

## BIG PICTURE SCHOOLS: HOW WE WORK, WHAT WE CLAIM, WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

### How we work

Big Picture schools promote highly personalised learning by engaging students in adult world activities, involving parents, and making a variety of connections to the communities in which students live. Big Picture Education promotes intellectual rigour as well as critical and creative thinking.

Big Picture Education was first established in Australia in 2006. There are now a variety of schools, almost 40 in 2014, adopting this design of school change.

We have a great variety of students who actively choose to become part of a Big Picture school. Many were not achieving in their previous schools. Some faced difficulties in their personal and family lives. All want something better.

The design principles underlying the activities of Big Picture schools in Australia include:

- ✓ Small size schools and classes promoting secure, personalised learning environments. The aim is for students to feel safe as members of a learning group - and know that their teacher cares for them.
- ✓ Advisory groups comprising a teacher with up to 17 students as the core learning community that encourages supportive relationships among teachers and peers.
- ✓ Interest-based learning through individualised learning plans and incorporating assessment through exhibition to an audience including teachers, peers and parents. Internships connect students to the world of work and real-world learning.

- ✓ Assessment is authentically linked to what students learn. They develop a portfolio of their work and show what they have learnt in quarterly exhibitions, to which parents are invited. Along with other assessment it is a rigorous evaluation of student learning and development. Teachers also monitor compliance with curriculum requirements.
- ✓ Students pursue their interests and passions through internships in meaningful project work in the community under the direction of a mentor. The Advisory teacher ensures that the internship is integrated with the learning goals of the student and subject-related study. Students become aware that learning has meaning beyond the classroom to the world of work. They increasingly have a growing sense of confidence and self-efficacy in community and work settings.
- ✓ Parental involvement is an integral feature of the Big Picture learning community. Parents are asked to help students develop their learning plans, and to participate in quarterly exhibitions as well as learning plan meetings.



**Most but not all Big Picture schools are public schools. Some are wholly Big Picture schools, others have within-school Big Picture academies - and other schools are exploring the design.**

### What we claim

Previously disengaged students are now participating in rigorous learning programs. They are motivated by learning that is linked to the real world and have high work completion rates.

#### Compared to mainstream students, Big Picture students are likely to have

- ✓ similar or better student outcomes,
- ✓ higher attendance rates,
- ✓ fewer discipline issues and much lower rates of suspension,
- ✓ greater parent participation in the school community.

Students are more likely to stay the distance and leave school with a credential. Former students are overwhelming advocates for Big Picture learning.





For more information go to  
[www.bigpicture.org.au](http://www.bigpicture.org.au)

We are currently rolling out the findings of our review of Big Picture, including its contributing research and information gathered from schools. We welcome your interest.

## What the evidence says

With the help of the Origin Foundation we have undertaken research, gathered data and provided evidence to show that Big Picture Education is making a significant difference to the lives of students.

### Our students are engaged and focused.

- ✓ Teachers report that all students complete a learning plan, supported by Advisory teachers, parents and often by mentors. They learn through their interest projects, in workshops and in regular lessons.
- ✓ Schools report that almost all students regularly complete exhibitions of their learning.
- ✓ Most Big Picture students undertake internships. Schools report increased student motivation as a consequence.
- ✓ Our research shows that students have rediscovered purpose and feel positive about their progress.

### Our schools are very diverse and we measure student achievement in many different ways.

- ✓ Data showing student gains in NAPLAN for Yule Brook College (WA), our oldest school, show that students are improving at better rates than those in similar schools and WA public schools and Australian schools generally.
- ✓ In schools with both mainstream and Big Picture programs – such as Montrose Bay High and Scottsdale High (Tasmania) - the Big Picture students now do as well as, or better than, mainstream students
- ✓ Students in our greenfields sites, such as Launceston City Campus and Cooks Hill Campus are re-engaged in learning at their new school. At the end of 2013 over half of Year 12 at Launceston City Campus achieved their Tasmanian Certificate of Education and most of Year 11 were on track to do the same.

### Information about student attendance tells us about their motivation and engagement.

- ✓ Attendance of Big Picture students in Tasmania is higher than state metropolitan secondary averages.
- ✓ Big Picture students at schools such as Erindale College (ACT) Scottsdale High and Montrose Bay High are better school attenders than those in each school's mainstream.
- ✓ More and more Yule Brook College students are achieving 90% and above attendance. The Big Picture students at Yea HS (Victoria) have reached over 94% attendance.
- ✓ The Big Picture attendance at schools like Hall's Head Community School (WA) and Cooks Hill Campus (NSW) is well up on their attendance in their previous schools or programs.

### Another good measure is student retention and transition. Are these previously switched-off students now staying the distance?

- ✓ The research which included in-depth interviews with students, teachers and parents says yes.
- ✓ In 2011 and 2012 all the Big Picture students at Ogilvie High left Year 10 with a destination for Year 11. All students who wanted to enrol in a VET course were accepted.
- ✓ Montrose Bay High reports that the Grade 10 to 11 retention for the Big Picture students was 90% in 2011 and 92% in 2012.
- ✓ Launceston City Campus reports that Grade 10 to 11 retention is 89%, settling at 82% during the year. A quarter of its school leavers are going into tertiary education.
- ✓ Scottsdale High reports that 100% of the 2012 Year 10 students in its Big Picture classes transitioned to eligible pathways.

### What about student attention and behaviour?

- ✓ All our surveys and research – involving students, teachers, principals and parents – tell the same story: the greater engagement in learning improves student participation and reduces the number of discipline problems and student suspensions.
- ✓ The teachers are able to emphasise student learning and wellbeing. Students can focus on their work.
- ✓ Most interactions with parents are positive: only 14% of parent visits to schools are about problems.

### Everyone benefits from close relations with parents and the community

- ✓ Big Picture schools report that an average of 90% of students have at least one parent/guardian attending their exhibitions, held four times each year. This figure increases to 96-99% in the longer established schools.
- ✓ City Campus reports that at least 60% of parents participated in the development of their child's individual learning plans through 2011 and 2012.
- ✓ Our research shows that parents value the commitment of teachers, the ease of communication, the motivation and achievements of their children and the benefits of good relationships in smaller settings.

They are advocates for Big Picture learning. Unsurprisingly, so are we!