



Australian Government

Department of Education,
Science and Training

Dare to Lead

...making the difference

Schools making the difference:
Models of good practice —

Excellence

This is the first of a series of publications showcasing exemplary schools within the *Dare to Lead* coalition. As an initiative of and by the profession, *Dare to Lead* is powered by the leadership of principals in schools. One of the strategies which underpins the project is the sharing of stories of success, both to inspire other school leaders and to provide information about approaches which are working in various contexts.

The four schools profiled in this publication were the High Achievement award winners in the third annual *Dare to Lead* Excellence in Leadership in Indigenous Education Awards, announced at Parliament House, Canberra in March 2007. The strategies that they are using to achieve their data-documented improvements are worthy of close examination — and, perhaps, incorporation into the way your own school approaches Indigenous education.



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Centralian Senior Secondary College

Improving Indigenous enrolments, attendance and retention

Centralian Senior Secondary College is a government senior secondary school in Alice Springs, NT, co-located and working co-operatively with Charles Darwin University. Of 300 students, one-third identify as Indigenous.

HOW THE SCHOOL IS SUCCEEDING

Concerned by the level of enrolments, attendance and retention of Indigenous students, Centralian Senior Secondary College embarked on an extensive consultative process before implementing a support programme it calls *Gateways*, designed as a more flexible pathway for students to achieve their Northern Territory Certificate of Education. A key to the school's success has been a determination to maintain close links with parents and the Indigenous community throughout the life of the programme so far.

The start of the process was parent meetings in 2005 discussing ways to combat the risk of students dropping out of the education system. In December 2005 there were meetings with the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and teachers to finalise a programme addressing the identified needs for extra student support. A further round of meetings with parents and the community was held to provide information about the planned programme.

Soon after the programme commenced, informal meetings were held with Indigenous parents and teachers to celebrate initial student success. Through the year there were further meetings, culminating in designing and securing funding for a nine-day leadership camp in Melbourne for 35 students. DEST District Manager Joyce Measures has noted, "Of special note is the success of the staff in encouraging Indigenous families and community members to become involved in the education process by organising informal parent BBQs, evenings, school camps and the like. I believe the staff have done a superb job in promoting Indigenous culture."

Another important aspect of the programme is the provision of significant financial support to students if attendance is greater than 90 per cent and all school work is completed on time.

PROGRAMME

The *Gateways* programme was developed to help Stage 1 (Year 11) students succeed and complete their Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE). The programme is aimed at students who need some extra support in their senior years of schooling. Some students may be part of the *Gateways* programme for one semester (6 months), others longer.

Data show that the *Gateways* programme has been successful in retaining students who would not otherwise have stayed at school. The programme provides a personal, pastoral approach. Teaching and learning takes place in a more relaxed environment with extra support available.

The four core subjects are taught by two teachers: Maths, English, and two Integrated Studies (Physical Education and Cooking). Students select two additional subjects of their choice from: Ceramics, Art, VET (Vocational Education and Training) Welding, VET Construction, VET Music, VET Restaurant Service, VET Office Skills, VET Hairdressing, VET Cookery, Photography, Information Technology, Introduction to Senior Maths A, Stage 2 Arts and the Community, and Stage 2 Health, Recreation and the Community.



The *Gateways* programme provides students with a ‘home base’. This means that most classes are conducted in the homeroom, allowing the teachers to keep track of students’ progress and give extra support and guidance. Tutors and education workers are also present to provide additional help.

OUTCOMES

	2005	2006
Number of Indigenous student enrolments	30	60
Indigenous student attendance	80%	95%
Retention January to November 2006:		97%
Satisfactory completion of Stage 1 and 2 subjects by Indigenous <i>Gateways</i> students:		94%

COMMUNITY COMMENT

“I would not have gone to school this year (without the *Gateways* programme). I get so much help from the tutors. I love it here.” — Kusha Graham, Year 11 student

“I am more focused here. *Gateways* is helping me get work ready. I like the grown-up feel.” — Bryce Welch, Year 12 student

“The work being done by the *Gateways* team has ensured strong partnerships have been formed with many Indigenous people and organisations in town. The involvement in community events and programmes help promote the programme to Indigenous families and create and foster a positive working relationship with the community.” — Wendy O’Brien, Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker

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Curtin Primary School

Literacy; Commitment to improving relationships between school, parents and the Indigenous community

Curtin Primary School is a government school in suburban Perth. Of 165 students, 25 per cent identify as Indigenous.

HOW THE SCHOOL IS SUCCEEDING

The School Development Plan of Curtin Primary School emphasises a continual commitment to fostering positive relationships between the school, parents and the local Indigenous community. This commitment is realised in a number of practical ways: representation in consultative processes; Noongar community members’ skills and talents being used to enhance learning programmes, storytelling sessions and special interest classes; school tours and staff meetings; a Noongar Assembly every term.

During the school’s 50th anniversary celebrations in 2006 there was a performance by Indigenous children and workshops on dance, music, design, science and environment, culture and language. The workshops were run by community members and parents. “There was a noticeable increase in the young Indigenous people’s self-esteem and their sense of their identities,” their parents noted.



PROGRAMMES

Since 2003 Curtin PS has implemented a programme called *Getting it Right in Literacy*. Other initiatives and positive factors for success in increasing literacy levels include:

- The Morning Readers Club, designed to ensure Indigenous students have an incentive to arrive at school on time, to develop and enhance their literature appreciation and to prepare for the school day.
- Development of positive relationships with Indigenous parents through workshops and Parent Support Groups.
- Indigenous parents' increasing support of and involvement in their children's learning.
- *Direct Instruction Programme* undertaken every day by an Aboriginal Education Assistant.
- *Support-A-Reader* programme on a daily basis.

The school's West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) data for 2006 is outstanding, with the school average often more than double the state average.

OUTCOMES

WALNA Literacy results 2006 — Aboriginal students			
		School mean	State mean
Year 3	Reading	345	216
	Writing	296	156
	Spelling	389	158
Year 5	Reading	341	297
	Writing	263	245
	Spelling	354	245
Year 7	Reading	441	356
	Writing	453	338
	Spelling	530	348

WALNA Numeracy results 2006 — Aboriginal students			
		School mean	State mean
Year 3	Mathematics	357	255
Year 5	Mathematics	376	328
Year 7	Mathematics	491	395
Punctuality rates		2005	2006
		55.6%	92.7%

COMMUNITY COMMENT

“The benefit of our regular meetings has meant that we have had input into overall use of Aboriginal funding. Because our opinions have been sought, we are well informed as to where our funds can be used most effectively. We feel that any additional funds that we may be lucky enough to receive are being well used for the benefit of our children.” — Honey Webb, Toni Johnson and Vanessa Parker, Noongar parents

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Kuranda District State College

Connecting with the Indigenous community to improve school readiness

Kuranda District State School (as it was known up until 2006) is a semi-rural government primary school in Far North Queensland. Of 220 primary students, 88 identify as Indigenous. In 2007 it amalgamated with the secondary school to become Kuranda District State College.

HOW THE SCHOOL IS SUCCEEDING

In January 2005 the school reviewed curriculum, attendance and behaviour management data. A range of community consultation meetings were then held to increase understanding of the issues by all stakeholders. The school leadership decided that stronger links with the Indigenous community had to be forged beyond the school fence.

A Parent School Partnership Initiatives (PSPI) programme called *Families As First Teachers* (FAFT) was established. This was a direct response to receiving the following feedback from Indigenous families: children find school daunting; some Indigenous families do not value formal schooling; general misunderstanding that education starts at home prior to commencing school; preschool programme not valued.

Significant Indigenous community members, the school, the Indigenous School's Support Unit and DEST determined together that there should be an educational programme taken out into the community to skill parents in teaching small children. FAFT was piloted, showed signs of succeeding, and was awarded further funding. After winning a Regional Showcase Award for excellence in early childhood education, the team was invited to present at a conference in Canberra.

PROGRAMME

Families As First Teachers endeavours to link those things which work at school with Indigenous parenting/learning styles. It acknowledges that some families are unwilling or unable to attend the school, so weekly workshops are held in the homes of Indigenous families. A team of two Indigenous community workers, one teacher and one retired volunteer teacher travels to houses in the outlying communities. Every second week a different Kuranda District SS teacher also attends. Links have also been made with Community Health Workers. Family participation in the workshops is supported by the local Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) office.

A range of activities occur at the FAFT community workshops including: making learning resources; photo books of families interacting in the workshops; finger painting; play with educational toys; distribution of reading materials in different forms; explicit links between what children hear at school and what it means.

The 'mutual learning' approach of FAFT values: the existing cultural capital and literacy practices of the Indigenous families; explicit use of intergenerational social and learning structures; and home-school partnerships which improve learning outcomes. The team has observed an increase in family literacy, parenting and numeracy skills; an increase in trust between families, teachers and students; better home-school links; and improved understanding of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy strategies.



Over 100 community members have attended the workshops. These workshops are held in five different community areas. Qualitative and quantitative data are regularly harvested and analysed.

OUTCOMES

- Increased number of family members attending workshops.
- 74 per cent reduction in Indigenous students' negative behaviour incidents 2004–2006.
- 337 per cent increase in Indigenous students' positive behaviour referrals 2004–2006.
- In 2005, 15 Indigenous families had to be reminded in week 2 that school had started; in 2006 the number was three Indigenous families.
- Prep/Year 1 attendance: Prior to programme — 50%; since programme commenced — 85%.

