VET in Schools good practice models
St Stephen's School

St Stephen's School is a co-educational independent school of the Uniting Church. The school consists of two campuses located in Duncraig and Carramar. The Duncraig campus opened in 1984 and the Carramar campus opened in 2001.

St Stephen's School vision is to inspire learning that transforms and empowers lives.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools has been delivered at the school for the past eight years.

School profile

- Approximately 2800 students (over two campuses)
- Kindergarten – Year 12
- Year 10 students enrolled in VET in Schools programs approximately 15%
- Year 11 students enrolled in VET in Schools programs approximately 25%
- Year 12 students enrolled in VET in Schools programs approximately 25%

St Stephen's School is committed to growing people and helping all students develop their individual gifts and talents. Delivering VET in Schools programs is one way the school can achieve this commitment. The school actively promotes VET in Schools as an equal and valid pathway and offers this to all students.

Program background

St Stephen's School offers a range of VET in Schools programs to students using a blended model of onsite and offsite delivery. Students can participate in VET in Schools from Year 10. The majority of the qualifications offered at the school are at certificate II and above and are completed within the year.

The school supports its comprehensive VET in Schools program through a well-resourced VET in Schools team, which consists of two external VET Liaison Officers, an Administration Officer and a VET Coordinator. The external VET Liaison Officers are responsible for VET programs delivered off campus. Their role involves communicating with parents and the registered training organisations (RTOs). The VET Coordinator is responsible for all VET programs delivered at the school. This role includes communicating with teachers and the heads of department, overseeing the entire program and ensuring things run smoothly and seamlessly. A VET Liaison Officer resides at each campus, while the VET Coordinator and Administration Officer move between the two campuses.

The school has also lifted the profile of VET by packaging VET in Schools programs more professionally. This has included holding a half day induction for new students and an information evening for their parents and preparing an individualised induction kit for each student.

Program partners

One of St Stephen's School's most significant VET in Schools partnerships is with its students' parents.

St Stephen's School has created a parent occupation database which contains a list of the occupations of students' parents from Kindergarten to Year 12. This database is drawn from a whole of school database which includes parents contact details and occupational information. The parent occupation database is one of the methods used to assist the school to locate work placements for VET in Schools students. The database is updated regularly by the VET Liaison Officer.

The school supports the use of the parent occupation database by allowing parents to be released from their yearly commitment hours[1] if their workplace can offer a student work placement. Approximately 30% of the school's workplace learning employers are students' parents.

The school shows its gratitude to its employer partners by sending them certificates of appreciation. This strong relationship building has enabled the school to maintain long term partnerships with a large number of employers and seen some parents continue to provide work placement opportunities even after their child has graduated.

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[1] St Stephen's School has a policy where parents are required to complete ten commitment hours per year, or make a $200 contribution to the school. Parents can contribute by washing windows on organised days or helping in whole school events/activities.

Program features

Course structure

The school believes there is value in having all students undertake a certificate in Year 10 and encourages this through integrating certificates in courses. The school currently offers Year 10 students the opportunity to complete:

- competencies leading to a Certificate II in Applied Languages Studies when studying French in Year 10 (both campuses);
- Certificate I in Information Technology when studying Applied Information Technology (both campuses);
- Certificate I in Creative Industries when studying Design Graphics (Carramar campus); and
- Certificate I in Sport and Recreation when studying Outdoor Education (Duncraig campus).

Senior school VET in Schools programs are offered as stand-alone courses or integrated in other courses of study.

In 2013, the school commenced a trial of combining VET classes with ATAR courses of study, in which students choose their preferred pathway. The school acknowledges that some students can excel in the practical component of course work, but struggle with theory. These students are given the option to complete the assessments under the VET qualification only and if confident, choose to undertake the ATAR assessments as well. This delivery strategy not only reduces the divide between VET students and ATAR students, but also enables the school to run VET qualifications when the numbers for stand-alone classes are unviable. The school has implemented this parallel delivery model with the following courses and qualifications:

- Certificate II in Fashion Design alongside Textiles 3AB at the Carramar campus;
- Certificate II in Live Production Theatre and Events alongside Drama 3AB at both campuses; and
- Certificate III in Applied Languages alongside French 2AB and 3AB at the Carramar campus.

This parallel delivery model has been mostly applied to Year 12 courses, but the school intends to apply this to Year 11 courses soon. A preliminary evaluation of this delivery model has indicated positive student outcomes, with all students in Fashion Design and Live Production achieving their competencies.

