**Bridgewater Primary School**

**Personal learning plans**

**Summary**

Students plan individual timetables around their initiated curriculum to meet Outcomes across all Learning Areas. Their learning is supported by widening horizons electives and is embedded through their teaching of their peers.

**Band**

Middle Years—Upper Primary

**Context**

All students in primary and middle years

**Learning Area**

All

**Timeline**

Continuous

**School**

Bridgewater Primary School

**Educators**

Roslyn Shepherd (principal)
Iian Love

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**The Vision**

Bridgewater Primary School staff and students are committed to lifelong learning that is relevant, enriched and passionate, and which uses the best of learning energies for everybody.

Learners are invited to explicitly question pedagogy, for example:

- What is the purpose of school?
- What do we need to learn?

Not only does this create a community of learners, but it also demonstrates a sharing of power and a respect for all stakeholders.

*We don't believe there should be two sets of rules—one for teachers and one for kids. None of this could work if you didn't have two-way respect. It's up to us as teachers to demonstrate that—we are the ones that need to break down the barriers.*

Students and teachers understand that learning is an individual as well as a shared experience.

Thus, instead of placing a whole class into the same learning situation where you have

- a third who may be receptive to it
- a third who are not ready for it,

individual learning allows students to see their learning as relevant because they can choose

- what they are doing

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• when they are doing it and therefore understand
• why they are doing it.

Furthermore, they are following their passions by
• beginning with what they understand
• deepening what they understand
• moving to less familiar areas and extending their comfort zones, thus adding enrichment to their learning.

Students are learning for life; not only are they following a program that is student directed and teacher guided, but they are expected to learn and apply skills which many adults have difficulty with. These include:
• setting deadlines
• setting criteria for success
• meeting deadlines
• remaining focused
• being able to work in a range of places.

*Students are acquiring skills for lifelong learning and lifelong living, rather than just ticking off boxes.*

**The Journey**

Bridgewater Primary School was selected as a Learning to Learn school, as part of the Hills Futures cluster. One of the key elements for the inquiry focus included student initiated learning. All staff were involved in the inquiry, as well as a number of students. By working hand-in-hand, teachers were able to pose questions to students such as:
What do we as teachers do
• to you?
• with you?

What is done
• by you?
• for you?

Furthermore students volunteered the following comments:
*Teachers don't listen to students.*
*They should ask for student input into choice.*

Back at school, the notion of student initiated/teacher directed learning via personal learning plans was explored. Teachers wrote their own personal learning plans, discussing them as a group and linking up with others with similar interests or with knowledge and understandings to share. It was essential that teachers were ready and committed to making the change. As one of the teachers remarked:
*Teachers have to buy into it when they are ready—choice is essential. You can't tell people to think in this way—you have to actually believe in it.*

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**Influence of the SACSA Framework**

The SACSA Framework, underpinned by constructivism, offers students the opportunity to demonstrate integrated Outcomes on a learning journey from the familiar to the unexplored.

Bridgewater translates this further:  
*You don’t have to learn about all of it; you only need some of it. When you want to know and learn more, you will and it will be useful to you. It is a waste of time if you are learning something for which you have no use and in which you are disinterested.*

Students are familiar with the SACSA Framework, particularly the strands and their connections. Because students have choice and therefore ownership of their learning, they recognise that evidence is required. Students can show evidence of current learning and supply evidence of previous learning to support identified Outcomes. They can also see their learning journey and are able to demonstrate their learning leading up to any particular point. They are encouraged to look at whether they are meeting all aspects of Outcomes so that they can provide a rich overview of their learning.

_We have a look at what the Key Ideas and Outcomes say and make them work for our situation._

When planning personal learning, teachers may direct students to particular Outcomes which they may be missing. Thus teachers use the SACSA Framework as a resource and guide, taking a big picture view to determine which Outcomes have not been demonstrated across Learning Areas. They may then direct students to incorporate these Outcomes into their projects through their personal learning and demonstrate this through evidence.

Thus they take an integrated, holistic approach, demonstrating multiple Outcomes through one piece of work.

