



School and community:
working together **What Works. The Work Program**

Improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Sustainable school and community partnerships

A research study



**What Works.
The Work Program**

www.whatworks.edu.au

What Works. The Work Program. Sustainable School and Community Partnerships – a research study
1st edition

Published by National Curriculum Services Pty Ltd.
Contact details: National Curriculum Services, PO Box 361, Abbotsford VIC 3067, Phone +61 3 9415 1299

February 2013

ISBN 978-1-875864-74-4

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Printed by Total Print, Campbellfield

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What Works. The Work Program

The What Works. The Work Program has been operating in Australian schools for over ten years. The program is all about helping people in schools take *systematic action* to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The What Works materials are based on a three part analysis of the way teachers and schools generally work to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Building awareness; Forming partnerships; and Working systematically. The website (www.whatworks.edu.au) provides resources to support all of these.

A 'School and Community: Working Together' series of resources supports the development of partnerships between schools and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

What Works. The Work Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Executive summary

The purpose of a School and Community Partnership is to improve the educational outcomes of students. By working together, schools, parents and families can increase their combined capacity to positively influence student outcomes. This is the clear incentive for schools to develop School and Community Partnership Agreements. Schools also pursue agreements because they will help lift performance on indicators such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and meet potential commitments under proposed national school improvement plan initiatives.

As part of its national programs, What Works has facilitated School and Community Partnership Agreements in a large number of diverse settings. This publication reports on a project where consultants revisited ten schools and their communities on four occasions from 2010 through 2012, to gauge what had happened with the agreements originally supported by What Works. The original support provided by What Works consisted of a consultant working with a school and the community over an extended period of time to develop a School and Community Partnership Agreement. The consultants facilitated conversations between school and community and provided a range of resource materials to help guide partnership agreements.

What Works consultants examined various factors thought to influence sustainability of the School and Community Partnerships. These factors covered the various stages of an agreement, from initial development, through implementation, to embedding in the school's culture. Some observed factors remain common through each of these stages. They are also consistent across school contexts.

The factors fall into two groups:

- Factors that establish some pre-conditions for sustainability.
- Factors involved in nurturing and sustaining SCPs.

Pre-conditions

For a School and Community Partnership to be sustainable, all parties need to be on sound footings at the beginning. A group of factors characterise a school and community's state of readiness to implement a successful partnership. Pre-conditions for success are:

- a clear and agreed strategic purpose based on high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- clear statements of roles and responsibilities;
- authentic two-way dialogue and conversations supported through well designed processes; and
- positive relationships among school, principals, parents, community, teachers and students.

Without a state of readiness, a partnership has potential to fall over before it becomes embedded. Ongoing engagement and connection with parents and communities is essential.

Factors contributing to sustaining a School and Community Partnership

Although the pre-conditions establish a basis for sustainability, by themselves they do not ensure a SCP will be sustained. SCPs have to be led and nurtured in order for them to become embedded in the way schools work.

A key factor influencing sustainability is the extent of planning for implementation. Sustaining the SCP requires constant focus on jointly maintaining it as a high priority in school and community. Sustainability also relies on a variety of other factors at the school, community and system levels, the key ones are leadership, capacity building, accountability and induction, and succession planning.

The critical role performed by principals is common through all stages of a partnership and across contexts:

- Principals consistently communicate a clear vision based on high expectations for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They articulate how the school will achieve that vision through working in partnership with community, parents and staff.
- Principals demonstrate a profound understanding of the school's relationship with parents, families and community. They are seen in the community and connect with community leadership to develop their understanding. They appreciate the implications this context has for the school and student outcomes.
- Principals organise their schools in ways that respond positively to their parents, families and community. They support staff in achieving what the SCP intends.
- Principals support and build the capacity of school staff and the community to achieve effective agreements.

A common theme related to sustainability is accountability to the SCP. Accountability works at various levels; to the community and parents, a school's internal accountability systems, and system or regional level. It appears that a school with strong internal and external accountability mechanisms has a higher chance of sustaining a partnership agreement.

