

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [I] Smallwood, Barb

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

The reintroduction of a curriculum in Western Australian has been in regional schools. It ensures that all students leaving primary school from a regional area have had 'uniform' instruction across key learning areas. It is reassuring for parents to know that the information covered in each year is the same whether or not your child is attending a school in metro areas or regional/ remote areas. I believe that the curriculum needs to focus on the basics, particularly for lower primary, to get a solid foundation established for the latter years. In regional/remote areas, teachers need to find ways to relate the information and its relevance to the students and their surrounding environments. Too often learning is stated as 'important' but what really needs to be acknowledged is the 'value' of education. I am not too familiar with the assessment standards aside from saying that I find it too subjective at times. Math should have a set text book which comes with a teachers guide for chapter assessments that is same regardless of where students attend. Schools can be supported by core areas such as Math, English, HASS and Science that have standard text books so that teachers can focus on the delivery of information rather than re-establishing programs. Focus on delivery of information can assist with the broad range of abilities in a multigrade class room situation.

Rating: 7

Teachers and teaching

Regional/rural/remote schools require multi skilled teachers. Education students should be encourage to have more than one discipline particularly for high school. Regional students need to be encouraged to study teaching. Regional/ rural/ remote schools need more than just a 'young' straight out of university teacher. They require a support network around them. RRR schools need a good balance of experienced staff and new staff. This provides benefits with transfer of information/ skills. Experienced teachers can be mentors and guide younger less experienced teachers while the younger teachers can keep the more experienced and sometimes less tech savvy teachers up to date with new technology. A good balance of age and experience is a huge benefit to RRR schools. RRR schools need to build networks within their neighbouring communities to extend the professional development. Professional development can be delivered across a number of mediums. In house, excursion or video conference. I know of a school that had a sudden change in demographic and a PD day was an excursion to a school with similar socio economic circumstances and it provided the staff with great insight into how to tackle some of the issues that were not previously a concern. Great outcome for staff and students.

Sometimes there is an issue with too many PD days and still no delivery of the new information to the students and that needs to be addressed.

Best way to attract and retain teachers is to have a strong vibrant and goal setting leader!

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

'When describing a school, people will quickly refer to its culture. A positive school culture creates conditions suitable for growth. Without growth conditions, a school will at best maintain the status quo, but most likely will flounder and experience significant, unsurmountable challenges. Knowing this a school leader must view themselves first and foremost as a culture builder.' RRR schools someone who is passionate out RRR life. The IPS system in WA has had some success with RRR schools engaging leaders. The community is part of the business planning process and input into what type of 'culture' they would like to see at the school. The IPS system has an extensive review process which holds leaders to account. RRR schools can become victims of long time leaders that are just seeing their time out - 'feathering the nest'. This can have such a detrimental affect on the community and surrounding communities. If school leaders are not building a good culture people tend to move due to lack of confidence. The right culture needs to start from within. For example: Staff have voiced concern over nominating for IPS as they feel it is a threat against their staff credentials. Or when we as parents are seeking to have opportunities and experiences available to our children that are attending a school. In both cases the staff have stood united and deemed each initiative low priority. While we have to sit back watch the staff send their own children away to schools that offer the very experiences that we are asking for but they are not willing to provide. So the message to parents is that while they are not interested in pursuing IPS because they have strong teaching credentials, yet they do not 'endorse' their fellow staff by sending their own children to the school. A strong leader should lead by example and say that staff needs to support the school in enrolments as it those very numbers that develop the school budget. It is the best marketing tool for the strength of a school to all neighbouring communities.

Rating: 7

School and Community

RRR schools often have a very real advantage over their metro counter parts and that is the support of the community. P & C is very supportive through fundraising to provide extra equipment for the schools. Volunteers help of all carnivals and support and encourage extras programs. Currently an art program, North Midlands Project ,is developing relationships between the surrounding schools. The initiative is to encourage mental wellness through art. Part of the project is to also creat links for tertiary education.

Two years ago our school joined the True Blue Dreaming program that provides mentors for high school students for career direction. UWA aspire program is also important to encourage RRR students to pursue a teritary education.

Sporting clubs and service groups are also another support network to encourage further education. Sporting clubs very the right culture can encourage goal setting, discipline and strong work ethics. Service groups provide scholarship money.

Rating: 5

Information and Communication Technology

RRR schools really need to have strong ICT. Local shires need to assist here to make sure that good interent connections are available to schools so that different methods of education delivery can be utilitised.

RRR schools need staff member that is capable with ICT knowledge. Again this comes down to teacher selection, appropriate description of the job and other desirable knowledge. A strong school leader will identify the importance of this area and should encourage either upskilling a current staff member and or advertise for a ' multi- disciplined teacher.

Rating: 5

Entrepreneurship and schools

In high school years it is important to engage students by showing 'value' to the education process. Entrepreneurship can encourage this and they can gain ' employable' skills in an area that they are interested in.

Rating: 4

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding
RRR schools really need to form networks to share resources. The sharing of resources can include specialist teaching staff. Sharing of knowledge, ICT. Engaging with ICT to deliver specialist knowledge. Use ICT to unite students. Perhaps one school has only 2-3 students in year 12, another has 5 and a third has 8. Perhaps this group of students can be viewed as a whole class. A group of 13 now can create more dialogue and discussion on subjects. They can be linked by video with some getting face to face time for one subject while another school can provide the next teacher so a different group gets face to face time. The group can plan excursions and social activities as well.

Rating for enrolments: 6

Rating for clusters: 6

Rating for distance education: 5

Rating for boarding: 3

Diversity

RRR areas are diverse and students at RRR schools and communities develop a different outlook on life and have different social skills to their metro counterparts. RRR students still have to mix with either much younger students and or adults when they play sport. They learn tolerance and patience that is not often seen in similar aged students that grow up surrounded by primarily peers of their own age. These skills can foster leadership skills early on as older students will be asked to help out with younger students at carnivals and other school events. These students need to be told that there is value in having those skills.

The toughest battle of curbing the directional flow from RRR to cities will be job opportunities. Until there are federal/ state or local governments that are proactive in promoting regional job development this will not change. Too many jobs are centralized in large cities and until that changes it will be a battle. So many of the small communities would just love to have more major employers in town. The spin off effects are enormous!

Rating: 4

Transitioning beyond school

Affordability will be the biggest obstacle as student will be living away from home.

Again I find this one at times a strength. As a regional student who attended university 7 hours from home, I had a lot more independence and life skills when I entered the work force and many a time

an employer would say that would actively seek out ' farm kids' as they understood the value of hard work, thinking ahead and were much better independent employees.

Rating: 5

Additional Comments

RRR communities need to endorse their own schools to give them the number base to get additional funding which goes directly back into the delivery of education. School leadership is essential to the success of a school and schools should not be held to ransom by a person who holds a permanent position but no longer has the leadership skills needed to keep the schools vibrant and growing. Please make sure that they are good review processes in place that engage with the communities regularly to avoid deterioration of a schools reputation!