Workplace learning is also a critical aspect of the VET in Schools programs, with approximately 70% of students undertaking VET in Schools involved in some form of work placement.

Student entry requirements

Students wishing to undertake the Electro-technology pre-apprenticeship program must meet a minimum entry requirement of a C grade in intermediate Maths.

There are no minimum entry requirements for students wanting to undertake other VET qualifications, however, students indicating an interest in VET at their careers counselling session are referred to the VET Coordinator for an informal interview. During the interview, the expectations of the program, the student's interest and their training options are discussed. The purpose of the interview is to assess the student's commitment and interest and minimise drop out numbers during the year.

Student selection process

There are no formal selection processes for internal VET in Schools programs, however, students are assisted in choosing the most suitable VET qualification and career pathways through a range of activities including:

- Careers Education commencing in Year 10 to help students make connections between school and future working life, working as a team and establishing Individual Education Pathway Plans;

- mandatory work experience in Year 10;

- an annual careers expo on each campus, where universities and RTOs are invited to attend;

- attending the WA Careers Expo and Skills West Expo;

- subject information evenings showcasing each learning area with teachers available to answer student queries;

- career advice and counselling to students commencing in Year 9; and

- Try a Trade days (when there are enough student numbers).

Students wishing to participate in external VET programs are subject to the selection process prescribed by the training provider.

Student support

St Stephen's School holds a half day conference/induction day for new external VET in Schools students. Each student receives a kit that is tailored to them containing:

- the contact details of the VET team (students are asked to put these contact details immediately into their mobile phones);
- the contact details of their training provider and course information;
- information on the days and times they will be attending the training provider;
- information on the dress code; and
- a journey planner detailing how they get to their training provider and how to get home (this specifies which buses and trains to catch and the times).

This kit was also designed to help put parents at ease when their child travels to the training provider.

The school has introduced a catch up class called External VET on the timetable grid. The VET Liaison Officer is responsible for coordinating these classes and liaising with teachers to arrange any tests students may have missed by being off campus. Mentor teachers are available for students to access during External VET classes. These mentors supervise the class and support students with class related queries. To ensure VET in Schools students receive adequate numeracy and literacy support additional Maths and English teachers are made available.

Parent liaison

St Stephen's School values and encourages parental involvement with the school. In addition to encouraging parents to provide work placements for students, the school engages with parents through a range of activities and events, including:

