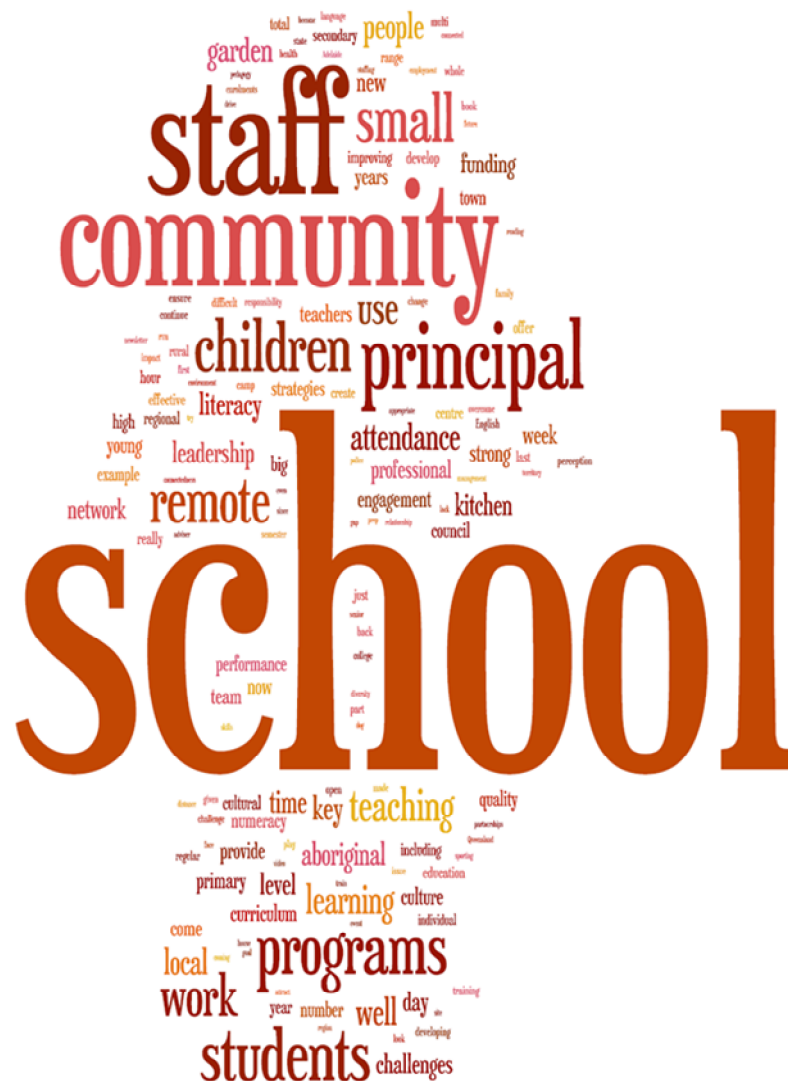


Demonstrating agility and resilience

Innovative Strategies for Small and Remote Schools – Case Studies

Western Australia
Department of
Education

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Disclaimer

The Innovative Strategies for Small and/or Remote Schools Project was funded by the Australian Government. This paper has been prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) at the request of the Western Australia Department of Education (DoE), acting on behalf of a Steering Committee representing all schooling sectors (State and Territory Departments of Education, Independent and Catholic schools) in our capacity as advisors in accordance with the Scope and the Terms and Conditions contained in the Consultant Agreement.

The information, statements, statistics and commentary (together the 'Information') contained in this paper have been prepared by PwC from material provided by stakeholders and from discussions held with stakeholders. PwC may in its absolute discretion, but without being under any obligation to do so, update, amend or supplement this document.

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1 Introduction

This attachment to PwC’s main report presents more detailed case studies for a number of the schools that were visited by members of our research team. Overall, our researchers visited, or participated in teleconferences with 26 schools. However, in some cases it proved difficult to provide case studies reports that genuinely protected the anonymity of the schools involved. Ensuring that participating schools could not be identified was a key condition of the research approvals provided by Education Authorities around the country. As a result, detailed case studies have been provided for fourteen schools. The range of programs and initiatives observed across all case study schools is reported in the table below.

Case study schools – school characteristics and strategies

School characteristics				Strategies				
	School type	Student numbers (per cent Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander)	ISECA (National average = 1000)	Effective leadership	Teacher quality	Student engagement	Student readiness	Community Engagement
NSW								
1	K-12	89 (82%)	715		✓	✓		
2	K-12	99 (69%)	729			✓	✓	✓
3	K-12	201 (93%)	635				✓	✓
4	K-6	51 (16%)	958			✓		✓
5	K-6	56 (9%)	1001			✓		✓
Vic								
1	7-12	98 (0%)	985		✓	✓		
2	7-12	1009 (3%)	994	✓	✓	✓		
QLD								
1	P-12	78 (70%)	727		✓	✓		
2	P-7	69 (4%)	923			✓		✓
3	P-10	86 (10%)	910		✓	✓		
4	P-7	42 (80%)	618		✓			
5	P-7	39 (82%)	661			✓		✓
6	P-7	49 (16%)	898	✓	✓	✓		✓
WA								
1	K-12	107 (90%)	645			✓		✓
2	K-12	140 (59%)	793	✓		✓	✓	
3	L-12	186 (53%)	777	✓		✓	✓	✓
4	K-12	74 (55%)	761		✓	✓		✓
5	K-12	119 (95%)	692			✓		✓
6	K-7	115 (99%)	569	✓		✓	✓	
7	K-12	232 (15%)	918			✓	✓	✓
SA								
1	R-7	35 (0%)	1064		✓	✓		✓
2	3-7	500 (9%)	956	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	R-7	24 (29%)	821		✓	✓		✓
4	R-12	26 (7%)	N/A		✓	✓	✓	✓
NT								
1	AH	73 (100%)	560		✓			
2	YH	208 (100%)	521	✓	✓	✓		✓

Case study schools were selected through a combination of methods, with the overall objective of selecting a group of remote schools that would provide a good cross-section of both circumstances and strategies. Candidate schools were identified on the basis of responses to a survey distributed to around 600 schools across Australia, an initial list of schools suggested by Steering Group members, and through discussions with officers from education authorities in each State. Discussions with Regional Directors, or officers in equivalent positions in different States, proved to be particularly useful for identifying innovative schools.

In keeping with the terms of research approvals provided by Education Authorities, the principals of candidate schools were approached to participate in the case studies, and provided with information on the project and the nature of their participation. Some schools, either before or after being provided with this information, elected not to participate in the case study program.

For those schools who did choose to participate, the primary point of contact for our researchers was the school principal. In some cases, where it was useful to do so and where it was convenient, teachers and support staff also participated in discussions during the case study visits. The discussions were conducted using a structured interview format.

Publicly available documents, including school plans and annual reports, and information provided by the schools themselves, was used to supplement information gathered during those discussions. Data on school enrolments and performance was extracted from the My School database and from publicly available documents.

PwC would like to acknowledge the participation of these schools in the case study program. We would also like to express our gratitude for the universally warm welcome that we received when visiting schools and our appreciation to all members of staff who took time out of their busy days to speak with us.

2 *K-12 School, Western Region New South Wales*

1 *Background*

School profile

Years	K-12
Enrolments	99
% Aboriginal	69%
ICSEA	729
ICSEA % from national average	-27%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 414; Yr 5: 409; Yr 7: 464; Yr 9: 536
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: 0%; Yr 5: -16%; Yr 7: -15%; Yr 9: -7%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: +35%; Yr 5: +7%; Yr 7: +2%; Yr 9: +11%

The school is located in far west New South Wales, and focuses on:

- improving outcomes in the basics of literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention;
- providing a culturally sensitive curriculum;
- engaging students through innovative programs and the employment of Aboriginal community members; and
- implementing the Quality Teacher Framework.

The school has an enthusiastic teaching staff, many of who are in their first years of teaching and who are supported by an experienced team of administrative and support staff. The school is a participant in the 47 Schools Staffing Pilot Program, which involves the devolution of funding for staff to local management, enabling the school to access a more equitable staff allocation.

The school's nine Aboriginal staff play an important role in day-to-day operations and are represented across the school's organisational structure, including the executive team. A key role of these staff members is to ensure that the school continues to operate with cultural propriety, strengthening the relationship that has been established with the wider community.

2 *Identification of need*

The school was facing a consistent pattern of poor or declining attendance, low levels of student interest and engagement in the school, constant staff turnover, and was struggling to improve the academic performance of students. In 2007, school attendance for Years 7-12 was well below that State and Region average, whereas in 2010 it was well above the Region average and only 0.3 per cent below the State average.

The needs of the school were identified by the *Schools in Partnership* (SiP) advisory committee, which was an initiative that ran from 2006 to 2009. The advisory committee comprised the Principal, two members from the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, a member of the town's Aboriginal Working Party, a Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) representative and a Teachers Federation Representative. The SiP hired a renowned Aboriginal educator as a mentor and facilitator to work with the group to resolve differences and build a shared vision for the school and its students. The Chair of the SiP Committee has said *"Five years ago our views weren't being listened to. Aboriginal parents and community felt unwelcome at the school. But now we own it – the processes, the decisions, and the future of our kids' education."*

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Teacher/staff resistance to change

Some of the initiatives being introduced at the school faced initial resistance from staff.

For instance, the school introduced a new salaried position into the school for an Aboriginal Male Educator (AME) (see below). This particular AME, who did not have a teaching qualification, was offered a salary that was above that of a beginning teacher as a signal to the community that the position was highly valued by the school. The AME also reported directly to the Principal.

The Principal and the AME continued to push for the AME role despite at times considerable staff resistance. After several months the AME and other school programs were put up for a staff vote to determine which programs should continue to be sponsored by the school, and the AME program was voted as the most highly valued program by staff. Their support for the program, reflected the positive impact that it has had on the behaviour and application of the Aboriginal students in the school, which has enabled staff to focus their time on teaching, and seeing the benefits for students.

Overcoming prejudice

The school also actively recruited an Aboriginal person to work in the front office so that the 'face' of the school better reflected the composition of the community that the school served. There was a time prior to the appointment and shortly thereafter where the other office staff had to overcome a prejudice that was held around the work ethic and contribution of an Aboriginal office staff member. However, the recruitment of an Aboriginal community member to the front office of the school has since proved to be a great asset to the school and a positive way of improving the opinion of the some staff of the local Aboriginal community.

Community acceptance of an enhanced role for the school

The school faced a considerable challenge in getting community acceptance of the school and its vision for the school community. The early days of strategy setting for the school (five years ago) were fraught with conflict and resistance and it was the collaborative approach of the school executive to 'co-creating' a vision for the school that ultimately reduced resistance to change and helped to build a genuine community partnership (as described above with the SiP advisory committee).

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Development of an “Enterprise Park” to provide genuine employment opportunities for senior students and encourage a work ethic amongst young people.

The school opened its Enterprise Park in March 2010 as a centre for training and commercial activity and has changed the face of education in this remote town. It comprises:

- Beyond Café – coffee and entertainment each Sunday showcasing student performances to an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audience;
- early childhood programs
- traineeships at the centre and funding for traineeships beyond the school;
- a local FM station, on which students are able to make presentations;
- an arts and craft centre to showcase student and community artworks;
- a boutique motel accommodated in a 1923 fully refurbished vintage railway sleeping car (10 compartments, each with the ability to accommodate 2 guests) with a functional commercial kitchen and amenities for guests;
- a construction facility for transportable homes (business plan written and awaiting funding); and
- a farm providing a range of agricultural products which the students plant and tend to, which is also used for outdoor science and maths lessons to measure, assess, experiment, and learn.

