



The Lyneham Academic Enrichment Program Evaluation

December 2014



LUKE WILLIAMS
LEAP COORDINATOR

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Introduction

The Lyneham Enriched Academic Program (LEAP, or LEAP Program) was first introduced into Lyneham High School in 1983 after “LEAP Extension Courses” were offered in 1982. An initial comprehensive review took place in 1983, conducted by Neil Russell (School of Education CCAE) with Ian Excell (Research and Evaluation Section) and John Clement (Priority Programs) of the ACT Schools Authority. This review found that the program was an “integral part of the Lyneham High School Education Program” and that it was “a legitimate approach to meeting the educational needs of...the academically able.” It recommended that more be done to publicise the program with the feeder Primary Schools and that identification procedures be refined. It was otherwise a glowing report.

Lorraine Hatfield, position unknown, ran an evaluation in November 1989. Ms Hatfield concluded that the program continued to be successful, attracting many candidates. Junior students (Years 7 and 8) were experiencing very positive outcomes, though seniors (Years 9 and 10) were “disappointed with their LEAP experience mainly because they feel the work is not challenging or extending them.” Students “felt they had learned more in LEAP [but] others felt that the course was no different to Level 1 courses.” Staff requested that the “LEAP curriculum should allow more time for students to explore individual interests.” The evaluation concluded that more information should be made available about LEAP course content, assessment procedures and program expectations of students. It also recommended that the senior curriculum be revised to provide more opportunities for students to pursue individual interests and that professional support be provided to staff.

No further documentation can be located to show any further evaluations until this year.

Recommendation 1: That an evaluation of LEAP run again in 2015. In particular, it should target Year 7 parents and senior students mid-year rather than at the end. A full evaluation should be run again in 2020 and to continue in 5 yearly increments. The evaluations should not be done by any member of the LEAP committee in order to keep the evaluation as objective as possible.

Evaluation Approach

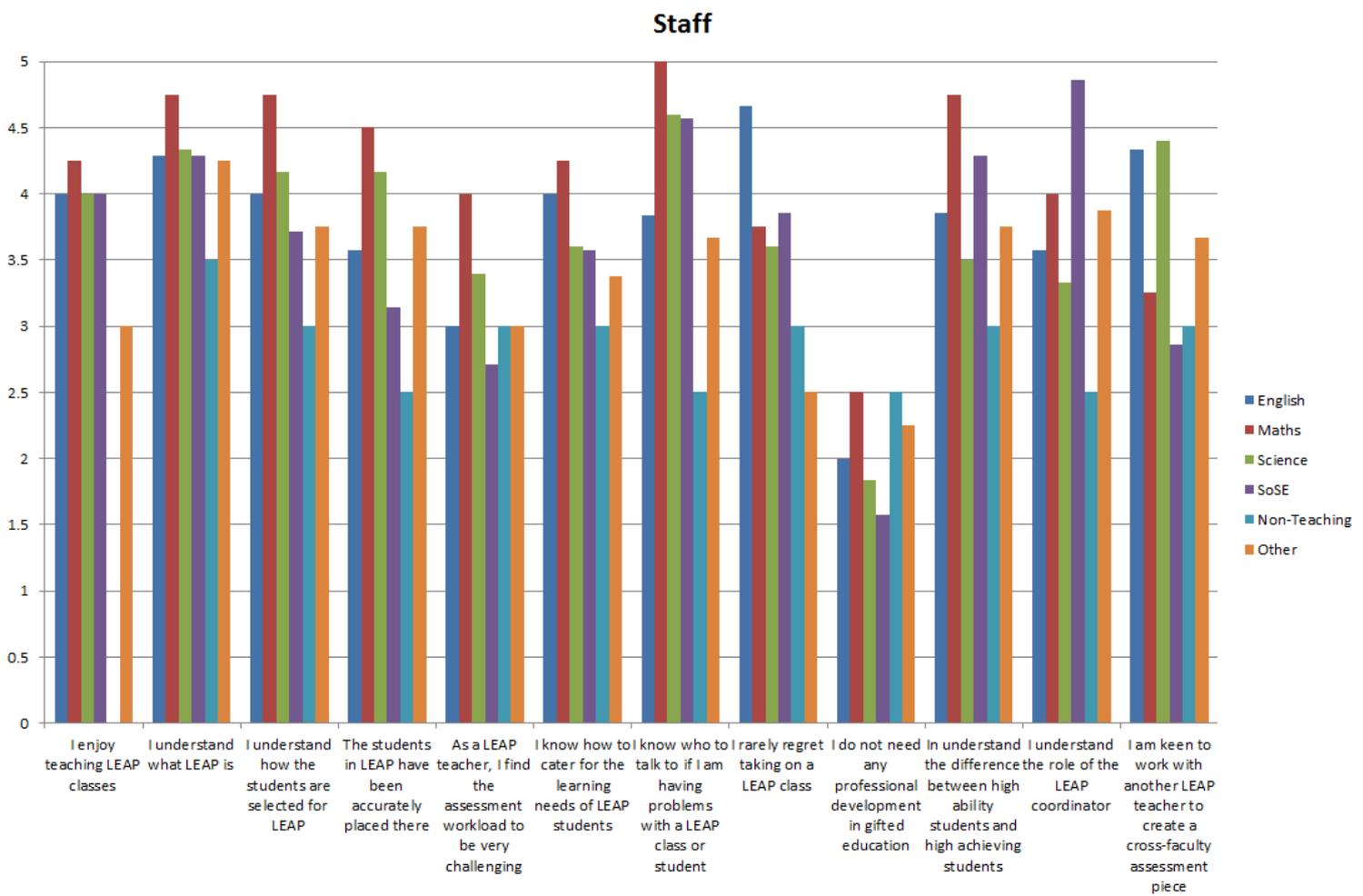
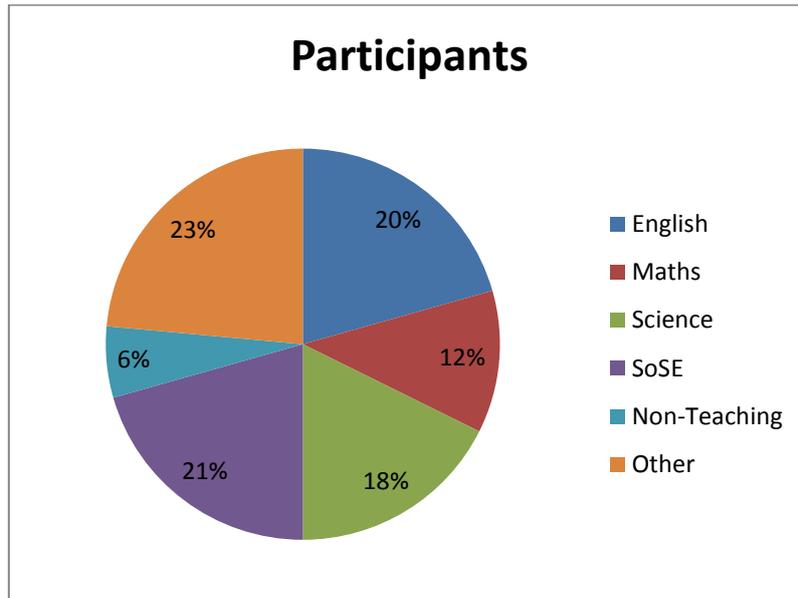
Data collection occurred over this year via both anecdotal and formal means. Anecdotally, complaints and issues were collected during phone conversations, parent meetings and student discussions. A formal survey was undertaken in mid-November, using Google Forms. A link was sent to staff and parents via email while students in LEAP classes were taken to the school's library to conduct the survey during a lesson. Questions were derived from the anecdotal evidence collected over the year. Copies of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.

