

Too many of our young people switch off school. Many leave as soon as possible. We see them in our communities – and in the sorry statistics about attendance, achievement and retention. The personal, community and national costs are high.

Their failure is our failure. A big part of the solution lies with schools.

More of the same doesn't work. Sometimes we just have to do school differently if we are to fully engage young people in learning and achievement?

IT IS TIME TO RE-IMAGINE SCHOOL

What if my school...?

- ... really provides a different learning experience
- ... provides a smaller, safer and closer learning environment
- ... cares about the fourth 'R': relationships
- ... is a place I feel good about
- ... genuinely knows about me, my interests and talents
- ... lets me learn in real-world settings
- ... helps me achieve and experience success
- ... doesn't put limits around what I can do, what I can be
- ... is a place where students behave because they want to learn
- ... is a place where I'll stay to see it through
- ... really connects to my family and community
- ... effectively sets me up for work, for life and to make a difference
- ... is properly supported to help my teachers help me learn

In the words of one senior education officer...

"if all schools did this, really assess their current situation, really looked at alternatives and what was out there, matched that with what they needed to provide for their kids, and then implement it in a staged and effective way, I think we'd all be doing quite well actually".

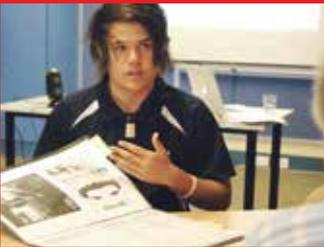
**From 2010 review of
Yule Brook College**

These are more than just dreams. Research consistently points to these as the key breakthrough strategies if we are to reconnect young people to their school and to learning.

Across Australia, Big Picture Education is recreating schools around these strategies. For the first time large numbers of students are discovering learning and experiencing success. Evidence of their success, and that of their Big Picture schools, comes from a three year review supported by the Origin Foundation. This brochure tells some of the story.

There are almost 40 schools in Australia implementing the Big Picture learning design for students in Years 9-12. Most, but not all, are public schools. Some are wholly Big Picture schools; others have within-school Big Picture academies; and some are exploring the design.

How are they delivering those key breakthrough strategies – and is it working? Let's consider them one by one.



... a different learning experience

Big Picture schools are different. A thorough review of Yule Brook College in WA, Australia's longest established Big Picture school, reveals two breakthrough school practices. The school was personalising learning through Individual Learning Plans for each and every student, based on their passions and interests. And it was developing authentic assessment of student work, especially through public exhibitions. In more recent research across Big Picture schools, students report being more involved in learning - and learning how to learn. They were more motivated. This is the Big Picture design at work.

... a smaller, safer and closer learning environment

Our learning groups are called Advisories, each with around 15-17 students, and the same Advisory teacher over Years 9 to 12. We know that limiting the size of schools and classrooms allows more personalised approaches. Our recent research shows that students value the opportunity to develop close and productive relationships with both their teacher and their peers. Parents interviewed for the research believe the smaller and more personalised settings help teachers better understand each child's interests and learning.

... the fourth 'R': relationships

Students choose to enrol in Big Picture schools for reasons ranging from negative prior school experiences (including bullying) to the attractions of more individualised learning. Our students talk about the importance of relationships. Their parents report an ease of communication with teachers and feel reassured by the family-like feel of the school.

Because it's the close bond with the teacher in Big Picture that lets you do that. I never sat down with a teacher in mainstream and talked about [name's] work because there were 30 other people in the class and you can put your hand up and they help you with that task but you don't get much time to actually discuss it they just try to reword the question.

Student, cited in research

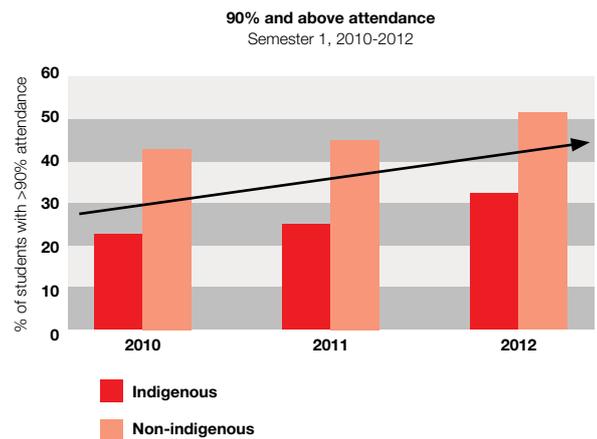
... a place I feel good about

What better way to show this than through attendance? When you think of the troubled background of some of our students even small improvements are significant. The graph on the right shows that students at Yule Brook College in WA want to go to school. Attendance of Big Picture students in Tasmania is higher than state metropolitan secondary averages. Big Picture students at Montrose Bay, for example, are better school attenders than those in the school's mainstream.

