

# Understanding Personalised Learning in Primary School

The majority of parents have a certain expectation about what school should look like, feel like and be like; however, sometimes when a parent brings their child to school or the first time, the learning spaces look different from what they experienced themselves as children. At first, this can be disconcerting; every parent has been to school and many parents assume that school will be the same as it was when they went to school. In some respects, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is still the same - including formal instruction in the key skills being taught every day. In addition to whole group instruction, small groups, individual extension and intervention are also provided, ensuring that all children are catered for more personally.

The wonderful aspect of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that in addition to literacy and numeracy still being taught and instructed, a broader range of other skills are also taught. These are often referred to as the skills of life: children growing up now need a variety of skills to be successful learners today.

These include:

- Decision making
- Resilience
- Problem solving
- Learning how to learn
- Intrinsically motivated
- Responsible citizens of the future
- Effective communicators
- Assertive and respectful
- Creative and lateral thinkers
- Researchers
- Able to transfer skills into new ideas and events not experienced before

Learning environments in all schools now provide a balance between "explicit teaching" in the formal instruction of key curriculum areas including sciences, history, the arts, physical education, literacy, numeracy balanced with "explicit teaching" during active engagement where children are trying things out, working alongside others, having to work collaboratively, problem solve and create.

**This balance between formal instruction and active engagement provides practice for children to have the best of both worlds.**

Children don't know what they don't know. So as teachers, we provide the instruction and curriculum content that helps them to grow in their knowledge and skills. Children also bring to their learning, lots of experiences, knowledge and skills that they already know. Children need to be given the opportunity to bring who and what they know and for us to balance this with what we need them to learn. Importantly this needs to be done in a way that helps them to explore, to experiment and to work alongside others. This is what prepares them for the real world.

**In personalised learning, we don't stop teaching the fundamentals which are the foundation of literacy and numeracy, we simply add more of the essential skills of life that all of us need as we live and grow and work in today's society.**

Sometimes parents of children in Prep - Year 2 who participate in Investigations initially say; "They are just playing!" They are not just playing. There is not enough hours in the day to justify "just playing" in school. That is why parents need to understand a little about the importance of and how Investigations teaches life skills as well as oral language, socialisation and a whole host of other skills while developing their numeracy and literacy skills.

Sometimes parents of children in Years 3-6 think that personalised learning is a curriculum where children can do whatever they want. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, true personalised learning is highly systemised and structured. In Years 3-6 the students are often sitting with their teacher who is instructing and teaching. At other times, students are working on projects for example in History or Economics or Health or investigating areas of learning provided by the teacher. They may be challenged to link their own interests and experiences to the skills and concepts being taught so that learning is viewed as relevant and meaningful to the student.

**They key questions to ask your school or teachers are:**

1. What method or philosophy of personalised teaching are you using?
2. Have the teachers participated in professional development to update their skills?

**Other helpful hints:**

- Always attend parent information nights so you can gain a better understanding about how it works in your school.
- Don't listen to what we call car park gossip. It is always hyped up and generally mischievous.
- Remember that teachers are highly educated at university and don't just implement strategies based on time wasting unproven methods.
- Remember that all schools use the same State and Federal Framework and reporting system so they are all working toward the same outcomes and standards. That is your final insurance policy!
- Finally, trust the professionalism and knowledge of your school. If you don't, you probably shouldn't be there, as it may not be the right school for you.