5)

and in the same report under ‘next steps towards improvement’;

Maintain a continuous improvement culture in Literacy and Numeracy with a focus on raising the bar and closing the gap. Analysis of achievement data identifies some areas for improvement and cohorts of students requiring intervention. (2006 Annual Report, p.7)

Improving literacy (and numeracy) results on the LAN appears to drive this literacy focus. Literacy Blocks are conducted from reception to year 7 (R-7), four days a week with school support officers (SSOs) and hours dedicated to offering small group learning support in all classes. Each classroom has a sign boldly displayed on the door to discourage entry and interruption, unless under special circumstances, during these morning literacy blocks.

- *Special education:* The school has a full time Special Education teacher and a significant allocation of SSO support hours. These are used to offer inclusive and individualised learning approaches for those students who have a learning disability or for ESL students. Extensive intervention is coordinated by this specialist teacher to cater for the diverse needs of second language learners, those with learning difficulties and disabilities (including speech) and Aboriginal students. This teacher also coordinates the ESL program across the school with the support of the Deputy Principal.

School infrastructure and facilities

Southbank offers a well resourced preschool on site and a before and after school hours care facility (OSHC) for parents needing to use the service. The preschool is located within the school buildings and offers plenty of space, both indoors and outdoors, for student play and activities. OSHC commenced just two years ago and the preschool was established a number of years ago.

With a dedicated information technology (IT) room comprising 25 near new computers staffed by a 0.8 IT teacher (the NIT teacher) who takes all classes in the school for information technology work, the school is well placed to offer technology programs for all of its students. Every classroom has at least two computers and features new interactive whiteboards (IWBs) offering teachers and students access to new learning technologies. Many of the staff were excited about the opportunity presented by technology to enhance classroom pedagogy and teacher-student interaction.

Some of the primary school buildings are in need of an upgrade; and there are some teaching space restrictions. The two newest teachers at the school highlighted the teaching challenges they confronted - dealing with a lack of classroom space coupled with large classroom numbers.

...we don't have the room. The physical space causes a lot of problems. I've been doing this thing called Success for Boys, which we do on a Thursday. It is a great idea, but I end up with 30 boys in a small classroom, so it doesn't work as well as it could. (teacher 2, p. 1, 2008)

Enrolment process and policy

The school enacts an inclusive and collaborative enrolment approach with enrolment protocols in place with its neighbouring public schools. It exhibits enrolment flexibility by taking enrolments at any time during the school year. At the beginning of 2007 the AEW spoke about 10 aboriginal children from ³ 'the lands' in remote northern SA turning up for schooling unannounced in the beginning weeks of school.

The principal indicated that some parents in the region will go from one school to another. As a consequence, the state schools in the district have established collaboration protocols around the enrolment process. These ensure that all principals are notified by their counterparts if an enrolment suddenly appears at another school within the neighbourhood.

The principals in the cluster do have a protocol in place that says if any school receives children from other schools in the cluster; the school will ring the other school and let them know. So if there's the idea that it's based on an issue or a problem, then they will encourage the person to go back to the school and talk to the principal about it. (Principal, 2008)

The cultural modality

School culture is about 'how we do things around here' (Boomer, 1992) ⁴. It includes processes and practices which are based on and shape the nature of the social relations and the environment of a school. The culture of a school can enable or inhibit various approaches to schooling. Each of the practices at Southbank described in this section contribute to building an environment which is collaborative, democratic, respectful and inclusive.

Behaviour management

All of the staff (including the SSOs) have received training in a 'Pathways to Peace' program emanating from a Queensland professional development body. They have all been accredited as 'Pathways' trainers. This program underscores the values that the school seeks to develop in its students and offers an explicit conflict resolution language that is readily understood by students and staff as the official school language of peace and mediation.

The Peace Code offers the school a clearly articulated behaviour management technology (vocabulary and process) that is viewed positively by the parents and followed by the students and the teachers. In all of the interviews undertaken with the teachers, parents and the leadership team, the Pathways to Peace program was proudly mentioned as an effective program and approach infused into the life of the school community. The school also flies a United Nations flag indicating the school's commitment to global peace and multiculturalism.

