Swan View Senior High School Advisory Committee

Workshop on 31 March 2016

Introduction

During a workshop on 31 March 2016 the Advisory Committee provided detailed feedback to Commissioner's staff on a draft survey for students in Year 7 through to Year 12 for the Commissioner's School and Learning Consultation.

Committee members also took part in a group discussion about what helps and prevents children and young people from staying in school and enjoying their learning and education. After the group discussion, they provided further feedback on ways the group discussion could be improved or done differently.

The following questions were asked in the group discussion:

Question 1 – Learning

What helps kids learn at school? What makes it hard for students to learn?

Question 2 – Relationships

What are some of the ways (good and bad) that relationships with teachers, other adults and students are important to kids learning and coming to school? How could relationships be improved?

Question 3 – Support

What support do kids need at school to like learning and want to come to school? What makes it hard for kids to get the support they need at school?

Question 4 – Families

Thinking about families – What are the ways they are important for how kids feel about coming to school and learning? Some ways might be helpful and some ways not helpful.

As a result of the Advisory Committee's feedback, changes have been made to the discussion questions for the School and Learning Consultation group discussion activity.

Views on school and learning

The following is an overview of the Advisory Committee's views, provided in response to the questions above. The Advisory Committee provided additional comments to further explain their views when they were given a draft of this summary. The comments have been incorporated.

Learning

The Advisory Committee (the students) felt that 'being engaged' is most important for helping students learn at school. Suggestions were made about both the curriculum – 'More attractive and fun learning subjects' – and the way it is taught – 'Lessons that are entertaining', 'interactive learning', 'more activities', 'wider range of subjects', 'doing fun activities'. Clubs, such as a robotics class, were suggested. 'Lessons that are boring', 'doing things don't want to do', 'paperwork' and 'having homework' make it hard for students to learn.

The students frequently acknowledged the significant role teachers play in engaging them in learning – 'Motivating teachers involving in class work', 'good teachers', 'fun teachers', 'helpful learning environments' and 'teachers that engage students learning'. Some of the students felt there should be more teachers (meaning two teachers in a class).

When teachers don't listen, are strict, bossy or don't teach it makes it hard for students to learn. 'Teacher pressure' was also mentioned.

The students said teachers are important for their role in helping individual students by ensuring 'a learning pace that suits everyone' and 'going around to every student (most of the time)'. They identified 'not understanding teachers' (because of their accent or the course work) as making it hard to learn as is 'having a small time–limit'. 'Supporting programs' were frequently mentioned as helping learning, as were tutors, smaller classes and revision. An example of a supporting program that is needed is a mentoring program for disruptive students. Follow the Dream and Clontarf were identified as important. 'Across the school programs, eg all cultures' were also mentioned (for example, after school tutoring for non-Aboriginal students for all subjects).

Teachers also create a positive learning environment by maintaining classroom discipline and a quiet class – 'Doing something about the misbehaving kid', 'It helps when it is really quiet', 'Discipline students who are in the wrong' – and providing structured lessons and rewards. 'Disrespect' (meaning disrespect in all relationships) was mentioned several times as making it hard to learn.

The physical environment including 'When it is really hot to work in the class' also affected learning. The physical environment could be improved by having cooler

classrooms (summer), warm classrooms (winter) and modern and ergonomic furniture.

Disruptions and distractions (for example, students out of class and banging on windows) were frequently mentioned as making it harder for students to learn – 'PA announcements (upper school withdrawals)'.

Other students were identified as one of the main things that made learning hard, with bullying and disruptions by them being frequently mentioned by the students. 'Kids reducing the time of recess and lunch', 'people who can't do as they are told', 'people gossiping', 'disrespectful students', kids disrupting lesson', 'when the class is really loud', 'misbehaving' and peer pressure were also mentioned. Having class mates that are sensible rather than silly helps learning – 'It doesn't help when kids are silly because other kids can't learn'.

Many students felt that individual student attributes and behaviour also impact on a student's learning. Confidence was felt to affect learning both positively and negatively, 'being engaged' was helpful but 'not understanding things', fatigue' and 'not sleeping at appropriate times' make it hard to learn. Some of the students suggested that when 'everyone [was] miserable' it was harder to learn. Also identified was being hungry or eating the wrong foods – 'Red foods!'.

The students felt that technology (computers and improved internet) is an important tool for students' learning although providing books and other equipment is also important – Learning is hard when there are 'Not enough text books'.

The students suggested there needs to be time or ways to relax – Having 'music in class', 'more break time' and no homework were suggested. Other examples include meditation, yoga classes, gym, pool, a therapy room, garden, chickens and an all-year common room.

The students identified Year 7 students in the school as making it harder to learn as they can be immature and disruptive. Perhaps a Year 7 common room would help?

Some of the students felt parents helped students to learn at school.

Relationships

The students described good relationships at school as involving respect and working together – 'Respectful relationships', 'equal treatment', 'students contributing', 'helping'. It is also important to care for others.