Limitations and Issues

There were a number of limitations:

1. All anecdotal information only reflected the participants willing to discuss their concerns. It was also largely of a negative nature.
2. While all **staff** were included in the survey email, there was a high proportion of non-LEAP teachers who added their points of view. There is no way to determine if all current 20 LEAP teachers took part.
3. Only **students** in English and SOSE streams were able to complete the survey. Partial LEAP students from Maths and Science were excluded only due to time constraints.
4. While a **parent and carer** email distribution list was created from data from MAZE for all LEAP students, some families do not have an email address. Also, it is unclear how many families regularly check their email.
5. Not all of the questions were particularly well worded and many did not have a similar question in the corresponding survey for the other stakeholders.
6. Using **Google Forms** meant that there was no way to check if people completed the survey more than once. While the survey was locked down in between student sessions, individual students could have completed the survey more than once during that class and staff and parents/carers could have filled them out multiple times. There is no evidence to suggest that any of this occurred.
7. As the program had not been evaluated for a very long time, students and parents used the opportunity to express a wide range of issues. Likewise, as a number of program changes had occurred during the year, students and parents expressed their displeasure with these changes rather than reflecting on the program as a whole.
8. Some of the qualifying questions about the current grade of the student for parents and carers were very poorly constructed leading to some issues with specific identification.

Staff Results



5 = Strongly Agree 1 = Strongly Disagree

Responses for each group have been averaged

Summary

A total of 34 staff members responded, approximately 30% of the staff at Lyneham High School. These people were spread across the four LEAP faculties with a large proportion of 'Other' – staff from Technology, the Arts and PE.

The data reveals discrepancies between LEAP faculties concerning understanding and agreement with LEAP identification procedures though with such low numbers of staff replying (only 4 staff in Maths, for example) it is hard to take too much away from these results. What is clear, however, is that most staff disagreed with "I do not need any professional development in gifted education". There was also a significant lack of knowledge about LEAP in the non-teaching section of staff.

Negative Experiences

In their written comments, 40% of respondents mentioned that LEAP parents could be very demanding, rude and "hostile" at times. A minority (5%) of staff had some truly awful stories to tell (*"the worst experience of my long teaching career"*) but these appeared to be with individual parents rather than a common interaction. Primarily, the staff-parent relationship broke down over grades and marks with parents having a higher impression of their child's work than the educator. High levels of perfectionism and parental expectations within the LEAP cohort appear more prominent than in other classes leading to stressed out students who face pressure on multiple fronts. This can be a recipe for conflict.

In regards to LEAP students, very few staff members spoke of any significant negative experiences. Individual LEAP cohorts had developed some behaviour issues – rudeness, argumentativeness and arrogance – leading to low staff morale and a generally poor impression of the program.

Extension and Enrichment

Most staff (80%) offered positive and encouraging answers on how to best enrich and extend students who were performing above their cohort.

"I ask them develop the next level of thinking above their current level instead of giving them more work. For example when their writing is already A level, I focus on further developing their skills in a particular technique." English teacher

"Investigate further options, either in or outside of school for the student to enrich their learning in the subject area depending on their interests - e.g. creative writing, journalism, blogging, vlogging, scriptwriting and so on. Other options might be to work with students in a higher Year level. Each case would have different options and possibilities." English teacher

"Extend the student further, find challenging pieces for them to complete; such as past enrichment questions so that they might be able to conduct their own research to solve a particular problem." Maths teacher

“Look for means of broadening and deepening that student's knowledge and skills without encroaching on curriculum that is set for older year levels. Provide extension tasks and/or an outside mentor (scientist, mathematician, IT specialist) for the student.” Science teacher

“Extend work for him so that his interest was sustained in the subject and differentiate even if it means going beyond the scope and sequences for that year group.” SoSE teacher.

Some staff highlighted the need for additional work to be done to better reward very high performing students.

“It's sad we don't have the ability to accelerate and or provide extra credit for outstanding performers.” SoSE Teacher

“Some students in LEAP are achieving well beyond the Australian curriculum Achievement Standards (as are some nonLEAP students) so reporting using the current learning outcomes is not reflecting the ability of these students.” English teacher

There were a wide range of answers for “LEAP is about grouping gifted students together across all four core subject areas. Do you think this works?”. Approximately 40 % agreed, 10% disagreed and 50% were undecided or presented both sides of the argument.

Professional Development

A huge majority of staff (90%) were interested in pursuing some sort of professional development, particularly from internal school PD (65%). PD was also requested from the ETD (58%), via online tutorials (40%) and readings (30%). Interestingly, training was an issue highlighted in the 1989 review. With regular staff turnover, one off training and development of staff will not ensure the best outcomes for students.

Other Comments

Staff offered a wide range of opinions in this section, including:

“Keep up the good work as you are attempting to develop and disseminate information. It is my problem not moving out or my little world.” English teacher

“I think we have the most amazing opportunities as LEAP teachers to work with gifted and talented students. It broadens and deepens my mind as much as I try to do that to theirs.” English teacher

“Are we an enrichment program or acceleration program; this needs to be explicitly communicated to parents and students.” Maths teacher

“I would like to see more enrichment opportunities across all year levels and would like to see more camps for social development not educational all the time.” Science teacher.

“LHS does an excellent job of testing, referring and reviewing in order to identify gifted students for the LEAP program. We could always get better at what we do but I think the biggest area of need right now is in teacher awareness and training. Teachers need to understand giftedness and LEAP in order to provide properly for our high ability students. PD with gifted educators and groups from outside the system would be excellent. We need to be able to cater to individual needs more through differentiation and acceleration. Also a grading system that allows for further recognition beyond the A - E system could be advantageous, especially for that top echelon, around 5 to 10 students per year group. We need to lock down what we are doing and then be transparent with the community about the program. We can keep elements of testing secret to ensure cheating/prep does not occur as long as we explain that.” SOSE Teacher

“Great program - the job of Coordinator for Leap is a huge job - lots of contact with students and parents. The program is working very well from what I see at LHS - hard to find the time however to target individual students dealing with issues, but that is across all classes, not just Leap.” SOSE Teacher

“LEAP is a highly valued and acclaimed program for the school which improves its standing in the community. It needs to be strongly supported with excellent staff and resources in order to continue the fantastic work teachers are doing.” Non-LEAP teacher

Recommendation 2: Future surveys should better delineate between LEAP teachers and non-LEAP teachers.

Recommendation 3: That the LEAP Coordinator begin a LEAP Newsletter that goes home at least once a term to LEAP families. This document must feature information from all 16 LEAP classes with input from all LEAP teachers.

Recommendation 4: That LEAP teachers be upfront and communicate with the LEAP coordinator quickly when experiencing any negative student behaviours.

Recommendation 5: Discussion to take place on the LEAP Committee about examining ways to deliver better targeted consequences to students exhibiting ongoing negative behaviours.

Recommendation 6: That the school examine a way to incorporate additional marking structures to reward students operating above an “A” in Australian Curriculum subjects.

