



MCE

Education
Consultancy

Lismore Heights PS

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MC Education Consultancy was invited by the Principal to complete an external, independent Snapshot at Lismore Heights Public School

Collegial
Snapshot of
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander
Education

Lismore Heights Public School

Evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

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Lismore Heights Public School

1.00 Purpose

MC Education Consultancy was invited by Lismore Heights Public School through its principal to facilitate an evaluation of the school with a view to identifying the strengths and opportunities of the Aboriginal education programs, as well to offer any ideas, where appropriate, for the ongoing operation and sustainability of the Aboriginal education strategy. This is a comprehensive report for the principal which reflects the current Aboriginal education situation and offer ideas for consideration based on what the Snapshot team heard from a variety of stakeholders. These ideas could be used to assist the school to strategically plan Aboriginal education in the future.

2.00 Acknowledgement and Terminology

The School and Snapshot team acknowledge that the School is built upon the traditional lands of the Wijabul Wiyabal people of the Bundjalung Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and ask for their guidance as we work towards improving outcomes for their descendants and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait students.

The terms Aboriginal, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander may be used in this document when quoting interviewees. In all contexts they are inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members and also inclusive of those Aboriginal people from other language nations across Australia.

The Snapshot report is for the school principal and it is at the principal's discretion which parts of the report are shared with particular school stakeholders. The report contains a collation of comments made by individuals and interview groups (Section 6.00). The interview team does not aim to validate, confirm, condone or challenge the comments, issues or concerns raised in the interviews, therefore the Principal will receive a broad range of comments and feelings from interview groups. We acknowledge that not all of these comments have been validated but are included to provide the full breadth of opinion of individuals and/or interview groups. It would be preferred if the principal did not share all of the comments contained in this report as the Snapshot team guaranteed confidentially to all individuals and group participants during discussions. Carefully selected comments may be suitable to share with discreet groups.

3.00 TEAM MEMBERS AND INTERVIEWEE DATA

The Snapshot team consisted of Mark Crouch & Helen Rea (*Principal of Wilson Park SS*). Interviews were held with the following:

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students – 10; Non-Aboriginal students – 4; Classroom Teachers – 5; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parents and community members – 6; Non-Aboriginal parents and community members – 3; School Senior Executive Members – 4; School Administrative Support Staff – 1; Aboriginal Community Support Officer – 1 ; School Learning Support Officers – 3

The interviews informed the Snapshot team's overall opinions of the school, their evaluations of programs and processes, and ultimately, the commendations and recommendations (found towards the end of this Report).

4.00 SCHOOL INFORMATION

School Profile

Lismore Heights Public School is situated above the town of Lismore overlooking the picturesque hills to the north. Our beautiful school caters for students of all abilities from Kindergarten to Year 6. Presently, the school has eleven classrooms, two of which are Support Classes for students with additional needs. Approximately 230 students are currently enrolled at the school. 24% of our students identify as Aboriginal. All of our students make an outstanding contribution to the life and culture of our happy school. The school and its community work hand in hand to ensure that all of our students 'Aim high' and reach their full potential.

Students' progress is carefully monitored throughout the year to ensure that children's individual needs are catered for in our day to day planning. Consequently, teaching and learning is tailored to the specific needs of our students, resulting in above state average progress for our students in National tests.

School Context

Lismore Heights Public School is a proud member of 'The Rivers P–12' Community of Schools which serves Lismore and its surrounding area. Our schools work collaboratively to provide quality learning experiences for all students living in the Lismore region. The Index of Community Socio–Educational Advantage (ICSEA) and Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) are measures that enable meaningful comparisons to be across schools. Lismore Heights Public School has slightly higher than average ICSEA, and lower than average FOEI, when compared with similar schools.

5.00 SCHOOL DOCUMENTATION

As part of the Health Check process, the Snapshot team has reviewed the following documents to identify references to Aboriginal Education:

Lismore Heights PS School Plan, School Newsletters, Annual School Report, School Website

6.00 Collated Interview Data

Transcripts of interviews have been removed from this version of the Report to ensure participant confidentiality. However, key messages have been captured in the commendations and recommendations section of this Report.

