



Asia Education Foundation



WHAT WORKS 8

Parents and the
learning of Asian
languages in schools

APRIL 2015



Contents

Summary	2
Introduction	4
Research design	6
Illustration: Illawarra Sports High School, New South Wales	10
Illustration: Tranby College, Western Australia	14
Illustration: Overnewton Anglican Community College, Victoria	18
Illustration: St Andrews Lutheran College, Queensland	20
Illustration: Armidale High School, New South Wales	24
Illustration: St Columba's College, Victoria	26
Illustration: Tenison Woods College, South Australia	30
Illustration: Essendon North Primary School, Victoria	32
Parental engagement and Asian language learning: what works?	34
The research base for <i>What Works 8</i> – a summary	42
References	48

International research into parental engagement in education shows a relationship between positive learning outcomes and parents’ participation in children’s learning. This also applies to language learning. Languages education research shows that parents can influence children’s attitudes and their learning outcomes. Yet, there has been limited research on how schools enable or encourage parents to actively support their children’s language learning. Incorporating a review of academic literature and eight school illustrations, *What Works 8* identifies ‘what works’ and ‘what is possible’ for schools to empower parents to support successful Asian language learning in schools. The focus on parental engagement and language learning supports two priorities from the Australian Government’s *Students First* policy.

Analysis of the eight illustrations has identified five key approaches that can strengthen parental support for the learning of Asian languages in schools:



Figure 1: ‘What works’ to strengthen parental support for children’s learning of Asian languages in schools

Building and sustaining parent and student demand for language learning remains a major challenge for education in Australia. This is evident, for example, in the fact that only 11 per cent of Year 12 students study a language in addition to English for senior certification.

The body of international research on the important role parents can play to support their children’s learning is extensive. The research shows a correlation between positive learning outcomes and parents’ active engagement in their children’s learning.

Building and sustaining parent and student demand for language learning remains a major challenge for education in Australia. This is evident, for example, in the fact that only 11 per cent of Year 12 students study a language in addition to English for senior certification. Languages education policies in most states and territories are currently being reviewed, developed, or implemented in an attempt to strengthen student demand. A focus on the teaching and learning of Asian languages in Australian schools makes sense in the context of Australia’s increasing engagement with the Asia region, politically, economically and culturally.

Research into factors that affect student demand for languages shows that parents have some influence on their children’s attitudes toward languages, even though the extent of the influence is inconclusive (e.g. Curnow, Liddicoat, & Scarino, 2007; Curnow, & Kohler, 2007; Holt, 2006; Hunter, 2013) and appears to vary from case to case.

Parents can actively support their child’s language learning, even in cases where the parents do not speak the target language themselves (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999; Prescott & Orton, 2012). This engagement has several dimensions:

- encouraging their child to study the target language
- communicating positive attitudes about the target language and culture
- actively supporting their child’s learning of the target language.

The focus on parental engagement and language learning combines two key priorities of the Australian Government’s *Students First* policy. With language learning, the Australian Government has committed to reviving the teaching of languages in Australian schools to ensure that at least 40 per cent of Year 12 students are studying a language in addition to English within a decade (Department of Education, 2014).

Nevertheless, there has been limited research on how schools enable or encourage parents to actively support their children to learn a language. *What Works 8* aims to identify ‘what works’ and ‘what is possible’ for schools to strengthen parents’ capacity to support successful Asian language learning in schools.

Many studies on parental engagement, both internationally and in Australia, refer to Epstein’s (1987) model of overlapping spheres of influence. These spheres are family, school and community.



Research questions

- How are schools encouraging and enabling parents to support their children’s learning of Asian languages?
- On what bases are the schools’ approaches built?
- How is a successful approach viewed from a school’s perspective? How is it viewed from a parent perspective?
- What outcomes have been achieved with parents?
- What outcomes have been observed with students?



Analytical framework

What Works 8 utilises the following broad view of parental engagement (Fox & Olsen, 2014, p. 20):

Parental engagement involves partnerships between families and schools to promote children’s learning and well-being. It involves:

- *family-led learning focused on high aspirations for children, shared reading, a positive environment for homework, parent-child conversation, a cognitively stimulating home environment and support for social and emotional well-being; and*
- *family-school partnerships that encourage positive parent-teacher relationships, communication about children’s progress, and engagement in the school community, while equipping parents to effectively support and encourage their children’s learning and well-being.*

Many studies on parental engagement, both internationally and in Australia, refer to Epstein’s (1987) model of overlapping spheres of influence. These spheres are family, school and community. The model suggests that students learn better when the spheres work in unison to support their learning and development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

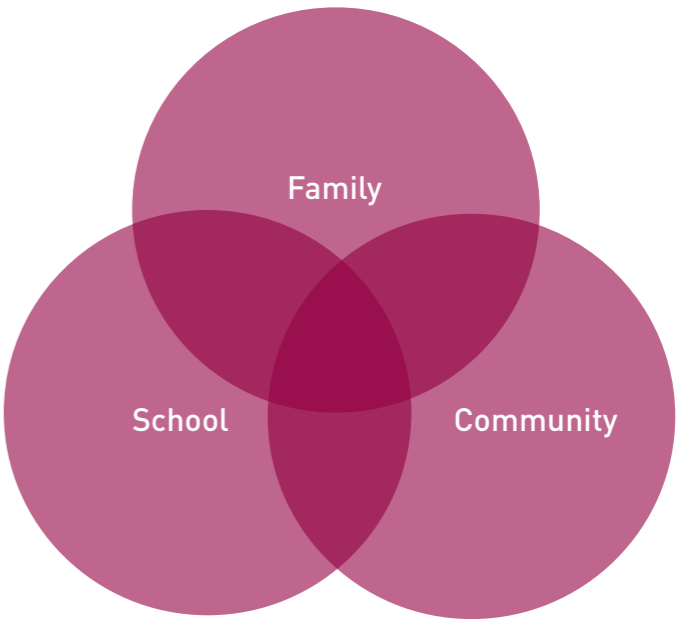


Figure 2: Epstein’s (1987) model of overlapping spheres of influence on a child’s learning

Epstein’s model reinforces the idea that supporting student learning is the shared responsibility of the school, the community and families (Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010). Epstein et al. (2002) further developed this model into a six-fold typology (Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012; Emerson et al., 2012). *What Works 8* uses this typology to inform its analytical framework.

1. Assist parents in child-rearing skills

Assist families with parenting skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students, at each age and grade level.

2. School-parent communication

Communicate with families about school programmes and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

3. Involve parents in school volunteering opportunities

Improve recruitment, staff training and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school, or in other locations, to support students and school programmes.

- 4. **Involve parents in home-based learning**
Enable parents to engage with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.
- 5. **Involve parents in school decision making**
Include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy, such as through school councils, committees and parent organisations.
- 6. **Involve parents in school-community collaborations**
Coordinate resources and services for families, students and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups within the community.

This typology provides a useful frame of reference for this research. What is unclear, however, are the cultural assumptions underpinning this particular view of parental engagement, which may not sufficiently take into account parents’ diverse backgrounds and perspectives (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Daniel, 2011). Hence, *What Works 8* is also interested in parents’ perspectives of parental engagement activities around the learning of Asian languages.

> **Methodology**

What Works 8 applies a qualitative methodology to identify and examine ways in which Australian schools encourage and enable parents to support their child’s learning of an Asian language. It uses a multi-perspective approach to explore the experiences and perceptions of school leaders, language teachers and parents. Participating school communities were identified through AEF networks and demonstrate a spread of jurisdiction, school sector and type, and geo-location.

With respect to school leader and language teacher perspectives, the research sought to examine ‘what works’ to encourage and enable parents to support their child’s Asian language learning. As to parents’ perspectives, the research was interested in their perceptions of what schools are doing in the area of parental engagement and the learning of Asian languages.

The multi-perspective approach used in *What Works 8* is illustrated in Figure 3, which enables the development of a well-rounded evidence-base for what works.



Figure 3: Multi-perspective approach used

> **Illustrations**

1. Illawarra Sports High School, New South Wales (Government, Metropolitan)
2. Tranby College, Western Australia (Independent, Metropolitan)
3. Overnewton Anglican Community College, Victoria (Independent, Metropolitan)
4. St Andrews Lutheran College, Queensland (Independent, Metropolitan)
5. Armidale High School, New South Wales (Government, Provincial)
6. St Columba’s College, Victoria (Catholic, Metropolitan)
7. Tenison Woods College, South Australia (Catholic, Provincial)
8. Essendon North Primary School, Victoria (Government, Metropolitan)

The school's website highlights the benefits of learning a language, such as global mindedness, intercultural understanding and cognitive advantage.

> The school and its language programme

Illawarra Sports High School is a co-ed government school in the provincial city of Wollongong and has a below average ICSEA ([Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage](#)) value. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the local population is culturally diverse with a relatively large Aboriginal community as well as Macedonian, Italian and Portuguese communities. Many families speak a language other than English at home.

The school teaches Indonesian language, which is mandatory in Year 8. It has an [Australia-Asia BRIDGE school partnership](#) with a school in Surakarta, Indonesia, and was part of the [Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools \(BALGS\)](#) project. BALGS supported the development of its Indonesian programme.

> What works and how?

Illawarra Sports has made the promotion of parental engagement a key strategic priority for 2015-2017, with the aim of enhancing student engagement and attainment. There is particular focus on strengthening school-parent communication, to ensure parents feel welcome at the school and are regularly informed about school activities. The school has recently employed a Community Liaison Officer to assist in implementing strategies to improve parent and community participation in learning.

These strategies include, for example, more frequent use of SMS to advertise events of relevance to parents (e.g. information sessions and parenting workshops) and increasing the distribution frequency of the school newsletter to three times a term. These efforts have borne fruit. An increasing number of parents are attending in-school meetings, such as parent-teacher interviews. Further, the number of parents who consider school-parent communication as being effective has increased by 44 per cent between 2012 and 2013. Ninety-two per cent of parents have indicated they are now happy with how the school communicates with them.

