



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Impact of the Big Picture Design for Learning on Engagement, Inclusion and Transitions for Students with Disability

Rarely is a finding presenting no differences between two groups so important. The learning outcomes and experiences of students with disability is the same as those for students without disability in Big Picture Learning (BPL) Schools and Academies. The BPL design (the Design) is a design for ALL students in ALL school contexts in ALL settings. ALL students have the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and experience success. The Design is personalised, strengths-based and planned around students' individual interests. It emphasises the importance of relationships within the learning environment and the broader community, providing opportunities for students through out-learning experiences and the International Big Picture Learning Credential (IBPLC). These aspects of the Design have particular impact on the learning experience for students with disability. The current research provides the opportunity to explore and provide evidence for how the Design specifically supports students with disability in terms of improving engagement, fostering inclusion, and facilitating transitions.

For many reasons, the current educational options pose a number of problems for students with disability. At times, students with disability may find their needs are not being effectively met in mainstream classes and in various special education support units. The students in BPL schools and academies are supported purely by the Design. In fact, this research arose from BPL CEO and co-founder Viv White not able to distinguish between students with disability and those without disability in the advisory setting. The learning content, learning style, learning pace and approaches to communicate their learning are personalised and flexible for all students, replacing out-dated curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

The proportion of students with a diagnosed disability in BPL is greater than the proportion of students with a diagnosed disability in mainstream. The mean percentage of students with a diagnosed disability in BPL is 22.5% (increasing to 49.7% when including numbers of undiagnosed students) compared to mainstream 18.1%. According to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data, students in BPL receive fewer adjustments when compared to students in mainstream, and the level of adjustment received for BPL students overall is lower than that received by students in mainstream. The research acknowledges the contributions from the principals, advisors, students, and parents of ten BPL schools and academies in NSW. From these insights, together with the comparison of data for students with disability in BPL with data for students without disability in BPL, and with data for students in mainstream



schools, we have gained an understanding of the experiences of students with disability in BPL schools and academies.

All students reported significant academic and social growth since joining BPL. Overall, they feel more connected and “better in general”. This research shows lower absenteeism, higher retention rates, fewer suspensions, and fewer negative incidents for students with disability enrolled in BPL compared to students with disability enrolled in mainstream. Since enrolling in BPL, students with disability report fewer incidences of bullying, more support from teachers, higher levels of school satisfaction and feeling more positive about their future. They experience a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment based on mutual respect.

Advisors develop strong relationships with students and know them well in terms of their strengths and challenges, wellbeing, aspirations, and family contexts. Students with disability in BPL demonstrate improvements with regard to engagement, behaviour, confidence, independence, relationships, achievements, and management of their disability. Parents reported that BPL was meeting the needs of their child with disability, noting academic, personal, emotional, and social improvements in their child since joining BPL. The Design not only supports students with disability, it has also been shown to reduce accompanying mental health and behavioural issues, and enhance wellbeing. Parents trust the Design to enable their child to reach their full potential and fulfil their goals.

Students with disability in BPL schools and academies had opportunities to apply their learning in real-world situations and had a clear vision of what they wanted to do after graduating. This provides students with the opportunity to develop relevant skill sets for post-school aspirations, including real-world experience and relationships in areas of interest through internships. This builds an awareness of opportunities available and establishes achievable pathways within the community, and ensures students feel confident in achieving their goals.

All students have unique needs, abilities and interests that need to be considered in their learning environment. This research provides evidence that the Design supports all students in terms of academic outcomes and wellbeing through personalised learning that is both aligned with interests and relevant to the real world. Evidence exists that fundamental aspects of the Design, such as interests, practice, and relationships, have a positive impact on student wellbeing. Students with disability consistently report improvements in their experience of these ‘measures’ since being part of BPL.



The Design improves engagement and fosters inclusion for students with disability to successfully facilitate transitions from school to further education, training, and employment. A growing emphasis on the importance of wellbeing associated with a sense of purpose and belonging will in turn improve student achievement. It is important to understand the ongoing needs of advisors to enable them to effectively provide support for students. Finally, BPL always seeks the student voice to provide insight and inform practice. It is important for the value of this to be recognised when determining their needs.

“Big Picture students help each other out, no-one is better than anyone else, you are not compared to others. Everyone is good at something – Big Picture helps you find out what that is.” (Student)

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