Recipient Details

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Reference Type: Teacher - School

State or territory: NT

Serial Identification Number: 477746

Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Students in remote schools have students with a vast range of abilities and needs (as do all schools). The staffing and ability/experience to meet these needs is not always there though, and students being taught in year-levelled or multi-year classes can often have differences in reading levels of as much as six years with their classmates. A policy of streaming students by ability needs to be mandated in NT remote schools. This is a fundamental part of the Direct Instruction program and (to the best of my understanding) also fundamental to Literacy and Numeracy Essentials (LANE). These groupings also require regular assessment and data analysis to ensure they remain in groups where lessons are challenging but achievable (again a fundamental part of Direct Instruction, less certain with LANE). This should occur in all areas but most importantly in literacy and numeracy blocks. Remote schools need to be able to devote more time to literacy and numeracy at the expense of other subject areas, as these are the areas where remote indigenous students require the greatest support in beginning to 'close the gap'.

Use of highly-structured, scripted teaching programs such as Direct Instruction ensure students receive uniform content that can be strengthened by quality teachers and can support teachers who have aspects of their practice to improve on. High quality script ensure high quality programming has occurred.

Regions need to consider if assessment tasks are appropriate for remote indigenous learners and develop a bank of assessments that are required to be used at a regional level, with the benefits of each being peer reviewed.

A continued focus on improving the quality and availability of early years programs is vital as these years are shown to be the most significant in a child's development. On-site support and appraisal of these programs and assessment of their benefits.

Rating: 7

Teachers and teaching

It is suggested that the standard of teaching in remote settings is inferior to that of cities, and I tend to agree. Yet I would be curious to see if this is reflected in the rates of teachers passing probation. If the standard of teaching is lower on average then surely the data on the rate of teachers successfully completing probation should be lower too, as should the rate of offers of permanency. Based on what I have seen I believe it would actually be higher in remote settings (these statistics should be examined). I'd attribute this to a historically lower level of scrutiny and expectation or remote teachers, along with concerns around retention and difficulties in filling positions.

I have concerns regarding the scrutiny which is taken when offering remote teachers permanency. More low-performing or struggling teachers need to be paired with high-performing teachers

(within-school or online). Where this support is insufficient then performance management conversations need to be occurring (something that doesn't seem to be happening in many remote schools).

Historically remote schools have had low-levels of accountability and schools need to develop a culture of transparency and observation within their classrooms. This should be a positive and supportive culture and needs to be implemented/managed delicately.

The idea of practicum placement schemes in remote schools is a brilliant idea which needs to be explored further. This allows teachers to learn about remote settings and see if they are suited to the conditions and workload. It also gives the schools and opportunity to vet potential future candidates for employment.

Recognition of long-standing remote teachers and financial incentives for those who remain remote for an extended period (5+ years) would help to retain teachers.

Remote teachers receive inadequate training on-site. More needs to be done to ensure schools are incorporating professional development into their weekly meeting cycles.

Many professional development events are hundreds of kilometres away for remote teachers and are costly to attend. These events can be recorded and staff can attend these events via video link or can view a video of these sessions in their own time.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Principals of remote schools often become jacks of all trades. As a teaching principal I had to manage school finances, administrative duties, school repairs, cleaning, gas and electricity bills/issues, kitchen staff, and liaising with external service providers. This was all in addition to my core business of managing staff relationships and wellbeing, and ensuring staff were provided with an environment where they could be productive and successful teachers. When a teacher was away I usually had to take their class for the day and if they were away for an extended period then my core business would not be dealt with effectively. It is not easy to get a relief teacher to remote settings and role clarity needs revisiting.

Of particular concern in the NT is the fact that there does not seem to be any real clarity between the expectations on principals and teaching principals. Teaching principals are expected to fulfil the same duties as a principal in addition to taking a teaching load and get paid at a lesser rate. This seems counterintuitive and leads to burnout among leaders in these positions.

Much like teachers, principals in remote settings also seem to be under less scrutiny than their city counterparts. This is particularly frightening for schools which have budgets that the principal directly manages. As with teachers there seems to be an improvement in this accountability and performance management process, however greater support needs to be provided.

Rating: 7

School and Community

School/community partnerships are vital to remote communities. Some remote schools seek no feedback (or token feedback) from their communities and make decisions which can at times be the polar opposite of the desires of their communities.

Within the NT people leave communities or keep their children home from school for a variety of reasons: Cultural ceremonies, sorry business, sporting carnivals, health reasons, to go shopping in larger towns, to go visit friends etc. Community and regional agreements need to be made on what is acceptable non-attendance and this needs to be clear to all community members. Schools should work with families to ensure students are not missing school for unacceptable reasons. Attendance and truancy teams also need to be examined to decide whether they are doing an adequate job or not. There are some issues with local indigenous staff not being able to speak to certain families for cultural reasons, which impedes on the collection of students for school. In some instances it would seem that a non-community member would be of benefit on these teams as they can liaise with all community members.

As a member of a local football league committee I requested a football carnival be moved to school holidays, as many students were taken out of remote schools in order to attend this event. My request was supported by my regional director and led to the even being moved for subsequent years. As a result of this student attendance in equivalent weeks improved in subsequent years. Liaising with communities to ensure no sports carnivals occur during school terms is a proactive way of ensuring school remains a priority. While more reactive, attendance by truancy teams of Sporting Carnivals to speak to families and issue infringement notices for children who are at carnivals rather than school would also support this message.

Rating: 6

Information and Communication Technology
Rating: 5

Entrepreneurship and schools
Rating: 3

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding
Many remote schools do not or cannot offer sufficient secondary programs for their students. Students are often grouped in multi-year-level groups with a broad spectrum of literacy. Boarding school pathways are a vital pathway to ensure remote students get an appropriate secondary education. The access to specialist subjects and specialist teachers is something remote schools simply cannot accommodate. All remote schools need to have a boarding school policy which recognises and promotes these pathways to students. Secondary attendance rates are generally lower than those of primary students in remote schools and students tend to disengage with sub-par remote secondary programs. Pre-vet and VET programs are excellent options for students however they often require all students in a cohort to opt in for them to be viable, as there is often only one middle years teacher available.

The current system of school funding based on effective enrolment appears, by and large, to be an effective funding model in remote NT schools. I do have concerns for schools where enrolments are around the 50 to 150 mark though (they generally have a teaching staff of 3 to 7 teachers). A slump in attendance can lead to schools potentially losing teaching positions, which can have devastating consequences the following year when student return and schools are down a teacher. This leads to larger classrooms, less fidelity in class groups and diminished returns. Enrolment is no indication of attendance in remote NT schools and the success of government/departmental attendance strategies and truancy teams needs to be assessed.

Rating for enrolments: 7

Rating for clusters: 5

Rating for distance education: 4

Rating for boarding: 7

Diversity
Rating: 5

Transitioning beyond school

Many remote indigenous communities suffer from a shortage of available jobs, and those that are available are often menial (garbage collection, working in a small shop, grounds work etc.). Boarding school offers these students a multitude of potential career pathways and they have the option to return to their communities once they finish. A counter argument I often hear is 'Students won't go back to their communities after attending boarding school' I contend why would they want to go back if the best job prospects a year 12 (or tertiary) educated student can expect is grounds work. Of course the cultural pull of home often brings indigenous students back to their communities, however often the most educated student and the least educated student both end up with the same non-existent prospects post schooling. In this respect I feel the education department needs to examine an area that has been considered outside of their scope: namely the creation of sustainable employment opportunities within remote communities post-studies.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments