



# **Submission from the Association of Independent Schools of NSW**

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**Inquiry into educational opportunities  
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015

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# **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

Submission from the Association of Independent Schools of New South  
Wales (AISNSW) Ltd

This submission has been prepared by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW)  
with input from member schools.

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The AIS will be pleased to elaborate on any aspects of this submission as required.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Geoff Newcombe  
Executive Director

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## Introduction

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) submits this response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The AISNSW welcomes this opportunity to provide overviews and examples of successful educational experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in independent school settings in NSW.

AISNSW is the peak body representing the independent schools sector in New South Wales. The Association represents more than 450 schools enrolling approximately 180,000 students, accounting for nearly 16 per cent of school enrolments in this state.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many independent schools are founded by religious or other groups in the community and provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations, such as Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist and Uniting Church schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities or those with behavioural or other issues that require special educational assistance.

Independent schools represented by AISNSW are not-for-profit institutions and are registered with the regulatory authority, the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES). Most independent schools are established and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation and Seventh-day Adventist system.

AISNSW provides a wide range of services to independent schools throughout NSW to support their provision of education. AISNSW services are supported by wide consultation with stakeholders, and include advice on matters relating to school governance, professional development of school board members and school staff, curriculum development and delivery, student services, as well as government regulations and policy. Specific, targeted support is provided for Aboriginal Education.

The population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in independent schools varies enormously. The Aboriginal schools in the sector provide services specifically for their Aboriginal communities. Some schools, such as Macleay College, located in Kempsey, have a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (currently 83 per cent, although the population is transient), while other schools may have only one or two students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The context of each school is a significant consideration in how services are tailored to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Independent schools follow the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) syllabuses. All students are supported to achieve the syllabus outcomes. The NSW independent schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are committed to supporting students in achieving the academic performance commensurate with their chronological age.

In preparing this submission, AISNSW sought input from NSW independent schools to capture strategies and educational models that have been successful in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners across the diverse range of independent schools in NSW. An appendix attached to this submission provides summaries of five case studies provided by NSW independent schools outlining how the strategies in the key areas are implemented in their school.

The AISNSW acknowledges the Australian Government for the Student First Support Funds which underpinned the AISNSW services to further the development and implementation of effective strategies to support independent schools in providing effective, evidence based practices to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to promote the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives, culture and languages across the curriculum for all schools.

As one of its core service to schools, AISNSW provides professional learning courses tailored to the specific needs of school leaders, school boards, classroom teachers, and non-teaching and administration staff. Services also include providing briefings to support school governance and legislative requirements, such as those relating to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015.

These professional learning opportunities provided to all independent schools across NSW aim to build capacity to support their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities by focussing on culturally responsive reporting and engagement strategies, with the goal of enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student achievement and progression through to Year 12.

In structuring this submission, we have identified the following five key areas:

1. Academic support including literacy and numeracy
2. Provision of boarding school education
3. Working in partnership with family and community
4. Developing pathways to post school options
5. Building social and emotional resilience.

## **1. Academic support including literacy and numeracy**

NSW independent schools effectively support the needs of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in meeting the academic demands of schooling, particularly in literacy and numeracy skills. Schools usually provide one-on-one support time with a learning support teacher to support students who may have experienced interrupted schooling or prolonged absenteeism in previous schools. In many cases the one-on-one support with a learning specialist is supplemented by the input and guidance of an Aboriginal Education Support person. Frequently, the cost of this additional support is borne by the school communities to enhance the schooling experience of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Specific strategies to support Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander learners' engagement varies from one school to the next according to the specific context and students' individual needs. One effective strategy that is increasingly being implemented is *Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal Students* (PLPs). Through the development of these individual strength-based plans, teachers are able to form a positive relationship with the students, their parent/carers and other key stakeholders. PLP's help inform the teaching and learning pathways and the development of content relevant to the individual learner – a key area in teacher professional development outlined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Focus Area 1.4).

Some schools have found that through the development and implementation process, parent/carers have formed more positive relationships with the teachers. These relationships have led to schools and community working in partnership to provide students with consistently high expectations and supportive learning environment. Impacts have also been evident within the classroom as students express that they feel a greater sense of understanding and belonging, while experiencing increased academic success and progress through the personal goal setting element of the strategy.

Another key strategy that some NSW independent schools are reporting as effective is the employment of Aboriginal Education Support staff, also known as aides or mentors. The extent of their employment varies between schools, from multiple full-time positions through to a single position for several hours per week. The specific role of the Aboriginal Education Support staff also varies, depending on the

student's individual needs and the structure of the classroom environment. A number of schools have employed Aboriginal Education Support staff's full-time to specifically support the development of literacy and numeracy skills - a crucial schooling outcome.

In NSW some independent special assistance schools educate students who are disengaged or at risk of being disengaged with education. Students are provided with additional support to help them access stage appropriate curriculum content as well as support to help them complete their coursework at school when their home environment is not conducive to study or research. The school executive in these schools are sensitive to the environmental factors that may affect academic outcomes, while also being protective of the well-being of staff members. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are candid about wanting to achieve the same standards of performance as their same-age cohort - how they demonstrate those achievements varies according to the local school context.

Many NSW independent schools have explored ways to find out what students already know and can do by exploring alternative methods of gathering information about students' strengths and skills in addition to reliance on standardised tests. For example, some schools have chosen reading approaches which have shown to have been particularly successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in other geographical locations, and these approaches have proved to be engaging, interactive and rewarding for students as well as providing a source of rich data for teachers to help further tailor future learning opportunities. Others have used outdoor mathematics classes, using natural realia, to ascertain students' numeracy skills. For example, Central Coast Steiner School reports a positive effect on students whose initial numeracy achievements could have been attributed to having poor mathematical skills. In reality, it was a linguistic conundrum of the way comparisons were expressed, rather than lack of proficiency in the mathematical concept being addressed.

Teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers are increasingly using English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) strategies similar to those used to support other second language learners. Traditionally Aboriginal language speakers were referred to the Learning Support Teacher for one-on-one support. Now teachers are becoming more aware of Aboriginal Languages, dialects and Aboriginal English conventions, teachers are using EAL/D strategies in the classroom to enable students to develop code-switching skills and Standard Australian English language acquisition.



NSW independent schools are actively working with local Aboriginal Elders to increase the teaching and use of Aboriginal Languages traditional to the school's community. For example, Macleay Vocational College teaches the Dhungutti language once a week alongside Standard Australian English, and provide students with opportunities to further their language acquisition with additional elective classes. Other schools are exposing students to the local Aboriginal Language through informal lessons such as learning traditional songs, naming words for local wildlife and place names.

NSW independent schools have observed an increase in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander student engagement when culture and language are taught on a regular basis in a respectful manner, contributing to increased outcomes and school attendance.

Many NSW independent schools have put effective strategies in place to support high-achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The following example is from St Joseph's College:

*"This year we identified a need to target several of our high achieving Aboriginal students by providing weekly tutoring sessions in subjects that we could see they had the potential to perform well in - the results have been outstanding. For example, one Year 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student at the school has completed his advanced mathematics HSC course in 2015. This student has volunteered to tutor a Junior School Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student in his spare period throughout 2016."*

In response to the key educational objectives of the Australian Government's *Students First* reform agenda, and the NSW Government's *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* initiative, AISNSW developed an early literacy screening tool which promoted the explicit teaching of early literacy skills in independent schools. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that the screening tool was culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from a number of NSW Independent schools participated in the development phase of the screener, providing vital feedback to the AISNSW.

The early literacy screener provides K-2 classroom teachers with a brief literacy assessment that indicates if a student may be considered at risk in their early literacy skill attainment. It supports

teachers in their understanding and developing appropriate teaching and learning experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait literacy learners. Participating schools engaged in complementary professional learning modules to enhance their understanding of Personalised Learning Processes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, as well as meeting students' needs within their specific learning environment.

The AISNSW provides professional learning within the organisation to strengthen its consultancy services in a range of issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, communities, histories and cultures. AISNSW also provides numerous professional learning opportunities for both primary and secondary schools with courses including but not limited to:

- Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal students
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culturally Responsive Framework
- Beyond Dreaming Stories (K-6 English Syllabus)
- Depth Studies in the 7-10 History Syllabus
- Teaching Aboriginal History and Cultures in English (7-10 English Syllabus)
- Annual Conference: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives across the Curriculum
- Access to Aboriginal representatives from external organisations, including Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, NSW Department of Education, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc., Reconciliation Australia and university representatives.

Individual schools are also provided with tailored consultancy support from AISNSW in matters including:

- Connecting with their wider local Aboriginal community
- Structuring Personalised Learning Plan support to specific school contexts
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners within the classroom
- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander from an EAL/D background
- Whole school cultural responsive structures
- Supporting school leaders and teachers to engage with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers 1.4 and 2.4.

In addition, the AISNSW supports remote NSW Independent schools through consultancy visits and advice, the provision of professional learning courses in the use of the EAL/D strategies and one-to-one school support for specific students. As a number of independent metropolitan boarding schools have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are multilingual, consultancy support has also been provided to these schools.

## **2. Provision of boarding school education**

Many NSW independent boarding schools provide scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from urban to very remote geographical locations across the country. NSW independent boarding schools are able to provide an increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students with access to high quality educational opportunities through scholarships. The majority of school scholarship programs are supported by organisations such as the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and Yalari, although some school communities raise the funds for their own scholarships.

The successful transition of students from their home community into the boarding community is one of the biggest challenges for boarding schools. Each school has developed an effective transition program in keeping with their specific school philosophy, context and location. Schools report that the most effective transition programs require individual adjustments to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students successfully transition from their home community into the comparatively set structures of boarding life. These adjustments have made a positive impact of the experiences of the learners, as it is apparent that the learning is two-way, particularly as the newcomer generally wants his or her home culture acknowledged.

Some schools have reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience homesickness which in a few cases has resulted in the student returning to their home community. Some students are worried about the family members they have left behind. A number of NSW independent boarding schools have been proactive in implementing long-term partnerships with remote communities where teachers and school leaders regularly meet face to face with parents and community leaders with these visits reciprocated by family members once their child transitions into the

boarding facilities. Schools have needed to develop innovative and flexible processes to ensure lack of communication does not hamper regular school interactions.

Schools have also reported the effectiveness of developing culturally appropriate and language specific resources to provide families and students with information about the school setting and an overview of boarding life prior to the student attending.

NSW independent boarding schools also have effective strategies to support students in completion of coursework and other homework activities. Old Boys and Old Girls regularly support both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students with their coursework and homework as well as providing a mentor relationship. In many NSW independent boarding schools, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents also regularly offer support students with their preparations for forthcoming assessments, including Aboriginal Elders being involved to support both teachers and students culturally.

### **3. Working in partnership with family and community**

Effective partnerships are one of the biggest pre-cursors to genuine engagement leading to achievement. Authentic partnerships have sometimes not been fully integrated in previous initiatives intended to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

NSW independent schools acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and community members in supporting student's successful engagement in education. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, grandparents hold a pivotal place within the family structure and although physically not present, schools are increasingly engaging with these care-givers. School staff in NSW independent schools increasingly use contextually-appropriate communication avenues to maintain these important family relationships.

The principal of Macleay Vocational College has been proactive in establishing effective partnerships with multiple community organisations to provide individual students with the necessary support structures to increase the likelihood of success.

As noted by the principal:

*“Community partnerships exist in all areas of a student’s life within our grounds and external to college. We have all services attend College and offer regular access on-site to health (mental, dental, addictions), mentoring, legal aid, domestic assistance and advice in housing, education and clothing, Juvenile Justice, Youth on Track and another 10 base programs for anger management, sexual health, motivation and belonging.*

*Most of the students at the College do not have continuity of paternal influence and domestic situations are often transient and disrupted by domestic violence or addictive habits.*

*Education has been refused in the main for a number of generations and the College is working to create a safe nurturing environment to promote belonging and opportunity through education in a holistic manner.”*

School executive of a number of NSW independent schools have visited remote communities across Australia to explore and establish positive partnerships with Aboriginal communities. These partnerships have resulted in schools developing a variety of exchange programs including regular student exchange initiatives and initiatives to provide professional learning for teachers to enhance their own cultural knowledge and develop a better understanding of Aboriginal Australia. St Joseph’s College, for example, recognises the importance of sharing these understandings with other students and embedding Aboriginal culture within the whole school culture.

AISNSW has provided professional learning activities to support schools with the identification of evidence-based engagement strategies and implementation of culturally responsive strategies that enables the development of positive partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, students and their teachers.

Strategies canvassed during these professional learning opportunities included:

- Holding regular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events on school grounds;
- Sharing student progress with families on an informal and high frequency basis;

- Identifying best-practice pedagogies and learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Development of Personalised Learning Processes and Plans that are specific to the school and community context; and
- Engaging with local Aboriginal community to share local cultural and historical knowledge with all schools staff and students.

Schools that implemented these strategies have reported success in enhancing positive ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to support student achievement and level of engagement within education.

#### **4. Developing pathways to post-school options**

A number of NSW independent schools engage local Aboriginal community members to share their educational journeys from school to employment to provide students with the opportunity to hear real life situations about the pathways they may wish to consider. These opportunities have been facilitated by a structured program of trade days and scheduled career talks integrated into the school's timetable. Macleay Vocational College reports that all senior Aboriginal students complete work studies as a course for their HSC and spend time in the workplace observing a range of careers and trades.

An effective strategy reported by a number of NSW independent schools involve strategic partnerships between individual schools and universities from Year 9 to Year 12. A specific example of an effective partnerships is the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Project (AIME) which is provided by a number of universities across NSW.

Wenona School provides a range of ongoing and varied experiences of post-school options for students including opportunities for students to shadow experts in fields of related interest. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are supported to map individual career aspirations, including the identification of individual goals, providing students with a sense of the purpose of education as well as a pathway to realise their aspirations.

NSW independent schools have identified the crucial role that Aboriginal Education Support staff play in demonstrating the importance of lifelong learning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Macleay Vocational College ensures that each class has the assistance of an Aboriginal Education Support person to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage within the classroom, using their local community knowledge, experiences and culture to support students on a daily basis. All Aboriginal Education Support staff at Macleay Vocational College are also completing tertiary courses to further their education and role model educational expectations to students.

St Joseph's College had five boys complete their Higher School Certificate in 2015. Each boy was the first of their family to complete this level of education.

