THE WAY

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FROM THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

Professional learning and student outcomes

On Monday, the College staff gathered for a day of professional learning. Conscious that this may appear as an additional day of holidays while the teachers gear up for the term ahead, I thought it would be valuable to peel back the curtain and share a little about what happens on these days.

Research into student learning outcomes is unequivocal; the professional learning and growth of teachers is one of the single most impactful factors. If we want to support student learning, we must invest in the ongoing learning of teachers. For professional learning to be most successful, teachers need regular opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, to reflect on individual and collective practice and to respond to changes in the educational environment. The focus of the experience is not ‘new learning’ but more effective practice that ultimately results in improved student learning outcomes.

Thomas Hassall is committed to the ongoing growth and development of our teachers. We are blessed with high quality teachers but we are also aware that growing them further will continue to benefit the students.

The main focus of this term’s professional learning workshop was differentiation. For non-educators the concept of differentiation is essentially ‘teacher-speak’ for meeting the learning needs of all students through high quality teaching.

During the workshop we were reminded that there are no ‘normal’ classes, with ‘normal’ students

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who learn in the same ‘normal’ way. Our classrooms are full of diversity. This reality is a wonderful thing as it also reflects the nature of wider society and the workforce that our students will step into post school. Learning alongside people that think, process and express themselves differently is important to experience and learn to navigate. This is where teachers come to the fore as they seek to create learning environments that allow for all learners to be respected, to be successful and to experience growth.

Monday also provided an opportunity for teachers to meet in smaller teams to plan for the upcoming term. In the Senior School this time was dedicated to further developing our approach and systems to support student welfare. The College is committed to promoting a restorative approach to working with students based on high expectations and high support. It has been encouraging to see the student culture and behaviour develop across the year. Overall, students have been receptive to clarity around expectations, constructive feedback and a renewed focus on learning through experience.

The Junior School team spent time collaboratively developing new units of work based on the new NESA syllabuses. The focus of this work is creating learning experiences that are engaging, significant, challenging, and relevant.

Reflecting on the nature of a differentiated classroom, one critical aspect is psychological safety. Students need to feel comfortable to try things, make mistakes, and have a willingness to hear, accept and use feedback for growth. This is also true for our teachers. Beginning the term with professional learning helps to establish this learning environment and to set the tone for the learning that will take place in the weeks ahead for staff and students.

Mr Chris Wyatt
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