³ Aboriginal people who live on 'the lands' described here are known as the Pitinjara people and generally inhabit central parts of Australia including the northern most regions of South Australia. They have traditional aboriginal ways of educating and a unique world view with a rich and diverse culture. The young people have English as a second language and some were not able to converse in English at all.

⁴ *Negotiating the curriculum*, Garth Boomer, 1992

Professional development

The school has invested considerable time and money in professional development activities for its entire staff in recent years. English as a Second Language (ESL) training, Peace Code, and various federal and state projects are just a few of the programs which have helped to build staff skills as well as encouraging greater connectedness across the staff as they train together. Staff spoke about the bonding that ensued from their Queensland-based Pathways to Peace training, and the group-based approaches to ESL training, involving 54 hours of professional development (PD), 14 hours more than the DECS required PD hours for a year.

Leadership support and commitments

A large part of the success of the school can be put down to the fact that its formal leadership team is committed to a distributive and collaborative model of leadership. The staff at the school demonstrate a strong team-based approach to their work. Teams leading new agendas, projects and innovations in the school are evident across all of the year levels. There is an expectation that every staff member will carry out various leadership responsibilities above and beyond their classroom teaching commitments. It would appear that all of the staff have complied with this expectation. The staff acknowledge that their work can be very busy and intense, with everyone professionally accepting of the workload. There is respect for the leadership team and their supportive approach which has encouraged teachers to work hard and take on a little more:

.....(the principal) is really supportive. She works with you and from my experience she's prepared me for each bigger step that she's given me here, so she's built me up for what she's offering.

She's not dictatorial at all You're not just told 'This is the way it's going to be so get on with it'. It's very much discussed and talked about and thought about (Teacher 3, p 2, 2008)

Interviews conducted with the two newest and youngest teachers on staff who had both been at other schools prior to Southbank, highlighted the relaxed and supportive work environment at Southbank.

Coming from doing a lot of relief work everywhere, I've seen different schools and how they operate, and it's just relaxed here. (New teacher 1, p.5, 2008)

I've worked in a category 1 school before this, and it was really...it was completely different, very, very stressful and very difficult, and this is a category 2, so it's obviously a step more advanced along the way, but it's a world apart (New teacher 2, 2008).

Far from being a staff of disconnected individuals 'doing their own thing', SPS staff are regularly involved in professional conversations, debate and discussion demonstrating a high level of collegial professional maturity. This professionalism appears to be driven by a commitment to social justice, especially to ensure that all of the students get a fair go and a quality education. For example, when money is an issue that may prevent some students from attending an excursion, the staff will work together to cut the costs and share the resourcing so that all of the kids can participate.

We don't do a lot of individual things, we tend to do things where it means that people work together as a team for an outcome.' (Principal interview, p.2, 2008)

Always running

You never know what your day's going to be like, that's for sure, which is good sometimes, and other times it can be like being on a rollercoaster sometimes ...you can have very bad days, but then the good days are fantastic (New teacher 2, 2008)

All schools are busy but Southbank gives an impression of extensive activity. All of the staff are involved in various projects including State and Commonwealth funded projects, curriculum innovation, health and well-being projects, redesigning student spaces and resources and running sporting events like soccer to offer extra-curricular options for young people outside the formal school day.

(talking about the school being a boat)... It's not like you're in a storm or anything, it's just you're trying to stay afloat and you're running around a lot, but you quite enjoy the running around, if you know what I mean, ... (New teacher 1, 2008)

All of the school staff work hard, managing multiple roles. At the beginning of the 2008 school year the Principal volunteered for a self-review process and was asked by fellow Principals, 'How do you get your staff to work this hard?'

They just do. I mean, sure it's about recognition, it's about giving them time, the learning team structure, it's about ... democratic decision making where I don't make the decisions and tell them. (Principal, p.10, 2008)

The school does well with winning grants for various projects such as the 'Success for Boys' program. Indeed, it seems the school is always applying for and winning funding from commonwealth, state and council sources. However, this comes at a cost. There is a huge time factor involved in applying for these grants.