The school also recognised the importance of role models as a vehicle for success:

*"Tutors employed by the College are high achieving Old Boys who have the role of not only being tutor but also role model and mentor to our Aboriginal students. The bond and emerging work ethic created as a result of this has been extraordinary to witness."*

The AISNSW provided support to independent schools to assist in making connections to VET providers and initiatives such as the Aboriginal Affairs NSW OCHRE Hubs. , along with providing links to Aboriginal pathway programs and mentoring support provided by universities across NSW.

AISNSW has also fostered engagement with organisations such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Aboriginal Land Council and Reconciliation Australia. For example, relationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance provides schools with links to universities, business and industry in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to assist in closing the participation gap in STEM related study and career options.

## **5. Building social and emotional resilience**

NSW independent school teachers have participated in a variety of professional learning activities that build their cultural awareness and understanding of Aboriginal Australia and how they can work in partnership with students and community to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with a schooling experience that recognises and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages at a whole school level for all students and community.

An effective strategy to enhance the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a number of NSW independent schools has been the opportunity to embed cultural events and celebrations within the whole school calendar. These events have provided a platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student leaders to organise and lead – empowering them to be proud of their cultural heritage and share their knowledge and experiences with their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers.

The importance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and histories within an inclusive curriculum is recognised by NSW independent schools. Where schools engage in perspectives across the curriculum in an authentic manner, with support from the local, Aboriginal community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students develop a sense of belonging as well as an opportunity to engage meaningfully in a relevant curriculum.

A key strategy that is used throughout NSW is the employment of Aboriginal Education Support staff to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners within the classroom and to provide a cultural voice to the wider school community. Aboriginal Education Support staff are working in partnership with classroom teachers and school leaders to provide a culturally appropriate and engaging curriculum, along with providing vital social and emotional support to Aboriginal learners and their families. The development of positive relationships between the school and home has led to schools being able to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with social and emotional support that has allowed for students to engage and achieve within a challenging academic environment.

## **Conclusion**

AISNSW and the NSW independent schools sector recognise the need to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with a quality education. AISNSW is committed to continuing to support independent schools in implementing effective strategies to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in day and boarding schools.

The importance of financial support is particularly significant given the level of need. It is of national importance to achieve positive educational outcomes for our nation's first people.



## **Case Studies**

1. Macleay Vocational College
2. St Joseph's College
3. Wenona
4. Kambala
5. Central Coast Rudolf Steiner School

## **Case Study 1 – Macleay Vocational College**

The College, located in Kempsey NSW, is set up as a school to assist students who for a variety of reasons have been excluded from mainstream education, in gaining an opportunity to re-join the community and find a place they feel safe and belong to within the education sector. They are predominately from disrupted or transient domestic situations, often have learning disabilities within multiple areas, social/emotional mental health issues and have several forms of addictions to control and receive assistance with.

These students have been asked to leave a number of Education Campuses from the Macleay Valley, Macksville, Nambucca and Port Macquarie during the last four years. The College also caters for students under Juvenile Justice Programs returning from incarceration and exclusion and has formed positive relationships with the local courts to find suitable programs to help these young people, re-engage as they are often not allowed back into mainstream schools. We have a number of girls who are on part-time programs due to their maternal duties. It is important for us to maintain contact with these young girls to assist both their educational outcomes and the influence on their children and community in the future. We have one young aboriginal student/young mother who is being brought to the College from North Haven twice a week just to be a part of the program with support.

The College hours of operation were also extended to accommodate other needs of students and safety concerns; it operates from 7.30am-6.30pm each week day including most holidays. It is only closed for 10 days over the Christmas period (a non-continuous period of 5 days) and a submission is in to provide food for the young people during this period as well for 2015. It supports the students, offers the local community access to facilities to learn, play and be safe during these hours usually every Sunday from 11am-3pm as well.

We have grown from 70% to over 83% Aboriginal students in the last three and half years. Attendance average has increased for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with Aboriginal Education Support staff and mentoring initiatives, from 28% to just over 52% in the past 3 years.

Each semester the College staff review the Vision for the College with things that are working well, things that need to change and personal needs for each student, both successes and failures. This has been done with a list of recognition against student's progression completed by all staff in small groups. Our focus is not educational but holistic to the values of our Vision.

**Extract One:** *Access to, participation in and benefits of a range of school models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*

The attendance strategies are monitored and data gathered for all validation of points of interest so we can be both adaptive and flexible to their varying student's needs. There are numerous strategies in place which look to the value of the person holistically. Of these the some of the more successful would be; picking the students up (and taking them home) using College Aboriginal Education Support staff and supplying them with breakfast and recess. Other successes included modification of the timetable into shorter lessons times (with longer days Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and one lesson less on Thursday and Friday) and longer breaks for discussion and sharing; breaking writing blocks down into scaffolds/smaller chunks, allowances for funding excursions and sporting events, allowing for time shifting for students who cannot be here amongst lots of other students so they attend on the smaller days and engage fully then. We also don't shut as traditional schools do over the holiday periods running excursions or programs within the community for Art and health, or just having transport and food operations for students. We also continue the Ginda Barri (young mums) program every Wednesday and Thursday as they do not really need a holiday they need support and a safe place to attend and share.

Attendance data has been actively kept at the College in all aspects of College life, attendance to College, number and frequency of pickups, class time, exams, assessments, excursions and parent engagement.

Attendance successes are:

- Letters are sent home regularly of student achievement celebrating even small gains in all aspects of classwork, participation and performance.

- Data is kept on each student and rewarded by vouchers for food, shopping, merit certificates = shopping vouchers and presentation of year group awards for behaviour and engagement successes.
- Food, breakfast and recess provided, lunch if required and Up & Go's in the Principals office upon request every day including after school.
- Timetable changes to promote practical classes have also been monitored and are showing signs of success these are every second lesson for Years 9 and 10.
- Courses for music, woodwork, access to marine (PADI Diving Certificates), PCYC fitness, camping, Screen Printing and Graphical Design printing adding to each the week.
- Time out of class to work on projects with timber, art or jobs with elders
- Dhanggati language classes on Tuesdays with the Year 9 Literacy class and then the students who wish to learn the local language in the lessons up to lunchtime. This opportunity allows for the passing on of songs and stories spending time with Elders.
- Belonging to community through, completing programs for mental health, white ribbon, dental and HIV programs. Fixing up the local skate park and creating murals around town. These all go to a sense of "this is their community".
- Opportunities for workplace experiences from Year 9 onwards, for regular attendance and the promotion of the value of having a job as these young people often come from domestic situations where a JOB has not been a goal.

Confidence through success in Education is a key and the need to offer all individual students the ability to witness success and be able to share that with their carers, parents and peers is essential. This is done through the scaffolding of work but also through listening to each student about what they wish to achieve and making that the focus for a while, this requires great flexibility and dedication of staff to ensure these opportunities arise. To assist, each classroom has an Aboriginal Education Support person who understands the Valley and its way of life and can promote learning for the young person as each Aboriginal Education Support person is also studying to complete certificates as an example of community. This has been through their own desire and a sense of the need for modelling for education experience. We enter the students in competitions in every area they can and promote the keeping of portfolios to demonstrate their successes and efforts. Projects and the commitment required to complete them are a way we have found through trial and error that has been successful. Students

work is exhibited in the front foyer of the College and also at Gallery's and the Slim Dusty centre within the Valley. We have newspaper articles highlighting their successes regularly. Students thrive on independence and enjoy time on their own completing work as required. Flexible timetables allow students to determine priorities and task completion for example, they may change a class to complete an Aboriginal Studies project that has been on their mind for the week. This is an example of how flexibility needs to be paramount in staff understanding of success.