The program was created in recognition that training opportunities are limited in the rural community, with the intention to generate student employment in the hospitality, construction, agriculture and tourism industries. The project has been successful as a commercial venture and is providing jobs and delivering training and skills to local children. As the initiative progresses further, it is intended that it will deliver traineeships in hospitality and business administration as well as further employment opportunities.

The park was developed from cash and in-kind donations from many parts of the community, as well as grants from the Commonwealth Government and local donor organisation. For every dollar received from grants, \$2 was donated or acquired in kind locally – testament to the support from local industry and business.

Importantly, the Park has Aboriginal community support, which has grown as a result of the SiP initiative.

The whole school community is clearly proud of its achievements, demonstrating the Principal’s very positive impact on the school culture and the way that the school is valued by the community.

Development of a non-teaching role for an Aboriginal Male Educator to provide a positive male role model for Aboriginal students

The AME has responsibility for:

- value, respect and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and student identity by being a positive male role model and planning and implementing cultural events at the school, and encouraging the Aboriginal community to be involved in school programs;

-
- genuine partnership and engagement with Aboriginal parents, communities and interagency groups through ongoing liaison, producing radio content on cultural matters for the school run local radio station;
 - maximising educational outcomes for each Aboriginal student through a variety of means including assistance at the school and at home, providing drug awareness education and delivering sports programs outside of school hours;
 - increased engagement and participation of all students by promoting attendance, self-belief and self esteem and to enthuse students to have higher expectations and greater confidence, and to promote the dignity of risk; and
 - increased capacity, awareness and empowerment of Aboriginal students through education by promoting university, VET courses, apprenticeships and other post-school pathways in culturally appropriate ways.

It is a position that extends beyond the hours of the school to do whatever is needed to lift the engagement of Aboriginal students and their participation in the school and community.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

Many of the initiatives at the school are driven by a highly motivated and committed Principal. He is also past retirement age, making succession planning a key sustainability challenge for the school. This challenge is recognised and a Deputy Principal has recently been appointed with the hope that he will transition into that role.

3 *K-12 School, Western Region, New South Wales*

1 *Background*

School profile

Years	K-12
Enrolments	240
% Aboriginal	93%
ICSEA	635
ICSEA % from national average	-37%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 288 Yr 5: 365 Yr 7: 444 Yr 9: 504
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -31% Yr 5: -25% Yr 7: -19% Yr 9: -12%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: +7% Yr 5: +5% Yr 7: +5% Yr 9: +10%

The school is located in a rural centre in the north west of the state. About 95 per cent of the school's 240 students identify themselves as Aboriginal, with students from two nearby reserves comprising a significant proportion of the total student population. The school has one Principal, with activities based on two sites, one accommodating the junior (Years P-4) and middle schools (Years 5-8) and the other site housing the senior school (Years 9-12).

The school is supported by the community and many agencies, with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and local Elders being particularly active in supporting the school.

Improving attendance has been a particular focus for the school and it has well-established strategies to achieve this. Partial and whole day non-attendance is managed in various ways across the school. Parents and carers are notified on a weekly basis of student absences by the sending of a letter home with a tear off section that can be returned to the school outlining the reason that the student was absent.

Deputy Principals meet on a weekly basis to discuss and monitor attendance. Students whose attendance is of concern are referred to the Year Adviser for follow up in the form of parental contact either via the phone or a home visit from the Aboriginal Education Officer. The outcome of this contact is reported back to the Learning Support Team.

Specific monitoring tools are used to ensure that those students whose whereabouts are unknown, either because their parents have not contacted the school or because they fail to return at the beginning of a new school term, do not fall out of the system. These methods of tracking non-attendance are effective for the more lengthy periods of non-attendance involved in these situations.

The Home School Liaison Team also offer support for students and families who are referred to the Home School Liaison Program. All attendance issues are reported on as part of a focus within each of the Learning Support Teams.

The same Merit System is now in use throughout all year groups within the school. Students are rewarded for positive behaviour through a points system with students achieving points for attendance, classroom work and positively representing the school. Levels and awards are in Aboriginal Language and prizes are obtained for each level that a student gains.

In 2010, the school's onsite radio program was used to make connections with the curriculum and the community. The radio station serves as a platform for students to read out and record important messages during events such as NAIDOC Week and Sorry Day. On Sorry Day, students read out Kevin Rudd's Sorry Day Speech alongside a critique that was used as an assessment for their area of study on Belonging.

Sport is popular with students and the school performs at a high level at inter-school and district carnivals. The students participate in these and other activities with enthusiasm and pride, resulting in both personal and sporting rewards and successes.

Teachers at the school are generally in their first years of service and are enthusiastic, involving themselves with student programs and participating in community organisations.

2 Identification of need

The school was facing consistent poor attendance, which was even declining in some year groups. The average attendance rate for Years K-6 had declined from 87.9% in 2009 to 85.4% in 2010, which was 8% below the regional average, and 10% below the national average.

Engaging parents to become involved in the school's activities was also problematic. A lack of parental engagement meant that students were often not receiving the necessary support at home in relation to their school work. The schools NAPLAN results indicate that students were performing at or below National Minimum Standards and its students were over represented in the lowest two bands in the School Certificate exams.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Staff recruitment and retention

Similar to many small and remote schools, the successful recruitment and retention of quality teachers has been a considerable issue for this school. It has often been the case in which the school will invest in the development of a graduate teacher, only to see them leave a year later. High turnover rates have spurred a change in the Principal's recruiting method, based on their belief that:

'putting the work in before we get them is better than working harder on the wrong person'

Offering subsidised rent is one of the incentives the school uses to make the adjustment for new teachers easier.

Limited parental involvement

The Principal has commented that the lack of positive reinforcement on behalf of the parent community is a challenge, especially when many of the students are in vital need of this support. The Principal has commented that 'it's hard...to be upfront with parents about children's behaviour'.

Attendance

Attendance rates are low, ranging from 64% to 88% across the year groups in 2010. These rates have only marginally improved in some year groups or have decreased in others relative to the previous year, and sit well below the regional average and even further below the state wide average. The Principal has listed mobility as a major factor behind this, stemming from welfare issues, bad weather and attendance at funerals.

Attendance is being managed, with parents and carers notified on a weekly basis of student absences. Deputy Principals also meet regularly to discuss and monitor attendance. Phone calls and home visits with the Aboriginal Education Officer are made frequently to try and eliminate this recurrent issue.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Expanding the curriculum and focusing on quality teaching

The school has invested a considerable amount of energy and funds into expanding the curriculum to stimulate learning.

Learning the local Aboriginal languages is popular with students and important for increasing their engagement. At the end of 2009, an Aboriginal Language Course was incorporated into the curriculum, taught from preschool up until Year 7.

The school has also become an important contributor to revitalising and sustaining these languages. Commencing in Term 4 2010, the only linguist of these languages, in collaboration with TAFE, was able to offer a Certificate 1 in Aboriginal Language. School staff participated in this course, which not only teaches their language, but also builds pride, passes on local knowledge and instils a sense of responsibility in participants to keep the local languages alive. Participants also gain an understanding that greater use is the key to the survival of the languages.

The school has put funding received from the Priority Schools Program and Country Areas Program towards students' learning outcomes. For example, organising visiting performers to come into the school and acquiring new technology to create an exciting learning environment. Funding has also been allocated to professional development, specifically in Aboriginal Pedagogies.

School camps are also run, targeted specifically to students on the Student Representative Council who are given the chance to participate in activities that were tailored to the development of their teamwork and leadership skills.

Engaging with the community

The school is actively engaged with the surrounding community, which helps build a level of trust and respect between community members and the school staff. Various activities involving the community include:

- a Breakfast program, in which members of the community are able to come in and eat breakfast at the school;
 - the school radio program;
 - visits from Aboriginal Elders to share stories with the students;
 - visits to nearby places of interest that have cultural meaning for the largely Aboriginal student body;
 - hosting events such as carnivals, BBQs and gala days which the community attend;
 - organising structured play groups at the school, where mothers are able to attend with their babies (a practice which also provides early learning opportunities for younger children and increases parent engagement); and
 - health facilities on site, where community members can receive check-ups.
-

Student work readiness

The school recognises the importance of preparing its elder students for life after school, and offers a range of valuable training opportunities. In 2010, all students who were in Years 10-12 took part in T-VET courses on a Wednesday morning. Courses offered included horticulture, children's services, business services, sports coaching, hospitality and construction.

A significant achievement last year was marked with a group of boys in the Business Services Course winning a state wide TAFE excellence award for their creation of a Country Rugby League Virtual Club Program. They applied learned business skills directly to the running of a virtual club. The school aims to expand the range of VET courses offered to include a Fashion & Design course and a Beauty Therapy course, both run at the local TAFE. Students in Years 11 and 12 were also given the chance to attend an Outdoor Recreation course which consisted of a 10 day outdoor learning experience with other students from across the Western Region.

A few years ago, the school faced difficulty finding training placements for Aboriginal students in the local community, with employers unwilling to back students. Significant improvement has been made in this domain, with almost all Year 10-12 students linked up with a local employer, in either a traineeship or a paid role. There are now approximately 30 local employers on board.

The Principal has recognised the importance of the early development of a work ethic, commenting that "it's important to give the kids responsibility and make the jobs stick".

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The Principal has made a conscious effort to change the means by which the school recruits its teachers. He has noted the importance of investing the time and effort into finding the right teachers for the jobs. His philosophy is that while the recruitment phase may require a greater investment of money and time, this will ultimately result in benefits down the track. It ensures that new teachers are not only well suited for their roles, but also to the rural environment.

The hiring of fifteen Aboriginal staff has been a positive step forward for the school in terms of tying the contents of the curriculum to the students' cultural heritage. They also act as positive role models to the predominantly Aboriginal student body. This step will also hopefully assist in changing parents attitudes towards the school and its activities.

The school currently does not have an active Parents and Community group, reflecting some of the ongoing difficulties in engaging parents and the wider community in the school.

4 6-12 School, Alice Springs Region, Northern Territory

1 Background

School profile

Years	6-12
Enrolments	73
% Aboriginal	100%
ICSEA	729
ICSEA % from national average	-44%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	N/A

The school was opened in late 2009 as part of the Northern Territory Government's *Smart Territory* strategy, which is intended to improve school attendance, lift literacy and numeracy levels and provide brighter futures for children in the Territory. It is situated in a mail community that provides a range of services for the 15 Aboriginal Homelands in the region.

The school is a modern learning facility with general learning areas fitted with interactive whiteboards and wireless computer networks, a specialised science laboratory, two home economics areas, breakout computer pods in the library and teacher resource centre to accommodate Homeland learning centre teachers. It also has kitchen facilities to enable students to prepare lunches.

Prior to the establishment of the school, community schooling consisted of one or two teacher primary schools scattered across the outstations. Students now catch the bus from outstations to attend the school, requiring in some cases journeys of up to 100 kilometres a day to get to and from school.

2 Identification of need

Prior to the creation of the school, students were taught by teachers going out to each of the nearby Aboriginal communities. In order for the new school model to succeed, community buy-in was essential. Parents had to be convinced to make a significant change and send their children out from the community and to a centralized location on a daily basis.