Illawarra Sports has undertaken a series of initiatives aimed at promoting the Indonesian language programme among students, parents and the whole-school community. Some of these initiatives are aimed at keeping parents informed about the programme and encouraging them to learn more about Indonesian culture and language.

The school's website highlights the benefits of learning a language, such as global mindedness, intercultural understanding and cognitive advantage. The website also explains the reasons and approach behind the school's Indonesian programme, emphasising the relevance to Australian students of learning Indonesian. More specifically, apps that

'Parents have reported that they have enjoyed using Indonesian Flashcard Apps to work together with their children to help them consolidate Indonesian language learning in the classroom.'

make Indonesian language learning more appealing to students are also suggested on the website. This is partially in response to parents' desire to help their children learn Indonesian and/or to learn the language themselves.

According to Jennifer Jurman Hilton, Indonesian language teacher at Illawarra Sports, the apps are well received by parents. '*Parents have reported that they have enjoyed using Indonesian Flashcard Apps to work together with their children to help them consolidate Indonesian language learning in the classroom,*' she explains.

One parent has described her involvement in her child's homework through use of the apps:

The Indonesian language apps are fun and easy to use. I help [my child] review Indonesian vocabulary and phrases. We listen to each word pronounced by a native speaker and we have the ability to record our own voice to compare our pronunciation with that of the native speaker. The apps also include listening and writing tests that give me the opportunity to help [her] prepare for Indonesian class assessments and tests.

The school's fortnightly e-zine, *Bamboopalooza News*, contains regular updates on the Indonesian programme, useful language learning apps and student work. According to Jennifer, this initiative has received very positive feedback from parents. Parents have reported that material contained in the e-zine enables them to talk regularly and openly to their children about the learning that occurs in the Indonesian classroom and the value of learning Indonesian.

'*Bamboopalooza News is a colourful and informative e-zine with photographs and articles about Indonesian language learning. I like to talk and ask about digital learning in the Indonesian classroom with my daughter,*' remarks one parent.

The use of Edmodo, an online password-protected platform, is another way parents are kept updated about teaching and learning in the Indonesian programme. New information, activities and tasks are added to the platform on a daily basis. This helps students keep up with the learning, and parents have appreciated the opportunity to access tasks and resources. According to Jennifer, Edmodo has encouraged parents to help their children develop strong work habits, positive attitudes towards Indonesian and a love of learning. She believes the enhanced student and parent engagement with Indonesian language and culture at the school is partly a result of the popularity of *Bamboopalooza News* and Edmodo.

Other initiatives at Illawarra Sports are aimed at expanding parents' awareness and knowledge about Indonesian language and culture. For example, Jennifer invited parents to discuss the importance of intercultural and intra-cultural communication during an excursion to

Due to the success of the demonstration lessons, after-school Indonesian lessons will be offered for parents starting in Term 2, 2015.

an Indonesian restaurant. This was intended to give parents a taste of the intercultural language learning approach—language and culture taught together—used at the school.

In addition, parents have been invited to attend a once-a-semester morning session where the selected works of students are showcased. This showcase is part of a broader school event involving other learning areas. Moreover, parents are encouraged to get involved in the school’s kitchen garden, which reflects a fusion of Indonesian and Indigenous Australian culinary traditions. The garden’s opening day was attended by parents, Indigenous Australian Elders, the media, staff and students.

Another initiative aimed at fostering parents’ interest in Indonesian language and culture is the free demonstration lesson held during school open nights. Parents who participate in the lessons are generally positive about their experiences. For example, one parent commented, *‘I love the Indonesian classroom. It is very relaxing. I now can understand why [my child] loves learning Indonesian. He has finally found a subject he really enjoys and is good at and can sink his teeth into.’*

Due to the success of the demonstration lessons, after-school Indonesian lessons will be offered for parents starting in Term 2, 2015. Parents have responded positively to the invitation to attend another free Indonesian and mindfulness lesson to be held at a Buddhist temple near the school in early 2015.

According to Jennifer, *‘parental engagement represents an important piece of the puzzle when analysing language enrolment and performance.’* She points to the ever-expanding Indonesian language programme and Asia focus at Illawarra Sports. Only four years ago, no Asian language was taught at the school. Today, it is mandatory for all students in Year 8, including those in the school’s Autism Unit.

In 2013, Asia learning and perspectives were incorporated across all key learning areas. In 2014/15, a Year 9/10 Elective, called ‘Culture Shock’, was offered for the first time to students who wish to further deepen their understanding of Asia. Jennifer credits the introduction of this elective to parental engagement in Indonesian language learning. She adds that these initiatives send *‘a loud and clear message to students about the value and importance of learning an Asian language’*. Parents at the school are now more informed about the benefits of learning Indonesian, and their engagement has played a role in encouraging students to excel in their study of the language.

> Why it works

Specifying parental engagement as a school priority and including it as part of the school’s strategic plan is an important step towards its

Only four years ago, no Asian language was taught at the school. Today, it is mandatory for all students in Year 8, including those in the school’s Autism Unit.

successful implementation (Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Kim, 2009). The appointment of a Community Liaison Officer at Illawarra Sports further underscores the school leadership’s commitment to making parental engagement more than a mere add-on (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Kim, 2009). Such commitment sends a message to parents that their contribution as co-educators is needed and desirable (Emerson et al., 2012).

Sharing information with parents about the Indonesian language programme, the benefits of (Indonesian) language learning, useful apps and online learning tools for students, and student achievements within the programme fosters positive parental attitudes towards the target language and culture. This helps parents to engage in regular conversations with their children about language learning, which are known to have a positive effect on student achievements (Emerson et al., 2012; Houtenville & Conway, 2008). Information sharing also enables parents to feel more equipped to support their children’s language learning at home (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

Strengthening parents’ awareness and knowledge about the target culture and language—through various in-school and out-of-school events—helps strengthen positive parental attitudes towards their children’s language learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999). This provides additional opportunities for parents to talk to their children about language learning (Houtenville & Conway, 2008).

> The school and its language programme

Tranby College is an independent, co-ed K-12 school, with an above average ICSEA value. It is located in Baldivis, a Perth suburb with a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population, including many residents born in England, New Zealand, South Africa and Scotland. According to the ABS, the vast majority of families (over 90 per cent) speak only English at home.

Tranby offers an Indonesian language programme from primary to senior secondary. It is mandatory in Years 1-8. From 2015 onwards, the College will additionally offer Mandarin or French, depending on demand, and these changes are linked to the implementation of the new International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum framework. Tranby has an [Australia-Asia BRIDGE school partnership](#) with a school in Surabaya, Indonesia.

> What works and how?

Community engagement is a key domain in Tranby's 2014-2018 Strategic Plan, and the College describes itself as a 'welcoming outward looking, family-oriented school that fosters positive and enduring relationships within and beyond the Tranby community'. The recognition of parents' important role in all stages of student learning is expressed in a variety of ways and features prominently on the College website.

The College's online portal, *Coneqt*, allows parents of middle and senior school students to access Tranby's learning management system and stay connected to their child's learning. The portal enables access to academic results, lesson outlines, online lessons, school notices and other school documents. The purpose behind *Coneqt* is to equip parents with the necessary tools to show interest and engage in their child's learning.

According to Tranby's Principal, Matthew Ivulich, *Coneqt* has enhanced collaboration between the school and the home, enabling the achievement of more creative and higher-quality learning outcomes. Vicki Richardson, Dean of Teaching and Learning for Languages at Tranby, states that '*the majority of parents are very supportive of Coneqt*', and many parents consider it particularly helpful with respect to their children's homework. One parent at Tranby has commented:

Coneqt is mainly utilised to message teachers as required and view the students' timetables, forthcoming homework and grades received. It opens the communication a bit better between students and parents, as we can see what they have coming up even if they neglect to tell us.

According to Jenai Lee, Indonesian and Mandarin teacher at Tranby's Middle School, parents appreciate receiving feedback regarding their

As of February 2015, over 150 Tranby families have hosted SMAN5 students for two weeks since the inception of the programme. 'Having this amazing opportunity has given me and my daughter a wider understanding of Indonesian culture', said one parent who has hosted an Indonesian exchange student for three consecutive years.

children's progress on *Coneqt*. The feedback enables them to '*support their children to improve their learning, regardless of whether they have background knowledge [in the language] or not*'. *Coneqt* is also used as an information-sharing platform to inform parents about various Asia-related cultural activities they can partake in with their children.

Vicki mentions a number of specific parental engagement initiatives—at Junior, Middle and Senior levels—focused on Indonesian language and culture. At Junior School level, parents are invited to attend the annual Indonesian Market Day, and various other Indonesia-related incursions, together with their children. The Market Day is now in its eighth year and is held as part of 'Indonesia Week' at the Junior School. Indonesia Week typically coincides with the visit of Indonesian exchange students from Tranby's BRIDGE partner school (SMAN5 in Surabaya, East Java) and offers a range of special Indonesia-related events.

Brooke Thompson, Junior School Indonesian teacher at Tranby, has observed parents getting more and more involved in the Market Day. '*Each year has seen parental involvement increase to the point where parents are now very active participants and an essential part of making the markets run successfully*', she commented.

In September 2015, parents will, for the first time, accompany their children on the College's Bali Cultural Immersion Tour. The trip is intended to build Asia awareness among parents and students. The Junior School is currently planning this five-day tour for 35 students, who will each travel to Bali with one of their parents. Parents have responded positively to this new opportunity, which shows the value they place on the Indonesian language programme.