In 2014, the College only charged \$800 in fees and returned \$100 each term for students who attained greater than an 80% attendance record. In 2015 the fees have been dropped to \$500 but the return of \$100 each term is still active.

The College has established a rewards system which entitles students to "merit money". Vouchers may be used on food items at the school canteen, or students may use a College account voucher where they can save funds to purchase goods in the town from a variety of stores. These include Big W, Stormrider, Crescent Head Surf Company, Camping Store, EB games, Chemists. While students can choose the goods purchased, no alcohol cards or cash is given to them. These awards and vouchers are given out each week at assembly.

Merit vouchers are also given out each week at assembly by the teachers and other staff for in class activities or recognition of student efforts in the areas of leadership, selfless acts, volunteering, representing the College at community events (cultural, sporting or social based) or entering competitions. 10 merits equal's \$20 worth of funding for students.

Other points involve the building of community within the College, having the agencies and services within the Community. Health Services that are engaged by students through the College include, Dental, Mental, Smoking Cessation & Support, Drug and Alcohol, Pre and Post maternal needs, sexual and personal health for girls, DV support and engagement for all, programs such as Love Bites, Skill to Chill, Drumbeat, Rock and Water, Work Development Orders, work readiness and counselling sessions at College and links with PCYC for pre-College physical training two mornings a week.

We also hold onto a lot of students medications for those on specific programs; Dispensing of medications for: ADHD, smoking and addictive cessation & depression. This has made a big difference to the young people as their lives are often domestically challenged and transient, that they lose, have stolen or even sell their medications for survival. It allows for us to look at their medical needs and book specific appointments for them where required.

Behaviour Agreements/Modification programs for our students have also taken a priority for the whole College. All staff are involved in identifying and recognising students TRIGGERS and completing courses in Restorative Justice, Circle Sentencing, Predicting Assessing and Responding to Challenging behaviour, Mental Health awareness courses for teachers', Aides and Aboriginal Education Support staff as well as reflective sessions from all teaching staff about how individual students are travelling with their self-regulation successes and keys areas of tolerance, resilience and self-identity (belonging). With self-regulation for students they have; Walk out of class time for all lessons without the need for permission from the classroom teacher or Aboriginal Education Support person. They leave the classroom they are on camera and can go to see the Principal for a chat, the counsellor on Tuesdays and Thursdays or sit down on the back deck or find an area of peacefulness within the College grounds until they can refocus and re-join their next class. This has been very successful in maintaining the focus of all classroom teachers on engaging those students within the classroom and also giving students the choice to move themselves out if they feel they are not in full control for that lesson. Data is also kept on these students to monitor what classes they are missing and follow up any concerns or fears they may have in those classes. We have put on a walk around teacher for the first four lessons everyday so try and form bonds with these young people and also to make sure they are fed in class, if a student is late they still get food but it must be consumed in class, we find that this message says to the students learning is important.

Cultural knowledge and skills spending time with Elders for Men's and Women's business occurs two terms a year and is reliant on the support and availability of Elders who want to spend time with the student promoting not only culture but a connection to family, country and community.

**Extract Two:** *Impacts on, and support for, families and communities whose children experience various models of educational services*

The College has BBQ days each term for carers and parents to engage with the students, Aboriginal Education Support staff, wider community and teachers. The primary function of the day is to have parents/carers and guardians or Juvenile Justice Workers look at the achievements and work the students have completed. A meal is provided around the times of walking through classrooms, looking through all College photos from the term and reviewing the newsletters and opportunities for next term. We also have Elders and a number of services that attend these days to promote further engagement and opportunities to connect with community at all levels. Through these days we have been able to pick up parents and carers with the students and bring them to College. This enables a less formalised discussion and identification of targets/goals and wishes for them. It has changed our approach towards setting the PLP's up and how we tests students to give better/more realistic feedback while still maintaining higher expectations.

Most of our community comes from a third generation of Educational Refusers, most parents and carers for these young people have not completed any formal schooling, so getting them re-engaged is a priority to change the students outlook on Education and the opportunities it presents.

Parents and Carers want their children to complete their HSC or gain a traineeship that has been the focus. Method is changing each person's role in this partnership to get them to College consistently. This strategy has facilitated discussions with parents and community Elders, enhancing their engagement with education, helping to raise the expectations for students, changing the community's views about education and the opportunities that it can bring and facilitating the development of personalised learning strategies even parent goals.

Community partnerships exist in all areas of student's life within our grounds and external to college. We have all services attend College and offer access to health (Mental, Dental, Addictions), Mentoring, Legal Aide, Domestic assistance in advice Housing Education and clothing, Juvenile Justice, Youth on Track and another 10 base programs for anger management, sexual health, motivation and belonging all occur within the College each month. Most of the students at the College do not have continuity of

paternal influence; domestic situations are often transient and disrupted by DV or addictive habits. Education has been refused in the main for a number of generations and the College is working to create a safe nurturing environment to promote belonging and opportunity through Education in a holistic manner.

The College belongs to all local advisory groups (AECG, Youth, C4C, Elders, sports and skills councils) and has over 30% of the staff who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, community partnerships exist with over 30 community groups, services and agencies who attend College for most parts on a weekly or monthly basis for a holistic approach to educating the student through looking after their needs.

We offer the opportunity for local Elders and community members to attend College on Tuesday afternoons to learn Dhanggati language with our teaching Elders. This has seen at times over ten elders involved including two Aboriginal Education Support staff from local primary schools learning how to teach the language to their students. It is a wonderful moment when the Elders are laughing and sharing stories from their past with each other.

The Aboriginal Education Support staff and Elders bring their knowledge, language, history's and understanding of the community, DHUNGUTTI Culture to both students and staff. A number of the Aboriginal Education Support staff are completing courses and studying, Cert IV in Early Language and Literacy, Frontline Management, Cert III in Teachers Aide's, Chemical Safety, Disability support Cert IV, Business Services Cert III, Teaching and Mental Health Qualifications and Degrees which shows students and community the value of education. All Aboriginal Education Support staff have an area of expertise in the College and this is shared by community so they know who to have a yarn with when they need to. The College bus drivers both know the families or carers and can get out and talk with them if they are having troubles. We also go out and pickup Parents, carers and guardians for our BBQ days each term, these are very important for students also that their parents and family can experience their successes at College; we provide transport, photos and food for the event so everyone can attend. Parents leave College fed, proud and with a desire to get back here and support their children again, some even ask to learn with their children in the digital media room creating artworks and displays. (This is a real winning strategy)



The College Principal supports all young people (students) under pressure from the Police, spending time with them in the cells (fish tanks), in court, organising lawyers etc., speaking on their behalf and providing supporting documentation or visiting them in a number of correctional centres throughout the state (Acmena, Frank Baxter, Cobham and Kariong). This is a way of showing that Adults when given trust will stay with that young person no matter what the result. It is important and we feel that it has had a very positive effect in those students who come to College after time away not reoffending. Our stats are impressive, still disappointing that anyone returns but sometimes they go just for stability and food.

Giving back to community, these young people have a lot of support from community so we need to model the desire to support others and stand up for what is right. They collect for Red Shield Appeal, do the banner for white ribbon day for the town, paint murals during their holidays, say the Prayer for the Fallen at Anzac ceremonies, mentor local primary students in better choices about drugs (petrol sniffing and chroming) as well as raise money having a walk for Westmead Children's Hospital.

*A copy of a link from my PaCE report in 2014 about a family of two boys very different within our community;*

(Provide a one-two page "Case Study" on how you have increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parental and Community awareness, knowledge and understanding thereby improving Parental and Community/School relationships.)

This case study will be about one particular family involving two boys one in Year 12 at the College for 2.5 years and another Year 10 at the College for 7 months. The mother supporting these boys has been keen to involve herself in their education and opportunities but has lacked both transport and the confidence to be involved in their educational decisions over the years. She has been in surgery in Sydney for cardiovascular complications a number of times during the last two years where the boys had no push to attend school in any manner.

Due to the mothers attendance at College, community BBQ's and the open classroom invitations from both the teachers and Principal through the Aboriginal Education Support staff working with the community through externally sourced funds. The mother first learnt about her youngest son's potential

and skill using Photoshop and Art Design (Digital Media) work when she saw his portfolio presentation for the end of term BBQ day. She wanted to see more of his work and was invited by the teachers into the room to share some of his work with the support of the Aboriginal Education Support staff available at the time and transport provided by the project. His mother has since brought in her extended family, sister, uncles and Elders to view and share in his successes, culminating in her making her own way to College with her friends and other community members. They have moved closer to College and regularly visit now without needing an invitation or special occasion. The student went on to continuously improve in his approach towards education and was keen to show off his skills and ended up taking a loaned computer home to work on during his weekends and holidays.

The young man has increased his attendance from not attending school each week a year ago to attending close to 85%, through the provision of transport, food and his mother's approval that education is worthwhile. He has since decided to follow a career path in the ICT industry and has returned to College to complete his HSC and has elected to spend more time in design and possibly commencing a Cert II in Information Processes and Technology.

The Elder son, who had severe anger management issues and could not spend any longer than 30mins in class two years ago, became involved in all facets of College life, sport, Aboriginal Cultural Arts and Skills, mentoring the junior students and helping with the College garden to take food home. He eventually moved out of home looking to leave College and live with his girlfriend, he was assisted to find suitable accommodation through agencies associated with the College. This was harder than described as his peers were making decisions to leave school or not make serious attempts to complete their course work and go to job search agencies throughout the year. (4 close friends in 3 different schools) Through positive interventions and consistent communication, the opportunities for pick up's we were able to maintain a link with him and get him to make the commitment to complete his HSC, this required him to complete some Saturdays at College to finish his major HSC Visual Art Project and returning to complete all assessments in all courses. He also obtained an Open Water PADI Certificate 1 scuba diving licence, was awarded the College Captaincy, make speeches representing the College at Community events and in the wider community as well as welcome all visitors to the college with pride while walking them around. To quote a teacher about his efforts; 'One good thing from MVC, mate

I could think of 10 at least. (Students name) just to start. Hey a lost little kid who grew up to be a man. I am so proud of him and his resilience, now direction and example.'

**Extract Three:** *models of schooling that facilitate the transition to further education and employment outcomes.*

The College has trade days and careers talks from local employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people every semester. These have been highly successful and promote both active discussions and the opportunity to hear real life situations of how they overcame some poor decisions in their own lives to make the smarter decisions and become work ready. .

Mentoring occurs from staff with small groups of 3-5 students, focused on maintaining close links with their domestic situation and putting them in touch with relevant agencies when the need arises. Each staff member has received information and contact lists from the respective organization that attends College and knows who and how to make the next step. This confidence motivates the students to return for both help and education. The College is also supported by an RTO that assists the students in gaining both opportunities to access the workforce and also gaining qualifications during their final years of school. This also translates to assistance for post maintenance of engagement and the College staff actively seeks to support all students in achieving their goals. A graduating student of the 2012 cohort is pursuing her goal of University and since 2014 is engaged at Wagga Wagga CSU Campus completing Business. Another former student, while another graduating student from 2005 is spending time at the College every second Thursday with our young mothers.

We currently have two students completing traineeships in Business Services (one in the Hospital system and the other in Finance) and another in Construction with Community Housing and are actively promoting more students in the areas of Aged Care and Hospitality. This is an outstanding result given the nature of our College and the size of the local community.

All senior students at the College complete work studies as a course for their HSC and spend time in the workplace looking at different jobs or obtaining work placement hours and experience. They also complete training in WHS and Safe Food Handling as part of that course and gain completed outcomes

towards a Hospitality Certificate II but more importantly gain valuable knowledge about the life skills of shopping, planning and preparing suitable cost effective meals.

With the young students who are being case managed on Juvenile Justice or Court related programs we also have commenced a Landscaping and Safe Food handling Certificate and work experience course this semester, it appears to be working well as most of the students are getting their hands dirty and learning about workplace skills. We have provided the Trainer for both qualifications and two Aboriginal Education Support staff as support, PCYC have provided the food and venue for Tuesday and the Thursdays this term.

We have been successful in the number of students who have been completing their HSC at College. Our numbers have grown from 2 in 2011 to 11 in 2015, all students each year have been first in family and a number have been first in their community. We stay in touch with these students as previously stated and enable them to return to College for assistance in getting through their new phases of life. From 2014 graduating class, all 9 students were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; two have moved into the workforce on a casual basis as a glazier and pharmacy assistant, another three have been studying and are now holding down either traineeships in Business, Agriculture or Hospitality another who completed a Certificate IV in Community service has just become an Aboriginal Education Support person in a local Catholic Primary School and two others are fulltime mothers. One of the mothers continues to be active with our community by being a part of our Ginda Barri projects assisting other young mothers to complete their study as she has done. Only one student has not yet entered the workforce or committed to further study.

## **Case Study 2 – St Joseph’s College**

2015 has presented us with many unforgettable moments involving the young Aboriginal men of St Joseph’s College. By far the most memorable and significant week of events were those that took place during Reconciliation Week. The boys gave an outstanding dance performance in a whole school assembly and Travis Blair’s (Yr12) speech to the entire Joey’s community was remarkable. Of great significance was the formal acceptance of Mark Champley (Father to Lachlan Champley Yr10 and Regan Champley Yr9) and Tracy Goodwin (Mother to Jacob Goodwin Yr11) to the role of Uncle and Aunt for the Aboriginal students of St Joseph’s College. The roles of Aunty and Uncle are ones that we cherish and will draw heavily upon for advice around sensitive cultural issues. These highly significant roles are of fundamental importance for our students and staff.

### **Reconciliation Week:**

Reconciliation week is always a huge event and one that is aimed at educating our non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as well as affirming our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys whilst promoting their culture. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students run the events for the week and one of our boys is encouraged to address the school in a whole school assembly. Below is the speech shared by Travis Blair in our Reconciliation Week assembly.

