ASHROFT HIGH SCHOOL
2014 – 2024
Draft proposal

Ashcroft Learning & Innovation Centre
Celebrating 50 years: 1964 - 2014

1. Four Stages of development

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1. Embedding Teaching and Learning - highly-skilled teachers as pedagogical practitioners within a whole-child approach. The NSW Quality Teaching model with an overlay of the whole-child (physical, socio-cultural, emotional-spiritual, cognitive-academic and relationship to educational outcomes) # PhD research program currently undertaken by Ted Noon, Principal AHS (UoN)

2. Triangulating practice: students at the centre of learning; the integral role of feedback from student focus groups and classroom practice; focus of each lesson and beginning & end of lesson protocols; all teachers as action researchers (classroom practice and teachers with learning journals); designing modes of data analysis so as to validate student learning within the AHS model (‘Connect the gaps’); Personal Learning Plans (PLP) for all students – students’ as conductors of their own learning; integrating knowledge across subjects (KI); integrating co-curricular as equal partners in the learning framework; Eliminating the variables about student learning over time, in order to get to know more about what we don’t know; ‘approximating’ our understanding of adolescent learning in context, through the prism of the whole child, in order to meet the total needs of the child as a learner.

3. Business as a significant partner; integrated community connections including Aboriginal community as a significant partner in the learning community; establishment – revamping of the SRC to the Student Leadership Council (SLC) as a significant entity in the school, incorporating 4 portfolios: Global Initiatives, Quality Teaching (students leading learning), Welfare and Healthy Schools, with a target of 30% of students involved 2012; Positive Behaviour in Schools project (PBIS) – student centred and complimentary to student learning; Ashcroft Research Centre (ARC) – 7 research projects; The Learning Village concept including corridors as streets named after successful students, and Hall of Fame.

Stage 4. Ashcroft Learning and Innovation Centre

Introduction

Phase four of the AHS learning plan is to prepare the school for the next decade (2014 – 2024), through the establishment of the Ashcroft Learning and Innovation Centre as a hub for learning within the broader Ashcroft community. The work of the last ten years has been to place the student at the centre of learning as equal partners in the learning process, and to prepare teachers as highly skilled practitioners and action researchers. The overall essence of this approach is to see continuing improvement and innovation in terms of student and teacher learning beginning from the classroom, not from an accountability or bureaucratic end. If it begins authentically from here, then bureaucratic protocols are in all probability likely to be fulfilled. This approach creates genuine trust, professionalism and mutual respect and engagement.
AHS can be regarded as a leader in the learning process in NSW. The school constantly seeks to explore the means by which the intricate processes of learning can be tested and explored through various forums and networks. Over time, these forums have included invitations to present at the University of Newcastle Pedagogy in Practice conferences; the ACT Curriculum and Teaching Directorate; The Australian Council of Educational Leadership including two articles based on learning; the University of NSW post-graduate conferences and educational leadership post-graduate program, and at a school level a unique student-led learning symposium. We intend this year to initiate and develop a learning symposium for teacher leaders where we believe a niche exists, so as to provide a platform in which we can further test our work and open up the discussion across NSW.

The complex nature of how a public school remains viable within the context of a market system approach to education as it exists in Australia, leads to considerable pressure on all public schools. The ‘residualisation effect’, i.e. the aftermath of separating schools into private and public elite and the rest, includes the inescapable truth that schools classified within the low SES band will spiral into negative growth thereby accentuating the learning gap. To partly offset this, public schools fight to survive, sometimes with a resultant insidious collateral damage effect – the ‘cannibalisation’ of our schools that includes specialisation such as selective streams.

AHS can be proud of its 49-year history, and can be equally proud that over the last decade it has become regarded as a leader in learning in NSW. Given the context just briefly outlined, this is a remarkable effort. Broadly, this has included students as leaders of their own learning, e.g. 30% of students in leadership roles including assisting in the design of learning protocols and tutoring all stage 4 students on common knowledge that connects learning across subjects (Knowledge Integration), and higher order thinking skills; community links including the highly acknowledged support of the Aboriginal community developed over two decades and including best practice “Buddy” approach to learning (NB Aboriginal student numbers have doubled in the last 10 years against a declining demographic enrolment [12%]); community learning and support programs that have seen 200 individuals graduate; business connections including HBOSA; Lloyds International, the Beacon Foundation and Horizons which was initiated out of the work of AHS, has also seen approximately a quarter of a million dollars invested into school learning and support programs. The school has 5 of 7 international standard research programs focused on learning as part of the Ashcroft Research Centre.