At the Senior School level, Vicki draws attention to how parents' involvement in the annual exchange with SMAN5 in Surabaya has been successful in fostering parental awareness of Indonesia. As of February 2015, over 150 Tranby families have hosted SMAN5 students for two weeks since the inception of the programme. Parents who host the Indonesian students are actively involved in planning for the visits. '*Having this amazing opportunity has given me and my daughter a wider understanding of Indonesian culture*', said one parent who has hosted an Indonesian exchange student for three consecutive years.

The exchange visits have also increased the school community's awareness about Islam and Muslims. As Vicki explains, '*The parents and students ensure they have the cultural knowledge to live with Muslims and adapt their lifestyles to ensure their host child feels comfortable in the Australian community.*'

The Indonesian programme at Tranby has been highly successful, partly due to the parental engagement initiatives described previously.

Year 9 students at Tranby have the option of studying Indonesian for one semester only, but many parents have lobbied for their children to be able to study Indonesian for the entire year. Eighty-five per cent of Year 9 language students have opted for whole-year study of Indonesian.

In 2015, there is a proportionately larger cohort of senior students studying Indonesian compared to previous years, and all Years 11 and 12 language students have expressed a desire to continue their language studies at university level.

The Year 9 Indonesian cohort is also growing. Year 9 students at Tranby have the option of studying Indonesian for one semester only, but many parents have lobbied for their children to be able to study Indonesian for the entire year. This lobbying has been successful, and language classes are now conducted over both semesters at Year 9. Eighty-five per cent of Year 9 language students have opted for whole-year study of Indonesian.

> Why it works

Formalised leadership commitment to strengthening parental engagement in student learning is a major success factor for building successful family-school partnerships (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Kim, 2009; Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). One way to formalise such commitment is to incorporate it into school policy documents, as demonstrated at Tranby.

Online platforms, such as *Coneqt*, enable parents to stay in the loop of their children’s learning and progress and support them in their language studies. When parents are well informed about learning, there is a greater chance of them engaging in learning conversations with their children. Such casual conversations have a positive impact on student achievement (Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

The extra-curricular and out-of-school activities focused on Indonesian help build parents’ interest in the target language and culture. This provides an opportunity for them to communicate positive views about the value of learning the language to their children (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly 1999). Though voluntary, these activities also enable parents to play a more active role in supporting their child’s language learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly 1999), which is a key element to making a successful second language learner (Prescott & Orton, 2012).

The College sees parental engagement as one of its defining characteristics, and each school within the College has its own Parent Support Team.

> The school and its language programmes

Overnewton Anglican Community College is a P-12 independent co-ed school operating on two campuses in Melbourne's northwest, in Taylors Lakes and Keilor. The College has an above-average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, Taylors Lakes is a culturally and linguistically diverse suburb with a large proportion of first-generation immigrants. Keilor also has a large overseas-born population; many residents are of Italian ancestry and the proportion of people from an Anglo-Saxon background is below the national average.

Overnewton is aiming to become a 'lighthouse school for languages' and emphasises the need to prepare students for the Asian century. It offers Indonesian from Year 3 and German from Year 5. In 2014, it successfully introduced Chinese at Prep. The College's rationale for introducing Chinese language learning at an early stage is based on research into successful language acquisition, which promotes the earliest possible start.

> What works and how?

Overnewton is committed to fostering partnerships with parents to encourage and enable their active engagement in their child's education. The College sees parental engagement as one of its defining characteristics, and each school within the College has its own Parent Support Team. The College regularly draws attention to this commitment, for example, in its official documents.

One way this commitment is implemented is through information sharing—such as in the College newsletter, *Whispers*, and during parent education evenings—on how parents can support their children's learning and wellbeing. The following two activities are examples of parental engagement with respect to the newly-introduced Chinese language programme.

First, parents were involved in the preparation of resource material for the programme. This activity was part of the College's Family Contribution Scheme, which requires parents to commit at least 18 hours per term to an activity related to the school community. In December 2013, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) team at Overnewton emailed 45 parents of Chinese background to inform them about the establishment of the 2014 CLIL programme. Since then, eight parents from this group 'work once a week to help make Chinese labels and posters, organise teaching materials and reading texts, and make simple PowerPoint presentations and iBooks', as clarified by Janet Gangell, the Acting Head of Curriculum at Overnewton.

Second, the school developed an online Wikispace platform to facilitate joint parent-student learning of Chinese. All parents are given a

Janet has recorded positive feedback about the platform from parents. This shows that they are using the Wikispace with their children and are finding its content useful. Some parents have remarked that younger children insist on singing along to the videos before going to bed.

password to access the platform. The aim is for parents to support their children's language learning, using materials created by Chinese language teachers at the College. The teachers also upload audio and video material, such as songs, so that parents can help their children read and sing in Chinese at home.

Janet has recorded positive feedback about the platform from parents. This shows that they are using the Wikispace with their children and are finding its content useful. Some parents have remarked that younger children insist on singing along to the videos before going to bed. One parent stated that her son now loves doing his Chinese homework on the iPad and sharing what he has learnt with his family. Another parent of Chinese background said '*we access the online resources every day, and I encourage [my son] to speak more, read more and listen to more Chinese.*'

Parents are also able to access help avatars on the Wikispace, to gain a better understanding of more complex linguistic points and explain these to their children.

> Why it works

High-level commitment to engaging parents in their children's learning—captured in official statements and/or policies—are important to the success of school parental engagement strategies (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Overnewton is committed to fostering a school culture that both appreciates and calls for parents' active engagement, which helps strengthen parents' self-perception as active educators of their children alongside the school (Emerson et al., 2012). The two parental engagement activities with respect to Chinese language can be classified as active approaches that seek to build parents' capacity to encourage, support and monitor their children's learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

The school holds an annual Student-Led Conference (SLC), where all students share with their parents for 40 minutes the work from their Learning Portfolios. This sharing includes work completed as part of the Japanese programme.

> The school and its language programmes

St Andrews Lutheran College is a P-12, independent, co-ed College located in the Tallebudgera Valley at the southern end of the Gold Coast. The College has an above-average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, the vast majority of residents (89 per cent) speak only English at home. Most residents are either Australia-born or migrants from English-speaking countries like England or New Zealand.

The College’s Junior School (Prep-6) is an authorised International Baccalaureate (IB) World School. The College runs a mandatory Japanese language programme, and students study Japanese from Prep through to Year 6. After Year 6, they choose either to continue with Japanese or to begin learning German until the end of Year 9. In 2015, students in the Early Learning Centre have also begun learning Japanese once a week.

The College emphasises the intercultural and educational benefits of learning a second language, including improved brain functionality, greater appreciation of other cultures and better English literacy skills.

> What works and how?

St Andrews seeks to work in partnership with the students’ homes and emphasises the importance of collaborative effort by students, staff and parents to enable successful learning. The College references education research on parental engagement in explaining its approach to working with parents. Particular emphasis is placed on the junior years, where the learning of Japanese is mandatory for students. The Junior School handbook highlights how parents are the primary educators of children and that school-aged children thrive when parents are actively engaged in their learning.

Sharon Taki, the Junior School Japanese Coordinator, cited two activities aimed at enabling and encouraging parents to support their child’s learning of Japanese. First, the school holds an annual Student-Led Conference (SLC), where all students share with their parents for 40 minutes the work from their Learning Portfolios. This sharing includes work completed as part of the Japanese programme. Students take their parents on classroom tours to discuss classroom displays and their key learnings. Sharon elaborates:

This is an opportunity for parents to visit the Japanese classroom and to see what learning is occurring. Students share with their parents their current Japanese unit and what knowledge they have gained. It provides the student with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

During the SLC, students are allowed to use their mother tongue to present their learnings to their parents. This approach not only facilitates parent-child communication about learning, but also responds to the cultural and linguistic diversity within the College.

The School Performance Report for 2013 mentions that the use of Moodle has reinforced the school-home nexus. It also provides another way for parents to assist their child’s language learning.

Almost all parents (98 per cent) attend the SLCs each year. According to Sharon, gaining first-hand insights into their children’s Japanese learning enables parents to develop positive views about learning a language. She describes, *‘We see this as a cycle. Parents show interest in their child’s learning, and the child is then even more eager to gain more knowledge.’*

The College has conducted a small survey to learn more about parents’ views on the value of the SLCs. Overall, parents were very positive about the SLCs, and see these as useful for:

- developing insights into what their child is learning in Japanese, which encourages them to support language learning at home
- finding out how to better support their child’s language learning
- gaining a better idea of how their child is traveling in learning Japanese.

The following statements from two parents further illustrate the success of the SLCs with respect to the Japanese language programme.

[The SLC] *allowed me to see what was being learnt and provided additional information to [enable me to] further interact [with my children] and base discussions about what they were learning in Japanese.*

I think supporting the learning of a language and being interested in their class work helps keep them motivated.

The second parental engagement initiative is linked to the school’s Moodle (intranet) site. The School Performance Report for 2013 mentions that the use of Moodle has reinforced the school-home nexus. It also provides another way for parents to assist their child’s language learning. Each term the College sends a letter to parents—at each year level—outlining what students will learn in Japanese, including the unit of inquiry, sentence patterns and vocabulary. This material is made available, with corresponding voice recordings, on Moodle. This initiative enables parents to learn basic Japanese together with their children and monitor their learning.

> Why it works

Endorsement and promotion by school leadership of the active role that parents can play in their children’s learning is a key factor for successful parental engagement (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Including such commitment into a school’s official mission and profile is an important first step. This signals to teachers that parents’ active engagement should be encouraged and appreciated, and it sends a message to parents that their active contribution to their child’s learning is needed and wanted (Emerson et al., 2012).

Student-led events tend to attract many more parents to a school than open-door policies that might cause some groups of parents to refrain from visiting (Daniel, 2011).

