

Learning Futures In-depth

Our approaches to school engagement

The main insight developed from the programme is the realisation of the need to focus on creating engaging schools. This takes the focus of engagement away from the narrow concern on student engagement. The school's engagement with parents/carers, the local community, local businesses, and other schools are equally important to create an engaging school. When a school becomes engaged, it will engage students, and it will be responsive to the needs of the 21st century.

We have developed four approaches to school engagement which we are currently trialling with six schools:

- **Enquiry-based learning:** students learning by seeking out and evaluating information, often within an extended project
- **School as 'base camp':** the school a base where learning is organised taking students into their communities and further afield
- **Extended learning relationships:** reciprocal relationships that support learning – these can be peer-peer, student-teacher, involve parents, external mentors, businesses, external experts and others.
- **School as Learning commons:** the school as 'common ground', with all its users sharing access to its resources, and responsibility for its development

Principles of student engagement

From our evaluation of the programme, we have developed principals of school engagement. We have found that learning is most engaging when it absorbs students in actions that are purposeful and appeals to the student's passions. Actions which allow them to have the chance to work like professionals are more likely to engage students. It is important for the learning to be about more than examinations and connect with students ability to learn in the long term. Learning needs to be prolonged through independent informal learning and learning which can be supported by family, carers and peers. We also know that it is important that their learning is relevant to the student's whole life. This can be done by connecting with the student's family, community and their interests outside school.

Engaged learning in action

We have found many examples which demonstrate our idea of school and student engagement. In one example, a teacher at a Learning Futures school was approached by three students that wanted to do a project on cars. Plans were developed through the teacher and class challenging the three students' learning plan. It was decided that the best idea was to try and construct a high-performance engine from its parts. The teacher remembered a friend who had an engine which had been stripped already. The students

worked a full morning and when they were told it was break time they politely refused the invitation. The teacher commented:

"What was clear was that they were in the current of a real learning... they had hypotheses in the air about which sections were going to fit where. It was absolutely intense. With myself and the Head teacher watching them through the hall I left them to it, still seriously and seamlessly engaged."

You can find more examples of engaged learning on the Learning Future's blog and in pamphlets.