*SACSA has complexity and there are a lot in Outcomes. But it is our business as teachers to not get hung up about them, to deal with them through explanation and get on with business of learning.*

For example, regardless of the topic, the English Outcomes which a student might be working towards when creating a book review might include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts and contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In. T. KC1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3.4 Composes a range of texts that include ideas and information about familiar and some unfamiliar topics and applies an understanding of audience, purpose and context. Id. T. C. KC2

### Language

3.7 Identifies and analyses features of written language and visual images when reading and viewing independently a range of texts about familiar and unfamiliar topics. T. C. KC1

3.8 Selects and uses a variety of language aspects when planning and composing a range of well-structured fiction, factual and media texts about familiar, new and possible experience. Id. T. C. KC3

### Strategies

3.11 Selects and uses a variety of strategies for locating and recording information and for reading, viewing and critically interpreting a range of written and visual texts. F. Id. T. C. KC1, KC2

3.12 Selects and uses a variety of strategies for planning, composing and reviewing own written texts and for consistently spelling most common words accurately.

In addition, if they then create from this an oral presentation of their review, they could further work towards:

### Language

3.6 Selects and uses most aspects of language when producing a variety of spoken texts appropriate for a wide range of school and community audience. Id. T. C. KC2

### Strategies

3.10 Selects and uses a variety of strategies for planning, composing, presenting and evaluating spoken texts for an increasing range of community audience. Id. T. C. KC3, KC6

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**Ensuring Learning Areas are covered**

Teachers need to be familiar with the SACSA Framework and how it is structured. Maths and English are clearly integral to students' personal learning, with society and environment easily incorporated into most projects. Where other Learning Areas are missing in personal learning, they are made up for through electives in the Widening Horizons program, art, music and drama programs.

Bridgewater recognised that one Learning Area which was underrepresented was science. This was remedied by a whole-school, two week intensive science week, in which everyone participated. This included deconstructing science and the strands, how to develop experiments, how to develop procedural writing and how to test theories.

Deconstruction of Key Ideas and Outcomes has been a theme when working with students to increase their familiarity with the SACSA Framework. The following questions, for example, gained a highly enthusiastic student response and influenced a number of future personal learning plans:

- What can you measure?

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• What attributes can you measure?
• What tools would you use to measure?
• What language would you use to share your findings?

Whereas in past it was up to teachers to plan teaching to a whole group, now they are enriching the learning of each individual. Teachers thus need to offer options which are appropriate for their students and which students will see as relevant. This will:
• strengthen confidence and assertiveness of learners
• widen their interests
• offer possibilities of what they might do in the wider context.
Thus, the Essential Learning 'Identity' plays a significant role in this model of learning.

Teachers state that it is much easier to keep track of each learner's progress because of the individuality of the program, making it easier to remember what each learner is doing.

*I can give you a detailed description of each student's personal learning. But best of all is that we've got rid of 'OK-ness' and mediocrity from the classroom*

**Logistics**
In order to timetable programs at Bridgewater, communication between teachers is paramount. Whilst each student will complete their timetable in their circle group, teachers need to also be aware of each other's movement and availability. For example, the success of focus groups depends on an adult being able to uninterruptedly teach a small group. Therefore another adult must be available who can act as the 'touch-base' person to facilitate learning for other students, as well as sign movement and resource notes.

NIT is structured so that students are always with adults who know them, including the principal or other staff who teach specialist subjects, such as drama or sport. Relieving teachers are familiar with the system at Bridgewater and know that they are coming in to act as a 'touch-base' person for students who already have individual learning plans; they therefore do not have to spend time preparing lessons to enrich students' learning, which may interest some, but not all students.

**Behaviour management**
Because all students are engaged, very few need to be reminded of behaviour issues. Rather than taking punitive measures, those students requiring help with behaviour issues are encouraged to change their behaviour and move on. The 'Kids' Club' assists them in finding strategies for anger management. Students also have the right to request a short 'chill out time' if they need time out from their learning in order to get back on task. Thus the culture has changed from one of denial to one of ownership, and responsibility has become prevalent.

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Furthermore, struggling students can choose to attend the Tuesday Club, which operates after school. Here they can access teachers in small groups or one on one and improve their planning and organisational skills or work on any additional skills they are lacking.