A major characteristic of the schools, particularly those in remote communities, is the often transient nature of teaching staff. This characteristic is a key stress point for the sustainability of an agreement. Having support and accountability processes in place provide guidance to newly appointed teachers. However it is clear that ongoing induction and succession planning is necessary to maintain the profile of the SCP in schools with frequent teacher and principal changes.

While the schools are situated in different contexts and differed to some extent in the issues they and their community wanted to initially address, common factors related to whether the SCP had been sustained or not became evident. As a result, factors affecting sustainability of agreements appear to be transferable to various contexts and locations.

The What Works School and Community Partnership model

The focus of this publication is to report on the sustainability of School and Community Partnership Agreements originally facilitated by What Works. A more detailed set of materials related to the processes and outcomes of School and Community Partnership Agreements is available on the What Works website (www.whatworks.edu.au).

The What Works School and Community Partnership model describes a process incorporating various stages:

- **Development** of the School and Community Partnership. Important considerations in this stage are understanding of the lead up context including reasons for initiating, level of readiness and capacity of each party, time devoted to conversations and building relationships, key people and their roles, levels of involvement of community and parents/carers, use of external consultants, protocols and celebrating, for example, through a signing ceremony.
- **Implementation** of the School and Community Partnership including planning, monitoring, reviewing and refining. An agreement should be accompanied by an implementation or action plan to ensure that what the School and Community Partnership says, will be done.
- **Sustaining** through embedding the School and Community Partnership in the school's culture. If there is a well documented action plan that contains clear roles, is regularly monitored, reviewed and refined, then a good basis for sustainability is established.

Research project overview

Methodology

The What Works SSCP project is a research study designed to identify factors that contributed to School and Community Partnerships originally developed through the support and guidance of What Works being sustained.

What Works consultants revisited ten schools and their communities on four occasions from 2010 through 2012 to gauge what had happened with the School and Community Partnerships. Each consultant used a common template to identify:

- what had worked in making School and Community Partnerships sustainable; and
- the challenges schools and communities faced in sustaining effective School and Community Partnerships.

The What Works consultants gathered a broad cross section of opinions from school leaders, teachers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers, parents/carers, community leaders and members, students and system level personnel.

Context

Of the schools revisited for this project, some were secondary, others primary, others spanned both stages of education. Combined, they catered for students from pre-primary through to senior secondary. School settings ranged from major metropolitan suburbs, through regional towns to remote and very remote settings embedded in local communities. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in each school's total enrolment also varied, from just over one in ten students to virtually every student in the school.

For example, the La Grange Remote Community School, is situated on Karajarri land. It draws children from the five different language groups within the Bidyadanga

community. Fraser Park Preschool – 7 School situated in the rural city of Murray Bridge, approximately 80 kilometres from Adelaide, is on Ngarrindjeri Land. Although there is a strong connection to the Ngarrindjeri culture, the parent community have a diversity of Aboriginal heritage. The 65 Aboriginal students (15% of total enrolments) at East Kenwick Primary School, located in the metropolitan southern suburbs of Perth, are primarily Noongar people. Ngalangangpum School, a K–10 facility, is situated on the lands of the Kija people serving the Warmun Aboriginal Community in the Kimberley.

It is not too obvious to point out that context will influence the conception of who the community is and the content of a School and Community Partnership. This is important because the sustainability project findings indicate that some common themes exist across different contexts, and actions are potentially transferable.

The schools

- Charleville State School, QLD
- East Kenwick Primary School, WA
- Fraser Park Preschool – 7 School, SA
- Christ the King Catholic School Djarindjin Lombadina, WA
- Drouin Primary School, VIC
- La Grange Remote Community School, WA
- Mount Lockyer Primary School, WA
- Western Cape College – Napranum, QLD
- Western Cape College – Mapoon, QLD
- Ngalangangpum School – Warmun, WA

Background to School and Community Partnerships

The requirement for schools and systems to work toward the development of School and Community Partnerships in focus schools has its genesis in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy [NATSIEP or AEP] (1989). The AEP was introduced by the governments of Australia and marked an important landmark in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. It identified priority areas that directed focus and resourcing to the goal of achieving equitable educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other Australian students.