Challenging inclusion work

One of the biggest challenges for the school leadership team has been how to engender greater involvement of ESL parents into the school community and its various committees. There are school community, cultural and language barriers that must be overcome and require translators to involve ESL parent participation in the life of the school. However, translators are not always readily available; and because interpreters are often involved within the same small community as the parents who require their services, there is sometimes a reluctance to express sensitive issues for fear that they may be broadcast to other members of the community. Despite these obstacles, Southbank has non-English speaking parents participating on school council for the first time. However, the Deputy Principal considers that the barriers for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds to participate on council are still considerable.

...but this is the first year that we've actually got people, and part of it is that we have such a broad range of different cultures. Most of the parents are learning English, so they don't feel confident in being able to come and understand and contribute (and) for a number of cultures school is school and you don't go to it - from their cultural perspective, you don't come into a school. (Deputy Principal, p.3, 2008)

School values and goals

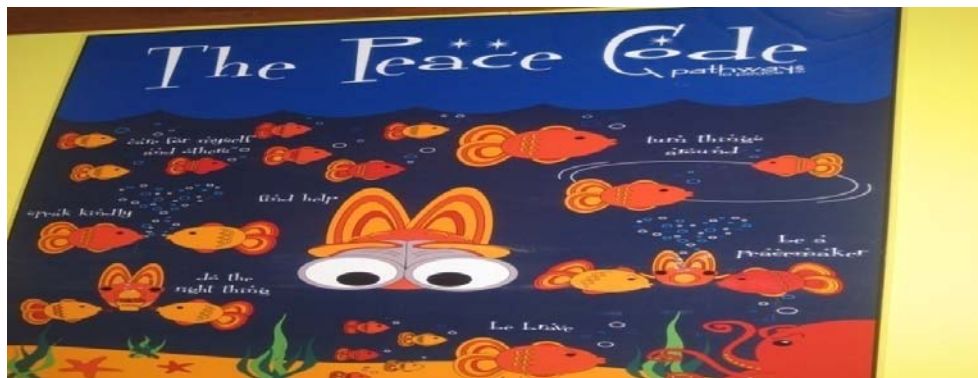
The school symbolically declares its values to the community through its flags; three flag poles stand at the front of the school with an Aboriginal, United Nations and Australian flag hoisted by a student every school day. Through the symbolism of the flags, Southbank's values are declared to the community; *we value cultural diversity, global citizenship (United Nations flag), aboriginal culture (Aboriginal flag), and being Australian (the Australian flag).*



Flags proudly displayed

On Harmony day 2008 the school was accredited as a United Nations Global Peace School with a host of political dignitaries and departmental representatives attending the ceremony. The school received the United Nations Peace School flag and proudly displayed the UN Poster in the front foyer.

A Peace Code driving school values and behaviour management



All of the staff interviewed spoke about the positive impact of the Pathways to Peace program upon student behaviour, staff and student communication, and parental support. Staff and parents cited the benefits of having a common language between staff and students about what is expected of all people participating in the school community. Some parents indicated how impressed they were to actually see and hear the peace code language being used by their children in the home.

The Deputy and other staff indicated that racism was not evident within the student community, with only occasional low level taunts between kids being the extent of any problem. She indicated that this tolerance and harmony was a relatively new cultural change.

Every now and then you will hear a racist comment come from one of the kids and it's really shocking. You know, you think 'Gosh, we don't hear things like that!' (Young teacher 1, p.7, 2008)

Strong supportive community relationships

The school's AEW spoke about her changing role and that of her colleagues - from classroom support for literacy and numeracy to being a community worker; mediating conflict, supporting families with financial difficulties and attending to health care needs. Some staff were involved both inside and outside of the school community in multiple roles to meet needs as they presented.

