ACADEMIC COACH

Auburn Girls High School ventured into a new project the “Academic Coach” this year, as part of the National Partnerships Program. It is a four year project with a focus on students in years 7, 8 and 9. Academic Coaches were appointed for each of the three year groups for the project to begin. The Academic Coach Team comprises of five teachers and the teacher librarian.

What is an Academic Coach?

This is a trial to experiment with an additional approach to supporting academic performance. In the same way that Year Advisors support the welfare needs of the students, the concept of the Academic Coach is to address the learning needs of individuals and groups of students within classrooms and across the curriculum. Professional Development opportunities that the Academic Coaches undertake will be shared with their colleagues as they deliver programs for, and develop an understanding of a specific year group.

What are the projects goals?

- Experiment with approaches to supporting academic performance
- Address the learning needs of individuals and groups of students
- Develop an understanding of a specific year group that can be used to support learning.
- Establish whether the role and alternative learning opportunities it facilitates can make a difference.

What are our parameters?

Proposed target areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Literacy:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Literacy:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading – with an emphasis on comprehension</td>
<td>Writing – with an emphasis on persuasive writing (or similar) and ‘grammar and punctuation’</td>
<td>Reading comprehension – with an emphasis on interpreting questions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Numeracy:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Numeracy:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Numeracy:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number across the curriculum - with an emphasis upon number facts</td>
<td>Interpreting questions and problem solving strategies</td>
<td>Data and graphs across the curriculum</td>
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<td><strong>Learning to learn:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Learning to learn:</strong></td>
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<td>Problem solving (including understanding assignments and feedback)</td>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>Understanding assignments and feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Management skills:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Management skills:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Management skills:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal management and being organised</td>
<td>Homework and study skills</td>
<td>Setting and achieving goals</td>
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How will the project operate?

- It will be based upon the knowledge of our students
- Working towards the needs of our students
- Utilising evidence based research (that is: John Hattie’s ‘Visible Learning’)
- Using initiatives built around ‘Action Research’ cycle
- It may involve individual initiatives (example: IEPs/ILPs), groups, classes or even year groups.

Getting Started

- **Appointment of Academic Coaches** - Once the Academic Coaches were appointed, the replacement teachers were employed to replace them in the classroom. The coaches took on their roles in week 7 of Term 1.

- **Getting to know our students** - It was essential for the coaches to get as much background information about individual students before the implementation of plans and strategies in the classroom. How did we do this!
  
  ➢ Individual interviews - Each of the coaches withdrew students from the classroom and had a one to one interview with them. This is an ongoing process. Students were informed at the beginning of the interview that the information that they shared with the coach was confidential and as such the students were able to speak freely about issues and concerns that they had. Aspects that were discussed included; receptive modes, communication skills, academic skills, behavioural issues, health, emotional issues, home support, and attitude and perceptions. Follow up questions were also asked in relation to their goals and abilities.
  
  ➢ On-line Survey - SurveyMonkey (free online questionnaire and survey software) was used as a tool for students to complete the survey. The focus of the survey was to determine the use of language/s in terms of reading, writing, communicating and time spent on schoolwork outside of school. The data was analysed and this was made available for all staff members to access.

- **Pre-Testing students** - The literacy levels of students were tested using the “The Torch Test’ for both fiction and non-fiction text. The results were analysed to determine the year level each student was performing at. The analysis of the data showed varying results and it re-affirmed that the project may be beneficial for our girls.

- **Specialised Training** - The Academic Coaches underwent professional development on two specific Models; The Super Six and Reciprocal Reading. It was decided that we were going to focus on Reciprocal Reading as our first strategy to model in the classroom.

- **In the classroom** - The Science Faculty is involved in the trial of Reciprocal Reading in their classroom teaching. Currently the Academic Coaches are working with individual teachers to model Reciprocal Reading in their respective classes. The aim is that students will apply the skills learnt from their Science classes in all other subjects and eventually have a positive impact on their overall academic performance. Are we going to make a difference? Time will tell.

- **Where to next?** - The Academic Coaches will continue to work with the 7-9 girls for the next three years using other strategies to hopefully make a difference in their academic performance.