A key challenge for increasing student engagement, particularly for young men, had been the conflict between the initiation of boys into manhood who, within the previous schooling arrangement were required to sit with toddlers in a primary school. The unrewarding and potentially demeaning nature of this arrangement meant that many young men dropped out of school.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Low student attendance

A large proportion of the high school age population only attended school sporadically. This was due to low interest, responsibilities at home, illness and cultural rites of passage.

Limited staffing resources

The community in which the school is located is very isolated, with little opportunity to leave the community. Limited staffing resources has implications for the curriculum offered to students, as staff must balance a range of academic abilities as well as the need to have separate classrooms for girls and boys after boys go through their cultural initiation.

It has been a continual challenge to attract and retain quality staff. The remoteness and isolation of the school makes recruitment difficult and teachers tend not to stay long. In many cases, the teachers would arrive because of the higher pay, then leave soon after, realising that the bonus wasn't enough to compensate for the lifestyle change.

Wide range of student academic abilities

The school's limited resources meant that the leadership had to choose whether to implement a mainstream high school curriculum, or focus on bringing up the literacy skills of students that had been disengaged from school for many years.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Community involvement in school policy and school activities

The Principal has made sure to maintain community engagement with the school. By having the community leaders stay involved in school decisions a sense of community ownership of the school is created. In addition, the community is invited to a number of regular school activities. For instance, a festival was put on to raise money for a project at a nearby town, helping to connect the Aboriginal communities to the nearby town community. These activities also help to empower the community through the act of helping others.

Transportation logistics

In order to get all of the students from their various remote communities to the school each morning and home again in the afternoon, a complex logistical system had to be created. It involves over 600km of driving each day and both the teachers and the Principal must help out in order to accomplish it. However, the Principal makes sure that the teachers only help out with driving in the afternoon, so that mornings are free for classroom preparations.

The drivers rotate the routes they drive so that the Principal is able to go out to each of the different pick up locations on a regular basis. She uses this time to speak with community members regularly. This allows her to stay up to date on community issues, answer questions and maintain relationships. As such, the community knows she's around, they have access to her and she can continue to build the strong connection with the communities and the school.

Weekly health clinic at school

A health clinic comes to school every Thursday. As part of the health curriculum, children make their own appointments. Bringing access to health service to the school has had the dual impact of allowing students to take control of their health, as well as increasing attendance, as students would often stay at home if they were sick and not gain access to treatment.

Teachers' independence and personal space

Due to the remoteness of the school and the fact that residences are on the school property, teachers can quickly get burnt out. The Principal has instituted a number of policies to help teachers deal with this. For instance, she insists on each teacher having their own accommodation, even in times of a housing shortage. This allows them privacy and personal space, especially necessary in such a small and remote location. Another policy is the rotation of supply runs. The teachers rotate who goes into town to pick up supplies. Anyone who wants to go along must adhere to the driver's schedule. This allows the staff to get away from work and colleagues, have some measure of independence in their schedule and attend social events outside of school. These strategies have allowed the school to retain teachers longer and have resulted in better quality of teaching as well.

Teacher development opportunities

Part of reducing staff turnover is enabling the teachers to build their skills and CVs in ways not available to them in larger, urban schools. The Principal does this by including the teachers in curriculum building, allowing them to head up major projects and initiatives within the school and giving them licence to innovate, such as moving away from a literacy-based program to one focused on discussion, debate and the Arts.

Student recreational room

A recreational room was set up that included internet, gym and music facilities. Students that attended school at least 80% of the time were able to use the room. This provided an incentive for students to attend school, even if they were not particularly academically engaged.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

A dedicated Principal who really works to engage both the community and staff in school strategy and direction has been vitally important for maintaining momentum in the implementation of the school's strategies. This highlights the risk that a future Principal, without the same level of dedication, may find it difficult to maintain and strengthen to build on the relationship with the community.

The school leadership and staff need to accommodate cultural rituals and norms within the school, affecting the school environment. For instance, girls and boys need to be separated after boys go through their initiation into adulthood which obviously requires additional resources and staff to accommodate. Limited housing resources have meant that staff resources are artificially restricted, creating barriers to extending the curriculum and making full use of the school's physical resources. For example, at the time of the case study visit the school did not have a Science teacher to use the school's fully-equipped Science Lab.

5 *P-12 Multi-site School, Kakadu and Arnhem Land Region, Northern Territory*

1 *Background*

School profile

Years	P-12
Enrolments	156
% Aboriginal	100%
ICSEA	521
ICSEA % from national average	-48%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 59 Yr 5:161 Yr 7: N/A Yr 9: N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -86% Yr 5: -67%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: -74% Yr 5: -47%

The main hub school is to the east of Darwin, in a community with a population that fluctuates between 800 and 1,200 depending on the season and ceremonial activity. Sixteen clan groups comprise the cultural block of the region in which the school is located. These clans remain connected and are highly mobile for ceremonial and family reasons.

The school provides education services to nine Community Learning Centres (CLCs). The CLCs are varying distances from the main school, with varied accessibility (often seasonal) to each site, and deliver education to small groups of students unable to attend the central school. The CLCs are the 'classrooms' of the school, ranging in size from 20 to 60 students, with multi-age classes catering for students from early years to senior years.

English is used as a minor language, a third or fourth choice for most people in the community. However the school, at the community's request, teaches only in English. A further development, again at the community's request, has been a recent permanent relocation of two teachers to the largest Homeland to improve access to education. Prior to this, no non-Aboriginal people lived permanently in any of the Homelands.

2 *Identification of need*

Over a number of years there had been requests for on-site senior secondary education from the Schools Council, community and students. To achieve this outcome, principles for a working partnership between the Schools Council and the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training were agreed. These principles are:

- Valuing School—improved school and community partnerships. Parent education, increased engagement and positive perceptions of education and training in the community;
- Coming to School —increased enrolments and attendance.
- Learning and Achieving at School—improved achievement at all levels of schooling. Having 'ralpa' (self-motivated) students who accept 'raypirri' (self-discipline) as members of their community.

- Staying at School—increased retention of Aboriginal students through the critical stages of schooling, resulting in more students completing the Northern Territory Certificate of Education.
- Choosing opportunities after school—more opportunities for Aboriginal students after leaving school.
- Accessing effective training and employment—increased number of Aboriginal adults engaged in further education and training. Increased number of Aboriginal adults employed in the community.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Staff recruitment

The school struggles to recruit teachers who have the appropriate interpersonal skills to work cross culturally, can deal with the challenges of living and working in a remote region where significant travel is an everyday occurrence, and who also share the philosophy of the school and have the right approach to the role. The school's model is based on building the capacity of local Aboriginal teachers and support staff in remote Homeland communities. The role of the teacher therefore is not just as an educator, but also as a mentor and support person.

Logistics of being a Visiting Teacher across the vast region

Teachers currently spend Tuesday to Thursday in communities each week of the school year. In most communities they sleep in swags in the school building, have pit toilets, cold showers, don't have reliable power, and fly out and back in light planes. While upgrades to school buildings and teacher living quarters are underway, the logistics of this type of work is a constant challenge.

Risk of dependency relationship developing between some visiting teachers and Homeland teachers

Strong and close working relationships are important but the senior staff try to be vigilant to ensure unhealthy dependent relationships don't develop that can inadvertently effect the quality of the education programs and the development of the Aboriginal staff.

Accessing advice, research, strategies for teaching multi age and multi grades

Each Homeland learning centre operates as a multi age school. While this model has existed for decades, the school has difficulty accessing experts and advice to help with training and professional development for staff in its particular educational context.

NAPLAN is not accessible or meaningful for most students in the schools but they still try to participate in the national scheme.

The school is developing alternative ways to measure their achievements and progress that are relevant for their context

Finding ways to measure the progress/success of their Homelands Teacher model

The school believes they have a unique model and do achieve good outcomes for their students but they want to have more robust ways to not only report on those outcomes, but also to be able to attribute those outcomes to the Homeland model.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Effective leadership

The Principal has a long standing involvement with the school, having worked off and on in various roles for over 15 years. Over that time, he has built a strong relationship the Education Department Regional Director and established support networks and relationships with other schools across the region. The benefits include support for recruitment and performance management issues, decision making and for developing and maximizing opportunities for new funding.

The Principal has also placed a strong emphasis on developing ways to measure and evaluate the school's success, using strategies such as identifying and celebrating successes, and using ESL measures in the NT Curriculum Framework as measures for numeracy and literacy rather than NAPLAN. The Principal has also lead development of annual operational plans for the school, identifying focus areas for all teachers and longer term innovation and development strategies.

There is one Senior Management Team across both the local school and the Homelands School which has been critical for supporting the students and the teachers, and for developing opportunities. However the Principal retains significant flexibility and autonomy to make decisions that work for the Homeland schools and still has the final say on operational matters such as recruiting staff, school hours and professional development for staff.

Teacher quality

The Homelands school model appears to work best if teachers commit to and can work with a team approach, with a capacity building philosophy and are able to work largely unsupervised. The school recognizes that if a teacher chooses not to stay, or doesn't fit in with the school's model and approach, they are not necessarily a poor teacher. The school would rather operate with one of two positions unfilled instead of have the wrong people.

Hence careful recruitment is undertaken, regular monitoring and support is offered through the senior teachers, and there is a strong and open performance management system in operation. For example:

- the school ensures new graduates don't work in single teacher Homeland schools, but are paired up with a more experienced teacher;
- one senior teacher doesn't have a teaching load, allowing her to provide support on site in the Homelands as well as in the main community;
- other senior teachers have lower teaching loads so they can also assist and support the visiting teachers; and
- staff across the school have to re-apply to nominate their preferred communities each year. This allows for movement across the region (visiting or classroom based roles), as well as providing for some movement across communities if people need a break, or unhealthy dependencies are building up. The Senior Management Team considers all the applications and negotiates and develops the plan for each teacher, which is then endorsed by the Homelands Schools Council, which includes Aboriginal community members. If a teacher is not going to get their first preference the Principal will discuss this outcome with the teacher before hand and negotiate an alternative so there is "no surprise".

The school places a strong emphasis on supporting and training the local Aboriginal staff employed in Homeland teacher roles and other support roles. They partner with the regional Aboriginal tertiary education provider to tailor programs that articulate with and match the core units in recognized course. The school also supports some staff to undertake formal teacher training.

Currently the school is trialling the use of the Australian Core Skills Framework to measure their staff's skills and readiness as a baseline for future more formal assessment of skills and to enable them to monitor the development of Aboriginal staff's numeracy and literacy skills.

Student engagement

School attendance at Homeland schools has traditionally been higher than in other remote communities, however attendance rates vary across the Homelands, with some schools seeing rates as high as 80 – 90%, whereas other communities have rates as low as 60%. Homelands are smaller than other communities and have family based groupings and structures that generally support school attendance, yet disruptions and commitments can and do still vary between Homelands, influencing attendance. Other environmental or infrastructure issues, such as a bigger than usual wet season where families come into town to avoid being isolated and then take time to return to their Homelands, and children not attending the school while in town, also influence student attendance.

The Homelands Schools Council has employed tutors and attendance officers in most Homeland communities to work with the children and with parents on attendance and student progress, and to help negotiate and resolve issues in culturally appropriate ways. These officers also help deliver some programs and provide support to teachers.

Engagement and education of the senior students is a constant challenge. Some of the strategies that have been adopted include encouraging students with high attendance and academic ability to move to the Secondary Homelands Education Program operated from a central community in the Homelands region. The senior students fly in each Tuesday and return to their community on Thursday each week. They sleep at the school and participate in school programs with the visiting senior teachers. The Homelands school employs a local cook and a cleaner, but the students are rostered on to help with meals. The dedicated contact time each week is seen as the most effective way of delivering educational programs to this older student population.