This work requires a commitment and belief about the importance of high-level practice based on research. It also requires time and patience in order to ensure it is embedded in the culture of the school, not seen as a one-off focus that is based on such approaches as ‘teaching to the test’, or a singular focus on literacy with no connection to all aspects of learning, or a particular cohort. Ultimately, it relies on the belief by all AHS teachers and leaders working together and taking on risks and having trust in each other and a passion about doing the very best for their students and their families. Finally, there will be positive changes to educational outcomes. Over the last decade, the last triennium of that period at AHS has seen a consistent decrease in high-level poor
behaviour, and a commensurate increase by threefold of students achieving higher bands in the HSC.

It is time now to position this work in tandem with other important aspects of the work of the school within the paradigm of a leading educational institution in the twenty-first century.

Plan

Phase four draft proposal is to extend and merge the intellectual direction of the last ten years. This will include the physical spaces of the school including the design and development of a sustainable environmental design, the development of an Ashcroft learning and innovation centre with connections to significant educational institutions, and at the centre the student as part of its development.

The following points will highlight the key essentials of the proposal:

Part 1. Physical spaces

1. The design will emerge from the schools essential learning focus over the last 10 years. In this way, there is a connection between the validity of this work and the essential belief about learning, and the viability of building a future that links powerfully to the elements of c21st thinking. e.g. the student at the centre of learning; students & teachers at the centre of the NSW Quality Teaching model; connection to the (Aboriginal) ‘8-ways of learning’; the connection between the Quality Teaching model and the merging of a Focus on Reading; the place of the whole-child as an overarching construct and the development of healthy schools, canteen, student café and performance spaces.
2. The proposal will have a brief of not designing a school in a typically spaced model of C21st architecture, but to ‘modify and adapt’ the current model. There are very good reasons for this, including the disconnect between the former design model and the school’s real purpose; the limitations based on cost, and the need to embrace c21st sustainable environmental purposes and the parallel learning that occurs for students.

3. That students’ work with teachers with the support of parents and the community in the design. It is proposed that students connect to a university landscape architecture faculty to develop a design based on the schools learning culture, within the framework of a small budget, and a ‘greening’ of the school environment in a way that transforms the aesthetics and functionality of the school. The draft school team model: a small team involving Year 5/6 students with Year 7/8; mentored and led by Year 11 targeted D&T/VisArt students; coordinated by Vis Art teacher and assistant; mentored and coordinated by UNSW Built Environment students. Reporting to AHS senior executive.

4. The proposal will have a focus of building a futures oriented identity, within the brief of it not being expensive, but prudent and complimentary to the nature of its work as a proud public school.

5. There has been a trend of many public schools in NSW ‘privatising’ their schools by ‘badging’ them differently in an attempt to be viable, e.g. selective streaming classes or providing a specialised identity (e.g. sport). In some ways, this is an attempt to stem the flow to private schools and compete on an equal footing, although in many cases and geographical locations, it becomes a matter of simple survival, a way of offsetting a reputation where there is a perceived group of ‘problem’ students dampening the reputation of the school. The inevitability of such trends is that private schools and ‘selective public schools’ ‘residualise’ the remaining public schools, leaving them in a poorly exposed position. The perception of the community broadly speaking is a separation of ‘elite’ schools and schools for everyone else. This cycle can be a damaging and insidious process resulting in poor decisions and learning effects.

Rather than join this ‘patchwork’ model, the draft AHS proposal is designed to be authentic in approach, i.e. how can we build upon the teaching and learning of the last ten years in a way that transitions and indeed supports this approach by adapting the school environment in a way that is complimentary? While AHS is one of a number of schools that have been left in the wake of this ‘residualised’ process, it has worked very hard to provide some of the best educational processes and learning in NSW. It is proud of its community and students, and we believe it is now time to not retreat from its task by trying to change the ‘community’ dynamics, but to dress up the physical resource that is the school in order to support the great teaching and learning and student culture.

The ‘heart’ of the school is in its students, teachers and the high level of teaching practice. We believe that our students have achieved remarkable outcomes, and our teachers are some of the most highly skilled and caring in NSW. It is deserving of a time now to ‘dress up’
the external aspect however, not by creating a model foreign to its foundations, but complimentary to it and therefore likely to be sustainable into the future.