The SLCs at St Andrews have been successful in fostering communication between teachers, parents and students. Parents subsequently have a better idea of their child’s learning and can find more relevant ways to strengthen their child’s motivation for learning and academic performance (Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002; Prescott & Orton, 2012). Student-led events tend to attract many more parents to a school than open-door policies that might cause some groups of parents to refrain from visiting (Daniel, 2011). The fact that students have the option of presenting their learning portfolio in their native language shows how the SLCs at St Andrews seek to cater for a culturally and/or linguistically diverse parenthood (Kim, 2009).

With respect to the Japanese programme, the College’s Moodle site has helped improve school-home communication. Parents are better equipped to support their children’s language learning at home and monitor their progress. Such active engagement is beneficial to students’ language learning success (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

Armidale has a longstanding partnership with a high school in Nanto City (Toyama), Japan. A number of Japanese students—14 students and four supervisors in 2014—visit Armidale each year and stay with host families.

> The school and its language programmes

Armidale High School is a co-ed government school in the small town of Armidale located in the Northern Tablelands. The school has an average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, the local population is predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Australian-born. A high proportion of families speak only English at home.

The school offers three languages: French, German and Japanese. After a 'taster' experience with all three languages in Year 7, every student completes a 100-hour language programme in either German or Japanese in Year 8. This learning can be extended into Years 9 and 10 and, subsequently, as part of Continuers' courses in Years 11 and 12. Senior secondary students also have the option of commencing study in one of the three languages at Beginner's level.

> What works and how?

Armidale has reinforced its commitment to parental engagement by employing a Parent and Community Liaison Officer. The school's website emphasises the importance of parental engagement to student learning and refers to the research on this topic.

Parental engagement activities at Armidale fall mainly into two categories. First, the school shares information with parents—mainly through its website and fortnightly newsletters—related to teaching and learning and how they can support their children's learning. Second, the school seeks to raise parental awareness of Japanese language and culture in the context of the school's partnership with a school in Japan.

Deborah Moore, Japanese language teacher at Armidale, highlighted an information-sharing activity specific to Japanese, stating, '*At the beginning of each year I send out letters to parents informing them of what we are learning as well as a list of apps and websites their child will be using on our class set of iPads.*' She explains that this sharing activity is an attempt to increase the profile of Japanese at the school.

Armidale has a longstanding partnership with a high school in Nanto City (Toyama), Japan. A number of Japanese students—14 students and four supervisors in 2014—visit Armidale each year and stay with host families. The students spend their week attending classes at the school, demonstrating Japanese cooking, talking about Japanese culture to students and staff, performing Japanese dance and songs, and going on excursion. Deborah draws attention to components of this exchange programme that involve parents, such as pre-visit information sessions about Japanese language and culture and a 'Sayonara' party where they learn about Japan from the Japanese students.

Biannually, a number of Armidale students visit the partner school for a similar cultural exchange programme. In 2014, 17 students visited Japan. Parents are involved in preparing for the trip, learning about Japan and

While in Japan, Deborah was blogging live to keep parents informed about the trip, and she also set up a Facebook page, to share photos, updates and intercultural learnings with parents.

their children's homestay experiences in detail. While in Japan, Deborah was blogging live to keep parents informed about the trip, and she also set up a Facebook page, to share photos, updates and intercultural learnings with parents. These exchange-related activities have led to greater awareness about Japan in the school community.

> Why it works

Informing parents about teaching and learning within the language programme as well as useful resources, such as apps and websites, enables and encourages parents to actively support their children's language learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999). At Armidale, these activities also appear to have helped build parent demand for Japanese language at school.

Inviting parents to attend cultural events or information sessions on the target language and culture can help promote greater cultural understanding and foster positive parental attitudes towards their child's language learning. For Armidale, the existence of a longstanding exchange programme with a school in Japan, which includes an immersive homestay component, enhances opportunities for intercultural learning and building demand for language learning among parents. This encourages parents to communicate positive attitudes about learning Japanese to their children, which is an important dimension of parental engagement (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

The Language Evening is held strategically at Year 7 in order to inspire students to study a language and to continue doing so.

> The school and its language programmes

St Columba’s College is a 7-12 Catholic girls’ school in Melbourne’s northwest (Essendon) with an above-average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, a large proportion of the local residents are Catholics and Australian born. A relatively large group of residents—in contrast to the Australian average—are of Italian ancestry and speak Italian at home. St Columba’s offers three languages—French, Italian and Japanese—across all year levels. Each student has to study at least one language until the end of Year 9. The College’s website highlights its authentic approach to learning a language, claiming that ‘language learning comes alive ... through the use of learning technologies and materials acquired from the country whose language is being taught.’ Language units often focus on themes students are interested in, such as fashion, food or shopping. St Columba’s has partner schools in Italy (Istituto Mazzotti in Treviso) and Japan (Shin-Ai Girls’ High School in Kumamoto) and runs annual study tours to Italy, France and Japan (one per year on a rotating cycle). Students on the Japan study tour are hosted by fellow students from Shin-Ai, and every year, in March, Japanese students come to St Columba’s and stay with host families from the school community. The College actively promotes the value of learning languages in addition to English as a vehicle for personal growth and transformation and supporting social justice. Its website underscores the value of language learning—such as its potential intercultural, educational and career-related benefits—and does so by referring to the Australian Curriculum. St Columba’s website also highlights the particular advantages of studying Italian, French and Japanese. For Japanese, the school lists a range of economic and cultural reasons. These include the economic and cultural ties between Australia and Japan, tourism, popular culture and the opportunities for students to engage with Japanese people in Melbourne (e.g. Box Hill Japanese Festival and the Melbourne Japanese Summer Festival).

> What works and how?

School leaders at St Columba’s emphasise the school’s commitment to working closely with the school community to support student learning. This commitment is mentioned explicitly in the College Mission Statement on learning. Nathan Lane, Languages Domain Leader at St Columba’s, cites two major initiatives held regularly at the College to engage parents in their daughters’ language learning. Both initiatives seek to raise the profile of language learning at the College among parents and students, and encourage students to continue language study past Year 9.

The dinner brings together Year 9 students, parents and teachers with St Columba’s languages alumni who have continued their language study to university level and/or utilise their language abilities in their professional life.

The first initiative is the Year 7 Language Evening for parents, who get to experience a taste of how their daughters typically study a language at the College. For Japanese, the evening starts informally with Japanese snacks, after which parents participate in a small workshop that introduces them to some of the language taught in Year 7. Parents are also provided with material—developed by the College in response to parents’ requests—on how to support their daughters’ language learning. Nathan sees this initiative as a great way to start engaging parents with the Japanese programme, especially as many parents may be unfamiliar with contemporary languages pedagogy. The Language Evening is held strategically at Year 7 in order to inspire students to study a language and to continue doing so. According to Nathan, this event has received positive feedback from parents over the years. For example, one parent commented, ‘*The mini lesson for parents was wonderful. I went home with strategies on how to help my daughter, and also [a better understanding of] the complexity of the language. My daughter and I continued to discuss Japanese at home.*’ The second initiative is the annual Language and Career Dinner, which seeks to promote the value of language learning to both parents and students, and encourages more students to continue their language study beyond Year 9. The dinner brings together Year 9 students, parents and teachers with St Columba’s languages alumni who have continued their language study to university level and/or utilise their language abilities in their professional life. Alumni share their language learning experiences with dinner guests and illustrate the benefits of language learning. The dinner takes place once a year around the time when Year 9 students are selecting their electives for Year 10. School leaders at St Columba’s affirm how these dinners have placed a spotlight on language learning, providing opportunities for parents and students to hear from people other than teachers about the value of learning a language. In their effort to help improve parent-student communications, Nathan and his colleagues hope the dinners provide ‘*a springboard for conversations at home regarding the importance of learning languages and continuing with language study past the compulsory years.*’ Importantly, the college is still able to offer senior classes (Years 11-12) for all of its language programmes.

> Why it works

In both its formal policies and practice, St Columba’s has committed to engaging the whole-school community, especially parents, to achieve positive learning outcomes with students. Schools with a formalised parental engagement policy, prioritised in and integrated into their strategic plans, typically fare better in parental engagement than those where this engagement is an afterthought (Harris & Goodall, 2007;

Kim, 2009; Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). Further, parents are more likely to be engaged when they feel that school leadership encourages and supports their engagement (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Such leadership commitment signals to both parents and teachers that parental engagement is sought and encouraged.

The parental engagement activities at St Columba's facilitate parents' *active* as well as *passive* contributions to their children's language learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999). *Passive* approaches typically involve modelling attitudes and behaviour with respect to the target language and culture (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999). Children are more likely to achieve successful language learning outcomes when parents communicate to them positive attitudes about languages (Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002; Foard, 2000, cited in Prescott & Orton, 2012). This assertion generally applies to all students, regardless of gender, age and school type (Prescott & Orton, 2012). Examples of *passive* approaches at St Columba's include the Language and Career Dinners and statements about the benefits of language learning on the College website.

Active approaches refer to parents' efforts and capacity to support and monitor their children's language learning activities (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999). St Columba's Year 7 Language Evening seeks to do just that by introducing parents to basic language pedagogy and some of the content their daughters have been learning. This initiative sends the message to parents that they, too, can be supportive and influential partners in their daughters' language learning, which is a key ingredient for building active parental engagement (Kim, 2009; Emerson et al., 2012).

To reinforce the value of learning Chinese among parents and students, the College highlights the different learning pathways for Chinese studies as part of its 'Pathway Expo Nights'.

> The school and its language programmes

Tenison Woods College is an R-12, co-ed Catholic school located in the regional town of Mount Gambier. The school has an above-average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, the population of Mount Gambier is quite homogeneous, both ethnically and linguistically. The vast majority of its population is Australian born and speak only English at home.