Community engagement

Maintaining an interest and focus on cultural business is an ongoing activity at the school. The school has a Senior Cultural Adviser position, which is regarded as a position of equal importance to the position of Principal. This position manages the local Aboriginal teaching and support staff as well as advising on all matters related to curriculum and programming. In addition this position sits on the Senior Management Team.

The school has developed a process for managing cultural matters such as attendance at funerals and ceremonies. The Schools Council representative for the relevant Homeland negotiates with the Senior Cultural Adviser and teachers to hold school in the morning so that the funeral and business can occur in the afternoon.

The Aboriginal elders have requested that the school teach in English. Their view is that Homeland living environment and family structure provides the cultural input and the school's role is to develop students' literacy and numeracy in English.

The school has a very strong School Council which is made up of two representatives from each Homeland area. The school budgets to bring the council together once each term and usually combine it with teacher professional development days and other events to maximise teacher and council time together.

The Aboriginal staff deliver training to the non-Aboriginal teachers periodically throughout the year, advising them on matters such cultural issues and appropriate language.

There are strong relationships with the other Aboriginal service providers for the communities. It is through these relationships that they stay connected to the wider issues that are occurring or impacting on the communities, and through which they develop partnerships for employment, training and the provision of vocational education and training (VET) in schools.

Student work readiness

A Youth Transitions Coordinator is employed across the town based and Homelands schools. This person liaises with the teachers, employers and regional training providers to develop individualized pathways for each senior student. The VET in schools system is used, as well as working in partnerships with local providers to develop relevant apprenticeships.

The school has had success with students being educated entirely through the Homelands model being able to move into employment or traineeships in their communities or the town.

Student health and wellbeing

The school liaises with the local Health Department specialist staff in programs such as nutrition, dental care and environmental health. These programs are generally delivered by the Homeland Teachers. For example all schools run a daily “Breath, Blow, Cough” program and a Healthy Teeth program. Recently the Department of Health dentist provided feedback that the Homeland school students’ teeth had improved markedly since the dental program began.

The school also liaises with the local Indigenous Association, and with other agencies such as the Police, regarding other health and wellbeing programs such as alcohol and drugs, sports and crocodile awareness programs.

The school allocates an annual budget and a coordinating teacher to enable students to participate in sporting events across the region each year.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The school is attempting to maximise the opportunities arising from the Australian and Northern Territory Governments *Closing the Gap Strategy* and from other Indigenous and remote policy initiatives.

For example:

- the school has applied to set up a trade training centre across the schools in the region.
- a new Residential School is being built in a larger community to provide a base for the older students program. Under the new model, students would attend for a term at a time rather than commute each week;
- the school has used *Building the Education Revolution* funding to upgrade or build multipurpose facilities in all Homelands that includes appropriate accommodation facilities for visiting teachers;
- *Closing the Gap* National Partnership funding is being used to employ more local staff and increase the number of teacher houses across the region (accommodation having been a major barrier to recruitment in the region); and
- funding has been obtained for an Interactive Distance Learning program rollout, which will eventually see all Homeland schools connected via satellite, allowing changes in the way programs and support can be delivered.

6 P-12 School, Central Queensland

1 Background

School profile

Years	P-12
Enrolments	67
% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	73%
ICSEA	727
ICSEA % from national average	-23%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 325 Yr 5: 424 Yr 7: 484 Yr9: N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -21% Yr 5: -13% Yr 7: -11%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: +6% Yr 5: +11% Yr 7: +7%

The school is a small rural Prep to Year 12 school, located in central Queensland. The town in which the school is based has a population of around 900, with employment primarily coming from pastoral, timber harvesting and milling, and horticultural activities. Students are drawn from the local community and reflect the diversity of that community, with the school having a significant Aboriginal student population. In general, families in the school's catchment are very settled, with several generations of a family having attended or worked at the school.

The school strives to provide students with the best possible educational outcomes for the creation of life-long learners in a technological world, providing distinctive programs in the Early, Middle and Senior phases of schooling. Students in Prep and Years 1 and 2 share a classroom, with a support team providing reading intervention, literacy and numeracy development programs.

Students in Years 3, 4 and 5 also share a classroom, again with support staff complementing the educational experiences offered. A structured intervention program is used to address identified skill deficits. Composite classes are again used for Years 6 through 8, Years 9 and 10 and Years 11 and 12. Vocational education becomes an increasing focus of schooling, particularly from Year 10 onwards and distance education is increasingly used to provide additional curriculum.

The school fosters engagement with the community, participating actively in community and cultural events. These activities have included hospitality students catering for a Community Elders Lunch as part of NAIDOC week and the annual general meeting of the local Land Council. Students also participate in performing and visual arts events within the community.

The school is increasingly integrating information and communication technologies into all classrooms, key learning areas and learning experiences. Students have access to three computer labs and a variety of mobile devices (laptops) to suit their particular learning needs. At the end of 2010, two classrooms had operational mobile electronic whiteboards which are being well utilised by competent staff. Other learning spaces have access to portable projectors to enhance the classroom environments.

Classroom cameras are available for student use to record information and learning experiences and staff make use of these recordings to validate learning logs for students from all year levels.

The school has a friendly safe environment where students are encouraged to become involved in a range of school based and community based academic, sporting, social and cultural activities. The school is supported by regular visits from local youth workers conducting programs with students in the middle through to senior years.

A guidance officer also regularly visits the school to offer assistance and support to students, staff and families. Other Support staff including a School Nurse, Advisory Visiting Teachers and Behaviour Management staff visit the school regularly. Health workers from the Deadly Ears program visit the school to assess the aural health of students while the visiting dental van looks after their oral health.

Further support for students is provided by the local organisation of churches, which provides a pastoral service and offers religious instruction to students in Year 3, 4 and 5 on a weekly basis.

In the 2010 School Opinion Survey, 90% of parents indicated their belief that the school is a good school. Surveys of students, parents and staff during 2010 showed levels of satisfaction above the average for the State for areas such as the quality of education, professional development and staff morale.

2 Identification of need

The school has had an acknowledged attendance problem, which has been the focus of negative publicity in recent years. Attendance rates of between 70 per cent and 80 percent were being experienced.

In addition, the community in which the school is based has recorded a suicide rate that is some 60 times the national average. As part of a broader strategy to tackle this issue local community organisations have banded together to ensure that services are available for the school's students.

Being set in a relatively isolated location, means that providing students with experiences of the world outside of their community and providing staff with access to professional development opportunities is difficult and expensive. The Principal felt that to really open the eyes of the school's students to the opportunities that exist for them there was a need to ensure that they had the opportunity to go on excursions outside the school.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Poor parent and community engagement

Largely a result of its very remote location, the school has been confronted with the problem of successfully generating parent involvement in its activities. However, it has also been noted that a general negative attitude is present in the surrounding community, in which parents are unlikely to become engaged with the school on a voluntary basis.

The Principal noted that the community's view was that the school staff were very much outsiders. Nonetheless, there is pressure on school staff to become involved in community organisations based on the belief that staff are good managers and organisers.

Moderating the curriculum to achieve an optimal level of teaching

The small number of students in each year group means that it is difficult for staff to effectively moderate students' work.

Early childhood programs

The community in which the school is based does not have early childhood development programs in place. As a result, students have generally not started their schooling with the necessary degree of socialisation and familiarity with classroom routines. Furthermore, the children have very low levels of literacy and numeracy when they begin their schooling.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Establishment of a camp for secondary students

The school has formed a partnership with a regional university to provide an opportunity for its secondary students to broaden their educational horizons by attending a camp at the university where they participate in a campus tour and attend various activities, including a science lesson and a theatre production. The university contributes to the funding of the camp.

The camp provides an opportunity to broaden the students' world, helping to address some of the impact of the community's isolation and to provide the students with a greater sense of the opportunities that are available to them.

The camp is also part of the strategy for addressing the school's attendance issues. Students are able to attend the camp as long as they have missed less than five days of school in a semester. Where students have been excluded from participation due to failing to meet this attendance target there is a clear sense of missing out on their part, and participation in future camps can be used as an incentive for them to improve their attendance.

Hiring parents as teachers' aides

Following a teacher's aide leaving the school the Principal had funding for twenty five hours a week available. Rather than simply filling the vacant position with a single applicant a decision was made to try and increase parental engagement by employing a number of local women on a casual basis.

The school has successfully engaged three Aboriginal parents in the school's operations. This is a positive step forward in terms of addressing the challenge of poor parent involvement in school activities, with the parents sharing their positive experiences of the school with their community.

One of the aide's has excelled in her role and is being encouraged to pursue her own education through TAFE. Another aide, for whom a school was a foreign and threatening environment, has developed a more positive perception of the school and is encouraging students to pursue their studies with greater application.

Creation of an 'attendance train'

To tackle the problem of poor student attendance, two school teachers walk through the community every morning, each starting from opposite sides, and encourage students to hop on the 'attendance train' into school. A reward system is in place, through which students receive points for every time they have jumped on the train and once they have accumulated a certain number of points they are given a small prize. Not only has this initiative been successful in lifting attendance, but it also provides an opportunity to further develop effective relationships between teachers and their students.

Rewards for students participating in the attendance train are simply the free items that schools regularly receive from different organisations. For example, the Department of Health provides lanyards, backpacks, stress balls and yoyos that are prized by the children.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

Funding is an issue for the school, and is currently a barrier to the Principal's goal to establish a breakfast club as a further innovation to improve attendance. It was noted that additional support from the Department of Education, either financially or in kind, would be greatly appreciated.

7 P-10 School, Northern Queensland

1 Background

School profile

Years	P-10
Enrolments	105
% % Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	10%
ICSEA	910
ICSEA % from national average	-9%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 306 Yr 5: N/A Yr 7: 521 Yr9: 542
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -26% Yr 5:N/A Yr 7: -5% Yr 9: -6%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: -19% Yr 5: N/A Yr 7: +2% Yr 9: +1%

The school is located 30 kilometres from the nearest larger town and serves a student population of approximately 100. The school has a long and proud history, having recently celebrated its 125th anniversary.

Most students transition from Primary into Secondary on site, with a small number going on to schools in the town or to private boarding schools. Of those students who complete Year 10, the majority complete their secondary schooling at the town school. However, many students do not complete Year 12, leaving to work and/or undertake traineeships or apprenticeships before matriculation.

Aboriginal students made up approximately 10% of the student population in 2010. The school's Closing the Gap data around student attendance is extremely pleasing with Aboriginal student attendance data being ahead of non-Aboriginal attendance rates at the school (94.5% Aboriginal attendance: 92% non-Aboriginal attendance).

Aboriginal attendance data exceeded the Queensland attendance mean for all students for the second year in a row over 2010.

The school's educational program is learner-centred with an emphasis on real-life applications. There is a range of subject options for students in the middle phase of learning (Years 7 – 10), including, Language Other Than English (German), English, Maths, Science, Studies of Society and Environment, Health and Physical Education, Home Economics, Industrial Technology and Design and the Arts. Instrumental Music is available for students in Year 4 and above in keyboard and guitar.

Educational facilities include a Science Lab, Home Economics and Manual Arts facilities, a Library and a new computer lab. ICT is an important part of the program for all year levels.

The school also offers units to prepare students for the senior phase of learning such as: Aviation Studies, Graphics, Furnishing, Engineering, Film and TV/ Drama, Accounting, Business Studies and Home Economics/ Hospitality.