Our news schools are actively monitoring changes in attendance. In the first months of 2014, average attendance at Cooks Hill Campus (Newcastle) improved by 7%. It gets better if we look beyond the averages: attendance of individual students at Hall's Head Community College (WA) increased from between 3% and 55%.

School improvement surveys show very positive student, teacher and parent attitudes to the Big Picture school (City Campus) at Launceston. They are more positive about student safety, classroom behaviour, motivation, learning and management. It adds up to a big tick for the Big Picture design.

Yule Brook College, 2012 Attendance: on the up and up



"the highest improvement in the percentage of students in the regular attendance category in secondary schools in the South Metropolitan Education Region."

Regional Executive Director

... the school genuinely knows about me, my interests and talents

Knowledge about each student is at the heart of Big Picture learning. It shapes the pedagogy of the classroom (Advisory) and even the structure of the school, enabling close relationships. The passions of each student become the hooks into personalised learning. Close attention is paid to the essential skills and curriculum requirements needed to get students over the line. As a survey of Big Picture students at Balmain Campus (Sydney Secondary College) reveals, students value individualism and choice in learning. This is what Big Picture offers them.

"... literacy and numeracy embedded in Advisory tasks, individual learning plans, strong levels of trust between teachers, students and families as well as fostering a love of reading and the genuine desire to learn..... operating as a Big Picture school has had a major influence on improving student outcomes in these areas."

Yule Brook College Principal, 2012

... they let me learn in real-world settings

Big Picture learning doesn't just happen in school. Students' interest-based learning is connected to external experiences. They make contact with possible mentors and organise shadow days, and most undertake a workplace internship. Such experiences contribute greater meaning to their school-based learning. Big Picture schools consistently report increased student motivation arising out of this participation in internships.

"... it's real-world learning. I had to set up the phone calls and the meetings to get this [internship]. I had to get myself there every day and things like that. ... It opens you up to so much more.

"It's been amazing – it's been the best thing ever. I've got to learn from people I'd never get to meet."

Student cited in research

... the school helps me achieve and experience success

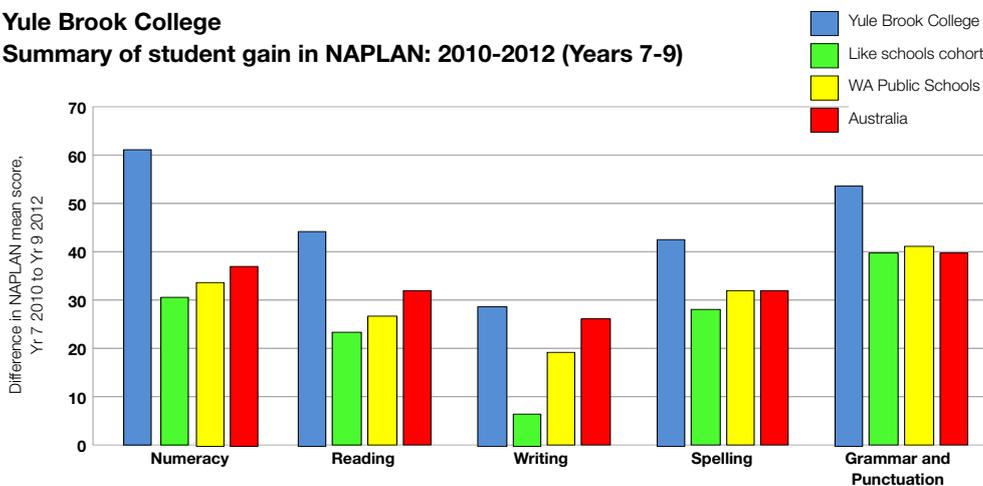
Students generally start Big Picture in Year 9 - but at Yule Brook College they start in Year 8, so their achievements show up in the Year 9 NAPLAN tests. And show up they do – as indicated on the graph below. The school has a low socio-economic status, yet the Years 7 to 9 student gain data (2010 to 2012) shows that the school is well ahead of schools with similar enrolments and, in fact, is ahead of all Australian schools.

Success is, and should be, measured in many ways. Big Picture students at Montrose Bay High perform as well as those in the school's mainstream campus. Scottsdale High reports consistently high results for Big Picture students. 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. In most schools these would be encouraging results – all the more so for these students, given the difficulties they faced in their previous schooling.