The twenty-one goals of the AEP relate to four themes:

- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making;
- achievement of equality of access to educational services;
- achievement of equality of educational participation;
- achievement of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

Several initiatives were developed to improve the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making. Perhaps the most significant of these was the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program that commenced in 1991 and ended in 2004. Under ASSPA schools applied directly to the Commonwealth for per capita grants to develop programs in schools and communities to realise the goals of the AEP.

In 2005 the Whole of School Intervention Strategy (WoSI) was introduced to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, parents and schools to work together to implement strategies to breakdown barriers to educational success. A key element of the WoSI was the Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI) which replaced ASSPA. The PSPI, a submission-based funding model, required schools and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to apply for funds from the Commonwealth to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in that process. It continued until 2009.

Emerging from the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform agenda, systems and schools have been given direction to close the gap in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other Australian students. The direction on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is now provided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010 to 2014 (MCEEDYA). The Engagement and Connections domain of the plan requires schools to develop School and Community Partnerships that sets out ways they will work together to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

School and Community Partnerships

Why have a School and Community Partnership?

‘Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These partnerships can establish a collective commitment to hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people ... Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed.’ (MCEEDYA 2011)

The purpose of a School and Community Partnership is to improve the educational outcomes of students.

School and Community Partnerships provide an opportunity to maximise the attendance, engagement, and as a result, the achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. By working together, schools, parents and families can increase their combined capacity to positively influence student outcomes.

School and Community Partnerships represent an important strategy to ‘problem solve obstacles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student learning’ frequently reported by schools (APPA 2012). These reported obstacles include absences, school programs and ‘meta-obstacles’ such as absence of trust and lack of awareness of what was not understood by various parties involved in student’s education.

Schools also pursue School and Community Partnerships because they will help lift performance on indicators such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and meet potential commitments under proposed national school improvement plan initiatives.

Benefits

All schools in the project report that the SCP has produced significant benefits.

The Executive Principal at Western Cape College considers that the three community partnership agreements have played a significant role in gaining community support from a low point in 2010. Results indicated through a College survey of parents:

Survey item	2010	2011
Parents satisfied that they are getting a good education at this school	47%	82%
Parents satisfied with their child’s school	50%	74%

At Drouin, as a result of the partnership, parents and staff worked to obtain funds to employ a Koorie reading recovery teacher who worked with Koorie students from Prep to Year Six. Improvement in outcomes for all Koorie students resulted from the involvement of parents and constant communication between the teacher, parent and the child, as well as the support provided by the teacher. Prior to the SCP, student outcomes were inconsistent. Current academic outcomes now show all Koorie students are performing above the NAPLAN National Minimum Standards.

A range of benefits are observed at Fraser Park:

- The SCP has motivated Aboriginal families to send their children to the school.
- Parents understand how important attendance is.
- Literacy Kits produced for Learning at Home have been very successful. Parents are taking joint responsibility for learning.
- The school also reports that every Aboriginal student has recorded sustained improvement in reading levels over the three years of the SCP.

Features

The structure of the **Ngalangangpum** School Community Partnership Agreement includes an overarching statement that affirms the principles and commitments around which practices related to school and community relationships are based.

This statement includes recognition of the school's two-way history and culture. The actions and understandings that support these principles are outlined in two documents; a staff charter, 'The Teacher Way', and a parent information book, 'The Parent Way.'

These documents detail the expectations, processes and available support to promote effective partnerships between the school and community.

A senior Warmun artist has also been commissioned to make a painting that symbolises and celebrates the two-way ethos at the school and the importance of the school and community working together.