Work experience and industry blue card training involving site-based vocational learning available to all students 14 years of age or older. All students in Year 10 do a one week work placement.

The school's vision is that every member of the school community will be successful, resulting in the following expectations for success across the school:

- to be literate and numerate;

- to model and develop positive attitudes and behaviours for self, others and the environment;
- to learn how to learn – 21st Century learners who are learning for life;
- to know how to adapt to change and develop resourcefulness and resilience;
- to set goals and achieve them; and
- to live a productive life.

These ideals come directly from the current School Strategic Plan, the development of which was informed by a community review of the school's strategic direction.

A key feature of the school is that all staff interact with students from P-10. Additionally, the school has the following school staffing in place to support student welfare:

- School Based Youth Health Nurse - one day per fortnight;
- Guidance Officer - one day per fortnight; and
- Chaplain - one day per week.

These staff coordinate and facilitate a range of pastoral care activities for students and staff.

Community volunteers and parents are actively encouraged to be involved in the school. The school provides support for parents to assist in their child's learning. Mathematics mentors, coaches for sporting teams, referees, drivers and visitors for hospitality and culminating activities are all encouraged and welcomed by the school.

A weekly newsletter keeps all families and the community well informed of school activities. A small, dedicated group of parents are members of the P&C, operate the tuckshop and take part in other fundraising activities.

2 Identification of need

The school actively monitors students' progress in literacy using internal diagnostic testing of reading skills, every eight to ten weeks. Last year this testing program indicated that only four per cent of students were reading at the required level, with around 20 per cent of students a long way behind.

Bullying has also been a significant problem within the school, with the issue reaching critical proportions a couple of years ago. Much of this bullying was taking place while students were on their way home as around 60 per cent of students walk to and from school.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Maintaining students' self esteem

In developing an effective whole-of-school approach to improving literacy the school had to find a way to avoid placing students in a situation where they felt ashamed of their performance. In a small school, with limited teaching resources and small student cohorts this is particularly difficult.

Managing staff sensitivity to performance feedback

The school has been an active adopter of feedback and coaching for teachers but has had to overcome an initial apprehension on the part of staff, particularly with respect to the Principal sitting in on their lessons. For many staff their past experience has been that a principal only attends a teacher's classroom if there are serious underperformance issues involved.

There was also sensitivity to the use of a ratings system as a way of benchmarking teachers.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

A whole-of-school literacy program

To address the school's poor literacy performance the Principal formed a working party to lead a review of possible initiatives. The working party included participation from teachers, teaching aides and three parent volunteers. This review led to the development of the school's Reading Action Plan, which is a 3 to 4 year strategic document.

For three quarters of an hour every morning, the school now has a whole school literacy block, where the entire student population is split into cohorts based on their level of accomplishment. Sensitivities amongst older students are managed by ensuring that those who are struggling are not put into groups with younger students and by making one-on-one assistance available to those who prefer it. Excelling younger students, however, are often grouped with older students.

Primary parents are supported to help their children with reading. Regular 'Support-a-Reader' training is offered and in 2011 this was supplemented with training in the use of the LEXIA online reading program which is accessible to students outside of the formal classroom.

Retesting of students in the second half of last year suggested that significant improvement had been achieved since the previous testing in May. Every time data is collected, the results are communicated to parents via a newsletter and individual information packs on their children's performance.

Feedback and coaching to improve teachers' performance

The school staff were very early adopters of feedback and coaching of teachers, a process that takes place in the school six to seven times a year.

Teachers arrange a block of time and the Principal visits their classroom, (they can also invite a colleague to attend if they wish, a practice the Principal supports as it promotes the sharing of ideas).

During the first session of the year, the Principal holds discussions with each teacher on every element of teaching style. Subsequent discussions through the year focus on one or two issues that the Principal decides need special attention school-wide, or alternatively, the teachers can nominate a particular area that they wish to focus on. The practice of allowing teachers to attend other teachers' lessons, has allowed staff to find support amongst their colleagues and promoted a more active sharing of experiences.

The biggest gains have been in Secondary School classes, as each teacher teaches Years 8 to 10 so they can share approaches. The gains have been less substantial in the Primary School, possibly because each teacher teaches one year level, making it more difficult to translate or transfer experiences.

Following three or four rotations of the program the perceived stigma of having the Principal in the classroom has begun to disappear. A decision to focus discussions around qualitative assessments has avoided the at times deflating nature of quantitative rating measures.

Bullying and the Walking Bus

In 2009, the school had a big problem with after school bullying of the local students. To address this issue the Principal established a Walking Bus, where a volunteer from the school staff walks a winding path through the town after school. Participation on the part of students is optional, with younger students being more likely to join the bus.

Further, if any student is accused of bullying (inside or outside school) they must attend the walking bus and stand with the teacher.

While the number of participants is quite small there has been a substantial decrease in bullying incidents and parent feedback on the initiative has been very positive.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The school would like to also tackle numeracy through a similar strategy to the one used to target literacy. However, the approach places significant demands on the time of teachers and support staff and running joint programs is not a viable alternative for the school. As a result, a decision has been made to focus more on numeracy once significant progress has been made on improving students' literacy.

8 Middle Primary School (3-7), Eyre and Western Region, South Australia

1 Background

School profile

Years	3-7
Enrolments	500
% Aboriginal	9%
ICSEA	956
ICSEA % from national average	-4%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 357 Yr 5: 454 Yr 7: 552
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -14% Yr 5: -7% Yr 7: 1%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: -8% Yr 5: -3% Yr 7: 5%

The school is based in a major commercial centre for the region, with a population of around 14,000 people. Fishing and farming are the most significant local industries, with either direct participation in these industries, or employment in supporting industries, forming the community's economic base.

The student population includes a growing number of Aboriginal families who choose to live within the central schooling precinct, as well as a significant number of children from rural backgrounds, students whose parents are professionals or business owners, a rising number of students from single parent families and students who are experiencing poverty. This diversity of backgrounds and cultures makes for a vibrant and energetic student population.

The school is committed to working in partnership with its community to provide quality learning and care for all children. The Year 3 - 7 school community is extended to include the nearby R - 2 school through a shared governing council, canteen, gymnasium and co-located class spaces. Close proximity between both schools and the high school fosters strong transitional links and complements the focus on effective teaching and learning pedagogies for all learning areas within the state and national curriculum frameworks.

Leadership in the school is negotiated and shared, with a strong commitment to teaming and curriculum leadership. The term co Principal is used in preference to Deputy Principal, symbolising the ethos of leadership and a move away from the traditional concepts of leadership. The school has endeavoured to bring students into school leadership through a developmental model of school democracy. The Student Representative Council provides an opportunity for students to apply the procedural and thinking skills learnt in class in a meaningful and real decision making context. Members develop leadership skills as they learn about building ownership within the school community and share their learning with classes.

The staff enjoys a strong and supportive spirit and offers a broad range of skills and teaching/life perspectives. Learning teams and a negotiated performance management process exists for all staff. Professional support meetings incorporate appraisal and reflection on the staff members contribution to the whole school and year level teams. Staff nominate areas of strength to share and areas for further development, new learning; negotiate process for their professional development and share new learning. As a whole school team "shared" resources via technology access has become a priority. Learning time for staff is maximised by reducing the time spent on administration through the use of weekly bulletins and notice boards. New learning is supported

with the hours from such activity logged. Leadership and management teams are encouraged to identify new strategies to keep the school moving while also dealing effectively with the day-to-day issues of school life.

Parents have the opportunity and are encouraged to be actively involved in the school. The parents choose to be involved in classroom activities such as English/Maths programs, learn and assist with computer skills development alongside students, and attend excursions, camps, celebrations and special events. Parents are also encouraged to become involved in whole school activities such as sports days, the running of the school canteen, mentoring and various decision making committees-in particular Governing Council.

Community involvement in school includes participation in special events and celebrations, use of school facilities for meetings, sporting events, special occasions and in turn sharing their facilities and expertise with the school as required.

The school has been a strong supporter of traineeships, school based apprenticeships and Hourly Paid Instructor opportunities for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people also participate in school programs as volunteers with encouragement from the schools Aboriginal Community Education officer.

2 Identification of need

The Principal felt a need for the school to bring in a more progressive approach to education. This included a change in teaching approach, new and innovative programs, an emphasis on the arts and student leadership and an improved connection with the local community.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Teacher/staff resistance to change

This school experienced some difficulties with the staffing culture and attitudes towards groups of students. The new Principal's approach became a source of tension with some of the long-tenured teaching staff. Some staff turnover occurred, so as to bring in fresh perspectives. A number of staff immediately bought in and helped drive the innovations and changes. Others gradually became supportive as they experienced the positive impact that the new approach had on the behaviour and results of the students.

Program funding acquisition

One of the major hurdles was acquiring funding for a number of the new programs being introduced. Room within the budget was not provided for many of the initiatives that were proposed. Getting new ideas off the ground without financial backing can be difficult.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Student engagement through community programs

In this initiative, the school links a student with a community partner (such as a local artist or business) and allocates time for the student to spend working with their partner. The aim is for the student to gain a mentor outside of the school and connect them to the community. In that respect, it is not considered as a work placement role, but rather as an 'aspiration exercise'. In addition, students also participate in simulation situations at school where they practice ringing up businesses and writing letters of introduction.

While this program was initially geared towards Aboriginal students, it continues to evolve and is now inclusive of all students. The aim is to improve student engagement at school, as well as improve relationships with the local community.

Through the program, the school has developed strong partnerships with small businesses, government agencies and other individuals in the community. In addition, the perceptions of the community and local businesses have changed regarding Aboriginal students. Finally, while the goal of the program is not to secure job placements, a number of students have eventually gained employment with their community partners.

Establishing student-run playground activities

There were a number of students that struggled to engage and interact with others outside of the classroom. To improve engagement and social skills, the school created programs that students would run on the playground.

The Blue Shirt Brigade is a group of selected senior students who lead activities and games during lunchtime. It gave the senior students opportunities to lead social learning at lunchtime and behaviour has improved dramatically as a result.

An activity centre at lunchtime was created for students to voluntarily engage through structured activities. This has been helpful for children who have a difficult time interacting and engaging with other students in the playground environment.

Implementing innovations now, rather than waiting for funding

In line with his progressive approach, the Principal looks for new programs and initiatives that can be implemented to improve the educational experience for his students. However, there is often no funding available for new programs, which can inhibit their implementation. The school takes on new initiatives, often driven by teachers, prior to receiving funding. The Principal feels that if the program can be shown to be effective, funding will follow. As such, the Principal sees grant-writing as one of his key duties. Teachers are encouraged to create and implement programs and if they can be seen to work, he will help to acquire funding so that they may continue.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

Many of the initiatives at the school are driven by a highly motivated and committed leadership group. Continued staff commitment is also essential for the strategies to be successful. This can be achieved by strong leadership, selective hiring and a collaborative and positive working environment.

The local sporting culture can present a challenge to the school. This is especially true when Aboriginal teams compete against non-Aboriginal teams. These tensions can spill over onto the school playground and can be exaggerated or mitigated by community and family attitudes. To combat this, the school emphasizes a theme of unity - that when children come through the gates they are all one school.

9 *R-7 School, Eyre and Western Region, South Australia*

1 *Background*

School profile

Years	R-7
Enrolments	35
% Aboriginal	0%
ICSEA	1064
ICSEA % from national average	+6.5%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	N/A

A small, vibrant rural school located among broad acre farming properties around 100km away from the nearest regional centre, the small number of students means that the school has a genuine ‘family atmosphere’ with strong rapport between staff, students and parents. This rapport is highly productive, with parents heavily engaged in the school and both students and parents actively participating in decision making. Families in the community place a high value on learning and have a high level of expectations for their children.