7.00 Commendations

Lismore Heights Public School is an attractive learning environment which is culturally safe for Aboriginal students and community members with several examples of Aboriginal cultural iconography in and around the school including the flag, murals and samples of artwork in various locations including the front office where there is Aboriginal artwork and a copy of The Apology.

Throughout the Snapshot process the students were responsive and respectful and it was evident that they enjoyed attending school. It was also evident that the staff members (teaching and non-teaching) are hard-working, caring and were providing a quality education for all students. The teachers, support staff and parents who participated in the Snapshot discussions commented that they felt the school was moving forward and were optimistic regarding the future. They also commented positively on the support and direction given by the school leadership team. Throughout the Snapshot process there was strong endorsement of the principal.

7.01

Lismore Heights Public School provides a welcoming environment for all who visit the school. The school has an attractive and well maintained physical appearance. The School Administrative staff members are professional and personable. Several Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents commented that everyone is made to feel most welcome.

7.02

The school is a culturally safe environment where Aboriginal students and parents are proud of their heritage. There is evidence of Aboriginal iconography around the school including the Aboriginal flag, murals, art work, totem poles, Yarning/Learning Circle, the Aboriginal bush garden and the Bundjalung Community Room, all of which acknowledges that the school values and respects Aboriginal people and cultures. The school is also commended on its inclusion of the Sista Speak program and the Deadly Dancers program, both of which support the school's aim to ensure that student's Aboriginal heritage is respected and celebrated.

7.03

There was a strong view that the school makes genuine attempts at including Aboriginal content and perspectives in all Key Learning Areas and that this work is not tokenistic. The staff acknowledge that there is still much to learn but are committed to improving their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures.

7.04

The academic performance of Aboriginal students in NAPLAN in 2018 is to be commended. Year 3 Aboriginal students scored above the Similar School Group (SSG) and the State student average in Numeracy, Grammar & Punctuation and Spelling. The Year 5 Aboriginal students scored above the SSG and State student average in the areas of Reading and Numeracy.

7.05

It is commendable that one student in Year 1 was awarded the 2018 Una May Smith Scholarship, which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to participate in and successfully complete schooling and progress to tertiary education and/or training. This is a significant achievement by the school as only 1 scholarship is awarded Australia wide annually.

7.06

Lismore Heights Public School presents as a professional educational environment to all who visit the school. Within the local community the perception of the school is that it provides a quality education for all students and is a place where children like to learn, teachers like to teach and where parents are happy to have their children educated.

7.07

All students, staff members and parents who participated in the Snapshot process commented positively on the Bundjalung Language Program. This program was seen as a positive way for students to learn about language and culture and staff members saw the program as an opportunity for them to increase their cultural knowledge.

7.08

The school has a functional Aboriginal Education Team which has wide representation including executive, teachers and Aboriginal support staff. The team meets twice a term and deals with all aspects of Aboriginal Education from planning significant events such as NAIDOC Week to coordinating the implementation of Personalised Learning Plans.

7.09

There is a strong consensus from all interviewees that NAIDOC Week celebrations and the lead-up Bundjalung Art Project were well planned and culturally significant.

7.10

All of the students who participated in the process were polite, respectful listeners and contributed positively to the discussions. Their answers were carefully considered and at times respectfully different to that of their peers. They had a sense of humour and a sense of social justice and were generally positive about their school.

7.11

The Lismore Heights PS classrooms are well resourced and it is evident that they are busy and educationally stimulating learning environments.

7.12

The staff members with Aboriginal heritage at Lismore Heights PS are highly regarded by colleagues, students and community members. They are seen as a valuable resource, particularly regarding Aboriginal education where their contributions provide an informed and balanced perspective.

7.14

The school has been proactive in providing all staff with a variety of Aboriginal cultural professional learning opportunities, including Stronger Smarter and Connecting to Country.

7.15

There is a strong consensus that the teaching and non-teaching staff members are hardworking and caring. The parents and staff members who participated in the Snapshot discussions feel positively about the school and the school leadership.

7.16

There is a strong perception from the cross section of those who were interviewed that racism was not an issue at Lismore Heights Public School. All interviewees were also confident that if incidents of racism were to occur that they would be dealt with appropriately and efficiently.