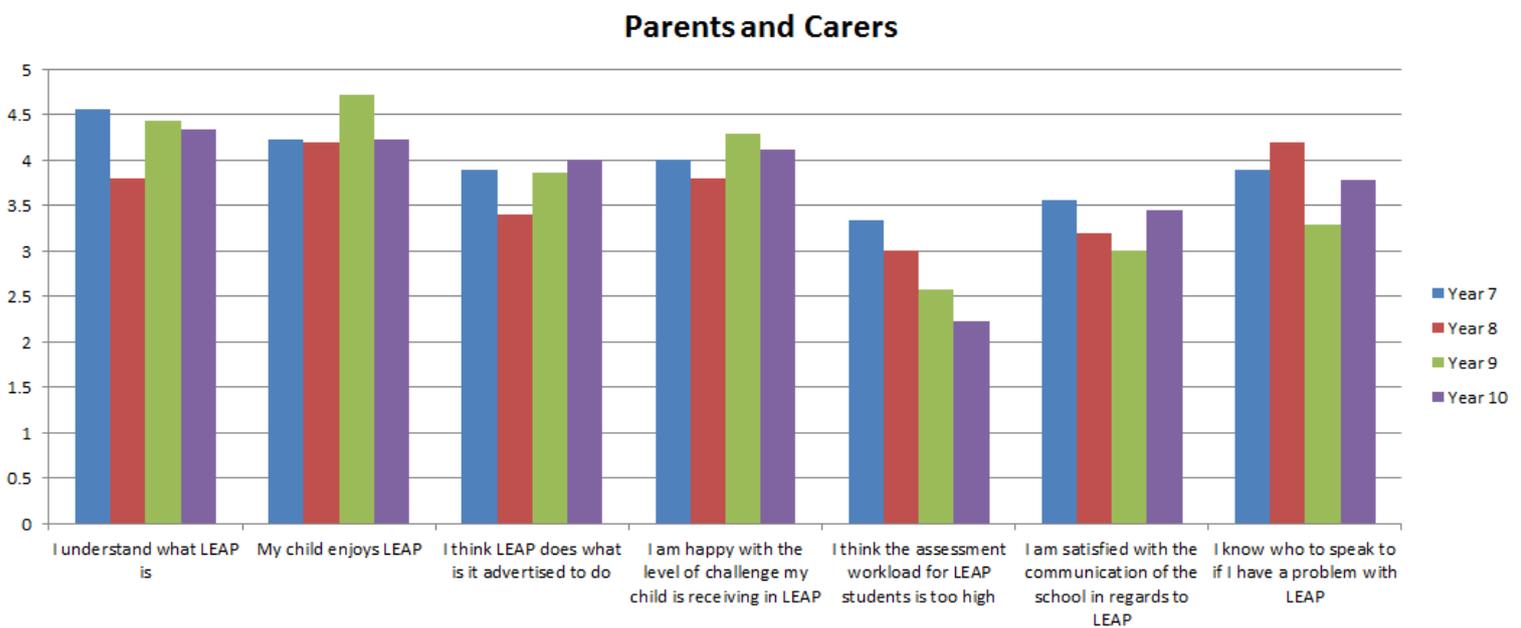
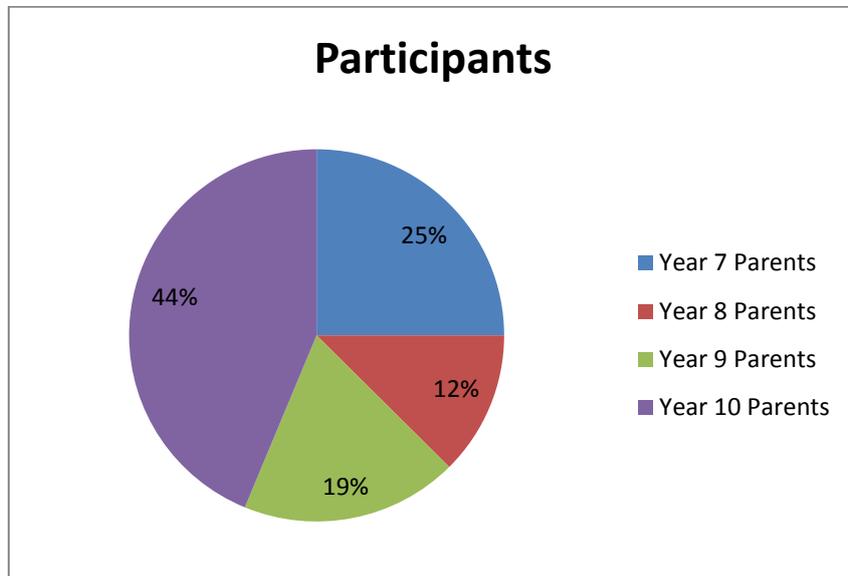
Recommendation 7: That the school examine a way to incorporate and fund ongoing professional development for all staff into the school culture, but especially for LEAP teachers, in how to extend, enrich and differentiate in classes.

Recommendation 8: That the school prioritise funding for LEAP teachers for either PD or time in lieu to encourage learning about gifted students and how to best cater for their needs.

Recommendation 9: That the LEAP Coordinator take on a more proactive role in observing all LEAP classes at least once a semester.

Recommendation 10: That further work be done to ensure that all staff are aware of the purposes and direction of LEAP and that this is better communicated to parents and students.

Parents and Carers Results



5 = Strongly Agree 1 = Strongly Disagree

Responses for each group have been averaged

Summary

A total of 32 parents responded, approximately 25% of the families in LEAP. These were largely (44%) from Year 10 families due to the double LEAP cohort in that year group, though Year 7 families were well represented (25%). The key information revealed from the data in this section was concerning communication and assessment. Another notable point was that dissatisfaction with the program increased with the age of the student. This phenomenon mirrors the results of the 1989 Review.

Benefits

Many (47%) parents expressed the belief that LEAP provides the necessary challenge and extension work they want for their child's schooling. However, most parents (63%) suggested that the strongest benefit of LEAP was that their child was grouped with other like-minded students, both to provide academic support and to make friends.

"[LEAP] provides a challenge to the normal curriculum for students who can quickly pick up new concepts, it is also a good idea to keep the students together that are in the LEAP classes until year 10. I think this provides stability for the learning environment to flourish during what is normally a very turbulent time for teenagers." Year 7 parent

"They are grouped together so that - no matter what else is going on - at least they are with like-minded kids. All the research suggests this is the single most important thing to aim for." Year 10 parent

"The on average higher background level or faster learning ability has allowed the teachers to challenge them more - set higher goals, or encourage them to really go for it in open ended tasks. But another key way in which LEAP has benefited the students is through being in a class where the average interest in learning has been much higher than in the other levels. The kids have commented on that many times when comparing with their other non-LEAP classes. As a consequence they could feel comfortable participating well in class and didn't need to hide their hard work. In many subjects it has allowed them to take the content much beyond the set curriculum. I feel they have also been inspired by each other's abilities and creativity. Another aspect that's been positive and noticeable in the later years is that the group gets to know each other very well and hence become more accepting of each other's quirks and habits. This has made for a significantly more relaxed and stimulating learning environment." Year 9 parent

Another significant (22%) response talked about the pedagogy of LEAP teachers who make lessons interesting and challenging while being able to work with "quirky" students. Only one parent (3%) wrote that they didn't believe LEAP offered any benefits.

Ability Grouping

A significant majority (81%) of parents agreed with the way Lyneham High School groups gifted and talented students.

"Absolutely. These kids need a different teaching method that works to their thinking processes and allows them to thrive. Allows them to have high level discussions. Don't have to wait for others to catch up or to understand the concepts compared to the non-Leap classes...My child has many friends in the school that are not in LEAP so a streamlined class has definitely not led to segregation in the school yard." Year 7 parent

"Absolutely. It has been of great benefit to my child, who has remained engaged in school. If he was not being challenged in a leap class, he would have easily got bored with school." Year 10 parent

However, a small number of parents expressed some concerns:

"No. I think the method that you use to determine "giftedness" is extremely flawed. It would be better to wait until the end of Term 1 and then identify students who are excelling in Level 1 and take those off into the LEAP." Year 8 parent

"...there has been so much variability within and between classes that it's impossible to know whether it works from the point of view of what is learned. In maths classes in particular, there has always been a huge range of student abilities, and often the maths classes moved very slowly. Whenever we discussed our concerns with teachers the response was always that there was this wide range and they needed to work to make sure the less knowledgeable kids were up to speed. They are supposed to be gifted students, how many years does it take to get them up to speed?"
Year 10 parent

Negatives

Parents provided a wide range of thoughts about the negatives of the LEAP program, though the second largest single response (19%) was that they thought there were no negatives. More prominently, parents also commented that they thought the workload was too high and that teacher expectations created additional stress (34%). Also mentioned a number of times (13%) was the feeling that being part of LEAP lead to harassment and "stereotyping" of their child from their non-LEAP peers.

"More an issue with the curriculum than the school - feel there is too much assessment. Seems like everything they do is assessed even if it's the first time they have done it. It's like there is no room for trial and error anymore or for kids to explore the parameters or be creative (away from a rubric) without fear. Instead it feels like each little task eg writing their first science practice report, writing poems, evaluating an arrive etc, doing an artwork - it counts towards assessment." Year 7 parent

"She feels a pressure to perform academically - feels like teachers and peers have high expectations. This leads to stress esp re assignments." Year 8 parent

“There is social stigma amongst non-LEAP kids, and even to some extent, amongst the LEAP kids themselves. It's not a huge issue but it is there. I think there is a lack of understanding amongst the broader school community (especially non-LEAP parents) about why kids are in LEAP. There is an expectation that they're all geniuses and they're not - most of them just think a little differently to other people.” Year 9 parent

“They do feel they are sometimes perceived as the nerds. Most of the time that doesn't seem to bother them. Maybe because they're together in it as a class - no longer one of two nerds in class as in the non-streamed primary school. But I do worry whether promotion of LEAP with t-shirts could make perception by those outside LEAP worse.” Year 9 parent

Parents also mentioned the possibility of negative relationships with non-LEAP students (6%), that the teachers on LEAP classes were not as good as the ones on Level 1 (6%) and that there was a disparity in marking and grading (6%).

“The LEAP kids have seen their other friends assessed work. In some instances they have seen level one work which received an A grade which would never get anywhere near an A if handed into a LEAP class. So I have had the LEAP kids think why should they extend themselves in LEAP if they could just cruise in level one and pull off an A with little effort. Luckily they know they will be bored. LEAP kids need to be assessed the same and not be at a disadvantage due to some teacher expectations when they mark the rubric.” Year 7 parent

Communication

The survey specifically asked a question about satisfaction levels with the communication of the school. Some parents (25%) expressed the opinion that they had received no information from the school about LEAP at all. Parents had received emails from some teachers about ‘what was going on in classes’ but other staff had remained silent. Two parents (6%) suggested a “LEAP newsletter” would be a great way to communicate with parents about what was happening in each subject area. One parent suggested that a specific Year 7 LEAP information night early in the year so that the “...school [could] talk on their objectives, how they aim to teach leap students and what to expect throughout the year. What to do if the kid is struggling etc. Can also convey the expectation that LEAP kids do certain academic competitions.”

Communication with LEAP parents has, in fact, significantly increased this year, with regular pieces in the school’s newsletter. Likewise the Year 7 “Meet The Teachers” evening also provided the additional information requested. These avenues, however, are not meeting the needs of some of the parents.

Extension and Enrichment: Is LEAP “challenging”?

When it came to talking about how challenging the LEAP classes were, there were no stand out answers. The most prominent response (13%) was that the challenge was “patchy” and

determined by the skills of the teacher. Other responses covered concerns about the scope of assessment (3%), that more tests were required (6%) and that Mathematics needed more challenging work (9%). One comment that was quite interesting, spoke about the difference between challenging work and busy work:

“We find that there is often too much of a focus in some subjects on very extensive assignments with fairly complicated rubrics that need to be followed. As a result, these assignments require a very large amount of effort but are not necessary intellectually challenging as such. In other words there is not enough time for intellectual curiosity and 'thinking' as the assignment workload is so high. As a result, it can be counterproductive - ie. our child's interest in some subjects has declined in some cases which is not what we expected.” Year 7 parent

Other Comments

The largest (22%) single response from parents in this section was to express positive comments about the program. Other parents were worried about too much homework (9%) and the nature and direction of assessment and grading under the Australian Curriculum (15%). There were also minor mentions about the lack of camps (6%), the criteria and tests used to identify gifted students (6%) and the poor use of group work (6%).

“My child sometimes becomes anxious about her school work and assessments. If this common to LEAP students, it might be helpful to provide tools and strategies for dealing with this.” Year 8 parent

“My son has really enjoyed LEAP this year (Year 7) and I think he has benefited a lot from the program but, and I realise this is beyond the powers of LHS, having across-the-board assessment is ridiculous. The common assessment tasks become completely meaningless and to some extent it brings the existence of a gifted program into question. Why single them out and teach them differently yet assess them in the same way as everyone else? Either differentiate completely or forget about it.” Year 7 parent

“Assessment workload: over time the assignments have grown in strength, providing some fantastic learning. The workload in later years does seem to get too high, especially for SOSE (but with fantastic learning!). In part it is because of where the students take this learning, which can be quite intensive and time consuming. A little bit more sharing between LEAP teachers in what they ask from their students and when may help. With the open ended assignments a few more guidelines on what would be sufficient (for the A grade they try for) may help too. A few teachers in Yr 7 did that very well this year telling the kids to think wisely about their time availability and not go overboard. Smaller shorter tasks may also help reduce the workload and still provide appropriate learning and extension.” Year 7 parent

“Many schools integrate higher level students in mixed level classes. It is fantastic that Lyneham offers the opportunity for Leap students to work with likeminded students and achieve their very best. Well done Leap program.” Year 10 parent

“Why are they being given assignments for which the highest mark they can obtain is a C? There is no interest or challenge in that for them, why would they be expected to engage or take it seriously? Why are they being told that LEAP students don't get more advanced work, just different work? In what way is it different? Why is it not more advanced? The genuinely gifted kids need more advanced work; I don't mean the next year's curriculum, although sometimes that would help, but more advanced concepts and tasks they can get their teeth into. Why was the Year 10 LEAP camp cancelled? The kids have looked forward to it since Year 7, they are bitterly disappointed that it has gone. They have apparently been told that it would be elitist to run a special camp for them - but they note that it is apparently not elitist to run camps for other student groups. I assume there are good reasons for all these decisions, but they are not being communicated to the kids or to the parents. What it looks like to us is that the LEAP kids are being quietly sidelined, and the program is being slowly dismantled. If the kids are not getting different work or a different program of any sort, what exactly is left?” Year 10 parent

Recommendation 11: That the LEAP committee fully investigate all assessment practices within LEAP classes and to examine whether or not assessment is actually challenging.

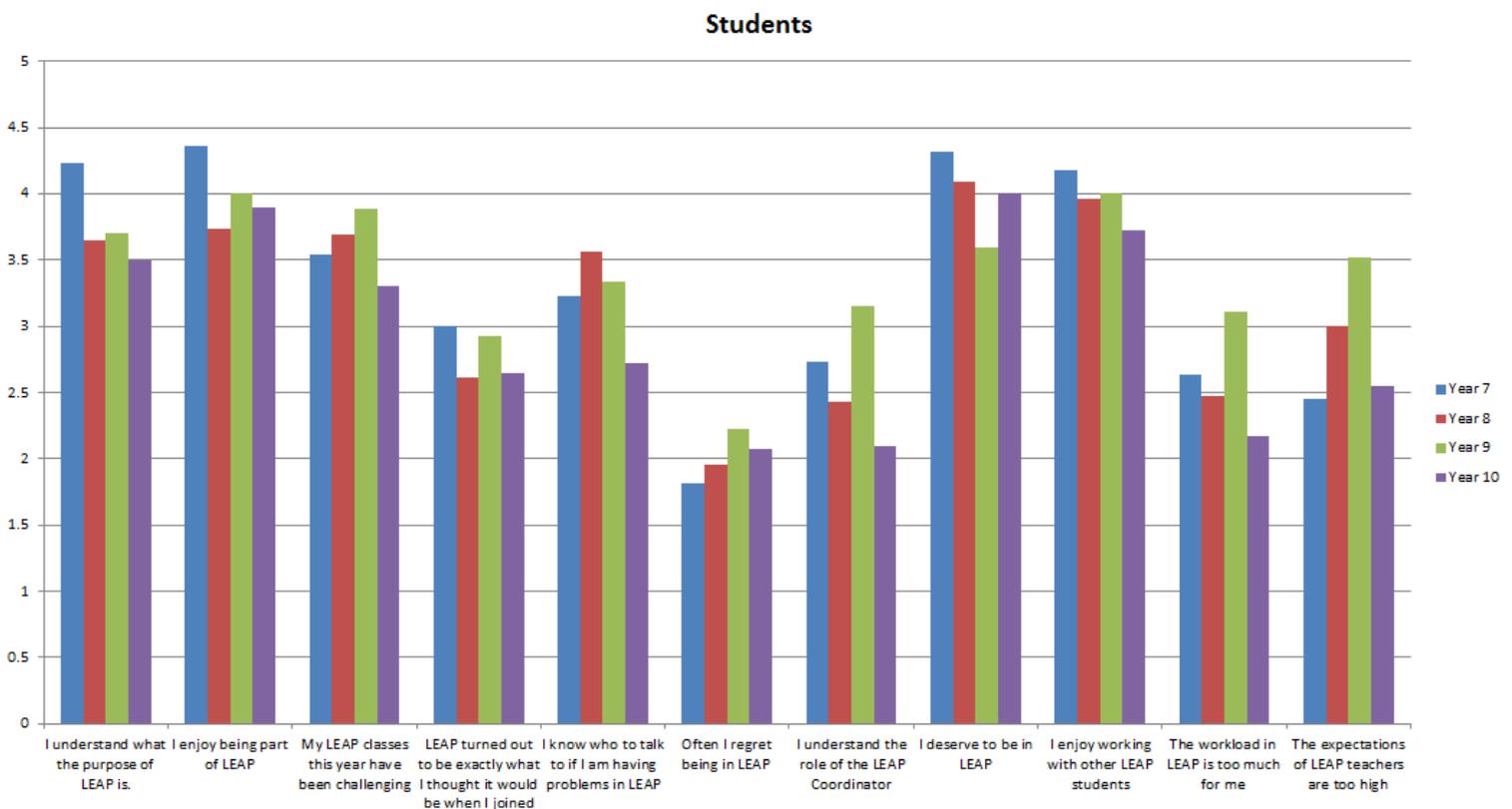
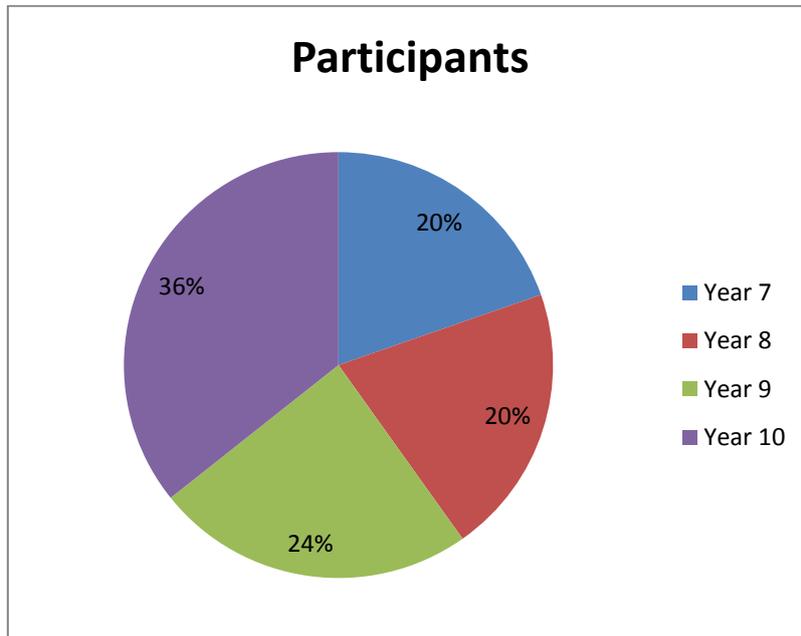
Recommendation 12: That the LEAP committee ensure that all LEAP teachers are using the LEAP PLCs 2014 guide on how to challenge students in classes.

Recommendation 13: That the LEAP committee examine ways to reduce the amount of “stereotyping” of LEAP students by other students, staff and relief teachers.

Recommendation 14: That the LEAP committee directly communicate major decisions regarding the program in writing to the families of LEAP students.

Recommendation 15: That the LEAP Coordinator consider how to best meet the needs of gifted students suffering from stress of high expectations.

Student Results



5 = Strongly Agree 1 = Strongly Disagree
 Responses for each group have been averaged

Summary

A total of 108 LEAP students responded, approximately 70% of the students in LEAP at Lyneham High School. Areas of concern were that the point or purpose of LEAP not being what students thought it was meant to be, the role and purpose of the LEAP Coordinator and widely differing opinions about assessment, workload and teacher expectations.

Benefits and Negatives

In one of the most significant results of the survey, over half (60%) of the students suggested that the best part of being in LEAP was being able to work “with other smart kids” and praised the classroom “environment”. Many students (31%) enjoyed the increased challenge and additional work, while others (7%) suggested that the best thing was the wide-ranging discussions that they could have in class and the flexibility and skills of the staff (6%).

“I feel like I am part of a team and it's nice to work with the same people every day. It also feels like we're part of a kind of "family".” Year 7 student

“Your learning is extended - you learn more each year. Every class is more efficient because most people want to learn.” Year 8 student

“You get to work among other people who enjoy learning as much as you do. It's nice to hear everyone's varying opinions on a wide range of topics. The topics are sometimes challenging, and fun.” Year 8 student

“It's really easy to fit in and form some long term friends, since you spend all your time with them. Getting along with everyone is pretty easy too :) Not sure if a benefit or not, but It gives my parents bragging rights when speaking to others.” Year 9 student

“The class room environment is often very amusing and the discussion can be rather enlightening. Sometimes a teacher will assign a task that is well suited to the class instead of just a general one. The dynamics are also fascinating.” Year 9 student

“You get to work with a bunch of equally nerdy people, and we all just get along except these two kids. If you're having problems with classwork, there'll be someone who can explain it. If there are fights/drama, it stays within LEAP and doesn't really involve other people. Everybody's friends with everybody. We learn to function as a class and it's great. The discussions in class are probably more in depth than other levels, and we're basically a dysfunctional family or a big friendship group. Also, we get advanced work and stuff. But the social dynamic's really good.” Year 10 student

“I like how it's easy to talk to people in leap and presentations are not as nerve racking because you know the people for four years. Also I like how our teachers try to extend our knowledge.” Year 10 student

However, one quarter of respondents felt that the expectations placed upon them by their peers, parents and staff were too high. They also mentioned (13%) that individual students that they

“were stuck with” aggravated them and the competitiveness in some classes created stress. A proportion of students (14%) felt that being in the same class for four subjects for four years was the biggest negative and expressed a desire to “meet others”. This was more prominent in the older students, but still in relatively small numbers.

“On the whole, my first year of LEAP has been an amazing experience - I have enjoyed every minute of it and have liked everybody I have met. However, I just wish that there was less homework and/or assignments so that I did not have to spend all my lunches, afternoons and weekends working.” Year 7 student

“Higher expectations from teachers. Being in a class full of mostly exceptional students puts a lot more pressure on me because when we finish tests or receive assignments back from marking, there's a lot more competition and not getting a great score on those kinds of things and hearing about everyone else's full marks is kind of sad and makes me feel less great about myself.” Year 7 student

“Having a single class group for all core classes means that we socialise less and have less of a chance to meet other people, especially in year 7, and it means that we have no break from the annoying people that we wish weren't in the class.” Year 9 student

Staff and Stereotyping

A rather disturbing figure (15%) felt that they had not been taught by quality staff and expressed the need for teachers to be evaluated by students and removed from the program. Other students (6%) questioned why non-performing students were allowed to stay in LEAP and called for increased behavioural management in certain classes. The concept of “stereotyping” LEAP students – a word used many times by students from all year levels – was a major issue for many children.

“People ask for you to do their homework and people also say 'Why can't you do this properly, you're in LEAP?'” Year 8 student

“Mr XXX compares LEAP students to level one students, and vice versa, and tells both classes that they are worse than the other. Both classes find this offensive and unproductive. Many teachers strongly stereotype us as 'LEAP' students, and assume (some may be accurate) that we 1. Are really smart 2. Enjoy learning 3. Deserve getting a heavier workload 4. Think we are better than everyone else 5. Will be much louder/quieter than other classes. A lot of students in this class don't like being generalised in this way.” Year 9 student

This was a real concern of students. Comments that relief staff walked into their classes expecting them to be “machines” and when they didn't live up to expectations, staff berated or put down the students featured in the comments of most year groups.

Differences and Assessment

The older students, but especially Year 9 (40% of respondents from that year group), complained that they felt there was no difference between Level 1 classes and LEAP and “so what is the point”.

“Having joined LEAP in year 9, I find there is little to no benefits in being in...LEAP... over Level 1. The work is mostly the same, with most assessment tasks being the same throughout all levels, the grading system is the same and the topics being studied are almost always the same.” Year 9 student

These concerns overlapped with the annoyance of the “stereotyping” and a growing perception that if the assessment is the same, what are students actually getting out of the program. This was further highlighted by students in other levels doing what was perceived to be “lesser” work but getting the same or better grades.

“I think it should be overall easier for level one students to enter LEAP. Through the new curriculum it has become obvious there is not as much of a gap between LEAP and level one as might have been previously believed. I think the test for year 8/9's to get into LEAP is unrealistically hard, when in LEAP we simply discuss some things more and have a slightly different curriculum, rather than being completely superior in schoolwork and progression through units. This brings us to the marking system - LEAP classes are expected to be really good at all assessment - therefore the marking of LEAP assessment is harsh and teachers believe LEAP students should always be above the other levels. I think this is a bit unfair - LEAP is (I think) supposed to be about looking further into topics, not being ridiculously good at assessment.” Year 9 student

“Strongly disagree with the marking system, especially in SOSE and English, when our teachers give us assignment sheets and tell us... "This is how you get a C". They then say what they'd expect for most students to get an A, and then say "You guys are in LEAP, I expect even more from you to go above and beyond, you can do better than this". This is entirely untrue, a good half of the class are no smarter than many level 1's, and are marked more harshly with high expectations just because of the few bright people they're grouped with. If you're reading this and thinking "you're marked the same as level 1", wrong. With a large chunk of friends in level one, reading assignments and discussing grades, there is no way our teachers are marking us by the same standard (look up some stats).” Year 9 student

Dissatisfaction

Extreme dissatisfaction, while still only expressed by a small minority of students on the whole (9%), was most palpable in Year 10 with 20% of respondents signalling that they had felt their experience was more negative than positive.

“Leap is dumb, I wish I was never made to join it. It's a stupid program that is no different to being in Level 1 except that you have to share a class with weird socially incapable nerds.” Year 10 student

"I feel significantly let down by the implementation of the National Curriculum destroying any hope of showing my potential in some classes, Maths in particular. This has resulted in me completing assignments where it was physically impossible to get higher than an A. This made me feel betrayed, since I could not actually do well. Worse, apparently the program was never "above level one" but "beside level one and level two" according to the LEAP presentation given to all students. How is this an extension program again? There has either been a misunderstanding on an astronomical scale, or LEAP has been an enormous letdown, and I suspect the latter. I was informed that LEAP was an extension program, and fostered good social bonds. It has not fostered those bonds because of the double LEAP class, and there has been little to no extension at all. The assignments have been the same as the other levels (to which we are aside), the work has been of similar quality, and I feel that we have not honestly been challenged. LEAP has failed." Year 10 student

"LEAP is only relevant to the rest of the world when the school feels like showing it off. The program was touted as a "gifted and talented program", but turned out to be little different from any other Level. Now, apparently, it's a "side program", although what of is not clear." Year 10 student

"I'm doing my best to not sound bitter, but it's hard, because I am. LEAP is the thing I will be most glad to see the back of when I leave this school, and is the main thing that has made the past four years unpleasant for me." Year 10 student

The negativity of a minority (10%) of students in year 10 towards the LEAP coordinator was visceral.

