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# The six keys to school success revealed



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'It's about ensuring that there's greater consistency across the school' ... Kings Park Primary principal Jodi Park with some of her students

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Experienced principals, explicit teaching and strong school discipline — rather than additional funding — are key factors among disadvantaged schools that excel academically, new research has revealed.

A groundbreaking study from the Centre for Independent Studies has identified six common policies and practices that contribute to success in high-performing disadvantaged primary schools.

In addition to stable, long-term leadership, a disciplined culture of high expectations and explicit teaching, common themes in-

clude comprehensive early reading instruction, the effective use of student data and teacher professional development.

The schools did not receive any more funding than similarly disadvantaged schools. The findings serve as a blueprint for how disadvantaged primary schools can boost students' academic results.

CIS education research fellow Blaise Joseph said students from disadvantaged social backgrounds performed worse, on average, than more advantaged students, in Australia and overseas.

"This research shows it is possible for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed at school, given the right policies and practice — and this doesn't require significantly more

taxpayer spending," he said. The study, believed to be the first of its kind in Australia, identified schools in the lowest quartile of disadvantage that consistently achieved above the national average for literacy and numeracy achievement, according to NAPLAN test results.

Of the 18 primary schools selected, 12 of which were in Victoria, nine schools agreed to interviews. Each principal highlighted the importance of explicit instruction, which involves a teacher explaining new content to students in a systematic and methodical way, claiming that it was central to their approach to teaching, especially in literacy and numeracy.

They also tended to shun the

increasingly trendy inquiry-based teaching model, a constructivist approach also known as project-based learning or design thinking.

"Several principals mentioned that, for disadvantaged students in particular, inquiry-based learning activities are problematic because often these activities require background knowledge that students from low socio-economic backgrounds will not possess unless they are explicitly taught at school," Mr Joseph said.

Explicit instruction also had a part to play in maintaining school and classroom discipline, he said.

"One common practice across almost all teachers in the nine schools was having a clear set of classroom routines and rules, consistently applied," Mr Joseph said.

Kings Park Primary School in Melbourne's west draws students from a vast array of multicultural backgrounds and more than half of them come from the lowest quarter of disadvantage. Despite this, the school has consistently outperformed.

Jodi Park, who has been at the school for 13 years, the past five as principal, said a recent focus had been on ensuring teachers were able to effectively use student data to track progress and tailor lessons. "It's about ensuring that there's greater consistency across the school to ensure that all classes can produce those same results," Ms Park said.

Mr Joseph said the debate should switch from how much funding to how schools spent it.