I'm a mum, I'm a counsellor, I'm a police officer, judge ...advisor health worker...(AEW, p.4, 2008)

The AEW referred to the complexities of being aboriginal in a western world and how her work requires a skilful non-judgemental interaction with all families. She recognises the need to address the negative school experiences that many of the aboriginal parents may have encountered in their school days and this has involved relational work with the parent community which is intensive emotional work.

...when they (aboriginal parents) were at school, some had very bad experiences, so they just send their kids to school and don't want to know about school. Sometimes they just had horrific memories or bad experiences, so I go in there to tap into bringing the school and the community together, to support their children and our students here at school with their learning and their health issues (AEW, p.2, 2008)

School change agents

The staff embraces change. They are experienced in being able to take on a flexible and inclusive demeanour in their teaching work. An example of this flexibility of approach to students and their families involved the arrival (without notice) of aboriginal families from the 'lands' at the beginning of the year. With no uniforms, little English, some health and nutrition concerns, 10 students began school in the second school week and were received by staff with professional support, good humour and focussed endeavour. Being flexible and meeting student needs in a timely fashion requires a quick judgement about what is best in the moment. According to the AEW, sometimes to offer much needed care and support for the students requires you to 'break the rules.'

Celebrating school life and its diversity

The deputy described her work within a culturally diverse student community as a privilege. Teaching and inclusive practices are a hallmark of the teaching approach at the school. Even though many young people attending the school have English as their second language, or have learning difficulties or present with deep emotional needs, they are viewed by teachers as talented, sharp and clever. Staff do not have deficit views of the students but rather choose to consider and understand their students' life-worlds and incorporate student interests and experiences into the classroom curriculum.

.... it's the culture of the school to look for the good and the strengths in students, and what they're bringing. (Deputy Principal, p.13, 2008)

Every fortnight, on a Friday, all of the school's students will assemble in the school gymnasium with their teachers and some parents (open invitation) and celebrate school life. On these occasions students will present and perform their learning to the wider school community. There is a welcoming tone to these assemblies with students' demonstrating confidence and pride in their presentations. Awards and general information are offered during each assembly. The celebratory highpoint in the school calendar is Harmony Day with preparations for the event carried out in classrooms weeks prior to the day. Here students have the opportunity to perform their learning to the whole school community with a celebratory approach to cultural diversity in learning. Celebration forms a big part of the school's approach to teaching and learning with celebration of different cultures and global citizenship featuring as a regular occurrence in classrooms and whole school assemblies.



Positive affirming talk about students

The school yard at lunchtime, recess time, and before and after school consistently appears to be calm and well ordered. Teachers can be seen regularly conversing and joking with children and these interactions create a relaxed tone.

I think all of the teachers here have really good relationships with the kids, really relaxed (and) confident relationships, and I think that's huge...(New teacher 1, p.6, 2008)

Some staff indicated that student voice and leadership is probably not yet fully explored and utilised as an important approach to school change and improvement and the leadership team indicated that they were planning to do more work in this area. Currently, all teachers conduct fortnightly classroom meetings.

Publicising success

The school leadership team always publicise school success. In 2008 they achieved coverage in the national, state and local media (radio, television and print) involving significant school sporting events and student fund raising efforts for countries devastated by floods. This included extensive television coverage of the school's multicultural soccer team - a team that tries its heart out but loses with dignity every week! - meeting with the Federal Sports Minister,

The Maths Challenge, Wakakiri (multi-cultural dance performance), and improvements in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy results are other examples of school activities being featured in the media and celebrated in the school newsletter. The school is always considering programs both within the school day and outside of it that may meet new needs and interests.

(a former staff member) started off having Vietnamese lessons for the children outside of school hours ... it was only for the Vietnamese children at first, but then our non-speaking Vietnamese children wanted to do it as well, ...it's on a Tuesday night, they're in there learning Vietnamese and the kids love it...(AEW, p.14, 2008)

The principal indicated that she wanted the school to be known by the community as a school that offers plenty of opportunities for student learning and success and uses the media as a way of getting this message out there. She believes that public education must learn to be better at declaring its achievements so that the public are better informed about the quality of public schooling.