"Mr Williams is a terrible leap coordinator who does not care about us and does nothing." Year 10 student

*"I expressed my dislike of Mr Williams to someone today, and they asked 'Who is Mr Williams.' Just goes to show how useless he's been as a coordinator this year. It makes me physically ill with how much of a waste of space he's been. 'I was too busy to organise the YR 10 LEAP camp' he says, what an absolute jerk off. I haven't heard three useful words out of his mouth in the whole time he's been the coordinator, apart from when he degraded LEAP, saying that it is not above level one, rather along side it. What absolute horse shit. *Drops Mic*"* Year 10 student

"New LEAP coordinator. He took away nearly every value that LEAP stood for, diminishing the point of having a LEAP program. Thereby destroying the one of the purpose of LEAP and one of the core aspects of Lyneham High. The only thing he kept, to keep up appearances, was to keep the LEAP in it's two classes. Whilst problems did arise from the "National Curriculum", He didn't have to restrain us to certain amounts of work, and then hold us at the standard of Level 3+. A new LEAP coordinator should be issued for the benefit of the LEAP programs with it's Original Values restored to uphold the standard of and reputation of Lyneham High school." Year 10 student

The focus of such hostility appears to be threefold. The cancellation of the Year 10 camp in Term 1 under the direction of the school and the less than stellar communication and reasoning of this

decision resulted in a poor starting point. Showing all LEAP students a diagram that displayed LEAP sitting alongside Level 1 and 2 rather than an “above” course led some students to feeling insulted, especially as there appeared to be a pre-existing issue with feeling undervalued by the school and the previously mentioned “stereotyping”. Their experience of LEAP over the previous three years did not match what was being told to them and the messages being sent by staff over the course of this year that they were meant to be “geniuses” and that’s why they were receiving more work and faced higher expectations. The third factor appears to have been the outcome of teacher-led discussions in a single Year 10 LEAP class about the purpose, structure, direction and leadership of LEAP. The outcome of these discussions was a hardening of resolve of a few vocal and passionate dissenters. This in turn may have influenced the voices and opinions of others.

Improvements and Other Comments

Students had expressed their opinions in the comments sections quite randomly, signalling that the style and format of survey questions needed more thought. Some suggested improvements included more camps (18%), better teachers (16%) and more challenging classes (12%). Improving the perception and understanding of LEAP among staff, students (both LEAP and non-LEAP) and parents by a number of respondents (8%) was maybe the most constructive comment given that, if resolved, it may lead to the lessening of other concerns. One again, this was driven solely by senior students.

“Anyhow I believe that the LEAP guidelines should be more clear and that students should have a greater understanding of LEAP's purpose.” Year 9 student

“Teachers that understand the purpose of LEAP and don't stereotype the students.” Year 10 student

“Unrealistic expectations from relief teachers who do not properly understand the purpose of LEAP.” Year 10 student

“Nobody knows what the purpose of LEAP actually is. We have a good idea of what it's supposed to be, but in that sense it has been nothing but a disappointment.” Year 10 student

Recommendation 16: That the LEAP coordinator sit in on every LEAP group in Term 1 of every year and, where possible, speak with that group without other staff present in order to diagnose general problems as quickly as possible.

Recommendation 17: That is a matter of priority, the re-imagining of LEAP under the new ETD policy framework be communicated to all staff, students and parents. This should clearly outline the purpose of LEAP and how it differs from Level 1

Recommendation 18: That the LEAP Committee consider the placement of all LEAP students in the second semester of Year 8 for continuation into Year 9 and 10.

Recommendation 19: That an “exit” policy be determined for students who are no longer gaining anything from the social direction of the program.

Recommendation 20: That staff are actively and consistently reminded of the purpose of LEAP and warned against using discriminatory language with students. This reminder needs to include the fact that all LEAP classes are mixed ability.

Recommendation 21: That all LEAP students provide feedback on the classroom learning environment every six months and that data be shared with teachers, LEAP committee and SLCs of core faculties.

Recommendation 22: That Year 10 LEAP Camp be reinstated immediately for 2015 and consideration of the introduction of Year 9 LEAP camp and an overhaul of aspects of the Year 7 LEAP camp take place.

Recommendation 23: That the LEAP Coordinator provide honest information to all stakeholders about the specific nature of the LEAP Coordinator’s job description.

Acceleration

The new Gifted and Talented policy makes room for acceleration of gifted students, both moving ahead a whole grade or in individual subjects. With the expectations that Lyneham High School will be faced with increased requests for this to occur, Executive staff were asked to go back to their faculties and put to teachers the following hypothetical:

Five Year 8 LEAP students are being accelerated at the end of this year to start Year 10 in 2015 in your subject area. What problems do you anticipate? Who in your faculty would be willing to take on Year 10 LEAP?

A number of issues were raised, primarily concerns around the social aspects of a student being moved away from their friends and the side effects of missing out on key skills and sequenced content. However, many staff signalled via their executive that they actually didn't know what a gifted student looked like or had a variety of (sometime) contradictory impressions.

Recommendation 24: That Lyneham High School write an acceleration policy, clearly outlining the steps involved for a students to be considered for accelerating. This document needs to be made public for both staff and parents.

Recommendation 25: That all staff in the school engage in professional development about how to identify students who may be gifted.

Recommendation 26: That all staff in the school engage in professional development about the benefits of acceleration in order to unpick some of the myths and outdated theories.

Recommendation 27: That the LEAP Committee create a straight forward checklist for staff trying to identify a gifted student that can be used by the committee when placing students on the LEAP watchlist.

Conclusion

The 2014 LEAP Evaluation was challenging in a number of ways. Certainly, the fact that there had been no official or published review in over two decades meant that there were many people – staff, students and families – who had unexpressed issues that had never been resolved.

Students, in particular, expressed the widest range of distress and even anger at being part of a program that they felt they had little knowledge of or power over. The undercurrent of broken promises and false advertising was most prominent in Year 10, but there were echoes of it building in Years 8 and 9. It may be that this is the side-effect of being in any highly structured program for a number of years. With new competition in the form of STAR and, to a lesser extent, DARE, LEAP students are seeing social opportunities in other programs they feel unable to be part of in LEAP. It could be argued that LEAP satisfies the strong need for friendship of likeminded students in the first years of high school, but that dissipates for some program members by Year 9 and even more by Year 10. It is possible that Lyneham High School needs to be even more flexible in providing a satisfactory exit from LEAP without increasing the potential negative social implications such a move could create.

Staff recognised the urgent need for professional development in gifted education, a repeat from the 1989 review. Teachers should be congratulated for not only their awareness of the need, but also the desire to see such a skill gap lessened. The selection of LEAP teachers needs careful consideration by Executive staff, as does their ongoing evaluation by students. Staff of LEAP classes must be in regular contact with parents and must seek critical feedback from their students.

Parents and carers primarily were seeking increased communication not only about changes to LEAP but also what was happening in classes. Patchy and even non-existent communication methods in the past had not created a lot of goodwill in the parent community. Likewise, significant changes to curriculum and assessment with the introduction of the Australian Curriculum has been taken quite poorly by LEAP families; the one thing they thought LEAP was about – flexibility of pedagogy, content and assessment – has been, according to some of them, totally hijacked or removed. Reassuring parents, and indeed staff, that this is actually not the case will need to occur.

Recommendations

Evaluations and Reviews

Recommendation 1: That an evaluation of LEAP run again in 2015. In particular, it should target Year 7 parents and senior students mid-year rather than at the end. A full evaluation should be run again in 2020 and to continue in 5 yearly increments. The evaluations should not be done by any member of the LEAP committee in order to keep the evaluation as objective as possible.

Recommendation 2: Future surveys should better delineate between LEAP teachers and non-LEAP teachers.

Communication with Parents

Recommendation 3: That the LEAP Coordinator begin a LEAP Newsletter that goes home at least once a term to LEAP families. This document must feature information from all 16 LEAP classes with input from all LEAP teachers.

Recommendation 9: That the LEAP Coordinator take on a more proactive role in observing all LEAP classes at least once a semester.

Recommendation 14: That the LEAP committee directly communicate major decisions regarding the program in writing to the families of LEAP students.

Recommendation 23: That the LEAP Coordinator provide honest information to all stakeholders about the specific nature of the LEAP Coordinator's job description.

