Fact sheet

Distinct identity

This principle refers to students feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness to their school and to feeling safe and confident in this environment. Identity in this context refers to their status as lower secondary students, distinct from either primary or upper secondary students.

Implicit in the re-thinking of this phase of education is the belief that a different form of school organisation and pedagogic approach will facilitate enhanced student achievement over and above that which could be achieved in traditional upper primary/lower secondary education.

Fundamental principles underpinning *middle schooling* philosophies are that students in the lower secondary years require:

- a different kind of school environment and curriculum
- teaching which better accommodates their educational, personal and social needs and development
- assistance in the transition between traditional primary school and secondary education, and from childhood to adulthood (Rowe, 2003).

It is believed that middle school aged students will benefit from being in a situation without younger primary and older secondary students, both of which are generally at differing levels of development (Dinham, 2008).

Why is it important?

Significant bodies of research identify student alienation and disengagement from school as significant factors contributing to under-achievement in the middle years. A general conclusion from these studies was that improvements in the education of young adolescents could be made by challenging existing structural arrangements separating primary and secondary schools and identifying a middle phase of schooling with a clear purpose centred around developmental tasks (COGSCO, 2005).

Key messages

Rumble(2010) identifies three key features associated with forging a distinct identity in the lower secondary years:

- the presence of a dedicated school space for learning
- a changed teaching and learning culture
- new leadership patterns.

Schools should work to develop a distinct and common approach to teaching Junior Secondary students that reflects the community's shared beliefs of the principles of Junior Secondary schooling.

Examples of practice

- Identify staff to undertake Junior Secondary leadership positions
- There are opportunities for Junior Secondary teachers to share professional practice and discuss student welfare concerns
- Junior Secondary events are identified in the school calendar
- Designated spaces that Junior Secondary students can regard as their own or where they feel comfortable gathering.
- A shared understanding and commitment by the school and broader community of the philosophy, purpose, approach and benefits of the Junior Secondary philosophy.
- School organisational structures and practices that address the needs of young adolescents.

COGSCO, N., 2005. *A Review of Middle Schooling,* Darwin: Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisation.

Dinham, S. a. R. K., 2008. Fantasy, Fashion and Fact : Middle Schools, Middle Schooling. *Teaching and Learning and Leadership at ACEReSearch,* p. 11.

Rowe, D. &., 2003. *Centre on Education Policy US Department of Education,* s.l.: La Trice Hill.

Rumble, P. a. A. T., 2010. The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling,* 10(1).