The College offers two languages: Italian from junior to senior secondary, and Chinese from Year 8 to Year 12 (with separate Continuing and Background speaker programmes). Students must study one of the two languages in Years 8 and 9. The college has an [Australia-Asia BRIDGE school partnership](#) with a school in China (Zhoucun Experimental High School).

> What works and how?

The Principal of Tenison Woods, David Meziniec, formally promotes the important role parents play in supporting their children's learning. In the College's 2013 Annual Report, for example, he reinforced the view that 'parent involvement is one of the significant determinants of student success at school'. The focus on parental engagement is linked to the College's Catholic tradition, which underscores the significance of the family, as well as its Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasises school-family relationships as fundamental to a child's learning.

According to the results of a parent survey in 2014, the majority of parents at the College felt they had been given sufficient information about their child's learning and progress. Three quarters of parents felt their engagement is valued by the College, and 85 per cent stated they had ample opportunities to be engaged in their child's schooling.

Tenison Woods has undertaken a range of activities to promote its Chinese language programme among students and parents. For example, a visit to China was organised recently for all interested students, parents and members of staff. Upon their return, participating students shared their travel experiences with other students, and parents who went on the trip were able to fuel other parents' interest in Chinese culture and language. To further build parent interest and awareness of China, the College hosts cultural events, such as a lantern parade through the streets of Mt Gambier, in collaboration with other local schools.

To reinforce the value of learning Chinese among parents and students, the College highlights the different learning pathways for Chinese studies as part of its 'Pathway Expo Nights'. The College's Language Coordinator, Suzanne Pepe, describes these events as '*a whole 8-12 school approach* [where] *parents and students have the opportunity to research which pathway(s) they need to follow in order to further their*

language learning goals'. Moreover, the events provide a platform for teachers, parents and students to discuss the career pathways that language learning offers.

> Why it works

Strong support for parent engagement in children's schooling conveys to parents that their contributions as co-educators are valued and appreciated. This encourages parents to take an active role alongside the school in their child's learning (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). The high level of satisfaction among parents of the College regarding the school-home relationship suggests that the leadership commitment to parent engagement has been translated into practice.

Several language-specific initiatives at Tenison Woods, for example, the cultural events and overseas trip to China, have helped raise parents' awareness of, and interest in, Chinese culture and language. Parents who are interested in language learning are likely to communicate their positive attitudes to their children (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999). This subsequently plays a role in motivating students to continue with their language study (Prescott & Orton, 2012).

The Pathway Expo Nights provide stimulus for parent-child conversations about the benefits and value of learning Chinese. Such conversations are important to successful language learning (Houtenville & Conway, 2008).

Furthermore, the school has started using the Rosetta Stone (Mandarin) app as part of the Years 3-6 iPad programme, to assist students' language learning at school and enable parents to support their children's learning of Chinese at home.

> The school and its language programme

Essendon North Primary School is a government school (F-6) with an above-average ICSEA value and is located in Melbourne's north. According to the ABS, Essendon North is home to a sizeable Italian community, with around seven per cent of the population living in an Italian-speaking household.

Essendon North is a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP) and has a strong teaching and learning focus on intercultural understanding and global citizenship. For many years and up until 2014, the school taught Italian. In 2012, following community and School Council consultations, the decision was made to switch to Asian Studies, phase out Italian and replace it with Chinese. In 2014, the last cohort of students completed Italian. All F-6 students now attend one hour of Asian Studies/Chinese per week. In March 2015, a Chinese Teacher Assistant commenced working alongside the Asian Studies/Chinese teacher at the school, Amanda Kingsley.

> What works and how?

In his welcome message on the school's website, Principal Scott Mullen underscores Essendon North's commitment to have staff, students and parents working collaboratively towards recognising diversity and achieving high-quality learning outcomes. The school's commitment to engaging parents in school life and their children's learning has been translated into practice in a variety of ways.

For example, the school's leadership team has encouraged parents to have a say—through an online survey—in the drafting of the school's new Vision and Mission document. The school newsletter occasionally contains practical advice for parents on how they can actively assist their children's learning and personal development. Moreover, the school runs parent education forums, such as *Coffee and Chat* sessions, parent information sessions and workshops with external speakers, which parents are encouraged to attend.

After switching from Italian to Chinese, Essendon North has initiated various activities to enable all staff and parents to support students' learning of Chinese. Some of these activities seek to make Chinese language more visible within the school, such as using Chinese words and characters in signage around the school. A new section called 'Mandarin Words of the Week' has now been included in the school's fortnightly newsletter. This section chooses a particular theme, for example telling the time, to encourage and enable parents to practice some Chinese with their children at home. Furthermore, the school has started using the Rosetta Stone (Mandarin) app as part of the Years 3-6 iPad programme, to assist students' language learning at school and enable parents to support their children's learning of Chinese at home.

As Kate Barletta, Assistant Principal at Essendon North, explained, 'Our aim is to provide an entry point for all community members (including staff) in learning the language.'

Essendon North also runs special events to celebrate the cultural diversity of Asia. Parents are invited to these events. As part of its 'Asian Cultural Celebration Calendar', the school organised a special assembly performance by the 'Hong De Lion' dancers to celebrate the Lunar New Year in early 2015. In addition, students performed a dragon dance with a dragon they had made as part of a lunch-time Arts Club. Approximately 80 parents attended the event. For a school that has just initiated its Chinese language programme, this was an ideal demand building activity.

Even though these parental engagement initiatives specific to Chinese language and cultural learning are very recent, Essendon North plans to continuously strengthen its language and intercultural learning focus. In 2014, the school developed the basis for a school-wide 'Engage with Asia Strategy'. As part of this strategy, the school is currently developing a Chinese language programme specifically for parents and other community members. As Kate Barletta, Assistant Principal at Essendon North, explained, 'Our aim is to provide an entry point for all community members (including staff) in learning the language.'

> Why it works

Leadership support is crucial to the success of any strategy to enhance parental engagement in school life and student learning (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). This has been demonstrated powerfully at Essendon North, through parents' involvement in redrafting the school's Vision and Mission statement, the transition to teaching Chinese language, parent education forums and the crafting of a comprehensive Engage with Asia Strategy. These initiatives signal to parents that their contribution to learning is welcomed and acknowledged, which, in turn, strengthens parents' self-perceptions of their role as co-educators alongside the school (Emerson et al., 2012).

Parents need tools and information to actively support and monitor their children's language learning at home. The use of the Rosetta Stone app at Essendon North and the 'Mandarin Words of the Week' in the school newsletter are examples. When equipped with the right tools and information, parents can help facilitate successful language learning for their children (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

Schools can use cultural celebrations to build and sustain parents' interest in language and intercultural learning. Such activities provide stimuli for parent-child conversations around the target language and culture. These conversations are an important aspect of successful parental engagement (Houtenville & Conway, 2008). Parents who are personally interested in the target language and culture are likely to communicate their interest to their children (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly 1999).

Based on an analysis of the *What Works 8* illustrations, five key approaches aimed at strengthening parental support for children’s learning of Asian languages in schools have been identified.



Figure 1: 'What works' to strengthen parental support for children’s learning of Asian languages in schools

The following diagrams provide further details for the five key approaches, focusing in particular on what schools are doing and how parents are responding.



Figure 4: Build and formalise leadership commitment to parental engagement – what schools can do and how parents respond

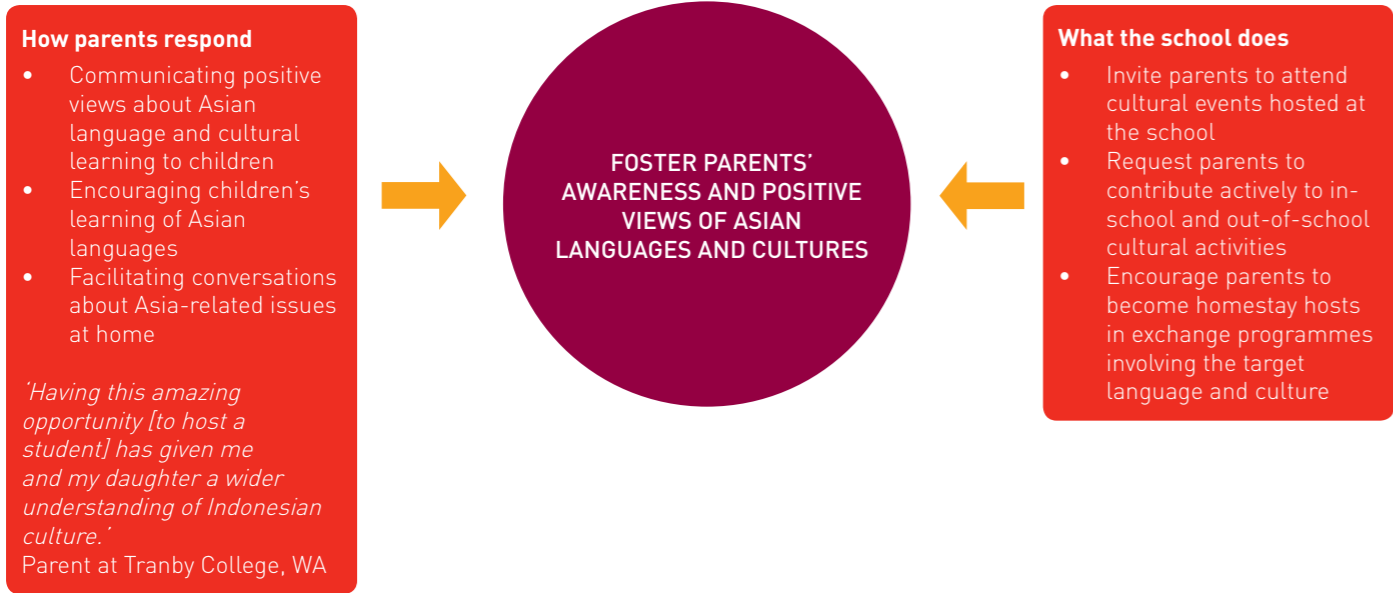


Figure 5: Foster parents' awareness and positive views of Asian languages and cultures – what schools can do and how parents respond