The pedagogical modality

All schools have their own set of teaching and learning priorities which determine how they enact curriculum and pedagogy. A school's approach to curriculum and pedagogy is heavily

influenced by its cultural dimensions and structural parameters and possibilities. All schools are engaged in a whole range of activities above and beyond the formal curriculum. Southbank teaches to the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability framework (SACSA) across eight broad learning areas but also considers other programs and approaches to teaching and learning that are available and relevant to their approach to schooling.

The School's Vision Statement declares Southbank to be a school 'Working Together for a Quality Education.' The school has a focus on continual improvement through the use of quality principles and tools, including ⁵Victoria Bernhardt Continuous Improvement Continuums, the DECS ⁶High Performing Organisations (HPO) program and the ⁷Quality Teacher Framework.

Literacy and Numeracy focus (LAN)

The school prioritises literacy and numeracy in its school development plans. The school's Site Learning Plan in 2008 was in the final year of a three year cycle. The current priorities are:

- Raising Standards in Literacy
- Raising standards in Numeracy
- Student Well Being

In the lead up to the National Literacy and Numeracy testing, classroom teachers felt obliged to prepare students for the tests. One teacher described this preparation time as a 'special time.'

...it became very prescriptive and it was kind of rushing through, especially because it was so early in the year. In term 1 in maths I start off teaching number, but the test is obviously the whole spectrum of maths, so you have to squeeze in shape and space and measurement, which I would get to do in term 3 or term 4. I don't really agree with that...It's very difficult. (Young teacher 2, p.3, 2008)

The Junior Primary classes use Guided Reading with all readers levelled by Reading Recovery Levels. The preschool has a strong literacy and numeracy focus as well. Primary classes use an Accelerated Reading Program with students levelled with a Star Reading Test. Some junior primary classes also use this program on completion of RR level 26.

Student initiated learning

A number of teachers at the school are committed to negotiating the curriculum with the students:

I'm a big fan of student-initiated curriculum. I like to pick a topic that is relevant to the students and then I find out what they want to find out about it, and then I'll take all of their ideas and then go back and try and link it to SACSA. So most of it comes from what they want to be learning, because they have excellent ideas....and they get more out of it. (Young teacher 1, p.2, 2008)

⁵ Victoria Bernhardt, a US based researcher offers various school improvement rubrics that are used by the Improvement and Accountability team situated within the head office of the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS).

⁶ HPO is the DECS school improvement framework that has been compiled from international and national research work falling primarily with the school effectiveness movement.

⁷ AGQTP was established in 2000 by the federal Government to raise the quality, professionalism and status of Australian teachers and school leaders. The program has seen over 240,000 teachers and school leaders participate in professional development opportunities.

The school is also part of the Learning to Learn program – a strategic curriculum development program run from the curriculum directorate of DECS which focuses on student-centred approaches to teaching and learning.

All students have individual folders with learning and assessment information in Literacy and all of the staff have undertaken professional development in *First Steps in Number* in 2006, and an *ESL Literacy and Learning* program in 2008. The primary students have Maths Tool Kits to increase the use of hands on learning to assist conceptual understanding. The school is well resourced for maths equipment. The school is working towards establishing Numeracy Expectations and monitoring of student achievement through continued work with SACSA and First Steps practices. All classes participate in daily fitness. Students are encouraged to eat fruit with an emphasis on healthy life styles.

Inclusive teaching practices

According to the leadership team, the staff understand what inclusive teaching means and enact this in their practice. Through ESL training, the Quality Teacher Framework, various projects and collegial professional development workgroups, the staff are well equipped to deliver an inclusive education for all of the students.

And the other thing I think we're really strong on is inclusivity our teachers actually understand and know what inclusive practices are, and know how to cater for individual needs. (Principal, p.16, 2008)

Of course inclusive teaching means offering a rigorous and meaningful education to all students, a complex task given that many of the classrooms can be characterised as having a huge spread of skill and ability levels.