### **Travis Blair’s Assembly Address: Reconciliation Week**

*Good morning Brother Anthony, staff, students and guests.*

*This morning we come together to celebrate and share our Indigenous culture. This week is National Reconciliation Week and this is a significant one for our community here at Joeys. National Reconciliation Week is celebrated across Australia each year between 27 May and 3<sup>rd</sup> June. The week is a time for all Australians to learn about shared histories, cultures and achievements – it is also an opportunity to explore how each of us can join the national reconciliation effort. As we entered the hall today we walked through the cleansing smoke – together we participated in this significant cultural experience. The dance you have just watched*

*tells a significant story. At the beginning of this assembly we acknowledged the original owners of this land on which we are gathered today and each Sunday evening before Mass we do the same – we acknowledge and remember who this land originally belonged to.*

*Reconciliation is about unity and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians. It is about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and valuing justice and equity for all Australians.*

*In order to create supportive relationships between Indigenous and other Australians, important dialogue must be to understand the interrelationship of past events and the present situation.*

*Reconciliation means acknowledging Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Peoples of this land and recognising that this fact is still important today. Past injustices shown to Indigenous people by colonial settlers, such as the removal of people from their land and families (the Stolen Generations), are very relevant to the current discourse. Australians must be aware of not only our colonial history, but the rich Aboriginal culture that was here long ago and that still exist in the present time.*

### ***Everyone has a role to play***

*'Reconciliation' is often misconceived as an Indigenous issue, a problem for Aboriginal people to solve. The truth is that it is an Australian issue, concerning our entire nation. Australia is built on the wealth of land that was stolen and non-Indigenous Australia has benefited from that. It is up to non-Indigenous people to make a commitment to acknowledging what has happened in the past and addressing present power imbalances and inequalities, restoring integrity to the process of reconciliation.*

*As part of our Reconciliation Week celebrations this morning, we would like to instigate and welcome two new members to significant roles within the Aboriginal community of Joeys. Aboriginal people traditionally refer to an Elder as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. An Aunty or Uncle are recognised as members of an Aboriginal community who are highly respected, who have made*

*significant contributions and who can be strong and nurturing role models. It is with great excitement that two of our Aboriginal parents have agreed to take on this role. Mr Mark Champley, Father of Lachlan and Regan and Mrs Tracey Goodwin, Mother of Jacob in Year 11. Both of these parents will provide wisdom, knowledge and support to our Joeys Aboriginal community and we are truly honoured that they have accepted these roles. Mr Mark Champley is here this morning to represent both himself and Mrs Tracey Goodwin and as a seal of our commitment and thanks we would like to offer Mark a small gift of our appreciation and we ask Jake to accept this gift on behalf of his mum, Tracey.*

**Travis Blair (Yr12)**

### **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Weekend**

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Weekend is a wonderful opportunity for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to spend time together connecting and getting to know each other. The events of the weekend are designed to celebrate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture of our boys and families and create a community that respects and values the place of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the college community. One of the highlights was the wonderful smoking ceremony performed at the steps to the entrance of the college. Walking through the cleansing smoke and being led to the doors of the chapel by the eerie sound of the didgeridoo played by Stephen Hobday (Yr12) was an unforgettable experience. The boys performed a wonderful dance and candles were lit inside the chapel to represent each person gathered.

Next year we will be holding our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Weekend in the bush surrounding Colo. We aim to invite an Aboriginal elder as well as our newly appointed Aunt and Uncle. The experiences will allow us to be fully immersed in the incredible culture of our Aboriginal students and their families.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tutoring Program**

This year we made a decision to target several of our high achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by providing weekly tutoring sessions in subjects that we could see they had the potential to perform well in. The results have been outstanding. Tutors that are employed by the College

are high achieving old boys who have the role of not only being tutor but also role model to our Aboriginal students. The bond and emerging work ethic created as a result of this has been extraordinary to witness.

There have been many boys who have achieved outstanding success across many facets of College life. In particular the following Year 12 students:

**Travis Blair:** *The Barry J Quinn Memorial Prize for Initiative*

**Travis Blair:** *The Brother Hilary Conroy Prize for Helpfulness to Younger Students*

**Johnathan Hookey:** *The Prize for Senior Athletic Champion (Johnno also competed in High Jump in the recent Commonwealth Games at Samoa representing Australia Youth)*

**Steven Hobday: Highly Commended:** *The Brother Felix Rogers Memorial Prize for Conspicuous Effort in Study*

**Steven Hobday: Highly Commended:** *The Nigel Watts Memorial Trophy for Personal Achievement*

#### **Students perform at local primary schools during Reconciliation Week:**

This year we have endeavoured to involve our students in events in the broader community. Students performed at local primary schools and more recently at the Interfaith Dialogue evening at the local Baha'i Temple.

#### **The AIME partnership**

Throughout this year, a number of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 participated in mentoring days at the University of Sydney as part of the AIME (Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience) program.



AIME provides a structured educational program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to access throughout their high school experience, this includes a series of sessions at the University of Sydney where students complete various confidence and leadership building activities in various social settings. Students also hear from celebrity speakers and have a chance to share their opinion through creative outlets such as Drama and Design.

One of the highlights for our Year 9's, were hearing a collection of inspiring poems and stories from Gumaroy Newman, a leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Story Teller, Educator and Traditional Song Man, As a Yidaki/Didgeridoo Master he also performed on various sized yidaki which the boys enjoyed.

Our Year 10 students have been working on goal setting with their individual mentors. They also joined the Year 9 students to create a talent video, which showcased Russell Moran (Yr10) playing the didgeridoo whilst the other boys performed a magic trick.

Year 11 students took part in a cultural presentation before enjoying lunch with the other participants. In the afternoon the students looked into the future and celebrated their '60th birthday'. This was an opportunity for them to consider what their achievements might be and what the world might look like when they are 60-years-old. Yirrbi Jaffer-Williams was one of three students to share his speech with the group.

Our Year 12 students, Travis Blair, Johnno Hookey, Steve Hobday, Kobe Pitt and Brad Watts are congratulated on graduating the AIME program, they received their certificates, AIME hoodie and graduation packs. It is fantastic to see the boys move on to bigger and better things and if given the opportunity, to maybe give back to AIME as a mentor in years to come.

### **Indigenous Students' Day at the Lane Cove Council Chambers**

Some of our Year 10's volunteered to participate in the Indigenous Students' Day at the Lane Cove Council Chambers in October. The day introduced students to politics, voting and becoming active in community affairs and local action groups. The students, Lachlan Champley, Aidan Porter, Russell

Moran and Lincoln Blackhall heard from a representative from Tribal Warriors, who challenged the boys to become a leader in their own right. Sharing about his journey and highlighting that “You affect every person in your life, positively or negatively – it just depends on how you approach them.”

The students then participated in a mock debate of various development scenarios of an area of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** significance. Some students argued the environment should remain as its current land use, a park, whilst others argued that it should become a site of a new Aboriginal Cultural Centre. Another group argued that it should be sold and the last group fought to develop the area for commercial purposes. A former mayor Scott Bennison chaired the debate, and newly elected mayor Deborah Hutchens also sat in to hear the debate. After much discussion and rebuttals considered, the students (mock-councillors) gave their vote. The mock-councillors were mostly in favour of the motion to develop the site for commercial purposes, but later decided that a cultural centre should also be placed on the site to educate the public and that the Aboriginal rock paintings will be preserved for the future generations to come.