6. The model must fit within the rationale of common sense financial planning, e.g. the limitations of a budget are part of our lives. While research evidence indicates improvement in learning when the environment is pleasant, it must nevertheless represent one part of a complex mix of variables that come together to provide an outstanding learning environment. It is therefore not philosophically appropriate that the extent of modifications exceeds the core task of our purpose, i.e. teaching and learning and the substance of student educational outcomes. There is a significant desire to incorporate design methods that are subtle, and therefore not over-the-top. The impact of ‘greening’ the school within a sustainable environmental model has many attractive benefits.

Update

(A plan has been drafted to commence semester 2, 2013). The environmentally-focused project with Ashcroft High School presents multiple opportunities and sounds like exactly the sort of engagement we love to have with schools.

A/Prof Linda Corkery | Director of Discipline, Landscape Architecture
Faculty of Built Environment | University of New South Wales
Sydney NSW 2052 AUSTRALIA

Specific examples of modifications:

- ‘Greening’ of the school, via walkways, as divisions between spaces, e.g. between proposed buildings adjacent to the hall – Construction and UWS Learning & Innovation Centre; throughout all open spaces as guiding ‘tracks’ between learning spaces, e.g. outdoor classroom/s. Green shade areas for students. Greening school walls through use of (hydroponic) climbing plants.
- Dressing up spaces, e.g. canteen as a café, and shade provided over existing basketball court. A space provided for lunch performances. Shade sails over parts of the quad. (These will be dependent on available grants)
- Walkways to centres of innovation spaces (complimenting current development of streets named after famous students and hall of fame). The connections will be linked via learning routes developed out of the school’s learning model, with points along the routes indicating the meaning of the connections.
- Innovation and research space or spaces – open and small cluster; outdoor learning spaces.
- Health centre (‘whole-child’ modelled) - classes of exercise, and allied health.
Some rooms allocated as part of the original ‘Learning Village’ concept noted in the original school plan, e.g., an environmental room; SLC room, running off streets (named after students); outdoor performance areas for lunch times as a means for student showcasing – in conjunction with café. The adjustments here are not major, much of which would be ‘dressing up’.

- Re-organised and upgraded presentation of buildings and spaces, by e.g. some modifications to facades: use of better materials instead of the current battered and discoloured metal linings. Improved and strategically placed garden spaces. Coloured signage against brick facades can give an appearance of significant modifications, along with plants, an upgraded joining covered walkway etc.
- Developing a (limited) ‘green space’ at the southern end of the school grounds that is functional.
- Upgraded capacity for internet technology
- Connecting with Padstow Tafe: landscape gardener course students to link with AHS community to develop the design.

Part 2. Learning & Innovation Centre (UWS)

Phase four of the AHS learning plan is to prepare the school for the next decade (2014 – 2024), through the establishment of the Ashcroft Learning and Innovation Centre as a hub for learning within the broader Ashcroft community.

There is a significant opportunity to develop an innovative approach that is mutually beneficial to AHS and the community, as well as to a university. The proposal is to connect to the University of Western Sydney initially via their education & research faculty. UWS has an important role catering for many prospective students through the establishment of various campus sites throughout South-Western Sydney. There is an opportunity for UWS to gain an initial presence in Liverpool city where they don’t currently have a physical presence. It may eventuate that the faculty approach may extend to a cross-faculty approach.

The proposal would be to provide land for the establishment of a building adjacent to a newly developed VET Construction building proposed in 2013. The way in which this would developed will require further discussion, including the building itself. (See Appendix 3)

While it is proposed to connect via the education and research faculty, it should be seen as a great opportunity to:

1. Create a significant opportunity to provide a much greater insight into the relationship between teacher and student learning through a mutual program that extends beyond current practices. This is a completely new model.
2. Extend the borders between education and other disciplines as an integrated approach, e.g. education, health and social services, and allow those boundaries to form as an integrated model of learning that also embraces C21st skills.

3. Extend the range of thinking connecting education undergraduate students across all KLAs and their supervisors with new approaches to learning, e.g. student teachers mentoring AHS students and their feeder primary schools. There is a significant opportunity to learn the nature of student learning and the various idiosyncrasies associated with adolescent development and learning. This can be done through research projects connected to their learning; mentoring and tutoring students in cutting edge programs developed by AHS and incorporating QT and Focus on Reading; student teachers learning the approach to pedagogy undertaken by teachers at AHS, and how feedback is undertaken through teacher learning journals, student focus groups and QT coded data; working with small groups of students on research projects.