I think obviously the biggest challenge in my class are the differences in ability. I've got kids either at one end of the spectrum or the other, so trying to work with that every day is very hard. Also you've got the few kids who are behavioural problems, although that's improved since the beginning of the year, I have to say.... (New teacher 2, p.1, 2008)

Summary

From the examples provided above from each of the three modalities, it is clear that schooling as it is enacted at Southbank is not simply about educating students in the classroom. It is much more than that. The school offers a holistic educational approach which involves all of the staff in addressing the many emotional, social, health, financial, and cultural needs manifested at any time in the ⁸school community. If left unaddressed, these needs may inhibit or prevent student learning. The school recognises that there are a number of blockages and inhibitors to student learning and to parent involvement which must be addressed before or alongside the formal learning program. At Southbank Primary School these 'external' issues are addressed in a range of ways which blur the boundaries between the school and its community. They include food and clothing support, trauma counselling, community mediation, financial and health advice, support and referral, translation services and so on. Importantly, the school's leadership team promotes and models collaborative and democratic practices, creating a culture of trust, inclusion and respect for difference.

⁸ School community here refers to parents, students, teachers, educational staff and stakeholders connected involved with Southbank Primary School.

SECTION 3: ENACTED PUBLIC PURPOSES

The three modalities described above served as a way to organise the mass of information and data that was collected during the course of my time at Southbank Primary School. In this section, I want to suggest that there are four key themes that run across each of the modalities and that the school is promoting through its formal and informal curriculum - social inclusion, community capacity building, educating for global citizenship and world peace, and building professional capacity.

These four themes represent dominantly **public purposes** of education in that they are concerned with contributing to the benefit of society as a whole, that is, to the common good. Of course the school also enacts purposes that are private in that they benefit each individual – but it is clear that its public purposes shape the nature of the school and define what it means by its motto of ‘working together for a quality education’. In this section I will briefly outline the contours of each of the four themes which are represented in the diagram below.

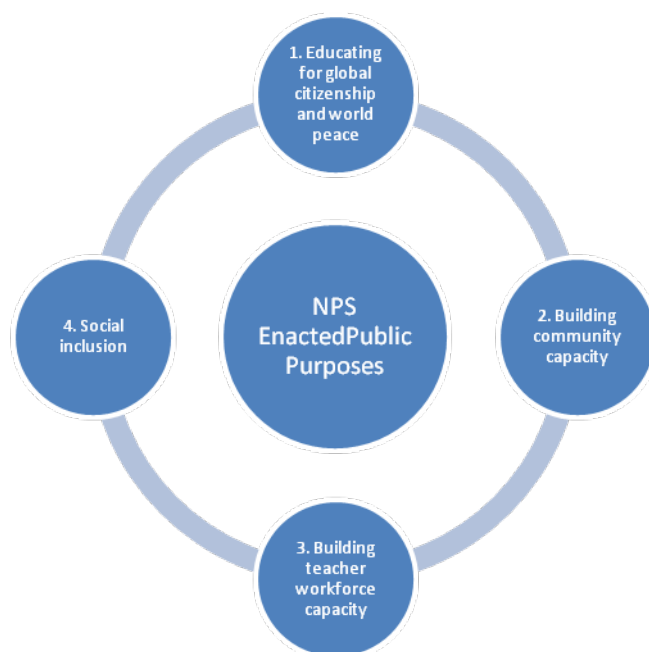


Diagram illustrating the various enacted public purposes at NPS

1. Public purpose: Education for global citizenship/world peace

The school community prides itself on having a peace code program firmly in place to support its health and wellbeing priorities and its curriculum focus on global citizenship aligned with a commitment to valuing cultural diversity. Each Southbank student is exposed to a rich tapestry of cultural diversity in their relations with each other where being multicultural is the norm. Living in harmony is a constant theme used by the teaching staff in its everyday language, and practised in a range of curricular forms. In a world marred by discrimination, racism and violence, an education that prioritises global citizenship and world peace is, par excellence, seeking to achieve a public purpose.