7.18

It is commendable that the school has an acknowledgement of the traditional owner's message on the front page of the newsletter and website and at the front entrance to the school. It is also noteworthy that the school delivers 'Acknowledgement of Country' in Bundjalung language at weekly assemblies as well as at significant cultural events throughout the year.

8.00 Recommendations

There is a general consensus from students, staff members and parents that Lismore Heights Public is a good school and visitors get a good vibe when they enter the school.

It was apparent after discussions with Aboriginal parents that there appears to be a new wave of Aboriginal parents and community who have an expectation that Aboriginal education programs should be supported by Aboriginal community members who are on country and familiar with the Bundjalung culture. The issue for the school is that it is difficult to find suitably qualified and skilled Aboriginal community members to be involved in these initiatives.

The recommendations set out below are merely suggestions for the principal, staff and community and are not necessarily intended to be a list of actions for the school to undertake. The strategies within the recommendations are also suggestions for the school and its community to consider within the school's context over a period of time. It is hoped that these recommendations will inform the school's future planning in Aboriginal education.

8.01 STRATEGIC APPROACH TO ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

8.01.1 Aboriginal Education Resource Audit

During the Snapshot process several teachers commented that they were unsure as to the extent of Aboriginal education resources in the school, suggesting that resources are probably scattered throughout the school i.e. in the library, classrooms and storerooms. A number of teachers also commented that they relied on the internet to access on line teaching resources and did not necessarily utilise the school's physical resources.

It is recommended that the school conducts an audit of all of its Aboriginal resources. This process may also demonstrate the need to cull outdated resources and develop more local teacher resource materials. It will be important to invite Aboriginal parents and community members to be involved in this process and the school could also consider contacting the Southern Cross University 'Gnibi' staff to assist. When this audit is complete the school could plan the purchase of additional resources which will support teachers in the implementation of the new syllabuses linked to the Australian curriculum.

It is also recommended that the librarian takes the opportunity to familiarise staff with the school's Aboriginal education resources and introduce new resources when they arrive in the school.

8.01.2 Staff Induction Program

The Snapshot team acknowledges that the school conducts an induction for new staff members but does not have a formal Staff Induction Program for newly appointed staff members. Some teachers and executive staff who participated in the Snapshot process indicated that the support for newly appointed casual, temporary and support staff could be handled more effectively by orientating new staff members with school culture e.g. the school's Aboriginal education focus, routines, organisation and programs (such as Positive Behaviour for Learning).

To better support and build confidence in all newly appointed staff, so they can quickly engage their Aboriginal students and parents, it is recommended that the school reviews the Staff Induction Program to ensure it has a focus on both school organisation and Aboriginal education. The Aboriginal education component could involve the newly appointed staff members meeting local Elders and Aboriginal community members, visiting local traditional sites and learning about the local culture and history. An introduction to the local AECG would also be important.

8.02 CONNECTING TO CULTURE

8.02.1 Cultural Awareness Training

It is acknowledged that the school has provided a variety of opportunities for staff to be involved in cultural awareness professional learning in recent years. Several staff members have been involved in 'Stronger Smarter' and 'Connecting to Country' training with 6 staff members enrolled to attend 'Connecting to Country' this year. However the majority of teachers who participated in the Snapshot process commented that their level of knowledge of the local Aboriginal cultures and history was very limited. They acknowledged that to some extent it was a lack of knowledge that inhibited the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. Some teachers said that they lacked confidence and were afraid of offending Aboriginal people if they were to do or say something wrong.

It is recommended that the school encourages all staff members (teachers, support staff and SASS) to learn more about Aboriginal cultures and history to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people and the local Aboriginal history. One strategy to support this ongoing learning would be to invite Maree and Sophia (Aboriginal staff members) to conduct cultural sessions at staff meetings. The content of these sessions would be determined by what the staff would like to learn about and what the presenters think is important for staff to learn. It might be a question and answer session – it would be important to ensure that the presenters were given the questions in advance so they can prepare.

It is also recommended that the school provide an Aboriginal Cultural Immersion Program with an emphasis on the local Aboriginal culture at the beginning of each school year, perhaps at a School Development Day. This program could be designed by the Aboriginal school staff, the local AECG and local Aboriginal agencies, similar to the 'Connecting to Country' Program offered by the AECG throughout NSW.

