Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [I] MacMahon, Donna

Reference Type: Parent - School

State or territory: NT

Serial Identification Number: 472966

Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Flexibility might be reflected in the Australian Curriculum but with regards to remote gifted and talented students (who can't have formal identification due to lack of appropriate testing), the teachers seem unable to apply the curriculum as flexibly as is needed. For example, a student who is excelling at Grade 6 maths and is in a combined Grade 5/6 class, isn't being challenged sufficiently. These students should be allowed to access the high school system for some subjects, or to access other higher level classes in an online environment. Our school provides no online opportunities to engage with students in other schools doing higher level studies. One example in the NT is Kormilda College and their gifted and talented programme - remote students could Skype in to their lessons - great for challenging students and engaging them with likeminded students.

Rating: 5

Teachers and teaching

Placements of teacher students should be encouraged during university. Also, why not be innovative and seek out community members (with degree qualifications) who are already living in these communities and offer incentives for them to move to a career in teaching. I have considered this many times but if I was offered the chance to study (maybe a person could earn money as a classroom helper whilst studying), guaranteed placements and a job for at least 12 months post education, then I would become a teacher.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

School Principals are often placed on a two or three year contract, whilst I see the benefits with this, our remote school has had a consistent turnover of Principals. Principals do come to the school as a 'stepping stone' to another position in another (larger, more urban?) school. This turnover is reflected in inconsistent approaches to discipline in the school, a lack of long-term planning, a lack of expertise in the running of the school (our Principal is learning on the job about her responsibilities which everyone has to do at some point, however when they are the only leader of the school in a remote area, this has an impact). The Principal isn't encouraged to think about staying long-term as they can only concentrate on the term of their contract. Relationships with the School Council can be affected - the Principal has to admit a certain lack of expertise when they first arrive (if new to the position) and this can be difficult for both the Principal and Council who seek direction. Our school has had Assistant Principals employed at the same school for a long period of time and yet haven't been successful (or possibly even applied) for the Principal position, they should be encouraged to if suitable.

Rating: 7

School and Community
The philanthropic sector does play a part in improving outcomes for regional, rural and remote students in relation to school achievement and post-school transition, although this is frequently at the secondary school level (in my experience). Primary aged children need to have more support in realising their aspirations. In your scenarios about a school operating a shop, this type of entrepreneurial work is highly beneficial for students. My own children (aged 10 and 12) are operating their own businesses to learn about earning money and the value of consumables. When we leave our community, they use the money they earnt to pay for items they want to purchase out of town (thus highlighting the differences in prices too).

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology
This is a completely under-utilised resource. Our school has difficulty with using IPADS to connect to the government's server (not compatible) and is now looking at spending significant funds on purchasing compatible laptops. Students don't Skype in with other students for any lessons at all. My child was identified in the top 4 percent of students for his age when sitting the ICAS exams for technology and yet has extremely limited opportunities for learning. Why aren't Skype lessons offered when teachers don't have the ability to teach the students? There is a lack of qualified science teachers at our school, technology should breach this barrier. Gifted and talented students could be 'pooled' together for certain lessons. There is no connection between students at our school with students in other schools - this is so important for their development both as a student and the sharing of ideas for the school and its development.

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools
Opportunities need to be made available to primary aged children. This is the age/stage when children have broad interests and may be interested in an educational area they would not enter when they are at high school and have already formed ideas of their pathways. Support would be needed to identify which industry partners, stakeholders have the ability/interest in supporting these children and linking them with the school. For example, media companies (small or big) can be linked with remote primary schools to make films, radio excerpts etc about many issues going on in Regional/Remote areas - giving students access to the know-how and producing pieces to be used for a variety of reasons. Or it could be as simple as local businesses who can think of ways students can partner with them. Small or big businesses or ideas, it doesn't matter. Partnerships don't seem to be high on the agenda of some schools. Maybe there is a lack of understanding about how they best operate, what to do and how to start.

Rating: 7

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding
Pooling of specialist resources doesn't occur often enough. Even when it does, the resources are stretched over such a large geographic area that frequently the resourcing is inadequate. Some schools don't seem so open to sharing resources. Our local high school and primary school share a counsellor, however the primary school seems to have very limited time with them and the wait times to see the counsellor are long. Relief teaching is one area in which schools could benefit from clustering. Boarding is extremely important for remote students as it can be the quality education that they need.

Rating for enrolments: 5

Rating for clusters: 6

Rating for distance education: 5

Rating for boarding: 7

Diversity

The purpose of education in remote communities is somewhat the same as it is in non-remote communities, however when looking at diversity it is adding/enriching this education. As my children attend a school with a large Indigenous population, enriching my child's education by learning about Aboriginal people/culture is limited. There is a certain amount of enrichment but it could be taken so much further. We don't have Aboriginal men and women talking to our children about how European settlement affected them/their culture and yet we live in an area where this had a major impact.

Rating: 7

Transitioning beyond school

Rating: 7

Additional Comments