Staff Responsibilities and Training

Recommendation 4: That LEAP teachers be upfront and communicate with the LEAP coordinator quickly when experiencing any negative student behaviours.

Recommendation 7: That the school examine a way to incorporate and fund ongoing professional development for all staff into the school culture, but especially for LEAP teachers, in how to extend, enrich and differentiate in classes.

Recommendation 8: That the school prioritise funding for LEAP teachers for either PD or time in lieu to encourage learning about gifted students and how to best cater for their needs.

Recommendation 12: That the LEAP committee ensure that all LEAP teachers are using the LEAP PLCs 2014 guide on how to challenge students in classes.

Recommendation 13: That the LEAP committee examine ways to reduce the amount of "stereotyping" of LEAP students by other students, staff and relief teachers.

Recommendation 20: That staff are actively and consistently reminded of the purpose of LEAP and warned against using discriminatory language with students. This reminder needs to include the fact that all LEAP classes are mixed ability.

Recommendation 21: That all LEAP students provide feedback on the classroom learning environment every six months and that data be shared with teachers, LEAP committee and SLCs of core faculties.

Recommendation 25: That all staff in the school engage in professional development about how to identify students who may be gifted.

Recommendation 26: That all staff in the school engage in professional development about the benefits of acceleration in order to unpick some of the myths and outdated theories.

Recommendation 27: That the LEAP Committee create a straight forward checklist for staff trying to identify a gifted student that can be used by the committee when placing students on the LEAP watchlist.

Student Needs, Behaviours and Progression

Recommendation 5: Discussion to take place on the LEAP Committee about examining ways to deliver better targeted consequences to students exhibiting ongoing negative behaviours.

Recommendation 15: That the LEAP Coordinator consider how to best meet the needs of gifted students suffering from stress of high expectations.

Recommendation 16: That the LEAP Coordinator sit in on every LEAP group in Term 1 of every year and, where possible, speak with that group without other staff present in order to diagnose general problems as quickly as possible.

Recommendation 18: That the LEAP Committee consider the placement of all LEAP students in the second semester of Year 8 for continuation into Year 9 and 10.

Recommendation 19: That an "exit" policy be determined for students who are no longer gaining anything from the social direction of the program.

Recommendation 22: That Year 10 LEAP Camp be reinstated immediately for 2015 and consideration of the introduction of Year 9 LEAP camp and an overhaul of aspects of the Year 7 LEAP camp take place.

Recommendation 24: That Lyneham High School write an acceleration policy, clearly outlining the steps involved for a students to be considered for accelerating. This document needs to be made public for both staff and parents.

Assessment and Grading

Recommendation 6: That the school examine a way to incorporate additional marking structures to reward students operating above an "A" in Australian Curriculum subjects.

Recommendation 11: That the LEAP committee fully investigate all assessment practices within LEAP classes and to examine whether or not assessment is actually challenging.

Direction of LEAP

Recommendation 10: That further work be done to ensure that all staff are aware of the purposes and direction of LEAP and that this is better communicated to parents and students.

Recommendation 17: That is a matter of priority, the re-imagining of LEAP under the new ETD policy framework be communicated to all staff, students and parents. This should clearly outline the purpose of LEAP and how it differs from Level 1.

Appendix

LEAP Survey - Parents and Carers

*Required

For how many years have you had children at Lyneham High School? *

- 1 year - this is their first year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 or more years

How many children do you currently have enrolled in LEAP classes?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

Who originally suggested that your child should try out for LEAP? *

- I did
- My partner/spouse
- Both of us
- Our child
- A teacher (primary school)
- A teacher (secondary school)
- A friend / other family member
- I don't remember / know
- Other:

How did your child gain access to the program? *

- Via testing when they were in Year 6
- Via testing when they were in Year 7-10
- Via the watchlist
- I don't know / remember

What LEAP classes does your child currently study? *

Check all that apply

- English

- Maths
- Science
- SOSE

I understand what LEAP is *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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My child enjoys LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I think LEAP does what is it advertised to do *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I am happy with the level of challenge my child is receiving in LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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If you disagreed about the level of challenge, please explain why.

I think the assessment workload for LEAP students is too high *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I am satisfied with the communication of the school in regards to LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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If you disagreed about the communication, what more could we do?

I know who to speak to if I have a problem with LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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How do you think LEAP benefits students?

Do you believe there are any negatives for students being in LEAP?

LEAP is about grouping gifted students together across a range of classes. Do you think this works?

Do you have any other comments?

LEAP Survey - Staff

*Required

What is your main teaching area *

- English
- Maths
- Science
- SoSE
- Other
- Non-teaching staff

How many years have you been at Lyneham High School? *

Include this year as a full year

- 1. This is my first year at LHS
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- 5-6 years
- 7-10 years
- More than 10 years

How many LEAP classes have you taught at LHS? *

- 0
- 1
- 2-3
- 3-4
- More than 4

I enjoy teaching LEAP classes

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I understand what LEAP is *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I understand how the students are selected for LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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The students in LEAP have been accurately placed there *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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As a LEAP teacher, I find the assessment workload to be very challenging

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I know how to cater for the learning needs of LEAP students

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I know who to talk to if I am having problems with a LEAP class or student

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I rarely regret taking on a LEAP class

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I do not need any professional development in gifted education *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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In understand the difference between high ability students and high achieving students *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I understand the role of the LEAP coordinator *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I am keen to work with another LEAP teacher to create a cross-faculty assessment piece

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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Have you had any negative experiences with LEAP parents or students?

If yes, please give brief details.

If a LEAP student in your class was performing particularly well above the level of the rest of the class, what would you do?

LEAP is about grouping gifted students together across all four core subject areas. Do you think this works? *

What type of professional development would you gain the most from? *

Check all that apply

- ETD PL (offsite)
- Internal school PD (staff meetings, January PD, after school)
- Readings
- Online tutorials
- None of the above
- Other:

Do you have any other comments?

LEAP Survey - Students

*Required

In what year did you sit the LEAP tests? *

- 2014
- 2013
- 2012
- 2011
- 2010
- I didn't sit any tests

How many years have you been in LEAP? *

- 0 - 1
- 1 - 2
- 2 - 3
- 3 - 4

What classes are you in LEAP for? *

Check all that apply

- English
- Maths
- Science
- SoSE

Who originally suggested you should try out for LEAP? *

- I did
- My parents / carers
- A friend
- A teacher
- Other:

I understand what the purpose of LEAP is. *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I enjoy being part of LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I deserve to be in LEAP *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I enjoy working with other LEAP students *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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My LEAP classes this year have been challenging *

Consider the average of all of your LEAP classes this year only

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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The workload in LEAP is too much for me *

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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The expectations of LEAP teachers are too high *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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LEAP turned out to be exactly what I thought it would be when I joined *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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I know who to talk to if I am having problems in LEAP *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree	()	()	()	()	()	Strongly agree
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Often I regret being in LEAP *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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I understand the role of the LEAP Coordinator *

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree				
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What are the benefits of being a LEAP student?

What are the negatives of being a LEAP student?

What enrichment activities have you been part of while you have been in LEAP?

Check all that apply

- Debating
- Tournament of the Minds
- English Competition
- English Writing Competition
- Science Competition
- Computing Skills Competition
- Maths Competition
- Geography Competition
- Da Vinci Decathlon
- Raising Hope Mentoring
- Year 7 LEAP Camp
- Year 8 LEAP Camp
- Other:

How could LEAP be improved?

Do you have any other comments?