Yule Brook College

Summary of student gain in NAPLAN: 2010-2012 (Years 7-9)



... no limits are put around what I can do, what I can be

They may not mean to, but schools often limit what students can achieve. It doesn't have to be that way. The Balmain Campus Big Picture students feel that they are challenged to demonstrate competencies and take risks in their learning. They can explore topics in greater depth and learn at their own pace in a variety of ways. This is not always their experience of mainstream schooling. They may be bright (Balmain Campus is a selective school), but students of any ability level can switch off learning if too many limits are placed around what they can do. Our experience is that students want meaningful and rigorous work. We insist on it.

"From a boy who lacked confidence to a boy who began to lead, we were extremely proud of him and the contribution that the group of teachers at [the school] had on him."

Parent cited in 2010 Yule Brook College review

"... her skills, her researching skills, her ability to tap information, her writing skills and her speaking skills have really developed."

Parent cited in research

... a place where students behave because they want to learn

Imagine a high school where deputy principals don't spend much time on discipline or chasing truants. Big Picture schools rarely even have deputy principals. All our surveys and research – of students, teachers, principals, parents – tell the same story: the greater engagement in learning improves student participation and reduces the number of discipline problems and student suspensions. This releases resources to provide other support for student learning and wellbeing.

"... I know the school is open to me at any time to go in and have a chat if I have any concerns. [the school has] more of a family feel about it, the teachers take the kids under their wing as though they're their own..."

Parent cited in research



With support from:

**Origin
Foundation**

... a place where I'll stay to see it through

Many of our students have previously drifted from school to school. Not any more. At City Campus 89% of Year 10 students go into Year 11 and 71% are still there a year later. There is a 90-92% Year 10-11 retention rate at Montrose Bay Big Picture school. Students want to stay in further learning and work. All the Big Picture students at Ogilvie High School have a learning destination at the end of their final year at the school. All the 2012 Big Picture students at Scottsdale High School took up eligible tertiary opportunities. Our students certainly do see it through.

... really connects to my family and community

Ask any school principal: they rarely see the parents they really need to see – and even then it is when something goes wrong. The parent experience at Big Picture schools is more positive. They are all part of what we call student assessment by exhibition, a presentation to an audience including teachers, peers and parents. Almost all students regularly complete these exhibitions – there is a family member present for 90% of them, a figure which increases in the longer established Big Picture schools. Schools also report that only one parental visit in six is about a problem. Our research shows that parents appreciate the effective communication with families and the community. Even more importantly, our researchers report that parents observe that their children's increasing confidence at school flows onto their home lives, as well as their social and sporting activities.

... sets me up for work for life – and to make a difference

Most City Campus school leavers are earning or learning. A quarter are going into tertiary education. Our research found that the Big Picture focus on interest-based personalised learning, especially when combined with internships, creates meaning beyond the classroom and connects students to the world of work. Our students describe a growing sense of confidence and self-efficacy in work situations. They clearly respond to the better relationships established in smaller school settings; relationships with each other, with teachers, with their families and in the wider community. They emerge better equipped to make a difference to their own lives and to the lives of others.

... is properly supported to help my teachers help me learn

Governments and education authorities are partners with Big Picture Education Australia in delivering the outcomes outlined in this brochure - especially in Western Australia, NSW, the ACT and Tasmania. Big Picture students, teachers and their schools are a growing and supported part of the delivery of public education. They know that, in the medium and long term, this is a better and more cost effective way to do school.

AUTHENTIC WHOLE-SCHOOL INNOVATION, TO RECONNECT THE YOUNG PEOPLE WE HAVE FAILED IN THE PAST, IS HERE TO STAY.

So what ... and so where to?

We have shown that engagement of our young people in learning, in school and beyond, is the key. Nothing much else will happen without this engagement, especially for those most at risk. Sure, schools can push most students through the hoops and many survive even the most turgid teaching and curriculum. But can we call that an education if it comes to an end when they walk away – which they do too early, too often, and at great personal and national cost?

More of the same won't work. Big Picture is different and it delivers. It isn't easy and we have far to go. Our research shows we need to better support our teachers and schools. The schools need to expand their internship and mentoring programs and more consistently implement the Big Picture distinguishers. We need to gather and scrutinise more of the evidence about student achievement.

There are wider lessons. Policy makers, educators and schools should measure, value and celebrate the things that make a real difference, especially student engagement in learning, student wellbeing and sustained achievement.

For more information go to www.bigpicture.org.au We are currently rolling out the findings of our review of Big Picture Education, including its contributing research and information gathered from schools. We welcome your interest.