8.02.2 Aboriginal Student Identity

While some of the Aboriginal students who participated in the Snapshot discussions were knowledgeable about their Aboriginal cultural heritage (e.g. their mob, their totem/s etc.) the Snapshot team is unsure how knowledgeable the rest of the Aboriginal students are about their heritage.

It is acknowledged that the school has been proactive in providing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students with cultural learning through the Broader Bundjalung Language program which all Snapshot participants rated highly. The students enjoy learning Bundjalung words and the teaching and non-teaching staff valued the opportunity to learn language and enhance their cultural knowledge.

It is recommended that the school considers implementing the following strategies to further enhance Aboriginal student identity:

- Providing opportunities for increasing the student voice in the school e.g. creating a School Parliament with elected ministers covering a range of portfolio including the environment, Aboriginal affairs etc.;
- Ensuring that Aboriginal students are consulted regarding Aboriginal education initiatives and events e.g. planning NAIDOC activities;
- Introducing Bro Speak to complement Sista Speak which is already being delivered in the school. It is understood that identifying an appropriate tutor is important but has been difficult i.e. a local Aboriginal man who has cultural knowledge and the skills to engage Aboriginal boys;
- Displaying the Aboriginal Language Map of Australia in all classrooms or in a prominent place e.g. the front foyer or library, which illustrates the origins of the Aboriginal students at the school and their heritage links;
- Providing opportunities for Aboriginal students to meet and connect with Aboriginal students from local primary schools and their feeder high school/s.

8.02.3 Deadly Students Dance Program

The school has a very successful Aboriginal student dance program which all interviewees considered to be an important cultural activity. The program provides the opportunity for Aboriginal boys and girls to learn separate dances and to come together to perform at a variety of events. It is acknowledged that the school currently does not have an Aboriginal dance instructor and that the senior Aboriginal students are helping out with dance instruction. While it would be convenient for non-Aboriginal staff to be involved with the dance program, it is considered inappropriate because they do not have Aboriginal heritage.

Throughout the interview process several non-Aboriginal students and parents expressed a desire for non-Aboriginal students to be involved in the dance program and did not understand why this didn't happen.

It is recommended that the school communicates to all students and parents that Aboriginal dance should only be performed by Aboriginal students because it is their heritage and culture and that the local Aboriginal community have expressed their strong desire for this protocol to be respected.

It is also recommended that the school explores the possibility of engaging Aboriginal students from the local high schools to teach the Aboriginal dance program. The school could also approach Norm Sheehan at Gnibi (Southern Cross University) regarding the possibility of Aboriginal trainee teachers being involved in dance tuition at Lismore Heights PS.

8.02.4 Aboriginal Content and Perspectives

While the Snapshot team is confident that all teachers plan Aboriginal content and perspectives which is reflected in their teaching and learning programs there was a consensus of opinion that the quality of the implementation of this planning varied across the school. It was acknowledged that some teachers do this very well while others don't do it as well as they would like to. Several teachers referred to The 8 Ways Pedagogy as something which assisted them greatly with their teaching of Aboriginal content and perspectives. While some teachers were familiar and confident with The 8 Ways Pedagogy others commented that they had forgotten a lot of their initial training and some had started working at the school after the training had been delivered.

It is recommended that the school revisits The 8 Ways Pedagogy to ensure that all staff members (teaching and non-teaching) are familiar with 8 Ways and confident about incorporating this pedagogy in their teaching. The school could consider conducting an 8 Ways session at the School Development Day at the commencement of the school year to ensure all new staff members are trained and to provide a refresher course for other staff members.

8.03 ENHANCING ABORIGINAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT

The Snapshot team heard many comments from teaching and non-teaching staff that the level of community involvement in the school was good with large numbers of parents and community members attending special events and activities.

It is acknowledged that the school has identified the engagement of Aboriginal parents and community as a priority and is introducing the 'Jus Coz' Aboriginal community meeting strategy. The snapshot team commends these actions and recommends that the school pursues these.

MC Education Consultancy thanks Lismore Heights Public School for their welcome, hospitality and organisation offered to the Snapshot Team during the Snapshot process.