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A whole school approach to changing school culture: The SASA way

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Anyone who has worked in a school or classroom knows changing a culture can be difficult and daunting. The staff at Sydney Adventist School Auburn decided to take up this challenge. These are reflections we can share about the journey so far.

I was faced with the task of finding a way to bring all cultures together by changing our school culture

Sydney Adventist School Auburn (SASA) is a Prep-Year 6 primary school with approximately 135 students. It is a small school set in a very diverse community not far from the Sydney CBD. The school has had many challenges in recent years as it has changed from a junior campus (Prep – Grade 4) to a full primary campus (Prep – Grade 6). The school has also had to adapt to meet the needs of the changing multicultural society that surrounds it.

As a school community we really wanted to focus on what values we wanted to see in our school, values we would expect to be shared by everyone who joined our school community. We did not want values on a piece of paper, but values that were demonstrated in every aspect of our school, and reflected in how we treated each other. “I was faced with the task of finding a way to bring all cultures together by changing our school culture,” says Mrs Efstratiou.

To start our journey, it was important to find out what our school community thought of our current culture and values, and identify areas where we could do better. We held a half-day workshop where staff, parents, students and interested community members shared their vision for the future of SASA. This workshop created a space for creativity and discussion regarding the vision for the school’s values and to identify what was important to our school community.

The workshop was one of the most valuable interactions between stakeholders for really connecting and understanding what our school community wanted. The areas of focus in the workshop were “Things we value”, “What we feel our point of difference is”, “To visualise the ‘ideal’ school” and “Identify the purpose of education at SASA”. Some of the main findings were that our school community values the love of God, community, joy and peace, humility and resilience, and shows care and nurture towards the students.

During this workshop the parents gave positive feedback on the experiences their children were having at the school, and how they looked forward to coming to school every day. They also shared what they valued most about the school, and their concerns that some of these things could change in the future with different staff and leadership. Some of the information that came out of this workshop was totally unexpected. What started as our school “values” became a set of 10 “ideals”, which we now refer to as *The SASA Way*.

The ten ideals were developed to uphold the school’s values and encompass the way we do things at SASA. The first ideal is “We Love and Respect God”. This is really important to our school because we want every child to be involved in worship and prayer and ultimately come to know God as their friend and Saviour.

To make these 10 ideals become alive to the students we developed Sam and Sally - two characters that demonstrated these ideals. “I wanted the students to connect with these characters so that the ideals became alive and real to them,” says Mrs Efstratiou. One poster for each of the 10 ideals was developed with Sam and Sally characterising each ideal. There are also plans to create a story book about Sam and Sally’s adventures. These stories would serve as a

THE SASA WAY

WE LOVE AND RESPECT GOD

We will be involved in worship and share our love for Him with others.
1 Peter 2:17

WE LOVE LEARNING AND STRIVE TO ACHIEVE OUR BEST

We are purposeful, engaged and enthusiastic learners, always striving to develop our skills and talents.
We do our best in class and we do not interfere with the learning of others.
We will be curious about the world God created.
Hebrews 11:6

WE ALWAYS 'HAVE A GO'

We make good choices and are confident to try new things. We show perseverance when things get tough.
Colossians 3:23

WE HAVE A JOYFUL AND POSITIVE MINDSET

We are humble in victory, graceful in defeat, and always thankful for the abilities and opportunities we have. We are happy and enjoy ourselves at school.
Philippians 4:4

WE RESPECT EACH OTHER AND OUR SCHOOL

We accept and value diversity. We are trustworthy, show tolerance and are understanding towards others.
We greet each other, and all visitors to our school.
We are proud to wear our uniform, and always look neat and tidy.
1 Peter 2:17

WE RESPECT OUR TEACHERS

We speak nicely to our teachers and follow their instructions.
1 Peter 2:17

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE

We keep our school tidy; we do not walk past rubbish. We arrive at school and to class on time.
We take care of our property and respect things that belong to others.
Galatians 6:4-5

WE HELP, SUPPORT AND INCLUDE EACH OTHER

We always look for ways to build and lift others up. We treat others the way we want to be treated.
Luke 6:31

WE VALUE SAFETY

We act safely and do not risk our health and well-being, or the welfare of others.
Psalms 121:7

WE ARE PART OF OUR COMMUNITY

We have many cultures but stand together as one community. We are willing to help those in need.
Philippians 2:1-3

“What started as our school “values” became a set of 10 “ideals”, which we now refer to as The SASA Way.”



Figure 1. The SASA Way – 10 Ideals

benchmark for Christian actions and behaviour in our school, would outline each ideal, and how Sam and Sally tackle these in every day life.

The SASA Way has been in place since the beginning of 2016. Initial implementation began by introducing one ideal a week during first term. Staff were fortunate enough to have a colleague create a story of two children embarking on a journey that found them questioning the value of the Fruits of the Spirit. The students really enjoyed these stories. The Chaplain, supporting this strategy, also told stories in Chapel based on the ideal we were focusing on for the week.

The SASA Way is also a benchmark for discipline in the school. It is a more proactive approach to behaviour management. Teachers refer to the 10 ideals to remind the students of the concepts involved and how each is made 'real' through the way we act and treat each other at school.

Though we are still implementing *The SASA Way* we feel that we can see a shift in attitudes with students, staff and families. There are reports of students referring to 'The SASA Way' at home. Parents are giving very positive feedback.

We had one parent tell us she heard her son/ daughter tell the other sibling when they were

playing, "We don't do that because that's not *The SASA Way*." When you hear stories like this, you can't help but be proud of your whole community and excited about what the future holds.

Mrs Efstratiou's advice to other schools would be, to "hold a workshop and get the people who are key stakeholders in your school together and have them share with each other, and with you, about your school." She believes that this process helps to bring together the ideals and image each person has for their school, and creates a wholesome school community. Her final word, "Just try it."

Editor's Note: Figures (2-4) are a sample chosen from the SASA 10 Ideals posters created by Sabrina Cruz. For further information contact defstratiou@auburn.adventist.edu.au

“
I wanted the students to connect with these characters so that the ideals became alive and real to them”

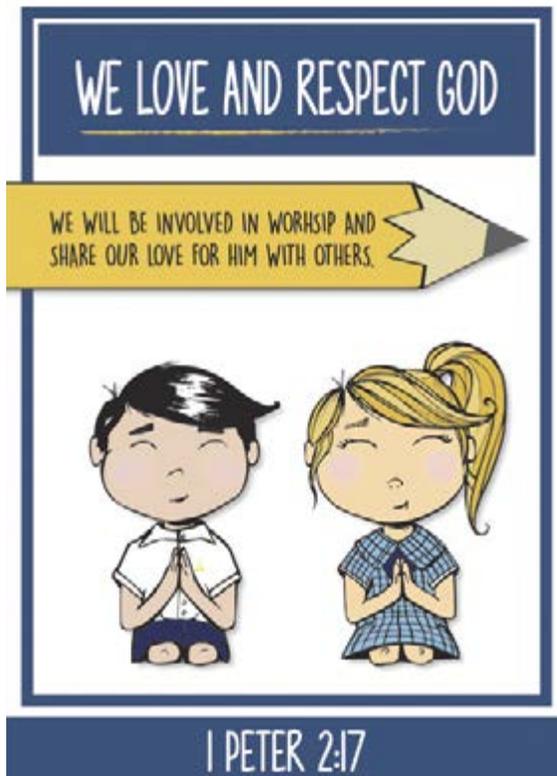


Figure 2. We love and respect God



Figure 3. We love learning