



# Focusing on Learners and Learning

The Importance of Knowing Thy Impact



visible  
learning<sup>plus</sup>

St. Bernard's Catholic Primary School • Victoria

# DEMOGRAPHICS

206

Students

40

Nationalities  
Represented

44.2%

Language Other  
Than English

## The Context

St. Bernard's is a co-educational primary school situated in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia in Coburg. The school has provided Catholic education for children from Foundation (five-year olds) to Year six (twelve-year olds) since 1941. The school's current enrolment is 206 students and is a diverse and multicultural community, with forty different nationalities represented and 44.2% of students being from a Language Other Than English background.

## The Approach: What did we do?

St. Bernard's, with its learning motto 'where you are known', identified in 2014 the need to review the impact of learning success across the school community. In 2015, through the support of Catholic Education Melbourne the school took part in a Collaborative Impact Program, which four years later has transformed the school's ability to 'know thy impact' through research, data and a rigour of employing effective

instructional practices to ensure learning success for all students.

After participating in the Visible Learning Foundation Day and Evidence into Action workshop series it became apparent the significance of deliberately gathering evidence to evaluate impact on learning success. Evidence that moved beyond perceptions, to rigorous data supporting the school's journey moving forward.

The two questions that underpinned discussions at this time were:

1. *What do we know about the impact we are having on ALL of our learners?*
2. *To what extent does data and evidence drive practice within the school?*

The Leadership Team used a variety of Visible Learning evaluation tools to gather evidence. These included an online self-assessment matrix, staff Mindframes surveys and other tools as shown in the table below. The school was also fortunate to undertake a School

Visible Learning Strand	What do we want to find out?	What tools/methods will we use?
Visible Learners	What does a good learner look like at St Bernard's?	Video Diary – students and teachers
Know Thy Impact	What progress are students making in Reading and Mathematics?	Standardised assessments to calculate effect size [i.e. Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT)]
Passionate and Inspired Teachers	What does a good teacher look like at St Bernard's?	Focus group of students
Effective Feedback	What type of feedback do teachers at St Bernard's give our students?	Feedback Observation
The Visible Learning School	Do senior staff carry out regular walk throughs and observations?	Visible Learner/Walkthroughs and observations



Capability Assessments where an evaluation visit with the Corwin Team provided further evidence gathering and summaries of findings.

The collection and analysis of initial evidence identified our baseline statements. It was apparent that the students could not describe what or how they learnt and our PAT results were on average below a year's growth, or an effect size of 0.4. Teachers used praise as a means of feedback and the students identified that they were unsure of what to do when they made a mistake. The evidence also identified that learning leaders did not carry out walkthroughs and observations to consistently collect and use data to support decision making.

Through this evidence gathering process we developed two aspirational statements at St. Bernard's:

1. *That all students understand and can articulate the characteristics of an effective learner.*
2. *That all students understand what they are learning, how they are going and where they are going to next.*

Our first step was to develop a common language of learning across the school and to identify our impact on all students.

We undertook further professional development, both internally and in partnership with the Corwin Australia Professional Learning team. We presented the evidence gathered and asked ourselves the question, 'How do we build our knowledge in order to know our impact?' Undertaking Visible Learning was a 'just in time' opportunity for our school community. We had identified the need to investigate our aspirational statements but needed to explore our learning community at a deeper level, which the model of Visible Learning professional development and learning offered.

Over the next eighteen months, we developed the language of learning at St Bernard's through the investigation of what an assessment capable visible learner looked and sounded like. We debated what learning dispositions we aspired our students to have and embedded the use of learning intentions and success criteria to bridge the learning gap and support effective use of the levels of feedback.

“ So humbling to see these students so engaged in their learning, and talking about it - this is VL in action.”  
- Professor John Hattie



## The Impact: Did we make a difference to student learning?

We recall hearing Professor John Hattie saying, 'What if I have gotten it all wrong?' The St. Bernard's school community is evidence that he wasn't wrong. Visible Learning has combined all that we know to enhance every learning opportunity. It has focused our energy on evidence informed and deliberate instructional practices that makes a real difference and we now know our impact on every student's learning success. The opportunity to undertake Visible Learning has been transformational for our students, our staff and school community and our ongoing gathering and analysis of evidence continues to show us that our learners are making progress. We are extremely proud to say that we know our impact on ALL learners.

### ST. BERNARD'S NOW HAS:

- a common language of learning
- students who can clearly articulate their learning goals
- students who identify mistakes as opportunities to deepen their learning
- students who are exceeding expectations in school assessments and ask not only for their personal data, but feedback to support their next learning steps
- staff who believe and know they are accountable for all student's 'effect size' and growth
- staff who can articulate where all students are and where to move them to next

*St. Bernard's lives and breathes 'know thy impact' in every aspect of supporting the learning growth of every student. Most importantly, we use our data as a learning narrative, to work as a collaborative team, providing learning opportunities where all our students are known and succeed.*