The Peace Code certainly underlies a lot of the things that we do in class. I think a lot of it is just personal...belief system sounds a bit too comprehensive, but that kind of thing. You bring your own ideas to it as well. (Young teacher 2, p.6, 2008)

The school is a superb example of the power of bringing together children with diverse cultures and backgrounds. In this situation they can learn about and from each other, in a variety of ways and through a range of experiences:

... we believe celebrations bring people together and unite everyone, and that's the time we can get more parents into the school, and so that's one of those lovely reasons to have it (as well as being) a way to get parents to school...(Principal, p.17, 2008)

The school regularly celebrates and publicly acknowledges its pride in being culturally diverse. Celebrations like 'harmony day' are a significant event at the school marked by visits from local MPs, student performances, parent and student lunches and a celebration of being a United Nations school for peace. Symbolic gestures like proudly displaying the UN Flag and the aboriginal flag to the community, with large and colourful global peace code posters displayed across the school and incorporated into the whole school curriculum across all year levels is of special significance.

I always go back to the Peace code ... and to peace being an essential part of what we do in the curriculum....and it comes out in their story writing, in their art work as well. I think that's one of the Southbank flavours of the curriculum, and I think a very important one. (School Counsellor, p.16, 2008)

The school appears not only 'manage' the complexities inherent in its student population really well, but to draw from it as a powerful and integral aspect of the learning program. One parent in talking about the diversity of cultures within the school community reflected upon the students' attitudes to cultural and physical difference in this way.

...I can tell you my kids have never come home and said, 'there's a lot of Arab or blacks or refugees.' The kids don't even identify that they're different, it's just 'we've got a new kid in the class' I know my son plays with everybody and so does my daughter. (Parent, p.5, 2008)

2. Building community capacity

The immediate Southbank Primary school community is not richly endowed with community support infrastructure, despite having a large number of new immigrants. The school has managed to engender a joined-up service delivery approach with a number of agencies in the area. Many of the community are doing it tough financially and are in need of service support and advice. The school plays an integral service support role in this regard. Often the first point of contact between a parent seeking service support and advice, the counsellor and the AEW regularly provide food, clothing, financial advice, and information sessions to help parents take the next step. The school also informs parents via the newsletter of ways to improve the educational experience of their children. Advice about nutrition, homework support, sleep needs, and health concerns are all given in a non-judgemental way to parents on a regular basis.

Poverty is a huge issue in the community. With 70 percent of parents on school card and probably another ten percent who should be, the staff are sometimes frustrated about the debilitating effects of poverty on families and student learning.

There's a child ... who I suspended last week for violence. The family is in absolute poverty. ...and we can see that child's future is not going to be good. He's not got a lot of choices,it's just pitiful in terms of the fact we can see kids really at risk, and we can't do everything. We need some connected services so we can make referrals where there's not money to pay, or a six month waiting list, because kids are slipping through the cracks. (Principal, p.19, 2008)

So the school has taken up the community counselling shortfalls by offering, and paying out of its budget, one of its relievers who is doing a counselling course two days a week

work to spend time offering intensive counselling support to the students who are traumatised. The school also provides one-on-one support for basic needs:

...I had a parent the other day ring me, who was in tears, that their rent has gone up, their washing machine has broken. She said to me 'I can't bring the kids to school because we haven't got clean clothes', and I said to her 'Is there any way you can get them to school because we've got clothes, I can swap them into uniforms and then they can swap back out, go home in their ordinary clothes, and I'll take the uniforms home and wash them for you'. So we've managed that. Then she confided she had no money because the rent, the electricity, the gas, and trying to get money for the washing machine, and she had \$430 to last her for the fortnight. She asked me 'What do I do?' so I said to her 'we can organise for you to get some food vouchers'. I told her where to go, and rang the people who I was sending her to and...(teacher, p.15, 2008)

The school newsletter educates parents about topical issues present in the community relating to education and health. Articles about hygiene, diet medical support, supporting reading the home, cultural awareness are regular features and are written in a non-condescending way. The parents deal with many issues in their lives and often their stresses and challenges are exposed to the staff. This again adds to the complexity of the work in the school.

In these and other ways, the school functions as a resource for the community, not just in terms of its learning program, but in helping to sustain and build the community. This is a crucial public purpose.