The **Fraser Park** School and Community have a shared vision of strong relationships with the families through an open door policy, home visits, phone calls, invitations, newsletters and a wide variety of school events such as Family Evenings and Parent and Community Partnership Meetings.

The agreement is included as part of the school's information materials and is reviewed with all parents new to the school. The school's approach ensures formal and informal connections are comfortable.

The Aboriginal Community Education Officer (ACEO) and the Aboriginal Student Support Officers (ASSO) consistently support the leadership and staff with this communication.

There is a clear focus on learning that values and respects the cultural connections within the community.

What is a School and Community Partnership Agreement?

A School and Community Partnership Agreement is a formal commitment based on shared responsibility for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the school. A partnership is negotiated between the school, the parents and the local community and is a commitment to change the way the school and community work together.

Although formal School and Community Partnerships vary according to local context they generally incorporate common elements:

- a preamble describing the parties to the School and Community Partnership;
- aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
- agreed responsibilities for the parties involved.

Who makes up community?

If a School and Community Partnership aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, then it will involve those who can and are able to support students and the school in improving outcomes. Schools understand the sense of community as that group of people, be they parents, carers and/or members of the extended family who have an interest in the education of their youngsters.

Parents are the first and foremost teachers in a child's life and have an ongoing direct influence on outcomes. As such they are integral to a partnership. An agreement might be established through a formal group who represent parents and the broader community.

Each particular community has its own dynamic. By engaging with and exploring that dynamic, schools can begin to identify ways of working which will suit both the school and community.

Mount Lockyer School Community Partnership Agreement

It's all our business – When we work together, our kids do better

Noongar Culture

We want

- Noongar children to be proud of their identity and culture
- Teachers to know about Noongar culture (past and present)
- All children to learn about Noongar culture (past and present)
- Community members to be consulted about Noongar culture

Families will:

- Help school staff learn more about local Noongar culture (past and present), history, language, land and families
- Participate in the process to develop and deliver an appropriate Aboriginal Studies curriculum
- Advise the school on how to strengthen children's sense of identity and culture

School staff will:

- Learn about the local Noongar culture (past and present), history, language, land and families
- Develop an appropriate Aboriginal Studies curriculum (including specific local information)
- Communicate with families to learn more about individual children's cultural heritage

Connecting families and teachers

We want:

- Families and teachers to get to know each other, have a strong relationship and communicate regularly
- More Noongar men involved in school

Families will:

- Share family knowledge with the school
- Host and attend community meetings once a term
- Meet with school staff regularly
- Promote positive relationships and communication with the school within the community
- Work with local agencies and organisations
- Use a mediation/ advocacy process when communication difficulties arise

School staff will:

- Learn about the family relationships and related cultural protocols
- Welcome and involve families
- Meet with families regularly
- Use school representatives to visit families in the community
- Work with local agencies and organisations
- Establish and use a mediation/ advocacy process when communication difficulties arise

Learning and Achievement

We want

- All Noongar children to achieve their best
- Families to know more about the learning and teaching programs
- Communication and feedback from teachers to families about children's progress

Families will:

- Attend family nights and meetings to discuss children's progress
- Participate in opportunities to learn more about how the school works
- Share information about children's interests and skills with the school
- Be involved in school planning
- Volunteer to help around the school

School staff will:

- Host regular opportunities for families and teachers to meet and talk about children and the learning program
- Provide opportunities for families to learn more about school programs and school learning
- Learn more about the way Noongar children learn best
- Communicate with family members in the planning, delivery and evaluation of programs

Behaviour

We want:

- The school and community to work together to solve problems
- Everyone to be committed to help Noongar kids stay out of trouble
- To understand the reasons behind the bad behaviour

Families will:

- Respect the right of all children to be safe at school and get an education
- Inform the school of any family issues that may affect children at school
- Attend the school when requested

School staff will:

- Ensure supervision is adequate
- Make a plan of strategies to address bullying
- Involve families to solve problems
- Clearly explain the school behaviour management process to children and families

The Mount Lockyer School Community (the Noongar families and the staff at the school) agree to work together so that Noongar children at our school achieve their best.

