

**PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

**2026
TEACHING &
LEARNING
PRIORITIES**

**MINLATON 150
PREPARATIONS**

**TERM 1
CALENDAR**

**4/5 AQUATICS
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**Edition 1
2026**



**MINLATON
DISTRICT
SCHOOL**



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PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

FEBRUARY 2026

Leadership and Learning: The Culture we are building at MDS

by Andrew Dickinson

At Minlaton District School, we believe leadership is not simply something a small group of students hold - it is a culture we build together.

At our recent Leaders Induction Ceremony, we took time to reflect on what leadership truly means at MDS. We received significant positive feedback from families and community members about the message shared on the day, so we have adapted the principal address below for our broader community.

Over the past few years, our conversations about leadership have deliberately evolved. We have explored the power of female leadership and the strength of inclusive, relational ways of leading. We have reflected on First Nations perspectives, where leadership is grounded not in hierarchy, but in responsibility to community. Each of these conversations has challenged traditional ideas of leadership as authority or status, and instead pointed us toward leadership as responsibility, inclusion and connection.



This year, we continued that journey with a simple but deeply important idea:

Leadership is connection.

Not position.

Not authority.

Not a badge.

Leadership lives in the quality of the relationship we build.

A student can be elected, appointed or given a title; but leadership only truly exists when others choose to walk alongside them. If people do not feel connected, they will not follow, regardless of the role someone holds.

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Relational Leadership in Action

At MDS, we believe relational leadership begins with noticing.

- Noticing who is included.
- Noticing who is quiet.
- Noticing who might be sitting on the edge of a group.

Strong leaders do not simply work within their friendship circles. They widen them.

Sometimes leadership looks like inviting someone into a game. Sometimes it is checking in on someone who has had a difficult day. Sometimes it is speaking up when silence would be easier.

Connection always starts with attention.



Influence Comes from Trust

We also remind our student leaders that influence does not come from a title - it comes from trust.

Trust is built slowly and deliberately:

- Through consistency.
- Through fairness.
- Through how we respond when things are challenging.
- Through how we speak when we are frustrated.
- Through how we act when no one is watching.

Students listen not because of what someone is called, but because they believe that person genuinely cares.

“Connection always starts with attention.”

“People think, learn and lead best when they feel safe.”



Safety Before Direction

Another key belief at MDS is that leaders create safety before direction.

People think, learn and lead best when they feel safe. safe to speak, safe to try, safe to make mistakes.

If you want to lead others, your first responsibility is not to tell them what to do. It is to create an environment where they can be themselves.

This means:

- Listening before speaking.
- Seeking to understand before being understood.
- Choosing curiosity over judgement

When people feel safe, they are far more willing to step forward.

Leadership Beyond the Badge

While we formally recognise student leaders at our induction ceremony, we are clear that leadership at MDS is not limited to those on stage.

Some of the strongest leaders in our school may never wear a badge.

They lead through:

- Kindness.
- Consistency.
- Inclusion.
- The tone they set in a room.

Our formal leaders carry responsibility but their role is not to be above others. It is to model what strong, healthy connection looks like so that others feel empowered to lead in the same way.

“How can I build trust in this moment?”

The Questions We Encourage

Throughout the year, we encourage all students to reflect on a few simple but powerful questions:

- Who needs to be noticed today?
- Who might be sitting on the edge?
- How can I build trust in this moment?
- Am I creating safety for others?

These are not dramatic leadership acts. But they are deeply meaningful.

The Leadership Our Community Needs

The leaders who make the greatest difference are not always the loudest of the most visible. They are the ones who make others feel:

Seen. Heard. Valued.

That is relational leadership. That is leadership as connection. And that is the kind of leadership we believe in at MDS. Importantly, this belief is not limited to student leadership roles or assemblies. It shapes how we teach, how we design learning, and how we build culture across Reception to Year 12. Leadership as connection is not a slogan; it is a guiding principle in our 2026 improvement priorities.

2026 in Action: Our Teaching and Learning Priorities

When we talk about leadership as connection, we are also describing how learning happens best.

Learning is strongest when students feel safe, when their work has purpose, and when they see themselves as capable contributors. Our 2026 school priorities are deliberately designed to strengthen that culture across R-12.

This year, our work is guided by three connected focus areas:

- **Authentic Learning:** real outcomes, real connections, real learning
- **Inquiry Based Learning:** curiosity

and student agency across R-12

- **Belonging, Connection and Positive Culture:** strengthening relationships and consistent expectations

These priorities are intentionally connected. When learning is meaningful, when students have ownership, and when they feel safe and connected, we see growth not only in academic outcomes, but in confidence, identity and pride.

Authentic Learning: Connected to Our Community

In 2026, learning at MDS is increasingly grounded in our local context, particularly through the shared opportunity of the Minlaton 150th anniversary. This milestone has provided a powerful platform for authentic learning across the school.

Students are not simply completing tasks for a teacher; they are creating, designing and presenting to real audiences.

Across the school, this includes:

- **Design & Technologies:** Students designing and producing practical items with a real purpose, moving from concept to production and evaluation, strengthening independence and problem-solving skills.
- **Junior Primary:** Exploring “then and now” learning experiences and contributing to collaborative displays that will be shared with families and community members.