Figure 6: Build and sustain parent demand for Asian language learning (beyond compulsory years) – what schools can do and how parents respond

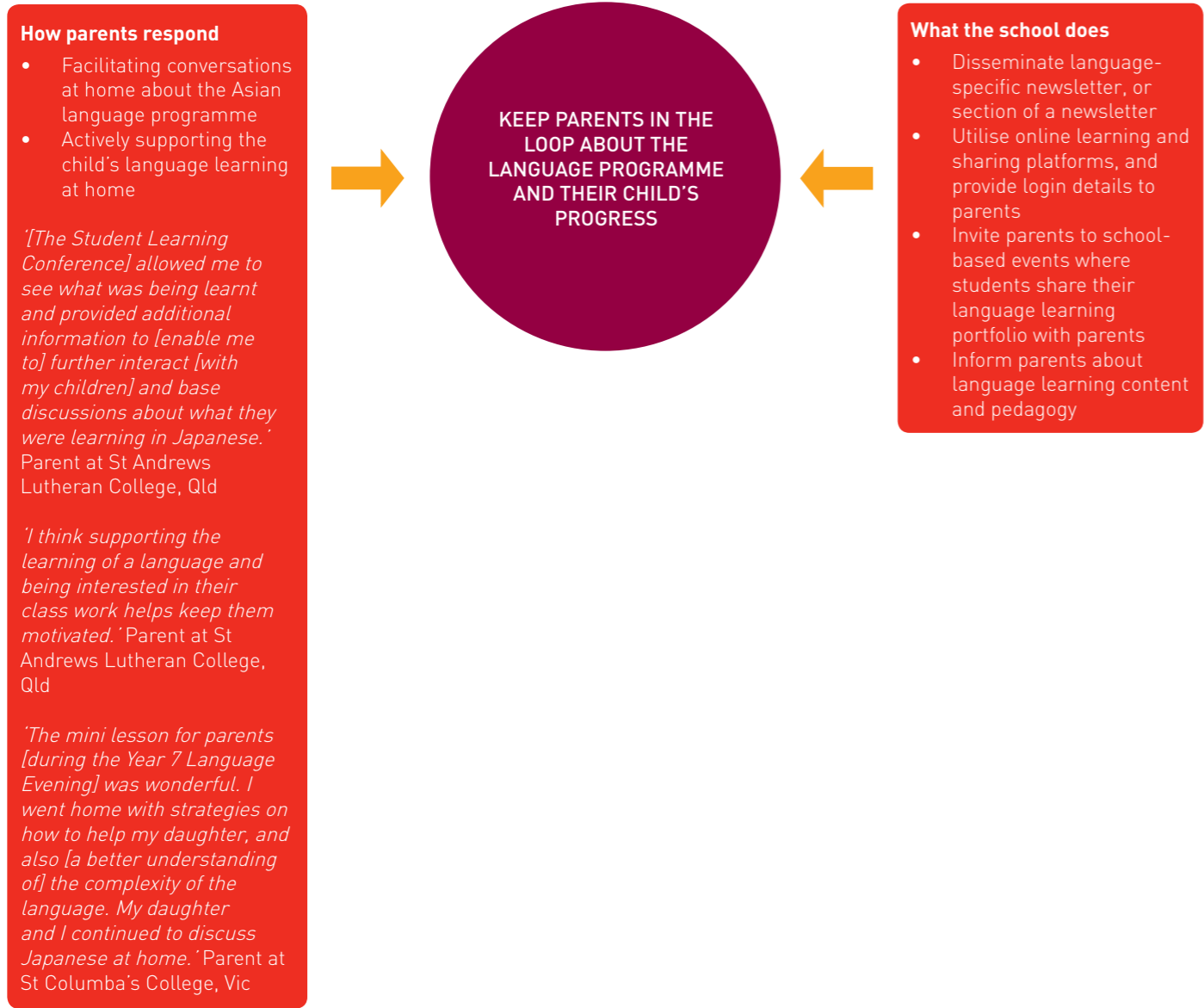


Figure 7: Keep parents in the loop about the language programme and their child's progress – what schools can do and how parents respond

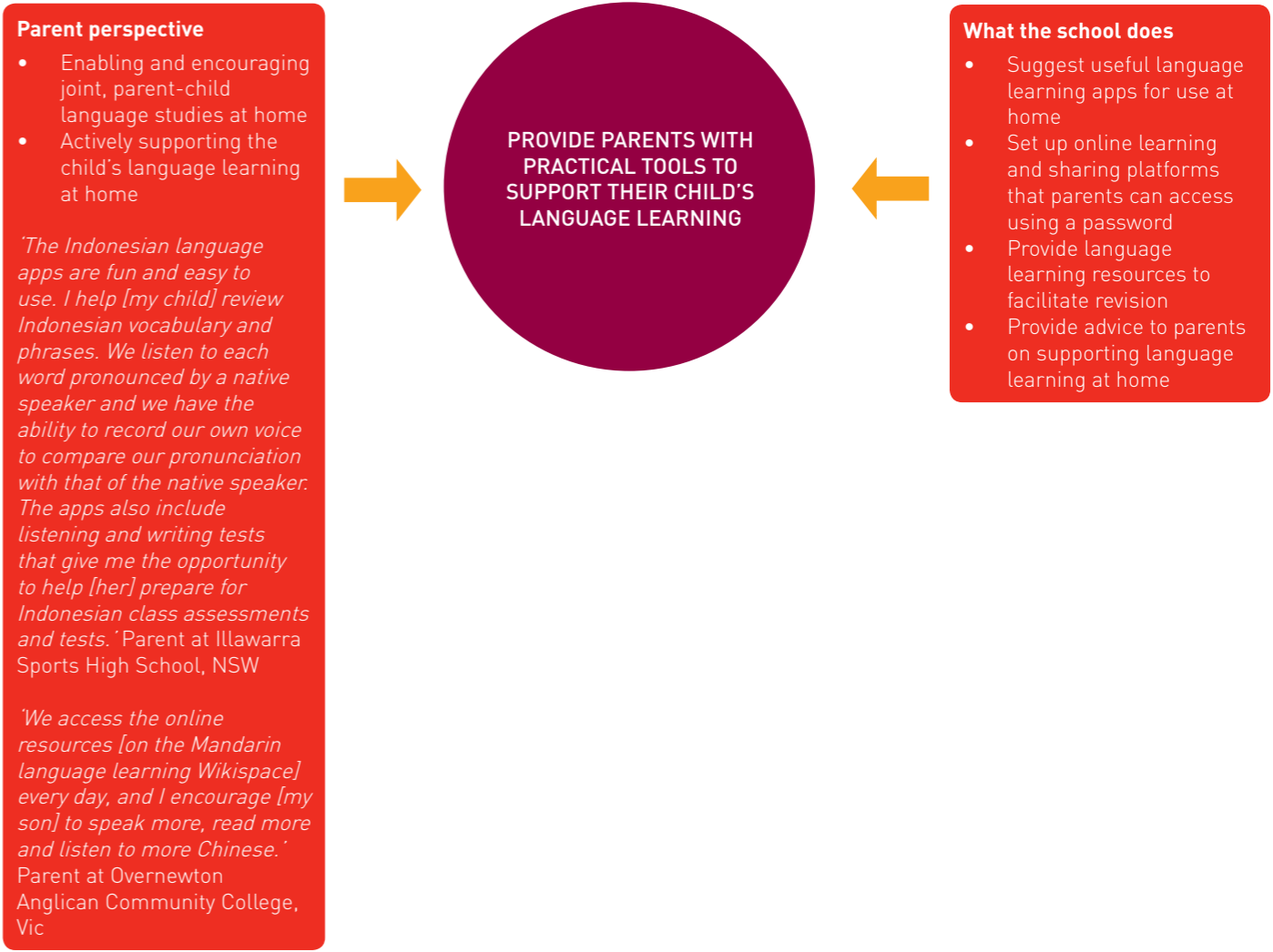


Figure 8: Provide parents with practical tools to support their child's language learning – what schools can do and how parents respond

Policy-makers in Australia have acknowledged the active role parents can play to support their children’s education.

The following is a summary of the research base for *What Works 8*, which was used to inform the research design, analysis of illustrated schools and the identification of key approaches aimed at strengthening parental support for children’s learning of Asian languages in schools.

> **The focus on parental engagement in Australia**

Policy-makers in Australia have acknowledged the active role parents can play to support their children’s education. For example, one priority of the Australian Government’s *Students First* policy is to work towards improved student outcomes through parental engagement (Department of Education, 2014). According to *Students First*, parental engagement encompasses several interconnected dimensions, such as:

- parental attitudes, values and behaviours
- parents’ practical support of their children’s learning at home
- active parental involvement in school communities, which is seen as making an important contribution to student success.

This policy focus renews the commitment of previous Australian governments to encourage and enable parents to actively support their children’s education both at home and through active participation in the school community. In 2004, the Australian Parents Council (APC) and the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) embarked on a joint project with the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (then called the Department of Education, Science and Training) that led to the development of a national *Family-School Partnerships Framework* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). This *Framework* was trialled in 61 schools in 2005.

In 2008, the *Framework* was endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)—now known as the Education Council—which underscored the important role that families play in education (MCEETYA, 2008). Further, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), also endorsed by the Council, emphasises the collective responsibility of schools and parents to ensure young Australians become successful learners, confident individuals and active citizens.

Another outcome of the joint project by ACSSO, APC and the Australian Government was the establishment of the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau in 2008. The Bureau has sought to share good practice, conduct research and provide practical support to parents, principals, teachers and other education stakeholders on promoting family-school partnerships.

The Bureau commissioned the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to research evidence of the value of positive parental engagement, successful parental engagement strategies and ways in which policy-makers can help facilitate such engagement. Key insights from this research were published in the *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research* report (Emerson, et al., 2012).

In 2012, the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (now Education Council) formally endorsed the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2012). A key aspect of the NSIT is the promotion of regular and systematic communication between schools and parents as a success factor for improving the quality of classroom teaching and learning.

Importantly, parental engagement does not only address parents and carers, but also school leaders and teachers, who are required to actively strengthen parental engagement strategies in schools. The NSIT states:

Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children’s education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school’s partnerships. (p. 18)

According to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), effective engagement with parents in the education process shall be a capacity that all teachers acquire. This expectation is highlighted in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2015):

- engage parents/carers in the educative process (3.7), under Professional practice (Standard 3)
- engage with the parents/carers (7.3), under Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community (Standard 7).

In states and territories throughout Australia, parental engagement has been recognised as one of the core ingredients in a good education. Various education departments have developed resources and initiatives aimed at encouraging and enabling parents to become engaged in their children’s learning. For example, in 2014, the ACT Education and Training Directorate commissioned ARACY to further build the conceptual and evidence base for successful parental

Over the past few decades international research has confirmed that parents' interest in, and support of, their children's learning has enormous benefits for their academic performance, motivation, school attendance, social development and life aspirations.

engagement. The insights gained through this project are expected to include practical ways to measure parental engagement in schools (ARACY, 2014).

> Parental engagement in the research literature

Over the past few decades international research has confirmed that parents' interest in, and support of, their children's learning has enormous benefits for their academic performance, motivation, school attendance, social development and life aspirations (Duckworth et al., 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Emerson et al., 2012; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Some researchers even suggest that parental support is needed if students are to maximise their potential at school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

The body of research in the field is extensive, especially in the United States and Europe, comprising numerous empirical studies and syntheses of academic literature. Since the mid-2000s, there has even been an expert journal dedicated specifically to research on the role of parents in education, the *International Journal about Parents in Education*.

Nevertheless, definitional and conceptual inconsistencies prevail, and there is no universally accepted definition of parental engagement (Emerson et al., 2012). Terms like 'parental involvement' or 'parent participation' are often used interchangeably with 'parental engagement', whilst sometimes referring to completely different activities. Another broad term, family-school partnerships, is also used (Daniel, 2011; Emerson et al., 2012; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Kim, 2009).

While 'parental engagement' and 'parental involvement' are interrelated, education researchers have attempted to distinguish between the two. Parental engagement broadly refers to family-school partnerships that encourage and enable parents to take their place alongside educators to support students' learning and development (Emerson et al., 2012; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005). Conversely, parental involvement is narrower, and refers to school-based or school-related activities, such as volunteering, engaging in a parents' associations, meeting with teachers, or attending school events (Emerson et al., 2012; Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Fantuzzo, Tighe & Childs, 2000).

What Works 8 adopts a broad view of how parents can support their children's learning of Asian languages in schools, regardless of whether the support strategies are more akin to engagement, involvement and/or partnerships.

The relationship between high levels of parental engagement and student achievement appears causal, regardless of parents' socioeconomic or cultural background (Emerson et al., 2012).

> Positive effects of parental engagement on students

Australian research on parental engagement in education has revealed its positive impact on student achievement, in areas such as grades and test scores, enrolment in advanced programmes, school/course completion rates and further study (Emerson et al., 2012). The relationship between high levels of parental engagement and student achievement appears causal, regardless of parents' socioeconomic or cultural background (Emerson et al., 2012).

Several empirical studies have pinpointed that parental *engagement* in children's learning at home is more beneficial to students than parental *involvement* at school events. Parental engagement at home is a powerful influencer of students' academic performance (Finn, 1998). However, the positive impact of parental involvement on student performance is less conclusive (Finn, 1998; Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010). For example, dinnertime conversations about activities and events of interest to children, new things learnt at school and future study and career pathways positively influence student achievement. Conversely, parents' volunteering at school do not have such effects (Houtenville & Conway, 2008).

Hill and Tyson (2009) have arrived at similar conclusions in their analysis of 50 studies on the effects of parental engagement on student achievement. Hence, it is parental engagement in learning that makes a difference to student outcomes, not parental involvement at school (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

> Challenges to parental engagement

Successful parental engagement is two-way, involving both parents and school educators. Challenges to parental engagement can be classified into three categories: practical, structural, and perception-related.

Practical

Some common challenges include language differences, intervening family and work commitments, lack of time, and practical issues as basic as access to transportation (Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Kim, 2009).

Structural

Structural challenges relate to factors within a school that prevent successful parental engagement from taking place. For example, teachers may be reluctant to engage consistently with parents because they do not receive practical support from the school for such activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). The inability of schools to develop tailored, context-specific approaches to parental engagement is another potential barrier (Emerson et al., 2012).

A common criticism of parental engagement approaches in schools is their tendency to ignore the ethno-cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity of parents (Emerson et al., 2012).

It seems insufficient attention has been paid to the challenges to parental engagement that exist within a school (Kim, 2009). There is a tendency also to attribute these challenges to parents rather than to factors the school can control. Yet, schools have the capacity to address:

- teachers' perceptions towards the efficacy and capacity of parental engagement
- teachers' beliefs in the effectiveness of parental engagement
- teachers' self-beliefs on the effectiveness of their teaching
- school friendliness and positive communication
- (the lack of) diversity of parental involvement programmes
- school policies and leadership (Kim, 2009).

Perception

Foremost of the perception-related challenges are different educational goals and expectations for children between parents and schools (Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). Another challenge is teachers' perceptions about their lack of skills and experience to engage with parents, especially those from a minority cultural and/or socio-economically disadvantaged background (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002).

Australian research has revealed that some teachers and principals feel threatened by active parental engagement, as it potentially questions their professionalism and authority. Further, some schools do not consider it to be within their realm of responsibility (Macgregor, 2005). At times, parents may feel their engagement is not welcomed or valued by the school. They may think they have nothing substantial to contribute, and some parents simply do not know how to be more engaged in their children's learning (Macgregor, 2005). Language and cultural barriers might also inhibit parents from engaging actively in their children's schooling, which can contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement (Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011).

A common criticism of parental engagement approaches in schools is their tendency to ignore the ethno-cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity of parents (Emerson et al., 2012). Many approaches to parental engagement privilege particular forms of engagement over others, often in favour of the dominant culture and a particular socio-economic standing (Daniel, 2011). Without reflecting critically on their underpinnings, it is possible for such approaches to exclude parents who might have different ideas about their role in education (Daniel, 2011; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Family-School &

Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). It then becomes convenient to label these parents as disengaged (Daniel, 2011). Yet, they might well be engaged, just not in ways expected by the majority culture (Kim, 2009).

> Success factors for parental engagement

Research on practical ways to facilitate, extend and enhance parental engagement in schools has been patchy (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Nevertheless, several success factors have been identified. Drawing on insights gained through the ongoing Harvard Family Research Project (established in 1983), Weiss, Lopez and Rosenberg (2010) suggest the following success factors:

- going beyond random parental engagement efforts
- conceiving and implementing parental engagement as a shared responsibility of the entire school community
- constancy and consistency from the early years to the senior years
- implementation across multiple learning settings, in-school or otherwise.

Hence, successful parental engagement needs to be systematic, integrated and sustainable (Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010; Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). Specifically, schools need to focus on the following areas.

Formalised school policies

Schools with a formal parental engagement policy typically fare better in working with parents than those that do not (Kim, 2009; Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011). Policies could be standalone or integrated into other school policies, as long as parents see it as an integral part of their children's schooling (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Schools should offer teachers the necessary training, administrative support and resources to engage with parents (Kim, 2009).

Context-specific and culturally sensitive approaches

Parental engagement strategies must be tailored to the specific needs of school communities in order to be inclusive, empowering and effective (Daniel, 2011). Re-assessment of existing approaches to parental engagement, and re-adjusting where necessary, are essential to safeguard against potential bias towards certain ethno-cultural and socio-economic groups (Daniel, 2011). There is no one-size-fits-all approach, as this belies the sheer diversity of school communities (Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau, 2010).

Schools that proactively seek direct personal contact with parents and run smaller, more personalised activities tend to be more successful in engaging a diverse parenthood (Kim, 2009).

Personalised, proactive and flexible

Having only general, open door policies can inhibit, rather than encourage, parental engagement. A school is an institution with its own values and culture that might not immediately appeal to some parents. Schools that proactively seek direct personal contact with parents and run smaller, more personalised activities tend to be more successful in engaging a diverse parenthood (Kim, 2009).

Building trust and relationships

Building trust and relationships with parents to support students' learning is widely accepted as fundamental to successful parental engagement (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Even though these take considerable time and effort to develop, they empower parents to see themselves as co-educators alongside schools (Emerson et al., 2012). The co-educator role not only encompasses parents' awareness and support of their children's learning, but also an understanding that their expectations alone can influence educational outcomes (Emerson et al., 2012).

Fostering parents' self-perception as active educators

Parents who underestimate their ability to contribute to their children's learning are less likely to be engaged. Schools need to convey clear messages that parental engagement is desirable for achieving positive learning outcomes. They also need to communicate to parents the variety of forms this engagement can take (Emerson et al., 2012). For example, schools can encourage and support parents to engage in daily conversations about their children's learning and aspirations vis-à-vis their own expectations (Emerson et al., 2012). Such conversations can have a significant impact on student achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

While these success factors are generic and the challenge to apply them in specific contexts remains profound, they reinforce the idea that schools are ultimately responsible for making parental engagement work (Kim, 2009). Further, the role of the principal has been emphasised as particularly important, and parents are more likely to engage in their child's learning if they feel the principal encourages and enables their contributions (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014):

> Parental engagement in language learning

Most research on the factors affecting students' language learning has not specifically investigated how parents can support their children in this task. An exception is Colletta et al. (1983). The research has tended to explore more broadly the factors influencing student motivation and successful language learning.