The school offers a balanced curriculum with a strong teaching focus on literacy, numeracy, information and communications technology and supporting the individual needs of students identified as requiring additional academic and social support. As all classes cover a range of teaching levels there is a requirement for staff to utilise a wide variety of teaching methodologies to cater for the range of abilities in their classroom.

The school also has a strong focus on environmental sustainability, and all students from Reception to Year 7 are involved in maintaining communal vegetable plots, cooking produce for school lunches, monitoring power production from a school solar array and implementing various measures to 'Wipe Out Waste', and conserve water and power. Students also maintain a school orchard, chicken yard and aquaponics system. Students regularly conduct tours of the school for interested groups and are invited to present their programs at local community events.

The school's students are actively involved in school and community events and sports, participate in an Active After Schools program and attend regular excursions and camps to local and intrastate locations that support learning programs. Students also participate in environmental projects and regularly work with Natural Resource Management officers and community groups.

The school's operations are jointly managed through a decision making structure involving staff, students and parents. The partnership relies on open and honest communication between parties and assists in creating ownership and commitment toward the decisions that are made. Regular meeting of Governing Council, Parents & Friends, staff and class help the school to function more smoothly.

2 Identification of need

The school identified student engagement as an area of need, particularly for students who were not academically inclined. Located in a rural farming community, the Principal wanted to ensure a curriculum was implemented that tied the academic material to relevant practical-based programs.

With nearby schools closing due to enrolment issues, as well as the limited resources of a small and remote community, engendering a strong connection between the school and local community was seen to be a high priority.

3 Key challenges of implementing the programs or strategies

Challenges

Ambitious, volunteer-intensive programs

The programs at the school need a number of volunteers in order for them to run. Without community support, many of the programs will have to be shut down, as the staff is not large enough to provide all the time needed.

Staff turnover

With the school having a small staff, any turnover is an issue. The number of programs and initiatives that are run depend on a passionate, cohesive staff. This is especially true with regards to the Principal.

In addition, attracting and retaining staff can be difficult due to the remoteness of the school. If possible, local teachers are preferred, as they are more likely to stay with the school for a longer period of time.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Embedding the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden curriculum

The school has recently integrated the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program into their overall curriculum. This has involved the building of a large, fully functional kitchen and dining area, as well as a garden with aquaponic plants, fruit trees, vegetables and a number of chickens and fish. The students spend roughly one hour a week in the garden with the garden educator. In addition, the students are responsible for daily upkeep, including watering plants and feeding the chickens and fish. The students also spend an additional two hours a week in the kitchen. Activities in the kitchen range from creating and following recipes to tying in geography, literacy, numeracy, health and nutrition and cultural studies.

In this way, students are engaged and learning, without even realizing it. Students who are not academically inclined are given an opportunity to excel by entering into cooking competitions or taking larger roles in the kitchen and garden.

Establishing the school as a hub for the broader community

The school feels that it is very important to have a strong connection with the local community. Due to its remoteness, the small size of the community and the lack of communal gathering areas, the school has worked to become the hub of the broader community. This ranges from the school providing space for community programs, to community members volunteering and running programs for the school. Examples include:

- The school produces a newsletter which is distributed to the entire community, whether the household has children or not. When needs arise within the school, word is sent out through the newsletter and someone in the community is usually able to provide what is needed.
- The community uses school facilities for professional development days. A number of additional community functions occur on the premises as well. Lack of space for community events is an issue that the school is able to remedy.
- Community volunteers help run hour-long after school sessions. This helps to fill in the students' time between school and community sport training sessions.
- The school also operates a Child Centre (Play centre) on Mondays. In the morning, the mothers stay and play with their children as well as socialise with each other. In the afternoons, however, this is the mother's chance to take a break. A lack of child care services is a critical gap in the community that the school has been able to address.

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden has also helped considerably with community relations. The community is invited to open house days and markets that are put on by the school. Recipes that are created within the school are shared with the community. In the summer, the community is invited to take produce from the garden.

This strong connection has allowed the school to run ambitious programs and initiatives that need significant volunteer support. In addition, the school has been able to continue to operate and even grow, despite the closure of many other area schools due to lack of enrolment.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The success of the school's programs is due to a driven and motivated Principal. He really led the process of the school attaining the funding to enable the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen curriculum to be implemented. Continued growth of the program and other innovations will be dependent on the continued passion and dedication of the school's staff.

The size of the local community is a concern. With drought conditions forcing families to move and other schools in the area closing due to low enrolments, the threat of closure is a concern. However, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen program is expected to have a positive effect on enrolments. In fact, students have already been drawn to the school from outlying areas due to the kitchen garden.

The school has used a number of grants to fund their many initiatives. Leadership emphasized the need to be proactive in writing grants in order to fund and implement programs.

10 K-12 School, Kimberley Region, Western Australia

1 Background

School profile

Years	K-12
Enrolments	104
% Aboriginal	91%
ICSEA	645
ICSEA % from national average	-35%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 341; Yr5: 346; Yr 7: 455; Yr 9: N/A
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -18% Yr5 : -3% Yr 7 : -2%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: 24% Yr5 : -2% Yr 7 : 7%

Situated in a very remote part of the Kimberly, the school services an Aboriginal community of approximately 400 people. A Community Development Employment Project provides employment for the adult community members, with tourism and aquaculture being important local industries. The community is situated around 200 kilometres from the nearest regional centre, with road access dependent upon seasonal conditions.

The school offers education for students from kindergarten through to Year 12, providing distinctive educational programs that recognise students' cultural and language background. The programs include a nationally recognised and award winning cultural studies program, an intensive English language curriculum, language education in the local language, partnerships with neighbouring schools to enhance vocational education, and the empowerment of parents as partners in their children's education through home literacy and other programs.

Most teachers at the school have a few years of teaching experience with the range being between two years and twenty three years experience. Teachers are expected to plan, teach, monitor and assess collaboratively, with collaboration extending to the school's Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs).

The school has one full time secondary teacher, with many families in the community choosing to send their children to other towns for their secondary schooling. The secondary teacher instructs all students in all learning areas according to their ability. They access local projects, such as aquaculture, horticulture and jewellery making, which are incorporated into the overall program.

The school involves the community in decision making through involvement in the School Council. As with most schools a few dedicated parents make up most committees but the school's AIEOs contribute a community perspective to staff meetings and school development day decision making. There is also an emphasis on evidence-based decision making in relation to the school's direction, with evidence collected through formal testing, comparison against State standards and community surveys.

2 Identification of need

The school's cultural program was introduced in response to a need identified by local Elders and other members of the community to ensure that students were being provided with a better understanding of their past and its impact on their lives. It is a means by which Elders can be involved in the school, capturing local community knowledge and history and weaving it into the school curriculum.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

The impact of programs on younger children

In trialling innovative strategies the school has had to be aware that young children respond well to consistency and routine. There is a risk that the introduction of a new program can reduce consistency with a resulting impact on outcomes for children.

The need to draw on the interests of particular staff

Innovation in the school's curriculum has had to depend to some degree on aligning innovations with the interests of particular staff members of the school. This limits the range of activities that can be incorporated into the curriculum.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Cultural programs as a way to bring school and community together

The school holds three cultural programs a year, which involve:

- whole school excursions (over 100 students K-12);
- the production of a DVD;
- a two-way learning book (in both English and Aboriginal English); and
- a culture camp (held once a year).

The culture programs are organised by a 'culture team' which includes members of school staff, community Elders, the AIEOs and students.

Themes for the culture programs are selected to run closely with the Language Other Than English (LOTE) program. For example, if the LOTE program is focused on studying 'heritage' this theme will continue into the cultural program.

An output of the culture program is a pack that includes a DVD, and two-way learning book (every class receives a copy of both) and posters for the local shops and community centre.

This year, the school compiled a school book comprising themes from the last three years, which was edited by local elders. At the book launch, every family in the community was given a copy and the book is now on sale.

The cultural program is funded through:

- A grant from the Kimberley Aboriginal Language and Culture centre (\$25,000 a year), provided on the basis that other funding for the program is received;
- Royalties from the school book; and
- And grants from other community organisations and local businesses.

The school values the culture programs as a key source of pride for the community and an important activity for promoting community, staff and student involvement in the school. The program also contributes to building the leadership capacity of Aboriginal staff and has been identified as making an important contribution to improved attendance in junior primary and improved student performance across the board.

Providing role models for primary students through innovative curriculum

This school is trialling an innovation to the regular primary school learning model .

There are four teachers that have specific interests and skills in:

- gardening;
- technology;
- whole school science programs, and
- physical education.

These teachers are developing learning programs outside of regular classroom environments and provide relief across the whole school. As a result, primary students who would usually have only one regular teacher are now exposed to more teachers on a regular basis.

In particular, these teachers (all male) provide additional role models for students as many of the primary teachers are female. The school has found these relationships have had a positive impact on student behaviour and provide diversity for students' learning.

The school was aware of the challenge that younger children respond well to consistency and they were initially concerned that this trial would move away from this. However, they've found that this model of learning in addition to regular classroom formats has had a positive impact on the student population as a whole.

As this model of learning is dependent of the availability and skills of staff, there has to be strong interest and commitment for staff participation and for the program to continue.

One example of this work is the community garden. There is a teacher at the school with the strong interest in gardening and he has taken on the responsibility of the ongoing maintenance of the school's Community Garden. The teacher also takes classes into the garden and teaches them skills in horticulture, such as seed germination.

Wider benefits of the Community Garden have been that students get to take home fresh fruit and vegetables and this year have taken home developed tomato plants to be grown in their own gardens.

The Community Garden is supported by the Edge of Nowhere initiative, which provides garden beds, fertiliser, seedlings and garden tools. However, the success of the garden is still dependent on a teacher or grounds person with a keen interest in its maintenance.

Streaming students based on ability rather than year level

The school has introduced streaming for literacy and numeracy teaching through the use of three classes for Years 1 to 4 and three classes for Years 5 to 12. This strategy is aimed at improving student outcomes and providing consistency across the school and the students' learning environment.

The streaming enables the scope of these classes to be targeted to students with similar literacy and numeracy skills, allowing teachers to tailor their teaching to the students needs. The school is able to increase the number of hours dedicated to literacy and numeracy, with resulting improvements in student outcomes.

This approach has been used in other schools in the Kimberley region, but it is still a relatively new way of approaching this common problem. Its successful use requires flexibility in school leadership as well as sufficient support for staff development.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The school has clearly identified the links between the school and the community, an exercise that the Principal identifies as particularly important for subsequent success. Experience has shown that if parental engagement with the school and their child's education can be secured then improved student outcomes can be achieved. The school's existing ethos is about supporting kids, staff and parents in the school.

The school is fortunate that its community has a particularly strong sense of identity. There is strong cultural continuity, with lore remaining very important. The school has opened itself up to the community, actively trying to involve people. The planned next stage of building community engagement is the establishment of a Community Learning Centre.

To achieve this greater engagement the school's ethos will need to change from one of meeting the needs of Kindergarten to Year 11 students to core values that reflect the provision of life long learning opportunities for all community members. The school has instigated adult education courses in literacy, numeracy and ICT, which has meant setting up flexible timetables and hours of operation. The school is also currently in the process of establishing a 0-4 years activity centre, which will include parenting workshops run in collaboration with external government agencies.