- **Primary Hias:** Investigating Minlaton's buildings and history, participating in community walks, analysing historical photographs and presenting learning in a gallery-style exhibition format.
- **Middle Years:** Researching local industries, exploring career pathways on the YP an connecting learning to real-world opportunities.
- **English Classes:** Writing memoirs and conducting interviews with community members to capture stories that reflect the history and spirit of our town.
- **Digital Technologies:** Developing digital artefacts and event-related projects connected to the 150th anniversary.
- **Science and Chemistry:** Investigating local geological processes and linking learning to real-world scientific applications and community history.
- **Visual Arts and Performing Arts:** Creating works for public display and developing interactive experiences for community engagement.
- **Health and Physical Education:** Partnering with local fitness facilities and designing applied learning experiences connected to health and training principles.

These experiences provide students with purpose. When students know their work will be seen, shared or used, the quality of thinking an effort increases significantly. We are seeing students demonstrate greater pride in their work and stronger ownership of their learning.



Inquiry Learning: Curiosity at the Centre

Inquiry Based Learning continues to be the backbone of teaching and learning at MDS.

Inquiry means that students are encouraged to:

- Ask meaningful questions
- Explore topics in depth
- Mak choices about how they demonstrate their learning
- Work collaboratively and respectfully
- Reflect on their progress and thinking

In our primary years, this often takes the form of play-based inquiry, hands-on provocations, wonder walls and collaborative problem-solving.

In the middle and senior years, inquiry becomes more structured and analytical. Students design investigations, select research questions, analyse evidence, evaluate perspectives and make informed decisions about how to present their findings.

Importantly, teachers are maintaining clear learning intentions and success criteria so that curiosity is balanced with rigour. Students are not only engaged they are developing deep understanding and transferable skills.

We are seeing positive signs of growth in:

- Student confidence in sharing ideas
- Willingness to take positive learning risks
- Quality and depth of student responses
- Increased independence in completing complex tasks

Belonging, Connection and Positive Culture

Academic success cannot be separated from wellbeing. In 2026, we have intentionally renewed our focus on belonging, connection and behaviour support.

- Prioritising regular check-ins and genuine conversations
- Building structured routines that create predictability and safety
- Reinforcing positive behaviour expectations and common language
- Supporting inclusive group work and collaboration
- Celebrating progress and effort, not just outcomes

Teachers are deliberately creating environments where students feel:

- Known
- Safe

- Respected
- Valued

When students feel connected, engagement improves. When engagement improves, learning outcomes strengthen.

We are also supporting students to develop interpersonal skills - listening, encouraging others, working through disagreement respectfully and celebrating shared success. These are life skills that extend well beyond the classroom.

Respecting Culture and Place

Many learning experiences this year also incorporate Narungga perspectives and connection to Country in developmentally appropriate ways. Students are exploring local history with a broader understanding of place, continuity and change.

Our commitment is to approach this learning respectfully and thoughtfully, ensuring that students build understanding of the richness and depth of the land and community in which they live.



“When students feel connected, engagement improves.”

What This Means for Your Child

You may notice your child:

- Talking about community interviews or local history
- Working on projects connected to the 150th anniversary
- Asking deeper questions about their learning
- Taking greater ownership over assignments
- Sharing pride in work that will be publicly displayed
- Demonstrating increased confidence when presenting or collaborating

These are positive signs that our priorities are making a difference.

Looking Ahead

As the year progresses, families will have increasing opportunities to see and celebrate student learning through exhibitions, performances and community events connected to the Minlaton 150th.

We are proud of the way our students are embracing these opportunities and of the professionalism and dedication of our staff in bringing our 2026 priorities to life.

When schools and families work together, we create the strongest foundation for growth.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

2026		MARCH				
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	2 1500m races	3 800m races		5 Sports Day	6 Student Free Day	
	9 Public Holiday	10 7/10 Immunis- ations				
			18 Secondry Interschool	19 Primary Interschool		
				26 School Photos	27 150 Display	
	30 Mile End Athletics					

2026		APRIL				
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	13 School Holidays	14 School Holidays	15 School Holidays	16 School Holidays	17 School Holidays	
	20 School Holidays	21 School Holidays	22 School Holidays	23 School Holidays	24 School Holidays	



Happy retirement, Tom!



After 24 years of dedicated service, we say farewell to Tom Anderson - a true cornerstone of our school community.

From coordinating the much-loved *Opt In* group to keeping our grounds in absolutely tip top shape, Tom's quiet dedication and steady presence have made a lasting impact on generations of students and staff. He has been more than a colleague - he's been a familiar, friendly face and a valued part of our community.

Tom, thank you for everything you have given to our school. We wish you every happiness in your retirement. You will be deeply missed by us all.

Year 4/5 Aquatics

Last month, our year 4/5 students enjoyed a fantastic aquatics day packed with learning and fun. After important water safety talks, students suited up in wetsuits and practised rescue techniques using boards to build their confidence in the water.



The excitement continued with boating activities, where some students had the chance to steer, while others explored the marina and even spotted local seals. With the sun shining by lunchtime, everyone enjoyed games on the sand before finishing the day with a creative sandcastle competition and a beach walk discovering shells and tiny crabs.

Charlotte Champion, Year 5 Teacher

"Connection is the spark; a love of learning is the flame that follows"