4. Leading teachers at AHS act as adjunct lecturers in providing opportunities to learn cutting edge ways in which to work with students; equally, the nature of a school context in terms of leadership roles and school planning. This could be negotiated as a service benefit to the school.

5. There is an opportunity for the site to provide space and support for research, much of which may extend from work being undertaken within Ashcroft and related 4 primary schools. This would be open to school students and undergraduates. (See document: current research projects at Ashcroft Research Centre [ARC]). There is a proposal to offer AHS students in tandem with local primary schools small research scholarships to be named after former students who have gained academic success.

6. There is also an opportunity to extend learning further to the wider community to include adults where there are already significant programs underway. The school in conjunction with the proposed Learning & Innovation Centre can extend its reach into the community as a hub of excellence in lifelong learning. There is an established Aboriginal learning program that is an outstanding exemplar in practice, in conjunction with strong community support.

7. The establishment of such a project will need to be cost-neutral for teachers, and can be developed through ways in which load variance is negotiated mindful of maximising student and teacher learning and time, yet derives professional benefits.

Additional and complimentary adjustments:

- Small research grants provided to students (groups of students) to undertake research as an extension of their studies.
- Innovation/Ashcroft Research Centre (ARC) to be housed. Currently has 3/6 national/international research projects. (Appendix 3)
School operates 8.00am – 4.00pm: built-in periods for PA/fitness; socio-political groups (Jnr Amnesty in conjunction with Student Leadership Council); ethics/philosophy groups; music/drama/art/dance as lunch performances.

Update

The University of Western Sydney has expressed great interest in such a proposal, and will seek to develop further conversations over the next weeks. Professor Wayne Sawyer is Director of Research in the Faculty of Education, and A/Prof Christine Johnston will help coordinate the interest.

Appendix 1

Built Design: Landscape Architecture
Landscape Architecture is a design profession engaging with art and science to address the environment as a whole – its design, development, planning and management. Landscape architects create sustainable and meaningful places for people and other living things. Their work in shaping the landscape is increasingly important as the global community responds to diverse environmental challenges of our times.

The Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLArch) Program at UNSW Built Environment was the first of its kind in Australia and is currently the only landscape architecture university degree program in New South Wales. The program is distinguished by its approach to learning and teaching that presents landscape architecture as both a powerful way of thinking and an increasingly important and influential profession.

Students learn the theory and practice of landscape architecture through the exploration of design principles, design representation, ecological systems and processes and studies of human modification of the environment. The emphasis of the program is on creative design inspired by Australian conditions – an approach that prepares our graduates to work anywhere in the world.

During four years of full-time study, students combine theory, technique and practice within a sequence of eight Design Studios. Design projects are related to the subject matter of concurrent courses and culminate in an independent design study of regional and national significance.

An important component of the BLArch, and one which also sets it apart from degrees offered by other universities, is mandatory work experience of at least 4 months duration. This exposes each student to the demands and expectations of working as a professional landscape architect, and equips them with practical as well as theoretical knowledge.

Appendix 2. Ashcroft High School Research Centre (ARC)
Healthy Learners' Project
AHS, UNSW, Inghams Medical Research Centre & 7 schools

Pedagogical Practice: Coding Quality Teaching in the Classroom
Teena Haslehurst & Kylie Landrigan

(QT) Coding Co-Curricular Programs: Equal Partners in Learning
Katherine Weeden

Maximising Student Health: A Whole School Approach
Rachel Carter/Rachel Steinke

A Longitudinal Examination of the Elements Associated with Educational Outcomes: Testing a Whole-child Approach
Ted Noon (PhD - UoN)

Dramatherapy’s influence on the well-being of ‘emotionally disturbed’ adolescent girls
Adrian Lania (PhD - UWS)

Middle School Action Research Project: Connecting learning
Jasmin Jones/Janet Fairweather

Appendix 3
Learning & Innovation Centre

Maxwells Ave.

Proposed Construction (VET) building - 2013

Proposed Ashcroft UWS Learning & Innovation Centre

Proposed sponsorships:
Sport field including a ‘hill’ and tree shade

Covered sport area

Proposed ‘green’ purpose built space.