11 *K-12 School, Pilbara Region, Western Australia*

1 *Background*

School profile

Years	K-12
Enrolments	140
% Aboriginal	59%
ICSEA	793
ICSEA % from national average	-21%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 342; Yr 5: 422; Yr 7: 467; Yr 9: 471
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -17%; Yr 5: -13%; Yr 7: -14%; Yr 9: -18%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: 4%; Yr 5: 3%; Yr 7: -2%; Yr 9: -6%

Located on the Pilbara coast, the school serves a town population of around 800 people who have traditionally relied on a mix of primary production and tourism for employment. With the continuing development of the LNG industry the town is also starting to become a service hub supporting offshore exploration, construction and production activities. In an isolated location, the school is part of the Department of Education's Remote Teaching Service, with staff appointed through a central merit selection process.

While classified as a primary school, the school provides education for a student population of approximately 140 four to seventeen year olds. Around half the school's students are Aboriginal. Ensuring that students in the secondary program are engaged and attending school has been a particular focus of the school's strategies.

The school has some significant advantages, one of which is the quality of its infrastructure. Constructed in 2005, the school has some secondary facilities that are relatively unique for remote schools. These facilities provide a benefit for the entire school and the quality of facilities overall.

2 *Identification of need*

The school was facing a consistent pattern of poor or declining attendance within its secondary student cohort, reflecting a lack of clarity amongst these students about the post-school pathways available to them. This issue should be understood in the context of a community where many children board during their secondary schooling.

In 2008, only 4 secondary students out of a cohort of twenty eight had an attendance rate greater than 80 per cent. The attendance of secondary students was part of a broader concern about student attendance across all school cohorts, with primary school attendance of 79 per cent in 2008 being well below the State average of 93 per cent. Low levels of student attendance had been an acknowledge problem for the school for many years.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

1 Opportunity to provide meaningful post-school pathways

The school's ability to provide meaningful post-school pathways for its students has previously been constrained by the limited opportunities for stable employment in the local community.

In addition, the highly successful secondary engagement program would not have been possible without significant financial support from a major energy company (\$150,000 over three years), and the opportunities being created by this company's gas field developments.

2 Working with two communities

Somewhat unusually for a remote school, the case study school has a student body that is almost evenly divided between Aboriginal students and students from other backgrounds. A significant focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students has at times been misinterpreted by the parents of non-Aboriginal students as a form of reverse discrimination, denying equal rights to their children. A recent review of the school conducted by the Dare to Lead program suggests that some students may also perceive this to be the case.

This issue points to some of the challenges that exist in trying to craft a strategic direction for a school where there are two distinct groups in the community, and the children from those two groups may have quite different needs.

3 Supporting social services

The prevalence of students with complex needs, particularly among those exhibiting non-attendance and behavioural problems, means that school needs to be able to access appropriate social services. The intermittent nature of these services in a remote town is a challenge for addressing the complexity of these issues. There is an absence of appropriate mental health services, with a school psychologist visiting twice a term. While this is appreciated, ensuring that those students who need this assistance are attending school when the psychologist visits, is an issue. More generally, a lack of agency coordination is apparent to the Principal and there has been a significant turnover of child protection case workers, in part driven by what are perceived to be inappropriate staffing choices.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

A Secondary Engagement Program that has contributed to significantly increased attendance and participation in secondary education.

The school developed a Secondary Engagement Program in 2008 to combat low levels of attendance among secondary students and low levels of participation in secondary education. The program comprises:

- The Working on Employment, Learning and Development (WELD) Program which focuses on developing pathways for students to enter the workforce with the skills and competencies required. The program, which benefits from significant support from an energy company, provides students with an incentive to complete their required Western Australian Certificate of Education and also develops a positive framework for future generations of students.

- An Integrated Bush Ranger Cadets and Society and Environment Course that enhances student engagement through high interest outdoor (or at least nature) orientated activities. Community involvement is also a key part of the program, with students undertaking environmental activities, such as collecting rubbish around popular camping and fishing spots and making and installing signs to alert people to fragile ecosystems.
- Innovative Design and Technology projects such as rod building, cabinet making, rocking toys (donated to the school fete) and furniture.

The program is complemented by the other strategies the school is using to target attendance, including its breakfast program, role model visits from the Ricky Grace Up4it Program and Wirrapunda Foundation and the monitoring and active follow-up of student absences. Eligibility for the end of year reward camp, and other activities, is also tied to meeting attendance targets.

There has been a significant improvement in both attendance and participation in secondary education as a result of these strategies. Overall, attendance for the secondary school cohort increased from 35 per cent in 2008 to 60 per cent in 2009 and 53 per cent in 2010.

Improving students physical well-being

The physical well-being of students is an important area of focus for the school given its contribution to attendance, performance and, through the activities, the sense of belonging to the school community. Apart from the breakfast program noted above the school also has in place the following initiatives:

- All students in Years 1-7 are involved in the Daily Fitness session, which is held every morning.
- The Breath, Blow, Cough program which is intended to reduce the prevalence of Otitis Media (middle ear infection) which is conducted every morning as part of the Daily Fitness session.
- After school sports, supervised by teachers on a voluntary basis occurs several times a week. The school ceased running these activities in 2011, with the V Swans program and the shire taking over the running of these activities.
- Through a partnership with the Leaping Lizards program the school runs vegetable garden. Leaping Lizards also works with the school on nutritional eating and provides a yearly camp.
- The school's medical room is made available to Community Health to enable the Community Nurse to see students for matters such as vaccinations and health checks.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

As noted above, the secondary engagement program has received significant funding over a three-year period from a corporate sponsor for the WELD program. With this sponsorship due to run out at the end of 2011 discussions have commenced to renew the partnership. The outcomes of these discussions will clearly have implications for the continuation of the program and the overall effectiveness of the student engagement.

A recent review through the Dare to Lead program found that school planning processes at the time of the review appeared to lack cohesion, with no one purposeful document providing a clear and shared understandings and knowledge to provide direction to the school. There was also some evidence that parents and community members were disengaged from the school's decision making processes. A School/Community Partnership Agreement is acknowledged by the school's Principal as an important next step in the development of the school's strategies.

12 K-12 School, Goldfields Region, Western Australia

1 Background

School profile

Years	K-12
Enrolments	186
% Aboriginal	53%
ICSEA	777
ICSEA % from national average	-22%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 3: 368; Yr 5: 433; Yr 7: 525; Yr 9: 494
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 3: -11%; Yr 5: -11%; Yr 7: -4%; Yr 9: -14%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 3: +13%; Yr 5: +8%; Yr 7: +1%; Yr 9: -1%

The school is situated in the Goldfields Region of Western Australia, serving a community that relies on mining, local business and to a lesser degree public administration and the pastoral industry for employment. The school student population reflects a broad range of cultures and language groups. This diversity reflects the number of Aboriginal students attending the school and a significant ESL student group. The school has a dedicated English as a Second Language (ESL) staff to assist in delivering programs to this diverse student group. The school's senior schooling program is delivered through the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE).

Given the predominance of gold mining in the region's economic base, the community's population and economic resources is tied closely to industry conditions. The reopening of a local mine has made a significant difference to the community and the school in recent years although the increased prevalence of fly-in/fly-out working has also resulted in a changing community.

Parents and local businesses are willing to enter into partnerships with the school to support and participate in the school's educational programs. Both the P&C and School Council play an important and active role in the school. The school's art priority is supported by a major mining company with a specialist arts teacher employed as part of this program.

The school has important physical infrastructure, including two specialist computer laboratories, a science laboratory, home economics room, design and technology centre, kindergarten, pre-primary centre, library and a community swimming pool. All students receive specialist educational instruction in Science, Physical Education, Arts and Information Technology.

Science education has been a particular success story for the school, with strong results being obtained in the Western Australia Monitoring Standards in Education assessment program.

The school has received numerous awards, including Goldfields region excellence in education award for its community health partnership initiative and sustainable senior schooling program in 2008.

The school has had positive experiences with respect to staff retention in recent years, retaining 55 per cent of its previous year's staff in 2010 and 87.5 per cent of staff from 2008.

2 Identification of need

Aboriginal attendance has been a particular area of focus for the school over the last three years due to attendance being below the State average for Aboriginal students. The school was also required to accommodate a sudden increase in the number of ESL students following the establishment of an immigration facility in the town.

As a district high school, with a student population drawn from across all schooling years (K-12), the school has needed to focus on engagement and transition into school, between primary and secondary school, and from secondary school to post-school pathways.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Being a “non-remote” remote school

Due to the eligibility arrangements for additional funding for remote schools that are in place in Western Australia the school does not qualify as a remote school. The school is, by most definitions, remote, and has similar student demographics and socio-economic status to schools which do qualify as remote.

Securing community engagement in a mining community

The key role of mining in the local economy creates challenges for getting the engagement of parents and other community members. Long hours of shift work, and fly-in/fly-out workforces means that it is difficult to secure the participation of people on committees and working groups.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Attendance

The school has adopted an integrated strategy to target improved student attendance, particularly for its Aboriginal students.

The components of the strategy include:

- an early years attendance strategy in the K-1 area, with kindergarten students attending three full days a week;
- enhancing relationships with the community to track and facilitate more sustained student attendance;
- the use of reward programs that promote attendance and participation, including the Up4it Program describe in greater detail below; and
- weekly home visits.

While attendance rates have fluctuated, an important improvement has been a decline in the number of unexplained absences, which, as a proportion of all absences, fell from 84.3% in 2009 to 55.7% in 2010.

Partnering with community organisations

The school has developed an important partnership with the up4it program is to facilitate and sustain a measurable increase in school attendance rates amongst Aboriginal students. The key outcomes of the up4it Program are to:

- engage students participation and performance in sport and other extracurricular activities;
- improve attendance rates for participating school students;
- improve student behaviours;
- provide incentives and motivation for school attendance; and
- provide opportunities for attendance to a Perth leadership camp

The program has two modes of delivery:

- remote community visits; and
- leadership development camps.

Role Models WA specialist teams of high profile Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sporting and community role models make three (3) visits to remote communities across WA delivering leadership workshops, sporting programs, and extracurricular activities and events to promote healthy lifestyles and the importance of education.

During the community visits, role models spend two to three days in each community spending time with students of all ages and liaising with school staff, community leaders and elders. The role models also assist teachers by promoting school attendance, attainment and behaviour.

The outcomes for the students involved relate to:

- sport and physical activity;
- enhancing healthy, safe lifestyles with an emphasis on no drugs, no alcohol and no violence;
- focus on education as the prime catalyst for significant positive change in their lives; and
- leadership and teamwork skills development.

The visits guarantee reinforcement of the program objectives for the students, and keep community engagement at a peak.

The leadership development camps act as a motivational tool to encourage young Aboriginal students enrolled in remote and regional schools to attend school regularly throughout the year. By achieving a pre-determined attendance target set by their school, successful students can be rewarded with a three day camp held in Perth.

The three day camp program uses prominent community and sports role models to deliver workshops, sports coaching and fun filled activities that reinforce the program's positive messages.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The school faces a particular challenge in getting participation from community members on its Council given the long hours and shift based working arrangements in the mining sector. However, mining companies are also an important source of resources for the school, and play an important role in the school's strategies for providing vocational education opportunities for its students.

The school has benefited from additional staff and physical resources provided as part of the arrangements put in place to provide schooling to detainees from the Immigration and Citizenship Centre based in the town.