**Productive work centre**
Giving students increased responsibility for and ownership of their school is further evidence of change in culture; students take an active role in the running of the school, such as answering phones, dealing with mail and greeting visitors, with students volunteering for ‘office duties’, even during lunch breaks and recess. Student involvement is therefore not just tokenistic, but highly valued in the day to day running of the school.

This is much more interesting than going out to play. We learn so much more about life and it’s good responsibility. I think it’s much more like university.

**The Program**
The primary and middle years program at Bridgewater Primary School gives ownership of learning to students; teachers meanwhile have the responsibility for ensuring depth, breadth and learning rigour by extending students understandings of what is available to them to learn and facilitating their learning opportunities.

**Organisational groupings**
Each student's timetable group is determined by where they are on their learning journey, together with their ability to plan and organise. Thus students are given ownership of their learning by celebrating what they know and establishing what they don't know.

Organisational groups include:
- **Novice**—all students new to middle and upper primary, either from junior primary or new to the school
- **Learner**—students who have acquired some skills as an organiser and/or learner
- **Advanced learner**—students who require little adult intervention in organising and learning. Many advanced learners may embed their learning by teaching on to novices.
A regular review process occurs; as they demonstrate increasing ability to organise and take responsibility for their learning, students are moved into a more advanced group. Similarly, students requiring further help with organisational skills may be moved into a group where additional assistance is provided.

Each organisational group has circle meetings in which agenda items, which are contributed by teachers and students, are discussed. Students take on a variety of roles, such as manager, lunch monitor and chairperson for the group.

At the beginning of each year students answer the following questions:
- What do you feel competent/confident about?
- What would you like to learn?

Skills and understandings are therefore tracked. For example, in ICT students identify their ICT skill level and learning goals. Students identify themselves as novice, learner or advanced learner and provide examples of how they have demonstrated their skills. A PowerPoint presentation, which demonstrates how the tracking booklet works, is available on the website.

**How is the learning program structured?**
Explicit teaching of core skills provides the tools for further learning and occurs in the following three areas:
- maths
- language
- ICTs.

In addition, students undertake learning in:
- Personal Learning Plans
- Widening Horizons
- Creative Ideas
- Focus groups.

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Personal learning plans
In addition to, as well as incorporating, the three core skill areas, students undertake their own personal learning. They can choose any topic they want, with no topic being considered inappropriate, although there are times when teachers may have to guide the learning around a topic.

Students complete a 'Planning a new learning unit' booklet. There are two versions of the booklet—one for novice learners and another for learners and advanced learners. Both can be viewed on the website. The booklet is a guide to the process which must be undertaken to ensure success. This includes:

- choosing the topic
- determining what they already know
- developing some questions or issues
- demonstrating new learning will occur
- considering methodology and resources
- planning the final presentation
- setting criteria for success.

Planning meetings
At this point, students must arrange a planning meeting with an adult. The adult acts as a mentor, ensuring the learning has rigour and challenge whilst also determining, in discussion with students, how Outcomes can be matched to their learning.

Similarly, students are aware of the principles of the three stages of learning—gathering, processing and applying. Thus, using an adaptation of Bloom's taxonomy, students indicate which 'storey' they are in and how their journey to the next storey might look and be achieved.

At planning meetings it is the adult's responsibility to ensure depth and breadth of learning, and to provide students with every opportunity to explore their chosen area of learning. Nevertheless, it is the students who must demonstrate that their topic does involve new learning and is not just revisiting old learning. Teachers who discover students are maintaining too narrow a choice will encourage students to explore more widely.

Planning meetings also avoid insularity; they might include other students and discussions may include relevant challenging issues, such as multiculturalism or gender balance. This way debate is kept alive and students have opportunities to examine issues and processes which might impact on their learning, creating still greater learning opportunities.

Students are responsible for setting timelines and deadlines for the completion of the planning unit. Any fixed dates, such as excursions, or visiting speakers, students write in their term planners and timetables.

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**Assessment**
Assessment is undertaken by holding initial evaluation meetings, where students may be assessed by teachers and their peers. They also self assess their work. In some instances, students will present their work to the whole group of students. Final assessment determines the ability grouping of the student for different aspects of the learning unit, with novice being celebrated as much as advanced learner. Assessment will be for demonstration of:
- planning/mind mapping
- challenging and relevant questions
- literacy skills
- numeracy skills
- ICTs
as well as for presentation of the learning unit.

