

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [I] Oates, Ros

Reference Type: Principal

State or territory: SA

Serial Identification Number: 473341

Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Innovative Approach: After decades of providing a variety of different Language programs, Spanish, Greek and Italian, that were delivered solely upon the availability of qualified languages teachers, Our Lady of the River School hit a period of 12 months, in 2014, without being able to source or employ any qualified Language teacher. An alternative option to provide this vital learning area of the Australian Curriculum to the students in our rural area was researched and OLOR was just one of three schools in SA to implement their Languages program online, through a Skype program called 'My Chinese Tutor'. This program provided registered Chinese teachers in Beijing to be transmitted live into every classroom through Skype in the school, teaching the students Mandarin with the assistance of a local part-time teacher to supervise and run the program. The students then put these online lessons into practise with their teacher during another weekly session, using the lesson plans and resources provided. Since its successful inception over two years ago the students have been provided with the opportunity to learn Chinese (Mandarin), learn about how Chinese classrooms differ from their own, have a visit from visiting teachers from China who provided instruction on Chinese writing and martial arts. The Principal has also been provided with an opportunity to travel to China to engage in a sister school program so that the students can communicate and interact online with Chinese students from the same grade levels throughout the year. The difficulty of sourcing qualified languages teachers and a consistent approach to providing the same language in the school over a longer period of time has now been solved. We have even empowered a local part-time teacher returning from maternity leave to embark on further study in being qualified to teach the Mandarin language in the future. The parent community is very supportive of the language choice of Chinese (Mandarin), especially due to the recent trade agreements with China that impacts on many of our rural families connected to the school who have a vested interest in exporting their agricultural produce to China.

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

Using AFL SportsReady Trainee scheme in our rural school has proven to be an important process and transition for young school leavers to work in a school for 12 months prior to taking on teaching studies in the city. This program is a paid trainee program providing these young people with an income, essential skills and knowledge about teaching before leaving their rural home environments to tackle further study. Graduates from this program in past years are now seeking University practicum placements back in our rural area, with the intention of trying to get future employment in the rural schools nearest to where they grew up.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

In 2014, I was selected from a group of educational leaders from regional schools around Australia to study, The Master of Education (Leadership and Management) degree, developed by Flinders University and Principals Australia Institute. A scholarship from Origin Foundation, provided the funds needed for the opportunity of further study to be possible. The context in rural schools is vastly different from urban settings, with distance, isolation and resourcing a daily challenge. The opportunity to study a course that focussed on issues encountered while working in a rural setting was invaluable. It proved, not only to myself but also my current colleagues that studying courses relevant to your setting and interests was achievable and the course design using a combination of online and face-to-face campus gatherings, didn't impede on me being away from my community, which is crucial as a Principal in effectively managing a school. The (REL's) program provided me with the additional skills of how to communicate more effectively and design relevant research projects that search for ways to 'fill the gaps' in my approach to rural education issues and to be influential on others working with children and their families in country areas. The introduction to component theories as a part of my final course work project, deepened my understanding of what the needs of the staff and I were for future educational professional learning and as a result created a group philosophy around the importance of rural teaching networks for not only my current teaching staff but also to include teaching staff from the three Catholic primary schools in our local region. This is now a successful regional professional learning network which meets once each term. I benefitted greatly from the collegial connections and conversations about student learning, quality teaching and learning but also subsequently was fortunate to participate in a dialogue tour overseas with many of the REL's colleagues to meet and work with Dr. George Otero, founder and president of The Centre for Relational Learning in Sana Fe, New Mexico which was by far the greatest learning opportunity to date, in my career.

Rating: 7

School and Community

Our Lady of the River School has provided the communities of Berri, Monash and Lyrup with a community space for parents of children birth to 5 to gather and access two structured play group sessions in a private room with outdoor facilities and a range of fun pre-school resources and equipment. The groups meet weekly and the sessions provide opportunities for any community carer, parent or grandparent to meet with other people and ease the isolation of looking after young children in a rural community.

Being registered with Playgroup SA and having experienced educators running the two sessions, both groups are provided continually with information about children's development and learning before entering a school environment.

B.O.P.P.E.R.S. is a unique group which provides 4 to 5 year olds with more formal experiences of play and pre-school instruction by a qualified teacher. These sessions are aimed at preparing the children for the routines and structures of formal schooling that starts for those children the following year.

The evidence provided by the Reception teacher of the children who start school at Our Lady of the River School, who have previously attended B.O.P.P.E.R.S., describes those children being school ready and comfortable to enter the school environment with ease as of their first day of school.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

The Catholic Schools in the Riverland are part of the Port Pirie Diocese. In the past 12 months the schools in the diocese have purchased through the Catholic Education Office in South Australia, a CISCO video conferencing system that allows all religious and educational leaders, teachers and community members access to meetings, in-service and workshops live through video. This has decreased the amount of times people have had to travel long distances for vital information and also strengthened professional networks because relevant people and experts are instantly available to communicate and share ideas.

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating: 7

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Rating for enrolments: 7

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 7

Rating for boarding: 3

Diversity

Rating: 6

Transitioning beyond school

Rating: 6

Additional Comments

This review is vital and I'm sure we will all learn a lot more about the inventive and vital programs and ideas that are offered in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia to make education accessible and available to all. I look forward to reading the outcome of this review.