13 Secondary School, Western Victoria

1 Background

School profile

Years	7-12
Enrolments	1,019
% Aboriginal	69%
ICSEA	994
ICSEA % from national average	-1%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 7: 544; Yr 9: 573;
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 7: 0%; Yr 9: 0%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 7: 0%; Yr 9: 0%

The school is a major government secondary college in a regional centre of approximately 14,000 people. Around 32 per cent of the school's 1,000 students travel by bus from the surrounding areas to the school. As a significant regional hub there are a range of industries providing employment for community members, although the region's dependence upon broad acre farming is a powerful influence on the economic vitality of the community.

As one of the larger schools amongst remote schools, the school has a large, well qualified teaching and non-teaching staff. However, as with most remote and regional schools attraction and retention of the right staff is a challenge for the school leadership.

Catering for all young people and being able to offer programs which challenge the most able students academically and which offer real alternatives for those students who wish to pursue non-academic options such as VET is also a challenge.

The school offers additional programs to the mainstream, traditional education program. Students who have social, emotional or learning difficulties, or who are returning to mainstream education attend a satellite campus, approximately 10 kilometres from the main campus.

The school devotes significant resources to assisting students who are at risk of leaving school early. An attendance officer, school chaplain, career advisers, a welfare coordinator and two level coordinators at each year have a focus on this issue.

33 per cent of the school's 2009 Year 12 cohort continued on to university, with a further 27 per cent going to TAFE or vocational study. Around 18 per cent of this cohort was employed following school.

The school, in partnership with families and the wider community, provides a curriculum that is both dynamic and responsive to the diverse needs of our students while acknowledging and implementing Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) initiatives.

The structure of the curriculum has been organised to meet students' intellectual, vocational and cultural needs. Students move through adolescence in the Middle Years campus and, as young adults complete their learning in the Senior Years area.

The underlying principles that guide the curriculum structure are informed by three main questions, which are:

- who are our students?
- what is important for them to learn so they can reach their full potential?
- what capabilities do they need to have in order to learn how to learn?

2 Identification of need

The school's strategies reflect the lessons learned from the development of a detailed school strategy, supported by regular testing of the views of parents, staff and students at the school. A key driver of these strategies has been a recognition that the local community has been changing, with a significant impact on the extent to which students coming to the school can be engaged.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

Natural events

Following the end of an extensive period of drought that has impacted almost every family in the school community a series of natural events have occurred that have been highly disruptive and created a sense of continuously managing very serious problems.

These events have included:

- bushfires;
- mouse, locust, redback spider plagues and ongoing snake management issues;
- a 1 in 200 year flood that damaged the property of some in the school community, including teaching staff, and led to insect plagues and an outbreak of Ross River virus amongst the staff and students; and
- a fire which destroyed the school library in early 2011.

Students and staff have been affected by these events, either directly, or through the widespread stress that these events have caused.

A changing staff profile

The schools staffing profile has begun to change in recent years with the retirement of experts teacher, who have been replaced by graduates. While this is only a minor trend relative to the overall staffing complement of the school, the loss of experience and an understanding of the school context and its community developed over many years remains a concern.

Staff issues

The school has had to deal with an uneven commitment amongst staff to embed particular work practices, and with some staff who have found it difficult to work in a team environment and accept the whole school improvement agenda.

Infrastructure

As is the case for many schools in communities with a long history of European Australian settlement and a tradition of broad acre agriculture, much of the school's infrastructure is old and, in the view of staff, in poor condition. The college has had limited success in obtaining funding to undertake major refurbishment and replacement works.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Teach for Australia.

The school has become closely associated with the Teach for Australia program and has attracted five participants in that program to the school.

In an effort to tackle its staffing issues, the school has formed close ties with this innovative organisation which seeks to confront educational disadvantage by transforming outstanding graduates into exceptional teachers and inspiring leaders. The Principal strongly supports the program, through which he has successfully recruited five new teachers, and believes it has led to a notable improvement in the motivation and skills of existing staff.

High performing young graduates are selected for an intensive teacher education program and then placed in schools under supervision. This particular approach has the advantage of bringing high-quality young teachers into the school. It also brings with it external support for the teachers within the school who act as mentors for the young teachers. In this way program is an effective professional development experience for existing staff as well as extending the range and quality of the young teachers who come into the school. The Principal strongly supports the program and believes it makes substantial difference to both the motivation and the skills of existing staff.

Professional Learning Teams

The school has been divided into professional learning teams in which a group teachers, who teach across the range of the curriculum, focus on a particular year group. In this arrangement there is a professional learning team for each year of schooling.

All aspects of the school organisation, including staffroom placements, reflect these professional learning teams

In this way the whole team is able to focus on a small group of students and, within their year level, build effective instructional practices monitor student achievement develop individual learning plans and focus on the engagement and well-being of students. This has been particularly effective for those students for whom improving behaviour, attendance and punctuality may be an issue.

This approach also enables the team to build more productive relationships with students and to build their own skills teaching in a particular level.

Innovative extensions to the curriculum to engage a more diverse group of students

The school has actively sought to develop a variety of offerings beyond the normal curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all young people. It seeks to ensure that all young people remain connected to education and training regardless of their interests and particular abilities. In addition to the normal Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) program and the school-based Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program, the school offers “a satellite VCAL” program operating off-site and connected to registered training organisations as well as to the school.

In addition, the school runs a program called ConnectEd, which provides alternative education opportunities and offers services in conjunction with a non-government community-based organization. This program provides case management of students, clothing, life coaching seminars, resume writing, apprenticeships and training with the goal of ensuring all students continue their education or move to meaningful employment. Students are based at a satellite campus and supported in their efforts to re-enter mainstream programs upon completion of the program.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The school’s electronic support system has suffered from lack of stability, which has created a considerable degree of frustration. Coupled with this, staff competency with E-learning has also proved problematic.

A high rate of turnover of Principals has meant that it has been difficult to maintain a consistent approach in the school’s strategies for enhancing student engagement and wellbeing.

The school faces several barriers to the effective and sustainable implementation of strategies, including difficulties in attracting staff (for example, a Work Experience Co-ordinator and Middle School Careers person) and limited funding which restricts numbers to programs such as ConnectEd.

ConnectEd while considered to be a highly successful program, has experienced a significant increase in enrolments from surrounding communities and schools. The school has had to introduce closer monitoring of the program to ensure that it is not being viewed as an easy option from the perspective of students or outlying schools.

14 Secondary School, Western Victoria

1 Background

School profile

Years	7-12
Enrolments	97
% Aboriginal	0%
ICSEA	985
ICSEA % from national average	-2%
NAPLAN Reading (2010)	Yr 7: 545; Yr 9: 595
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from national average	Yr 7: 0%; Yr 9: +4%
NAPLAN Reading (2010) % from like school average	Yr 7: +2%; Yr 9: +6%

Located in a small town in the Southern Mallee farming area of Victoria a long period of prolonged drought has had a significant impact on the local community, and the school's student population who come from several towns in the surrounding area that depend upon broad acre farming. The impacts of the drought have included a declining population and fewer long-term employment opportunities, an increasing number of families dependent upon the Education Maintenance Allowance and an increasing number of students who have complex, high maintenance needs.

The school has a highly committed staff, with a good mix of experienced and younger staff who generally teach in their area of expertise and embrace innovation and change. Nonetheless, recruiting high quality staff remains an issue for the school and remaining staff need to exhibit flexibility as total staffing declines in response to falling student numbers.

The school curriculum provides access to the eight key learning areas and the achievement of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. There is a significant focus on literacy and numeracy as a means to provide students with the skills and confidence to become active participants in their learning. Senior students have access to an extensive choice of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and VET studies. Cooperation with neighbouring schools, TAFE, the Local Learning and Employment Network and other agencies provides the opportunity to increase the number of programs available to the students.

Student achievement in the VCE, VCAL and VET programs consistently exceeds State and like-school benchmarks and the school has a proud record of students progressing to university, TAFE and vocational training and employment. Around 9 per cent of the 2009 Year 12 cohort attended university, with a further 27 per cent going on to TAFE or another vocational training program. 27 per cent of the cohort were employed in 2010.

The school has in place a well developed welfare network, including a school chaplain, family counsellor, student welfare counsellor, year level coordinators, senior and junior school coordinators and a caring staff.

2 Identification of need

A key issue for the Principal is the lack of support for leadership staff in small and remote schools. The role of the Principal at a small school can be a lonely one as there is a requirement to maintain a certain distance from staff (particularly when managing underperformance becomes an issue). Professional support is difficult to obtain at a distance.

The school has struggled to recruit appropriate staff to fill vacant positions. Online advertising of positions has not proved effective for the school, failing to generate productive engagement with genuine candidates.

A declining school staff has meant that the school has had to investigate and adopt other methods for delivering curriculum to its students.

3 Key challenges of implementing the strategies

Challenges

The value placed on education

One consequence of the depressed economic conditions in the school's community has been the decline in the value that parents and children appear to place on education. Diminishing long-term employment opportunities result in a perception that post-school choices are more limited than they once were.

The availability of funding

The school finds it difficult to secure the necessary funding to allow it to fully implement curriculum and teaching modes that rely heavily on the use of information and communication technologies. This is true not only of funding for equipment but also for appropriate levels of technical support.

4 Key focus areas and strategies

Strategies

Overcoming a lack of support for leadership staff.

The Principal has adopted several approaches to resolving this issue, including:

- participation in an induction program;
- establishing a mentor relationship with the Principal from another remote school in the same region; and
- close contact with the former Principal of the school who also provides a mentor relationship.

Staffing

The challenge of employing appropriate staff is a major one. To her regret, the Principal has in the past made appointments and allocated teaching responsibilities to staff who may not have been the most appropriately qualified for the role.

In order to address this, the Principal has adopted a number of strategies, including:

- advertising in newspapers as well as online;
- appearing on the radio show “Australia All Over”, to speak about the difficulties of staffing in rural and remote areas;
- preparing a DVD presentation on the experience of teaching in early rural or remote area, which emphasizes that you need to ‘sell’ teaching in these areas as an exciting experience that provides professional opportunities which wouldn’t otherwise be available to young teachers;
- speaking to groups of students completing their university studies to generate interest in rural teaching positions (The experience with this initiative has been that the most successful recruiting is in rurally-based universities, where many of the students come from rural backgrounds and choose to continue that way of life).

Another advantage the school has in recruiting staff is the ability to offer accommodation. They have six teacher flats available and four teacher houses. The houses and flats are available at very cheap rent.

Student engagement and well-being

The provision of ‘blended learning’ through video conferencing has been very successful and expanding their curriculum offerings of the school. They are part of the “Wimmera of Virtual School Network” in which teachers in different schools in the network offer VCE subjects to other schools. Students join the subject classes in the other school live via the video conferencing network.

Often a teacher in the “receiving” school will mentor the student who is being taught by video conference from the other school. This has the effect of improving the skills and knowledge of the teacher as well as the student. The Principal has found that by using this technique she is able to continue to improve the skills and extended the subject teaching range of staff within the school.

5 Enablers/Barriers to sustainability of the strategies

The school’s reliance on video and other information technology to maintain the range and quality of teaching means that an appropriate level of technical support is an important enabler of success. Funding to provide this support is constrained, providing only 2-3 hours of support a week. To address this, the school has funded a full-time support position through the addition of its own funds.

The other potential barrier to the delivery of curriculum using information technology is the availability of appropriate facilities. While the school is well equipped with basic ICT facilities it has not been able to secure specific funding for items such as data projectors and electronic whiteboards. Again, the school draws on existing funds to purchase necessary equipment.