Learning is considered continuous; students are comfortable in demonstrating what they know and are challenged by the goals they have set. Assessment may suggest areas for future study and students can identify gaps in their learning, which they can address by participating in focus groups. Having students self-identify their gaps will ensure greater connection with the learning; students can see the relevance of their learning and are engaged in moving along the continuum of novice to advanced learner.

**Focus groups**
Focus groups offer explicit learning opportunities, such as gaining a better understanding of fractions or writing more colourful fiction characters. Focus meetings are very short—often of only 10 minutes duration—as they are intended to meet immediate and specific needs and involve small groups of only about 6–10 students. Focusing on a specific area, there are usually 2–3 sessions on the selected topic, with one teacher explicitly teaching in an uninterrupted way.

Students may sign themselves into focus groups or they may be identified by teachers. Sign up sheets identify the:
- subject of the focus group, eg how to write a newspaper article
- identified group of learners, eg novice.

Once numbers have been established, the group is given a timetable slot and students are informed of the time and location.

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Because you're in a smaller group, and everybody is there for the same reason as you, you don't get embarrassed. In a large group you could get embarrassed also that you were holding back the whole class. Year 6 student

**Widening Horizons—enrichment**

Further enrichment is added to the program through Widening Horizons, where adults, be they teachers, parents or outside specialists, offer programs and units for which they may have a passion and which are frequently mapped to the SACSA Framework. Students indicate their interest via a sign-on sheet which indicates the topic, the adult or topic leader, the time, place and length of commitment.

Recent Widening Horizons have included art, square dancing, using the video camera and creative cookery.

**Creative Ideas**

Creative Ideas work in a similar fashion to Widening Horizons but are offered by students to other students. Students need to apply to run a creative ideas session by completing:

- a description of the activity
- how many people they are running the activity for
- the resources they will require
- whether adult help is needed
- where they will run the group.

Students can choose any topic on which to base their Creative Ideas, as long as they complete an application which meets the above criteria and have their application approved by a teacher. Recent topics have included:

- computer games
- Monopoly
- still life drawing
- propagating plants.

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Organising the program
Each student completes their personal timetable on a daily basis during circle meetings, which occur first thing each morning. This group time also presents an opportunity for any issues to be raised and for teachers to give notice to students of other discussions groups, such as global issues discussions.

On four days of the week, a set time is allocated to acquiring skills in maths and language, although within this time students have choices about where their focus will lie. Sport and fitness are also at set times, with students signing up for their chosen sport.

Wednesday is set aside almost exclusively for personal learning. There are also set times allocated to silent time, often used for sustained writing.

In addition to maintaining their personal timetables, students also need to book computer and teacher time, as well as write into their timetables any Widening Horizons, focus groups or Creative Ideas groups they are participating in.

At the end of each term, student volunteers in the 'novice' group create a large erasable class timetable for the following term. The timetable is constructed using brown paper covered in laminate. It is maintained by each circle group during the course of the term, and is finalised for the day during circle meetings. The timetable includes items which will occur over the day or the week as they become known, so that students can add these to their personal timetables and know when and where they can access things on offer. The class timetable also allows teachers to know when students are accessing additional activities, such as choir.

Movement notes
Because students are undertaking so much individual study, they may be utilising many areas of the school as their resource. This is managed by using movement notes to gain permission to utilise areas, such as the tech room which may only be utilised in the presence of a teacher, or for working outside.

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Movement notes give ownership of responsibility to students, as students need to know:

- where to get them
- what they allow you to do
- who is allowed to sign them (this varies according to the situation and request).

**Resource notes**

Students must request any resources they require using resource notes which must be signed before they approach an SSO to get the required materials.

**Reporting to parents**

Parents are kept informed through each student's timetable booklet, which includes feedback on their Personal Learning Projects and their learning in maths, literacy and ICTs, together with a reflection page, written by teachers and students. Timetable booklets go home each week and keep parents in touch.

**The way ahead**

Staff would like to see a tracking or progress chart for each student which could travel with them throughout primary and on into high school. The charts would record recognition of learning achievements, so that students could progress on their learning journey rather than repeating learning they have already achieved.