Research on the factors influencing the learning of French as a second language has revealed a correlation between students' attitudes towards learning the language and parental encouragement (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999). This confirms the findings of previous research, which found both an active and a passive dimension to parental influence (Colletta et al., 1983). The *active dimension* encompasses aspects such as encouragement, support and monitoring students' learning. The *passive dimension* refers to modelling behaviour and attitudes related to the target language and culture (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999).

Parental support is important to successful second language learning (Foard, 2000; Prescott & Orton, 2012). A British study on second language learners' motivation for language learning found that successful learners typically received much more parental support than less successful students (Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002, p. 517). Further, in an analysis of 14 interviews with students considered successful in their study of Chinese, parental engagement emerged as the common characteristic regardless of gender, age and school type, even if the parents themselves did not speak the language (Prescott & Orton, 2012).

Yet, larger-scale Australian research has revealed widespread ambivalence in parents' general attitudes towards language learning. In a 2007 study by ACSSO and APC, the majority of survey respondents (n=3274) agreed that 'Australian parents do not see the relevance of learning a language' (ACSSO & APC, 2007, p. 20).

- Australian Council for Education Research [ACER]. (2012). National school improvement tool. Melbourne, VIC: ACER. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.acer.edu.au/files/NSIT.pdf>
- Australian Council of State School Organisations [ACSSO] & Australian Parents Council [APC]. (2007). Attitudes Towards the Study of Languages in Australian Schools. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.aftv.vic.edu.au/resources/whylearnfrench/attitudetowardsthestudyoflanginausschools.pdf>
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL]. (2015). National Professional Standards for teachers. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/aitsl_national_professional_standards_for_teachers
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth [ARACY]. (2014). Parental engagement in the ACT. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/197>
- Barr, J., & Saltmarsh, S. (2014). "It all comes down to the leadership": The role of the school principal in fostering parent-school engagement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(4), 491-505.
- Borgonovi, F. & Montt, G. (2012). Parental Involvement in Selected PISA Countries and Economies. OECD Education Working Paper No. 73. Paris: OECD. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5k990rk0jsjj.pdf?expires=1416532951&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=1D694E05087063E545F4AE14C833393D>
- Colletta, S. P. (1983). *Community and Parental Influence: Effects on Student Motivation and French Second Language Proficiency*. ERIC.
- Curnow, T. J., & Kohler, M. (2007). Languages are important, but that's not why I am studying one. *Babel*, 42(2), 20-24, 38.
- Curnow, T. J., Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2007). *Situational analysis for the Development of Nationally Co-ordinated Promotion of the Benefits of Languages Learning in Schools project*. Adelaide, South Australia: Research Centre for Languages and Cultures Education, University of South Australia.
- Daniel, G. (2011). Family-school partnerships: towards sustainable pedagogical practice. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(2), 165-176.
- Department of Education. (2014). *Students First*. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au>
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations . (2008). National Family-School Partnerships Framework. Canberra: DEEWR. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.familyschool.org.au/files/9413/7955/4757/framework.pdf>
- Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A review of literature*: DfES Publications London.
- Duckworth, K., Akerman, R., Gutman, L., & Vorhaus, J. (2009). Influences and leverages on low levels of attainment: a review of literature and policy initiatives.
- Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S., & Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*: Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau.
- Epstein, J. L. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. In K. Hurrelmann, F.-X. Kaufmann & F. Lösel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints. Prevention and intervention in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 121-136). Oxford, England: Walter de Gruyter.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2006). Moving forward: Ideas for research on school, family, and community partnerships. In C. F. Conrad & R. C. Serlin (Eds.), *Handbook for research in education: Engaging ideas and enriching inquiry*. (pp. 117-139). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau. (2011). Parental engagement in children's education. Weston Creek, ACT: Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau.
- Fan, W., Williams, C. M., & Wolters, C. A. (2012). Parental Involvement in Predicting School Motivation: Similar and Differential Effects Across Ethnic Groups. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 105(1), 21-35.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1-22.
- Fantuzzo, J., Tighe, E., & Childs, S. (2000). Family Involvement Questionnaire: A multivariate assessment of family participation in early childhood education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(2), 367.
- Finn, J. D. (1998). Parental engagement that makes a difference. *Educational Leadership*, 55(8), 20-24.
- Foard, T. A. (2000). *The good language learner: students of Italian in an Australian secondary school*: University of Melbourne, Faculty of Education.

- Fox, S. & Olsen, A. (2014). Defining Parent Engagement; report prepared by ARACY for the ACT Government.
- Gardner, R. C., Masgoret, A.-M., & Tremblay, P. F. (1999). Home background characteristics and second language learning. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 18 (4), 419-437.
- Hargreaves, A. (2000). Professionals and Parents: A Social Movement for Educational Change? In N. Bascia & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The sharp edge of educational change: Teaching, leading, and the realities of reform*. (pp. 217-235). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2007). Engaging parents in raising achievement: do parents know they matter?: a research project commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. Annual Synthesis, 2002.
- Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45 (3), 740-763.
- Holt, R. F. (2006). Persistence factors in secondary school additional language study. *Journal of Language and Learning*, 5 (1), 86-97.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M. T., Jones, K. P., & Reed, R. P. (2002). Teachers Involving Parents (TIP): results of an in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 18 (7), 843-867.
- Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: an explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63 (1), 37-52. doi: 10.1080/00131911.2010.488049
- Houtenville, A. J., & Conway, K. S. (2008). Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement. *Journal of Human Resources*, 43 (2), 437-453.
- Hunter, N. (2013). Asian languages in independent schools: Factors contributing to student retention rates (Report prepared for Independent Schools Queensland). Retrieved 19 September 2014, from http://www.isq.qld.edu.au/files/file/our_services/TeachingandLearning/Languages/2012AsianLanguagesinIndependentSchools.pdf
- Kim, Y. (2009). Minority parental involvement and school barriers: Moving the focus away from deficiencies of parents. *Educational Research Review*, 4 (2), 80-102.
- Macgregor, R. (2005). Professional development for family-school partnership: Revaluing both sides of the coin. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from http://www.familyschool.org.au/files/1613/7955/4824/profdev_fsp.pdf
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2008). Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf
- Pomerantz, E. M., & Moorman, E. A. (2010). Parents' involvement in children's school lives: A context for children's development. In J. Meece and J. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and human development* (pp. 398-416). New York: Routledge.
- Prescott, C., & Orton, J. (2012). Good Learners of Chinese: Profiles of students in secondary school. Melbourne, VIC: The University of Melbourne. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from http://education.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/631599/good_language-learners-of-Chinese.pdf
- Pushor, D., & Ruitenberg, C. (2005). Parent engagement and leadership (research report). Saskatoon, SK: Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching.
- Weiss, H. B., Lopez, M. E., & Rosenberg, H. (2010). Beyond Random Acts: Family, School, and Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform. *Harvard Family Research Project*. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/beyond-random-acts-family-school-and-community-engagement-as-an-integral-part-of-education-reform>
- Williams, M., Burden, R., & Lanvers, U. (2002). 'French is the language of love and stuff': Student perceptions of issues related to motivation in learning a foreign language. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28 (4), 503-528.



Other *What Works* titles:

- *What Works 1 – Building demand for Asia literacy in Australian schools: what works?*
- *What Works 2 – Leading school change to support the development of Asia-relevant capabilities*
- *What Works 3 – Achieving intercultural understanding through the teaching of Asia perspectives in the Australian Curriculum: English and History*
- *What Works 4 – Using ICT in schools to support the development of Asia-relevant capabilities*
- *What Works 5 – Schools becoming Asia literate: what works?*
- *What Works 6 – Australia-Asia school partnerships*
- *What Works 7 – Study programmes to Asia*

www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks

ISBN 978 0 7340 5111 0

Acknowledgement

The Asia Education Foundation is supported by the Australian Government Department of Education.

Disclaimer

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education.

Copyright Notice

This work is copyright. Unless indicated otherwise, The University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia Limited, together operating the Asia Education Foundation, own the copyright subsisting in the work.

You may reproduce the work in whole or reproduce individual copy masters for non-commercial education purposes only, subject to the inclusion of an acknowledgement of the source(s). Other than for the purposes indicated above and as permitted under the Copyright Act, you are prohibited from downloading, republishing, retransmitting, reproducing or otherwise using any of the materials included in the work as standalone files. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Asia Education Foundation at The University of Melbourne:

Postal address:

Asia Education Foundation
The University of Melbourne VIC 3010

Telephone: (61) 3 8344 4800

Fax: (61) 3 9347 1768

Email: aef-support@asialink.unimelb.edu.au

www.asiaeducation.edu.au

The Asia Education Foundation provides teachers, education leaders and school communities with innovative programmes, curriculum resources and networks to support the achievement of Asia literacy for every young Australian.

AEF is a joint activity of Asialink at The University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia. It receives core funding from the Australian Government Department of Education.

AEF leverages funding to support Asia literacy in Australian schools from a broad range of government, philanthropic and corporate partners in Australia and Asia.

Research at AEF

AEF is building its research profile and capacity to support evidence-informed practice for Asia learning in schools.

About *What Works*

What Works is AEF's flagship research series. Aimed primarily at teachers and school leaders, the series is based on evidence-informed practice, combining up-to-date research with illustrations of practice that demonstrate 'what works' and 'what is possible' to support the development of Asia learning in Australian schools.

www.asiaeducation.edu.au