

Australian Early Development Census

School Story

Franklin Primary School

Tasmania 2017

Franklin Primary uses data-informed playgroup to empower families

About Franklin Primary School

Franklin Primary School is situated in the South of Tasmania in the picturesque Huon Valley. It is one of Tasmania's oldest Primary Schools and has approximately 110 students enrolled in years Kindergarten to Year 6.

What did the AEDC data show?

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national measure of early childhood development. It measures five key areas or domains when a child starts full-time school. The domains are: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills (school-based); communication skills and general knowledge.

The 2015 results for Franklin/Port Huon highlighted developmental vulnerabilities particularly in the areas of social competence, emotional maturity and communication skills and general knowledge. 14.8% of children showed vulnerability in the social competence domain compared with a Tasmanian average of 9.9% and 11.1% were identified as being vulnerable in the communication skills and general knowledge domain compared with the Tasmanian average of 6.4%.

Franklin Primary School playgroup – Creating change

Franklin Primary School teacher, Tania Steenholdt and parent, Louise Latham have been running a successful hands-on playgroup at Franklin Primary School founded on the principle of building strong relationships with parents and families creating the capacity to work in partnership to support child development.

During twice yearly Kindergarten Development Checks (KDC) Tania observed that there was an increasing number of students who did not adequately pass the gross motor skills check. "After reviewing the AEDC

and KDC data we decided that there were two areas they could focus on to create change for the young children and families in our community, these were; communication and physical development.”

“Whilst the Franklin playgroup on the surface looks like a typical playgroup the layout of the space and activities on offer are designed to boost the confidence of both parent and child whilst increasing gross motor skills and oral language.”

Tania invited Louise Latham, a parent at the school, to attend a two day Parents as Active Companions in Children’s Learning program alongside her.

Parents as Active Companions in Children’s Learning is a program that examines the value of working in partnership with parents to support them as active participants in their child’s learning and experts on their own children. It centres on developing common understandings and language, wellbeing, relationships, language and literacy to help build parent/practitioner relationships and support parents in developing a deeper understanding of child development and how they can actively support that.

Louise said what she learned through the program really opened up her understanding of the way activities and interactions can be designed to maximise learning and growth opportunities for both parents and children. Areas of development like speech, social competence, and physical wellbeing can be worked on through carefully designed activities; after the course, Louise began working alongside Tania to create those opportunities for children and to show parents how to replicate them in their home-life environment. “One of the things we do is try to encourage families to come and participate in things that will develop those areas.” The playgroup continues to work hard to emphasise the importance of play-based learning to promote growth.

Tania noted that often professionals make assumptions about what parents may or may not know and what their values might be. “Contrary to this typical approach, it is important that the knowledge of parents and families is valued in its own right as parents bring with them expertise on their own children.” Forming productive relationships and empowering families is critical to meaningful community change. Parents are also a part of that broader community with widespread social networks. Empowering parents creates a ripple effect throughout the community where knowledge is shared and community capacity is built. Tools and strategies learned through playgroup are taken outside that immediate environment and applied whilst children are at home with their families.

The playgroup takes a holistic view of children which contributes positively to the wellbeing and personal growth of both children and their parents. It has provided the opportunity for children to shine and opened up respectful conversations with parents that increase knowledge about child development allowing communities to forge their own pathways to success.

Achievements

The biggest achievement is undoubtedly the increased empowerment of parents. Parents are able to understand what the data demonstrates and are encouraged to be confident as experts of their own children. This exchange of knowledge ensures continual growth outside of the playgroup setting. Tania says that subsequent conversations with parents reveal greater understanding which appears to help them make informed decisions about the experiences they offer to their children. “Now parents better understand the role they have in providing the best possible start to life for their children.”

The playgroup has facilitated a significant confidence boost for parents and increased their active participation in learning activities. Tania has been amazed at the transformation of the playgroup families. “Parents are now seeking out frequent conversations with me about their children’s progress and asking many more questions than they used to.”

Tania has noted that all children who attend the playgroup go on to experience much smoother transitions to Kinder and then Prep level learning.

Playgroup parent, Jess says that she really values the information she got through taking her two young daughters to playgroup. AEDC data was shared with the parent group and Jess described this process as highly informative and relevant to the role of parents. "Through the playgroup, I was able to see how I can support my girls' development more easily in everyday life."

The playgroup continues to evolve and programs are being developed to conduct even more targeted work. Tania continues to work with many families who were some of the very early attendees at the playgroup sessions. She sees positive, informed and confident change in the community of parents which is reflected in the way they speak about their children and aspects of their development. "The positive change has been incredible."

For more information contact

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"Everybody wants the best for their children and sometimes as professionals, we make assumptions about what children need but we don't know for sure unless we have this data. It empowers us to tailor what we are doing and make a change in our community."

Tania Steenholdt, Playgroup Leader