The students said that having good relationships at school means 'you know you can speak to people with no worries', 'you can have a good bond with others' and it helps 'create bonds with staff and students'. The students identified trust as being really important.

Poor relationships mean students 'could skip classes or not come to school', 'won't do work', 'cause fights' or get distracted – 'Bad relationships with teachers make students wag/truant'. Students feel that some teachers need to be calmer and kinder. It was noted that 'some students have bad relationships [in general]'.

The students felt that 'enemies', 'not listening', 'misinterpreted communication', 'teachers /staff talking down to students', 'name calling', 'trust issues' and 'people [who] think they're better than others' all show relationships are poor.

The most important relationships identified by the students were with teachers and other students, however other adults in the school were also mentioned – A good relationship with a teacher/teachers 'can help children be happy to come to their subjects'. 'Having a good relationship with chaplain makes it easier to talk to them'. 'Belonging to a group in the school such as Clontarf can improve attendance'. Students identified the importance of groups or sense of family at school.

Friends are important. Friends 'can help children have fun at school' and are important 'for looking forward to coming to school'. The students identified the importance of 'having a nice group of friends' and 'talking to friend'. They felt having good relationships with peers means students are not always arguing in class. Girlfriends, boyfriends and love are also important however the students felt that displays of affection should not happen in school.

Good relationships were described as 'Teachers who take students advice', 'Doesn't hide things – tells us the whole story', 'Teachers teaching in an enthusiastic manner'. The students felt that it does not help relationships when 'Some teachers are more lenient towards certain students and/or biased due to other programs'. They felt there should be no favouritism, it should be fair.

The students believe that relationships at school can be improved by action by students, teachers and the whole school.

The students placed a big emphasis on what individual students could be doing to improve relationships, making suggestions about changing behaviour – 'Assert yourself in a positive way', 'behave better', 'don't carry it on from one class to another (emotions)'; getting along with people – 'Speak up in group sessions', 'socialise with more people (teachers especially) coming out of your comfort zone', 'answer more questions (putting your hand up to speak)', 'engaging in the class conversations', ' making new friends', 'learn more about the people you know', 'spend more time with loved ones' and improving 'your own school work'.

The students felt that teachers could improve relationships by 'teaching enthusiastic[ly]', 'equal treatment' and 'understand[ing] students learning better'.

The students were keen for all relationships in the school to improve and provided general advice about less fights, bullying and racism; 'being really nice'; having more 'respect' and equal treatment' and being 'more transparent'.

The need for 'more connecting activities', to improve 'how students treat each other' and to develop peer relationships was identified – 'Have team and trust building activities', 'games for senior and junior students so get along', 'programs for all different cultural backgrounds' and art activities to decorate the school.

Specific suggestions for building student – teacher relationships were made – 'Making a teacher and student engage each other by creating a program', 'Student and teacher sport day', 'Student and teacher dress up day', 'More sport games for student vs teachers' and to invite a teacher to Follow the Dream.

Some students said family were an important aspect of relationships at school – 'It's important to help family members when they going to new school.' 'Family issues affecting learning'.

Support

Support from home and family, teachers, other school staff, school programs and friends were all identified as important for students to like learning and want to come to school – 'Support from close friends, family, teachers and chaplain'.

Support to learn is necessary including 'help with school work', 'tutoring', 'study classes' and 'more 1–on–1 support'. It is difficult 'for students who struggle with work and teachers don't explain properly' and when 'teacher[s] don't know what they're teaching'.

Other support that was identified as important by some students was 'help up steps', 'learning games, taking sport' and 'art'.

The students identified the important role of teachers as support – 'When kids get support by teachers', 'Support needed, support from teachers', 'More teachers – student support', 'Teacher can be helpful when you need stuff' – as was the role of school staff such as student services and the chaplain. The students felt that sometimes teachers and school staff contribute to making it hard for students to get the support they need.

The Advisory Committee are involved in a number of special programs at Swan View Senior High School, mainly Follow the Dream (FTD). These programs were frequently mentioned as the type of support students need, which suggests that the programs are held in high regard. As well as Follow the Dream students also identified Clontarf Academy, FLOURISH, ACE (Achieving Curriculum Excellence), the Basketball Program, Specialist Drama (FAME), the Student Representative Council as important support – 'Follow The Dream give support'. 'FTD, ACE, Clontarf, Flourish,

Basketball program are all programs at Swan View that help us'. 'After school programs' (meaning science and maths tutoring) were also mentioned. Scholarships were also identified as important.

Friends were identified as an important support to students and usually meaning 'close friends', although not always – 'Kids in school give you support, when other kids put you down'.

The students felt there were a number of factors that make it hard for students to get support. Firstly being embarrassed or nervous about getting help – 'Shame to talk to the teacher', 'Getting scared'. For some students having the 'motivation to get up and go to school' or 'when you fail at your work' also made it hard.

