

# Schools of the future

THE FUTURE IS ALREADY HERE ... (and it's personalised) Government, business, systems, schools and, very importantly, the students themselves have redefined expectations and assumptions about the design, delivery and support of school education nationally. This is a vastly different landscape than even five years ago. *'The future is already here; it's just not very evenly distributed'* (William Gibson in Horizon Report 2012 K-12 Edition, NMC 2012).

Among the major influences on the changing landscape are:

- The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Dec, 2008) which identified two fundamental goals: 1. equity and excellence; and 2. all young Australians become successful learners; confident and creative individuals; and active and informed citizens.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the major instrument to develop and coordinate the adoption of an Australia-wide curriculum, which is profoundly and positively reshaping the national curriculum and standards framework.
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) which is establishing a national framework for teacher professional standards and accreditation.

Research which is now playing a more significant role in teacher, school and new system thinking about educational provision and which has become a powerful driver of differentiation at the local school level (schools are referencing *Leadbeater, Vygotsky, Rogoff, Fullan, Robinson, Masters, Hattie* for example). 21st Century Learning constructs, exemplified by the Framework for 21st Century Learning, identify learning and innovation skills (along with media and technology skills) as the differentiators between those students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments and those who are not. New technologies and their ready adoption by the new generation of students are redefining expectations, capabilities and connectedness and thereby redefining education and the models for its design and delivery.

At Good Shepherd we are focusing on the influences of the Melbourne Declaration, the Australian Curriculum and ensuring that the professional standards of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership forms part of our landscape of Learning and Teaching. Personalised learning is helping children to develop as confident, enthusiastic and effective learners, which is a central purpose of primary education. It is our vision to provide opportunities for all our children to fulfil their potential through a commitment to high standards and excellence within an engaging, broad and rich curriculum.

Research shows that the best primary schools and early-years settings achieve this. In these schools and settings children are engaged by learning that develops and challenges them and excites their imagination. The learning and teaching environment in these schools and settings is shaped by an understanding of what children can achieve and by teaching that meets their individual needs as learners. A walk through our classrooms and you will find our children engaged in their learning through many and varied activities which excites and challenges their imagination.

The majority of parents have a certain expectation about what school should look like, feel like and be like; however, sometimes when a parent brings their child to school or the first time, the learning spaces look different from what they experienced themselves as children. At first, this can be disconcerting; every parent has been to school and many parents assume that school will be the same as it was when they went to school. In some respects, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is still the same - including formal instruction in the key skills being taught every day. In addition to whole group instruction, small groups, individual extension and intervention are also provided, ensuring that all children are catered for more personally.

The wonderful aspect of education in the 21st century is that in addition to literacy and numeracy still being taught and instructed, a broader range of other skills are also taught. These are often referred to as life skills: children growing up now need a variety of skills to be successful learners today.

These include:

- Decision making
- Resilience
- Problem solving
- Learning how to learn
- Intrinsically motivated
- Responsible citizens of the future
- Effective communicators
- Assertive and respectful
- Creative and lateral thinkers
- Researchers
- Able to transfer skills into new ideas and events not experienced before.

Learning environments in all schools now provide a balance between "explicit teaching" in the formal instruction of key curriculum areas including sciences, history, the arts, physical education, literacy, numeracy balanced with "explicit teaching" during active engagement where children are trying things out, working alongside others, having to work collaboratively, problem solve and create. This balance between formal instruction and active engagement provides practice for children to have the best of both worlds.

Children don't know what they don't know. So as teachers, we provide the instruction and curriculum content from the Australian Curriculum that helps them to 'grow' their knowledge and skills. Children also bring to their learning, lots of experiences, knowledge and skills that they already

know. Children need to be given the opportunity to bring who and what they know and for us to balance this with what we need them to learn. Importantly this needs to be done in a way that helps them to explore, to experiment and to work alongside others. This is what prepares them for the real world.

In personalised learning, we don't stop teaching the fundamentals which are the foundation of literacy and numeracy, we simply add more of the essential skills of life that all of us need as we live and grow and work in today's society. Good Shepherd has for this reason taken on Design Thinking which is a process of problem solving, investigating and inquiry learning.

Sometimes parents of children in Prep - Year 2 who participate in Investigations initially say; "They are just playing!" They are not just playing. There is not enough hours in the day to justify "just playing" in school. That is why parents need to understand a little about the importance of and how Investigations teaches life skills as well as oral language, socialisation and a whole host of other skills while developing their numeracy and literacy skills.

Sometimes parents of children in our Years 3-4 think that personalised learning is a curriculum where children can do whatever they want. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, true personalised learning is highly systemised and structured. In Years 3-4 the students are often sitting with their teacher who is instructing and teaching. At other times, students are working on projects for example in History or Science or Health or investigating areas of learning provided by the teacher. They may be challenged to link their own interests and experiences to the skills and concepts being taught so that learning is viewed as relevant and meaningful to the student.