

Engaging with Schools

Why should an OSHLSP engage with schools?

There are many benefits that come from engaging schools and school staff in your Out-of-School-Hours Learning Support Program (OSHLSP). Partnerships with schools are an excellent way to increase the reach, success and sustainability of your program. For a community run homework club, communication with a student's school is a great way of ensuring any assistance given to a student is appropriate for their educational needs. There are many different approaches you can take in collaborating with schools and school staff.



Strategies for engaging with schools

- ❖ Form partnerships with local schools. Provide information and flyers about your program. You may want to set up a referral system with the schools to increase the number of students attending your program.
- ❖ Offer to run your OSHLSP at one of the schools in your local community. The school can provide the venue and students and you can provide the additional learning support. This can be done through a formal partnership with the school, with shared responsibility over the program.
- ❖ Invite key staff such as EAL workers, Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs), wellbeing officers, bicultural workers, and teachers to key events at your OSHLSP, such as end of term celebrations or awards days. This will highlight the important work you do, and will allow for open communication between your program and the teachers and more understanding of the work students are doing at school.
- ❖ Try to keep lines of communication open with your key contacts at the school, as this will directly benefit the support you offer your students.
- ❖ Remember that schools and community agencies are very busy services, so any system set up for liaison about a student's program and progress should be as time efficient as possible for all parties. If your program has students from many different schools, you may want to focus on liaising with schools attended by the students displaying the most difficulties with their educational progress.
- ❖ Consider holding an open day at your OSHLSP and inviting school staff members to visit and learn about your program.
- ❖ If possible, offer to present at school assemblies or staff meetings, providing information about your program and what support you provide. You could ask to display posters on notice boards for families and students to see.

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- ✦ If you have good working relationships and developed trust with your school/s you may consider a walking school bus to collect the students from school and take them to the OSHLSP venue.

Making contact with schools

- ✦ Email the school to introduce yourself and your service, explaining the purpose for reaching out and who you are hoping to talk to (if you know). Remembering that schools are extremely busy, ensure your email is succinct and to the point.
- ✦ Identify a key contact person for discussion on a student's progress, ideally someone who is aware of and/or involved in the students learning. At primary school level this will likely be their classroom teacher, but for secondary this may be the EAL coordinator, homeroom teacher, or another member of staff.
- ✦ Be clear about your purpose when making phone contact. Ensure you call at a convenient time for your contact at the school, you may want to discuss this with them prior.
- ✦ If setting up a face-to-face meeting, try and do this at the school. This gives you the opportunity to learn more about the school and will be more convenient for the school staff due to commitments.
- ✦ Be aware of staff changes and try to keep on top of this. You may need to find a new contact each year.
- ✦ Agree on keeping in contact. Once you have identified a contact person, discuss which will be the best method and times to maintain contact. It may work best to formalise the process and have a meeting once a term.
- ✦ Keep up-to-date. Many schools have newsletters and if possible, request to be added to the mailing list. This will allow you to keep across happenings at the school, to discuss with your students and to encourage them to participate in activities offered by the school community.
- ✦ Maintain the relationship. Communication will improve with the development of a relationship over time. Make every effort to be part of school events even if it is unrelated to the homework club so staff and students become more familiar and trusting of you and the organisation that you work for.

Communicating about students

The aim of communicating with a school is to gain clear information on a student's key learning needs and the best strategies and activities for addressing these in the homework club context. Some ways this information can be shared are listed below:

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✦ Student reports

You may be able to obtain a copy of the student's report either through the student, parents or the school. This will help you gain an overview of progress and areas in which they may be having difficulties. Particularly important sections for homework clubs are: "Areas for improving/future learning" and "what you can do at home to help student X progress". Both these sections will give homework clubs an idea to which areas of the curriculum the student needs to work on.

✦ Learning plans

Some schools have individual learning plans for each student, so if you can obtain a copy of this plan it will give you information on what work the student is currently doing.

✦ Parent teacher interviews

If the student, their parents and the school are comfortable with the idea, the coordinator could attend the student's parent teacher interviews. This would give you the opportunity to hear firsthand their progress in each subject.

