

Academic Conversations

How to organise and conduct successful core group meetings.

Manurewa High School

School Profile: Manurewa High School is a large, urban co-educational school with a roll of over 2000 students. 50% of its students are Pasifika and 25% are Māori. It began implementing core group meetings early in 2014 with the Year 9 cohort and extended this to Year 10 in 2015.

Organisation:

- Each group consists of five core teachers: English, Maths, Science, Social Studies, PE/Health, plus a facilitator – often the tutor teacher.
- The cohorts are divided into two main groupings for the purpose of meetings e.g., half in Group A, half in Group B.
- Meetings are held on a six weekly rotational basis.
- Class folders are set up in OneNote which is used for sharing information amongst colleagues.
- Facilitators' meetings are held on a regular basis, 2-3 times per term, with external support, prior to each cycle of core group meetings.
- Facilitators look closely at e-asTTle reading data and strategies teachers may use in teaching and learning to improve students' reading abilities.

What happens in the core group meetings?

- A discussion about learning and students' learning needs takes place.
- e-asTTle reading data, along with achievement from other assessments in the core subjects, are discussed.
- The facilitator presents 3-4 reading strategies. Teachers are asked to choose one strategy and try to embed it in their practice with their class, and in particular with their 3-4 focus students. Sometimes this has been done as a shared approach, for example the English and Science teachers deliberately adopt the same strategy.
- Sometimes RTLBs are able to attend the meetings. Teachers are told in advance when this will happen. It's a good opportunity for them to ask the RTLB questions and get advice on students they are working with. Teachers see this as being invaluable.

- One person records notes which are later shared on OneNote or by email to all the teachers, the Whānau Leader and the Deputy Principal with responsibility for core group meetings.

What makes the approach successful?

- The focus of the core group meetings is a learning discussion, not one based on pastoral issues.
- Results have shown that strategies teachers have been using have helped to address the gaps identified in e-asTTle data.
- Members of SLT and middle leaders such as HODs and TICs have been trained by an external provider to take on the role of facilitator for the groups. There are approximately 24 facilitators in the school.
- Facilitators are supported by SLT and an external literacy expert.
- Teachers trial, and reflect on their use of, reading strategies between each cycle of meetings.
- Timetablers try to ensure teachers have no more than two classes at each year level to avoid clashes with meetings.
- Members of SLT observe the core group meetings.
- Attendance at the meetings has been very good.