3. Building teacher workforce capacity

Southbank Primary school invests in its people. The approach to professional development is based on the concept of a professional learning community, with staff engaged in individual and collaborative learning where new learning is shared and problems, concerns and dilemmas are treated as issues for the school community, rather than being the domain of the individual teacher. In addition to an inquiry-based professional practice, the school also offers support to staff for their ongoing professional development. For example, in 2008 the school made a huge commitment to ESL training. It funded a course involving 27 hours of contact time plus another 27 hours of homework time for all of the staff, including the school support officers.

The school also contributes to the broader professional education needs of the state system. I will give two examples. First, many of its teachers have a long career ahead of them in the state education system and most will move to other schools at some stage. In contributing to the ongoing development of the state's teaching force through its quality approach to professional development, Southbank is contributing to the quality of the teaching workforce.

Second, the school has developed a strong partnership with state's major teacher education provider, the University of South Australia. It offers university teacher placements every year for over 25 new students and in so doing plays a major role in the development of pre-service teachers in South Australia. In doing this work, the school receives payment from the universities which is placed into the professional development bucket to pay for attendance of the whole staff at interstate and local conferences – a win for both the school and the University. In both these ways Southbank Primary School is fulfilling an important public purpose by helping to sustain and build the capacity of the teaching force in South Australia.

4. Social inclusion

The school takes all comers no matter what time of the year it is - students not successful at local private schools; 'lands kids' with significant health issues and few words of English who suddenly descend upon them in week 3 of the school year; and students with disabilities because the school is set up to meet these needs. In recent years, the school has also catered for many traumatised refugee students who are not only grappling with a new language, but also the social customs and culture shock that comes with life in a new country, a distinct lack

of money, and issues emanating from a cycle of torture and abuse, and the loss of loved ones in their country of origin. These are the stories that are seldom heard but are commonplace when the teachers are invited to speak about their work with the kids at Southbank. Inclusion lies at the very heart of the school.

Teacher work is not just in the classroom at Southbank. There is considerable behind the scenes work going on that involves staff in supporting the community. Staff are doing social inclusion work above and beyond their classroom teaching duties. A large proportion of teacher work beyond the classroom is consumed with supporting parents in the school community with food, health advice, citizenship preparation, clothing, diet and fitness and financial management. And when students are in the school, the formal curriculum as well as the atmosphere and environment of the school, embodies inclusion in ways described above.

Of course, engaging with inclusion is not easy. There are many issues to confront. These are cultural and social, as well as educational. And they are also financial. Meeting the diverse range of needs demands resources. Reading through three years of school newsletters highlights the school's efforts to raise money at every opportunity. Sausage sizzles, fetes, named paving bricks, Father's day raffles and so on, all attest to the school's fund raising efforts. Although these efforts only raise small sums in comparison to the bequests and the fund raising efforts of schools in more affluent communities, they serve to promote the strong sense of shared community that is the hallmark of the school.

Summary

Southbank Primary school enacts four distinct democratic public purposes in its approach to educational delivery. These are;

1. Educating for global citizenship and world peace;
2. Building community capacity
3. Building teacher workforce capacity and
4. Social inclusion

The school wants to be known as one that works together to deliver a quality education – and it prides itself on achieving that aim. However, in attending to their schooling work effectively, the school is always confronting and addressing a myriad of complex community needs, both inside and outside of the school. It addresses these needs by always running 'twice as hard'. In many ways, the school is so much richer than its modest infrastructure and resources suggest. It is the very embodiment of an inclusive society – one where people learn to understand, respect and celebrate difference, by meeting rather than hiding from the many challenges of diversity. In this way, Southbank Primary School is a superb example of a school working towards and delivering an education founded on a commitment to the public benefits that education can bring to a democratic society.

Through its supportive and professional leadership team, its highly skilled and committed collegial staff, its strategic approaches to professional development and its continual capacity to win resourcing that aligns with the school's developmental priorities, Southbank continues to deliver on critical public purposes and a quality education for all.