For some students people's understanding and attitudes affect getting support – 'Not understanding', 'Understanding that students learn at different speeds', 'Better understanding of personal conditions', 'The reluctance to change certain things'.

Other students and teachers having to manage student behaviour also make it hard for students to get support – 'The bad students taking up the learning time', 'Disruptive kids', 'Student services focus more on misbehaviour than students who need help e.g. mental health', 'Unfair punishments'. Bullying was identified as a problem for getting support – 'Bullying by the other students', 'When kids bully you and put you down', 'When friends and teachers put you down'.

The students identified the need for the support that is available to be made known to students – 'Finding out about resources available', 'Not knowing the support groups', 'Support made aware to all students – regardless their culture'.

The students also raised a number of practical barriers to getting support – 'In the middle of class', 'Not fitting in with other programming', 'Big classes (teachers can't get to students to help)', 'Less assistants', 'Too many kids with different needs', 'Money'.

Some students felt that a 'parent/guardian not supporting the child' made it hard to get support at school.

Families

The students identified families as being an important overall influence on how students feel about coming to school and learning.

Families are important for a students' wellbeing, providing food and a 'safe environment' – 'Security (not letting your children go out at night and during the day)' and freedom. Families' providing food was considered particularly important by students both when it was helpful – 'Providing lunch money', 'Good healthy food',

'Healthy diet', 'Lunch' and when it was not – 'Supplying junk food', 'No food/junk food', 'Diet – junk food/not enough nutrients', 'Not enough food – no food for school' A breakfast program is therefore important.

Sleep was also considered important and the students said that families help with 'Sleeping well/going to bed early', 'Good sleeping habits' and making sure there is 'No sleeping in on school day'. Problems with sleep included 'Staying up late', 'Not enough sleep', 'Not getting up in time'. The students felt that families may not be helpful to school and learning because of phones, parties and 'not enough exercise'.

The students identified families as an important source of emotional support. They described kindness, encouragement, understanding and acceptance. They felt families provide an environment of 'no fear' and 'no embarrassment'. They identified that 'when your parents yell at you', 'when you fight with your siblings' and when there are 'put downs' or 'high grumpiness' it is not helpful for how students feel about coming to school and learning.

Some families are not helpful because they are 'not supporting'. 'Some families are not helpful because they don't care' – 'Not getting the support from parents/guardians', 'Neglection', 'Not supporting all kids in family', 'Not have a stable authority figure'.

The students identified family violence as having an impact on how students feel about coming to school and learning – 'Domestic violence', 'Being bullied by siblings and/or parents/guardians', 'Being kicked out of home', Violence between siblings and parents/guardians'. Families where there were problems including drugs, alcohol, mental illness, unemployment and imprisonment were identified by many students as not helpful – 'When your family does drugs and alcohol', 'Having mental health and not getting help for it', 'Parents not having money', 'Parents not having jobs', 'In jail', 'Thieves', 'Teenage pregnancy'.

The importance of families' for parenting was acknowledged – 'Smart parenting', 'Up bringing', 'Independence (push but not shove to be independent)'. Families were also seen as role models and as providing 'good advice'.

The students felt that family 'prepares you' and 'want us to improve with our learning'. They felt that families' direct support for school and learning is important particularly in providing 'motivation' and 'encouraging students to come to school' – 'Parent supporting you to go to school', 'don't go to school late'. Families were not felt to be helpful when they did not care about education, in regard to going to school late, 'wagging school', 'Letting your grades slip' and when students have to 'miss school because of family events'.

Families help students in practical ways like 'getting up for school', 'assisting with homework', 'uniforms', 'equipment', 'support you with money' and 'keeping up with what's on in students' life' – 'Family help you when you need stuff for school'. It was not helpful when they were 'Not buying school equipment for kids'.

Some of the students felt it was not helpful to school and learning 'When you live distance to school' or have 'no transport', others but felt that families help by providing transport.

The students felt that it is helpful when families are involved with their school – 'Going to parent meetings', 'Attendance of parent/guardian', 'Parent/teacher interview', 'Attend parent/teachers events'. It is not helpful when they are 'Not showing up to activities' and 'Not attending school events'.

For some of the students the involvement of families 'in out of school activities' and 'going to get a job' was important support.

Summary

The Advisory Committee's views on school and learning can be summarised as follows:

- It is important that students are engaged in learning and that it is interesting and fun. Teachers have a significant role to play in engaging students in learning. Disruptions and distractions interfere with learning.
- Good relationships at school involve respect and working together and mean you have good bonds with others. Poor relationships with both teachers and other students interfere with their learning and mean students don't want to come to school.
- Support from home and family, teachers, other school staff, school programs and friends were all identified as important. Support from Swan View Senior High School's special programs including Follow the Dream, FLOURISH, Clontarf, Student Representative Council, FAME, Specialised Basketball and Outdoor Education were identified as important.
- Families are important for a students' overall wellbeing, as a source of emotional support and for directly supporting their child's school and learning in many practical ways. Families with problems and who are not supportive are not helpful to students.