Attendance and Participation

We want:

- All Noongar children at school
- Noongar children to feel supported, safe and comfortable at school
- Noongar children to be highly motivated and engaged in all school activities

Families will:

- Support their children to come to school every day
- Work with the Elders' Circle Attendance Plus when attendance is poor
- Communicate with the school if there are cultural or family reasons for being away

School staff will:

- Use attendance data to identify children and families needing extra support
- Work with Elders' Circle Attendance Plus when attendance is poor



Community Partnership Action Plan, Semester 2

The following extract is from a SCP meeting at Mount Lockyer attended by the Principal, teachers and community members (total 11 people). It illustrates the link between the SCP goals and parent/community consultations along with planning and accountability for the identified actions.

Record of general discussions:

1. Deadly Tucker cooking sessions. Continue, as these have been very successful.
2. Visitors Book. This information is collected by the GP network and sent to Canberra.
3. NAIDOC Week. Highly successful with extensive class participation in all activities.
4. Elders Circle. Improved attendance figures when compared with last year. 2009: 81%, 2010: 85.9%.
5. University link. Would like report on partnership and other matters.
6. Other comments. Great place to work. Good support.

Attendance

School and Community Partnership Agreement Goal:

Attendance and participation 'Maintain connecting families and teachers, which will help improve attendance'.

Departmental slogan: Better attendance, brighter future.

We want (from the SCP):

- All Noongar children to be at school.
- Noongar children to feel supported, safe and comfortable at school.
- Noongar children to be highly motivated and engaged in all school activities.

Actions

- Action 1: Movie night. Show 'Bran New Dae' in library in conjunction with disco night. 12 August. D and S to send out flyers and put in newsletter.
- Action 2: Early close, show 'Black magic' and 'Yilgarrin Dreaming'. Date in Term 3. M to organise.
- Action 3: Teachers/students invite families to class to join an activity. Term 3/4. D to discuss with teachers and organise transport.
- Action 4: Invite people to come and tell their stories to staff. Focus on younger parents. By end Term 3. J & L to organise. M & D to arrange staff meeting time.
- Action 5: Revamp staff bulletin. Make it broader and include the whole term. Teachers can add planned activities so other staff can see what is happening and help out or plan around this. Week 3, term 3. S, E & C to organise.
- Action 6: Swimming lessons. Let parents know they can travel on the bus if they want to see their children in swimming lessons. Term 3, weeks 1-3. S to organise.
- Action 7: C4C Deadly Tucker. Cooking lessons to continue. Terms 3 & 4. C to coordinate.
- Action 8: C4C Indigenous parenting. Target young mums, two or three at a time. Organise transport and resources. Terms 3 & 4. C to coordinate.

Pre-conditions for sustainability

The project highlighted some key factors during the initial establishment of a School and Community Partnership that contribute to it being sustained.

For a School and Community Partnership to be sustainable all parties need to be at a state of readiness. One What Works consultant describes the state of readiness as the positioning of the principal, the positioning of the staff and the positioning of the parents in relation to what the partnership should look like. A SCP will involve change to the way things have been done in the past. All parties need to be aware of what changes will be involved and be ready to give a commitment to them. This requires a willingness to reflect on current practices and preparedness to change how things might be done for the benefit of students. Without this state of readiness a partnership has potential to fail before it becomes embedded.

The characteristics of readiness, or the pre-conditions essential for future sustainability, are:

- authentic two-way dialogue and conversations supported through well designed processes;
- positive engagement and relationships among school, principals, parents, community, teachers and students;

Pre-conditions

The first two pre-conditions incorporate the 'how' of getting to an agreement and are important to developing a state of readiness in school and community to create a successful partnership.