## **Case Study 3 – Wenona**

### **Introduction**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continue to be one of the most under-represented groups of those who successfully transition into post-school tertiary or working environments. In recognition of the need for this situation to be remedied, boarding schools around Australia offer scholarship places for many adolescent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is an increasing awareness that the common determinants of student success in these learning environments are academic skills, personal development, awareness, and metacognition (Anderson, 2007). Moreover, the provision of an effective enabling programme furthers the likelihood of success by providing the students with a transformative experience. This, by definition helps them to transform their own understandings about their identity and capacity as learners. This case study will present how Wenona's educational philosophy, pedagogy and educational practice are drawn upon to move towards a transformative learning experience, which focuses on building and maintaining learner resilience. It is anticipated that this approach will assist in the building of crucial 'cultural' and 'social' capital required to become a 'successful' learner, while reinforcing the strength and knowledge the students bring with them from their communities.

The Wenona model is a deliberately planned approach that will evolve and change according to new knowledge and understandings we gather from educating young women from remote contexts.

### **The Wenona model Overview**

The fundamental questions at the heart of this model is:

1. What do the Aboriginal students need, in addition to academic understandings, to be effective learners who understand themselves as learners?
2. What do the Aboriginal students need in order to flourish in the boarding environment?

In response to these questions our model takes a holistic approach based on the research foundations: the 'Both Ways' philosophy which values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, experience and identity of the students and encourages critical reflection on the interface between knowledge systems (Ober, 2004; Nakata, 2007), pedagogy for emancipation which provides learning opportunities that are challenging not remedial, and engaging not boring (Sarra, 2014) and Learning Power which orients a student towards changing and learning over time and in different contexts by developing new and transformative understandings about themselves as learners (Deakin Crick 2007). Important to this approach is the ongoing consultation with Yolgnu Elders, the families of the students, our local AECG branch and the Cultural Supervisor.

Our developing model includes the four elements:

- Wellbeing
- Social Networks
- Academic Resilience
- World view understanding

It is important that each element is explicitly attended to across all teaching/learning and boarding environments and is reflected in each student's Personalised Learning Plan (PLP). The aim of this approach is that each student's school (including boarding) experience is fulfilling and rewarding. Cultural competency of students and teaching/boarding staff as well as cultural understandings underpin and infiltrate each element. Each element is composed of discrete components that will vary according to each individual student. These evolving components are briefly described below.

	Component	Typical Activities
<b>Wellbeing</b>	Physical	Consultation with practitioners of Bungee Bingell clinic - offers GP services, dental, physiotherapy, specialist doctors, hearing checks and school clinics
	Mental	Working towards a shared language for students to explain their particular symptoms and conditions.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- drawing attention to the potential cultural factors (Westerman, 2015)</li> <li>- appropriate 'cultural sensitive' counseling</li> </ul>
	Cultural	Connection to the land we are on through local Aboriginal organizations
	Family	Authentic, regular feedback on student progress Specifically designed handbook to communicate important knowledge
	Transitions	Managing and preparing for macro and micro transitions (e.g. leaving for school holidays...)

<b>Academic resilience</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Typical activities</b>
	Orientation	Pre-commencement –each student will be invited in term 4 to a 2 week school including boarding orientation.
	Community partnership	Annual visits to community Consistent consultation
	Cultural understanding	Annual culture tours involving teacher and students (this will assist in building learning relationships- teacher and student, peer to peer)
	8 ways of Aboriginal learning (Yunkaporta, 2009)	Modelled- guided practice-deconstruct information to reconstruct, promoting understanding
		Visual learning tools- mind-maps, Venn diagrams
		Knowledge in context - where does it originate from

		Non-verbal systems of feedback- gestures, facial expressions...
		Stories as a way into learning
		Visual description of the learning pathways.
		Making connections with prior learning
		Collaborative learning relationships
	Post –school planning	<p>Ongoing and varied experiences of post school options</p> <p>Shadowing experts in fields of interest</p> <p>Mapping career pathways</p> <p>Where appropriate community consultation and guidance will be sought to ensure that skills and learning are utilised if students return to community –ie links to community leadership programs offered by Jarwun in Nhulunbuy, NT.</p>

<b>Expansion of worldview</b>	<b>Component</b>	<b>Typical activities</b>
	Learning the traits of an engaged school participant	Through observation and discussion-ie. Becoming familiar with Learning Dispositions Deakin-Crick, 2014)
	Learning how to confidently share opinions, thoughts, knowledge	For example, participate in mock local government decision-making activities organised through Lane Cove Council.
	Learning from other's experiences and knowledge	Practicing empathy by reflecting on others personal stories

	Practicing critical and creative thinking	Participating in problem solving discussions at a school and community (home community)
	Making connections with others who may think differently	For example: helping peers to understand the effects of racist comments

Element	Component	Typical activities
Social Inclusion	Learning relationships	Peer to peer connections in learning situations Teacher to student- promoting respect and high expectations
	Shared Language of inclusion	With a focus on similarities rather than difference staff and students will be involved in ongoing cultural competence activities.
	Building purposeful relationships	This will involve cultural learning and be initiated by the cultural tours to Arnhemland.

## Evaluation

A set of criteria to evaluate each element will be compiled to enable an annual report.

## **Case Study 4 - Kambala**

Kambala conducted research over two years (2010/2011) in an attempt to find the best process and model by which we could initiate and sustain an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program allowing girls from regional and remote Australia to have access to our school. We identified five essential features we wanted of this program:

- Students would not be denied access because of academic ability but must be motivated and aware/appreciative of the opportunity being afforded them.
- The students would have to be boarders.
- A support system (ideally via an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee or contact) would be required to enable a happy transition and ongoing emotional and cultural support.
- There would have to be parental involvement/contact and financial and emotional support for their daughter's education.
- Ideally the scholarship (financing of placement) should be external – either through corporate sponsorship or an affiliation with a government- sponsored program.

We met with the Elders of the Shoalhaven community but felt the support system offered would not match our expectations and the fact that the girls would be schooling relatively close to home would inhibit their integration into the boarding house.

We met with AIEF and discussed an appropriate alliance that would enable girls to access Kambala via their sponsored scheme. The screening process and selection of “appropriate” candidates was an issue. We were cognizant that the parent community of Kambala may be sceptical of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program, that the student and their family must want this opportunity rather than have it thrust upon them, and that our program MUST succeed. To be abandoned or dissolved within a few years was not an option. The program offered no ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support.

In 2011 we met with Waverly Stanley, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man who had started an organization called Yalari, in response to his experience as the sole Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander scholar at Toowoomba Grammar in the 1980's, and his belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be afforded the same advantage to access elite and prestigious schools as he did. He was most inspiring and was eager to secure Kambala as the second girls' school in NSW that he could introduce to his program. Essentially we worked together to ensure that each of the requirements mentioned above, were met.

Two girls would enter Year 7 each year, commencing from 2012, and the aim would be to limit to 12 girls, those sponsored by Yalari (2 from each year 7-12). Yalari would contribute \$20,000 per student, their parents a nominal amount as a demonstration of their commitment, and Abstudy would fund between \$8,000 and \$15,000 depending on the student's home address and the distance she must travel to access the school. While this financially did not cover the full cost of supporting a Kambala boarder, the school Council agreed to fund the residual costs. A Yalari mentor would be accessible to the girls, their teachers and the boarding staff on a needs basis. The girls would be chosen on the basis of desire to have this opportunity, the willingness of their parents to embrace the opportunity, and the advice of their current school that they were enthusiastic, motivated contributors to their community.

