

11th August 2016

WA Hot Topic – Staffing Your School for High Performance

On Tuesday 9th August we held one of our famous Hot Topic events. The focus for the evening was on how to get the right people on the “bus”, the wrong people off the “bus” and the right people in the right seats on the “bus”. With that in mind we invited Vernita Jacques from St Stephens College (the largest K-12 school in WA) to describe the extensive program they run to recruit, select and develop their staff. We were also privileged to have Keren Caple from the Innovation Unit speak to us about the findings of the Professional Learning and Performance & Development Global Horizon Scan commissioned by AITSL. We finished the evening with two legal eagles: David Heldsinger speaking from his workplace relations law background on the pitfalls of dismissal and Heather Hussey from the TRB to outline the requirements of the Teacher Registration Act when employing teachers and dealing with performance issues.

Keren outlined four features that the Global Horizon Scan identified in many of the most innovative examples of professional learning found around the world, inside and outside of the field of education. These features were:

- Collaboration, “often organised around a shared project”;
- Personalised, where “learners choose their own routes through and pace of learning”;
- Informal, “not programmatic but opportunistic and highly unlikely to take place in anything resembling a classroom setting”
- Intensive, “characterised by deep learning in short bursts rather than long, thin engagements” (not a course)

Keren also identified the findings related to organisational culture and conditions. The most startling finding here was in regard to the value of professional learning being incentivised: ranging “from enhanced reputation and role to bonuses and pay progression” – recognition essentially.

However, the scan didn’t find much evidence for “compulsory, classroom based accredited learning programmes, which take a long time to complete”, such as a Master’s program.

Vernita outlined the process St Stephens uses when recruiting, selecting and developing their staff. This process starts from being clear about what the school values and what the school offers. Their selection process includes interviews, focussed on how the prospective staff member works with others, and panel observations of a lesson taught within the school to see how the applicant interacts with students. Those applicants who do not obtain a position at the school are then offered feedback to support their professional development. Those who are given a job, particularly those recent graduates, are supported through a two year cadetship program where they are offered extensive professional learning opportunities and mentoring relationships.

David discussed the need to be familiar with the terms of employment which can differ from one sector and school to another. He then outlined the difference between conduct based dismissals and performance management based dismissals and the appropriate processes involved in managing these.

Heather outlined the two sections of the Investigations and Compliance Branch (ICB) of the TRBWA: Investigations and Fit and Proper Assessments. Investigations are undertaken in response to complaints (from the public) and notifications (from the teacher, DPP, Commissioner of Police or the employer). Fit and Proper Assessments include the criminal history checks, behaviour and character, the history of compliance and contraventions of orders etc. She outlined the checks that needed to be conducted when employing someone and the principal’s obligations when investigating a teacher for misconduct or incompetence. Of particular note is that a principal must inform the TRB if a teacher has been suspended or dismissed, or even if they resign or leave their post during an investigation.

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These speakers generated a large number of questions and interesting discussions during the night. This was followed up after the event with some networking opportunities over a glass of wine and a light supper. Feedback from the evening showed it was probably our best received event yet. We also have lots of ideas for future events. We sincerely thank our wonderful presenters for their presentations and willingness to engage with the audience.

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