- a VET induction evening at the start of the year for external VET in Schools programs. Parents are introduced to the VET in Schools programs, shown what is on offer and what their child can achieve;
- forwarding any student interim reports issued by the RTO;
- inviting parents to their child's subject counselling session;
- inviting parents to attend the school's annual career expo; and
- regular newsletters and emails giving updates on their child's progress and any other relevant information such as open days at RTOs.
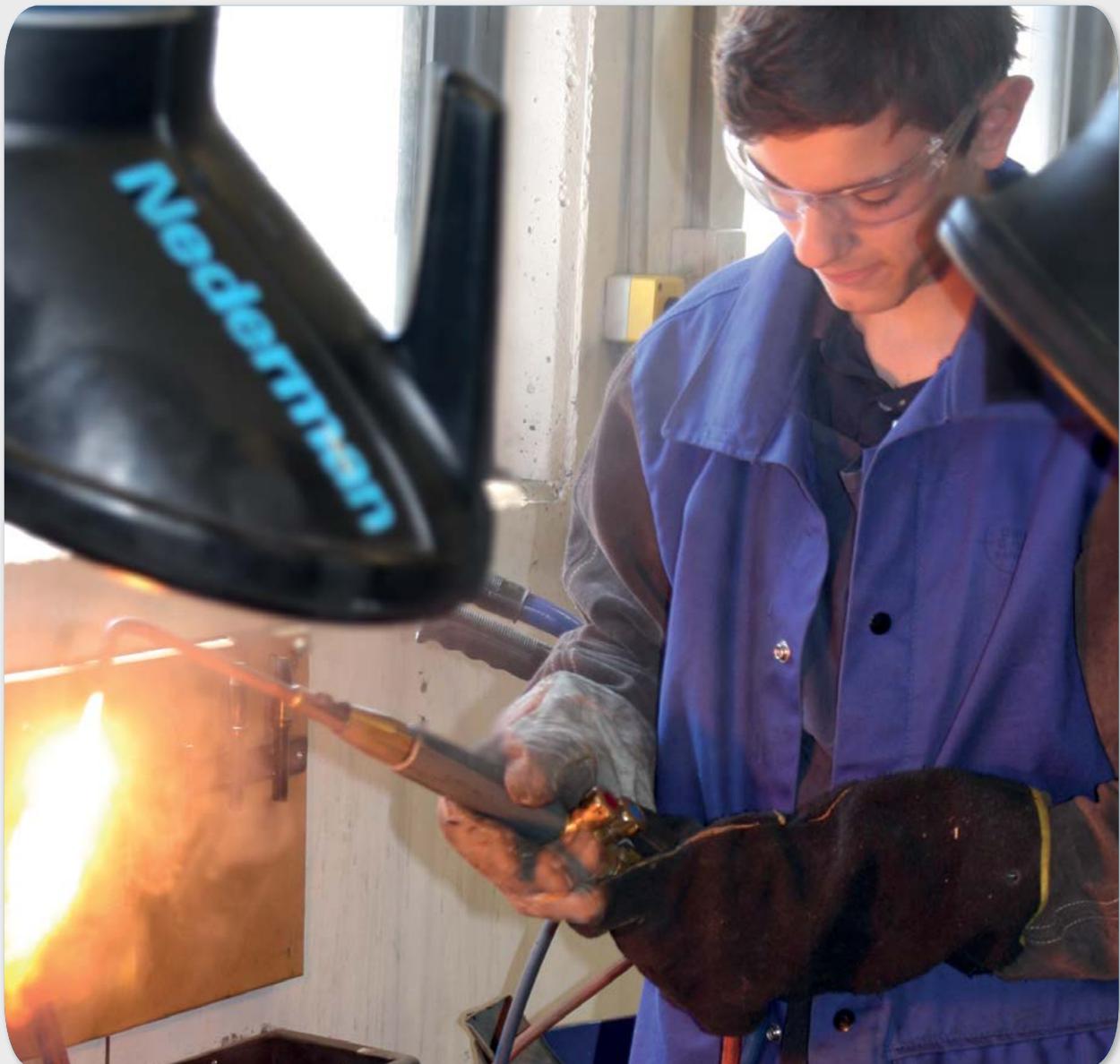
Program results

In 2012 St Stephen's School had a certificate II or higher completion rate of 98% for Year 12 students.

Two students were among the Western Australian recipients for the 2011 Australian Vocational Student Prize.

Lessons learnt

- Flexibility is extremely important.
- If the timetable is too rigid then a proportion of VET courses are off limits to students.
- Structure and clear boundaries are needed when dealing with RTOs to maintain a long term relationship.
- Schools need to carefully consider what courses they choose to offer students as a long shelf life is desirable to minimise changes from year to year.
- Two way communication in the VET in Schools team and each learning area is critical.
- VET in Schools is a process of continuous evaluation and improvement.

Critical success factors

Leadership, continuity and partnerships	• All staff are encouraged to be part of VET in Schools. Most staff, including non-VET teachers, the school Deans and Heads of Secondary School, assist with workplace visits. • The VET Coordinator is given the autonomy to make appropriate decisions for VET in Schools. • VET in Schools has its own budget allocation and is well staffed. • Staff in the VET in Schools team keep their job description roles up to date as part of succession planning.
Student cohort and parent liaison	• The school offers a broad range of VET qualifications at varying levels to meet the interests and capability of their various student cohorts. • The school offers VET qualifications specific to student cohorts including students with special needs and students at risk.
Vision, place and configuration	• The majority of the training programs on offer have a direct link with local industries or the broader skill shortage areas. • Work placements are sought from local businesses. • The school prefers to select employers that can offer apprenticeships.
Flexibility	• Timetabling is flexible to suit individual pathways and enable students to undertake work placements on Wednesdays or in blocks. • Students can postpone exams and assessments to accommodate their VET requirements.
Course content, structure and evaluation	• Data is collected on the number of students who have passed their certificates. This information is used to shape future VET offerings at the school. • The VET Coordinator meets with each learning area to obtain feedback on their VET in Schools program. • The VET Coordinator reviews all Memorandums of Understandings with external providers annually to assess what changes are needed for the following year. • The school will be collecting student course results and certificate completion rate data to assess the effectiveness of the parallel delivery model.

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