We are about to enter our fifth year of association with Yalari and it has been a highly successful relationship with significant benefit to our existing boarders and day students as well as to the six young women we currently have as scholars here. All girls, either ongoing or for a period, have required academic intervention, learning support and organisational training. They need to be encouraged constantly and reminded that their best is good enough. They needed support in carrying out the hygiene demands of living with other girls who are not family members. An understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, an appreciation for its history and a belief in the rights of all Australians to access good education is essential in the staff, particularly the girls' teachers and boarding carers.

Access to their Yalari mentor has been regular, warm and absolutely vital to the girls' wellbeing and transition. Kambala has had the same woman who has visited the girls weekly, assisted with any emotional issues, met with the Director of Boarding on a regular basis and liaised with parents when the school required. We acknowledge that we have been very fortunate in having the involvement of

someone whose generosity of spirit and professionalism has been outstanding. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families do not visit their daughters throughout the term and the girls do not go home. For most of our non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders, parental visits are quite frequent (2-3 times per term).

- The girls (particularly since we have had a critical number of them) have shown significant improvement academically, but needed to be timetabled academic support before arrival, rather than encouraged to seek it when issues arose. Similarly in their boarding homework.
- They are naturally gifted in sport and athleticism and find confidence and self-worth in these pursuits.
- They are eager to share their culture through acknowledgement of NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Day and significant events in their history (e.g. Mabo)
- Their connection to family/community and usually the grandmother who reared them, is stronger than we see in non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Relationship with gentle, nonintrusive boarding staff strong
- Literacy and Numeracy well below school benchmark.
- The girls need to participate in their Yalari/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities – the Cherbourg Walk, camps, special excursions related to their culture.
- They have high aspirations – doctors, nurses, teachers and veterinarians.
- They are loyal friends who find the transient nature of others' friendships difficult to understand – they withdraw when offended.

It is noted that not all students stayed the course or made the transition successfully. One girl from each of the pair, who came in our first two years, did not cope. We consider that in both cases the maternal parent could not adjust to having their daughters being away from them, and the girls themselves missed their community too much to persist. Domestic violence was also prevalent in both cases and the girls feared for their mother's safety. Grandparents more resilient, stable carers.

## **Case Study 5 – Central Coast Rudolf Steiner School**

Jessie\* (female) and Thomas\* (male) were 12 and 13 year old siblings from the Central Desert region of Australia who were under the guardianship of a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster mother at the time they enrolled at our school. Initial testing by Learning Support, put their reading ages at 6y 9m and 6y 10m, respectively; and their maths was tested at around 8 yrs. They were placed into the classes that their chronological ages dictated, Class 6 and Class 7. Both of the children were outgoing and friendly, unlike some central Australian children who can be shy initially.

Despite the poor standardised test results, it became obvious that these were bright children, who had big gaps in their basic skills caused by prolonged absences from school, and having SAE as their 4<sup>th</sup> language (the others being Luritja and various other central Australian dialects, including Kriol). The girl, Jessie, in particular, was a very keen student who sought every opportunity for help and who was determined to be like the other children in her class. She had no real behaviour issues other than she could be very demanding of teacher or aide assistance, and quite bossy at playtime. Thomas was prone to outbursts of extreme anger when he felt under threat or when he felt slighted or put down by his class mates or staff. He was a charming and popular boy outside of the outbursts and was generally well-accepted by the other boys in his class.

From the outset, it was obvious that these students would require intensive intervention around their basic skills, and our Learning Support team were engaged to assist both in class and in out-of-class sessions. Thomas needed 1-1 support in class to engage with all academic tasks as he was not working at stage level and quickly became distracted when he couldn't understand the work. Both students used peer support in that they copied the student next to them when unsure how to proceed, or the teacher/aide was assisting others.

The Learning Support team sourced an ESL literacy program, suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, and put together by researchers at Charles Darwin University, called Walking Talking Texts. This is *an ESL program based around the written English text of a book. It covers the range of teaching strategies needed to teach ESL effectively - both oral language and literacy. Walking Talking Texts is a language-teaching program. The teaching of oracy and literacy in English are planned for, within the broader framework of teaching English-as-a-second--language.* (Fran Murray, Walking Talking Texts 1997, new edition 2005). We chose one of the suggested texts, Wombat Stew.

We structured the sessions to take place each Thursday morning and included two non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with similar reading ages from Class 5. We did this to avoid conflict between the siblings, who were fiercely competitive with each other, and to promote inclusiveness. All the students enjoyed these sessions with their focus on whole language immersion, basic grammar and spelling, phonics and movement (enacting scenes from the text and skipping games). The animal based tale was particularly amusing and enjoyable to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and appealed to their sense of humour. It also enabled conversation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the other students about animals from their region.

One of our Learning Support team was able to source two Luritja picture dictionaries from the Art Gallery of NSW. This was a godsend, because from this we learned that their language does not have comparatives or superlatives - (the word for rock, 'bula' or mountain of rock were the same), so in maths the concepts of less, more, bigger, smaller, better, worse etc, had to be taught explicitly. Multiplication and Division were taught with organic concrete objects such as pebbles and explained in language such as 'sharing', and 'groups of' etc, as we would do with younger students. This concrete and hands on method of maths instruction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was implemented by Learning Support staff after research suggested that this was a preferred learning method for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Thomas was very interested in demystifying the operations of maths, and we used the scores from his beloved AFL team to help explain multiplication.



Jessie was unable to tell the time as we know it. When asked how she could tell when it was time to go home in her country, she replied, 'Well, I just look at the shadow from the tree, where it is'. Our Learning Support teacher began working with her using the illustrations from the Luritja dictionary, and a visual 24 hour clock.

Both of the children enjoyed the artistic component of their lessons and had excellent visual memories. Thomas drew some quite exceptional illustrations and took great pride in them. He also became fascinated by pens and pencils, and the variety, particularly the erasable pens about which he said, 'They are magic pens'.

In the course of teaching Geography to Jessie and Thomas, we found that their geography did not extend beyond Alice Springs, (which Jessie thought was the capital of Australia). We then had to focus their geography lessons around Australia, not the wider world as we were doing with the other students. Thomas was given the task of making a poster containing a map of his area of central Australia, with familiar towns and features (a brilliant version of which was featured in the Luritja dictionary), and illustrated with flora and fauna he was familiar with. Thomas was very proud of this poster.

We were also very aware that we needed to acknowledge and maintain a sense of connectedness to country for these students who were being educated in a system very far removed from their small town, exclusively Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school. Thomas had once weekly cultural exchange sessions with an aide outside the classroom, where he talked about his community and school, and built examples of desert dwellings in miniature, showed bush survival skills and demonstrated his language. Thomas was very proud of his culture and often explained, "I was one of the clever ones in my country".

Jessie on the other hand, seemed determined to deny her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and would not be drawn into discussion over her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective in lessons. She expressed disdain at her copy of the Luritja dictionary, but quietly secreted it away in her desk and looked at it privately. She was unaware that there were other

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in her class because they were either fairer skinned than her, or had a mixed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/African background.

Both of these remarkable children demonstrated improvement in their basic skills during the time they spent with us. Jessie, in particular, demonstrated significant gains. The children returned to their country after several terms with us due to homesickness and family reasons, and unfortunately before we could re-test them and quantify their gains in any objective way. In truth, we learned just as much from them as they learned from us.

\*Not their real names