COMMUNITY COMMENT

“Our communities like having the FAFT programme as it shows families what they can do to help their kids before they start school. That will make it easier when they go to Grade 1. We enjoy getting together and learning about the kinds of things our kids will do when they go to school. Some kids are frightened about school and FAFT helps them feel good about going. They get to know the teachers and so do we. We love this programme so much.” — Martha Brim, parent

PRINCIPAL: Chris Capra

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Waratah West Public School

Whole-school commitment to Indigenous education

Waratah West Public School is a small Kindergarten to Year 6 school in a low socio-economic suburb of Newcastle, NSW. Of 80 students, over one-quarter identify as Indigenous.

HOW THE SCHOOL IS SUCCEEDING

When Kerry Wellham began as principal at Waratah West PS five years ago the school was struggling. She decided that an overhaul was needed. “People say you can’t do it all at once, but what do you leave out?” she says.

“My focus is people. Put high expectations on them.” This includes not just staff but also students, parents and other school community members.

“One of the first things I did was call in an Aboriginal Education Consultant,” Mrs Wellham says. “Some people expected that I would call in a welfare person, but the best student welfare programme in any school is teaching your curriculum in a quality way with quality teaching, engaging kids in the classroom, using lessons that are significant, with stimulating resources, in an inviting place. Welfare has an important place but it is patching work.

“With the Aboriginal Education Consultant we looked at what we wanted for our Aboriginal students and Aboriginal education. Then we looked at how we would do that — reconciliation, appreciation of culture, valuing our Aboriginal families and students and celebrating Aboriginal culture.”



Strategic planning was crucial. “You look at how things are, and then you ask, ‘What do we want this to look like?’ Then you keep breaking it down. You get into details. If you can’t come down to little things, nothing will happen. And once you’ve decided what is going to happen, you have to decide who is going to make it happen.”

Local Elder Aunty Sandra Griffin was invited to become a major part of the school’s life, not just on special occasions but also day-to-day. Contact was made with the local Land Council and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The physical environment was transformed with the classrooms rejuvenated, Indigenous art and artifacts in common areas, and the creation of a Reconciliation garden at the front of the school.

PROGRAMMES

Waratah West PS’s commitment to Indigenous education is expressed through a wide variety of programmes, some student-initiated.

At curriculum level this includes developing full Scope and Sequence with lists of school resources and strategies, for all stages; Aboriginal maps in every classroom to help understand ‘country’; use of Indij Readers supporting home reading; relevant links on the school internet site including *Dreamtime Webs* and research sites. There are specific Aboriginal Awards for Literacy and Numeracy, Attendance, and Creative Arts and Citizenship. “The most successful strategy is to have Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum at every stage — NOT a token unit once a year.”

A mentoring programme focuses on leadership and belonging. There are traditional Indigenous games played, and Aboriginal art and Reconciliation art displayed throughout the school.

The school has received a Quality Teaching Indigenous Programme grant 2006–2009 for numeracy.

There is strong support from the Aboriginal community, with parents on P&C and students as Parliament leaders within the school.

OUTCOMES

	2002	2006
Suspensions of Aboriginal students	7	0
Time-out incidents for Aboriginal students	145	4
Aboriginal students in School Parliament	0	2
Aboriginal students standing for School Parliament	0	5 (max)
Aboriginal parents on P&C	0	2
Indigenous staff	No	Yes
Indigenous perspectives in curriculum	No	Yes
Aboriginal education in School Plan	No	Yes
Indigenous community involvement	No	Yes
Collection of data to support learning programmes for Aboriginal children	No	Yes

COMMUNITY COMMENT

“It’s a welcoming school and I feel at home. I love what the staff are doing for the Indigenous AND non-Indigenous students.” — Local Elder Aunty Sandra (Griffin)

“Waratah West has initiated an effective working collaborative partnership in order to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes.” — Aboriginal community member Tim Meehan

PRINCIPAL: Kerry Wellham

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www.waratahwst-p.schools.nsw.edu.au

This booklet contains snapshots of *Dare to Lead* member schools and their approaches to improving learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

They are intended for use in a workshop context, to assist schools in shaping their own individual approaches within a strategic plan.

It is important to ensure that any strategy is adapted to the specific context of a school, and in consultation with local Indigenous community members.

Further information and resources

The *Dare to Lead* website www.daretolead.edu.au has a number of case studies and links which are of use to school leaders concerned about improving outcomes for their Indigenous students. *Dare to Lead's* partner project *What Works* also has a wealth of information at its website www.whatworks.edu.au.

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The 14 Achievement schools for 2006 are awarded \$1000 and a Certificate of Achievement. The schools are:

- Braitling Primary School, NT
- Carlton R-9 School Port Augusta, SA
- Chifley College (Dunheved Campus), NSW
- Dubbo School of Distance Education, NSW
- Glendyne Education and Training, QLD
- Holy Family Primary School, NSW
- Kempsey West Public School, NSW
- Kensington Gardens Pre-School, SA
- Kingscliff High School, NSW
- Rockingham Senior High School, WA
- Santa Sabina College, NSW
- Slade Point State School, QLD
- St Peter's Catholic Primary School, VIC
- Trinity Grammar, VIC

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