The latter are the 'what' of a SCP, they establish the directions and guidance for a school and its community about purpose, what will happen and who will be responsible.

Combined, the four characteristics establish a framework that needs to be constantly revisited and applied through all stages of a SCP.

- a clear and agreed strategic purpose based on high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes;
- clear statements of roles and responsibilities.

Strategic purpose

The purpose of a SCP is to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

We know that principals, teachers, education workers, parents and carers can have a significant influence on student learning outcomes. It makes sense therefore that a school working in partnership with families and community can produce combined effects on student learning that are greater than the sum of individual separate effects.

SCPs can generate other valuable benefits for schools, parents and community. Examples include establishment of positive relationships and developing a sense of welcoming and belonging in the school. While these other benefits are acknowledged, the primary purpose of SCPs is to improve student outcomes and this needs to be acknowledged through the wording of a SCP.

Keeping this primary purpose as a high priority will ultimately influence how sustainable a SCP is. An agreed common purpose brings people together and ensures everyone is 'on the same page' in regard to learning, behaviour, respect and treatment of others.

High expectations

To be sustainable, a SCP should engender high expectations for students. Experience of the What Works consultants indicates that sustainable SCPs convey a collective commitment to high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These expectations form the basis for actions. Such a commitment can be seen, for example, through preamble statements and/or goals for student outcomes.

While there is a concern expressed in some quarters that ‘high expectations’ has become overused and lacks real meaning, the characteristics of these high expectations are observable in the SCPs.

In addition, expectations need to be acted on. It is not enough to state, ‘we have high expectations’, it is important they are translated into observable actions and the school culture. One way this is achieved is by describing expectations in terms of the roles and responsibilities for parties to a SCP.

Roles and responsibilities of parties to a SCP

Effective SCPs recognise that responsibility for making improvements in educational outcomes must be shared. They acknowledge the two-way nature of the relationship and contain high expectations for responsibilities in terms of the actions that each party will take. In some SCPs they are listed as part of responsibilities, in others they are described in terms of ‘what we want’ or ‘what we expect’ statements for the school, community, parents/ carers and students. SCPs also spell out ‘what we will do.’

Two-way conversations

‘You can’t have a partnership without a relationship, and you can’t have a relationship without a conversation. You’ve got to have the conversation.’

Establishing clarity around roles and responsibilities requires conversations. The What Works SCP process incorporates time for community to have conversations and build relationships. During the process the aim is to find the solutions within the group. Community people need to feel affirmed that their views on education of and for their children are valued. School personnel need to feel that their contributions are valued and what they were already doing in the school is recognised by the parents.

These What Works processes are designed to support communities and schools in developing a SCP while understanding the need for customisation and different emphases to meet the requirements of local contexts. The What Works focus on the theme of creating conversations, developing relationships and forming partnerships is paramount for sustainability.

Development of School and Community Partnerships, using the What Works model enables the employment of a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who is supported to continue the work of the consultant

between formal meetings. This has proven to have a positive effect on sustainability. As a community member the valuable role they perform in supporting school and community continues beyond establishment into maintaining a high profile for the SCP.

Relationships

‘Engage families and communities from the start, keep them informed and let them participate from the beginning – not the end.’

It was evident throughout the school visits that where schools were serious about engaging parents and community members, they were working hard to develop relationships based on trust, mutual respect and inclusiveness. Principals in these schools noted that the process took time, and they constantly had to think about and make changes to the way they did things. At no point did the school and community tick off relationship building. They noted that for partnerships to be sustainable, both parties need to continually nurture the relationships. It was very clear that successful schools had the education of their students as a central focus. This meant that conversations which took place gave parents and community members opportunity to talk about their aspirations for their children and their expectations of the school.

Key relationships are those between school and community, teacher and parent, and teacher and student.

School and community

Developing contexts in which people listen to, and understand, each other is the basis for a shared commitment to the education of the students, both as a group and individually. The process of engaging people to make them feel respected, wanted and valued as part of the education process, is a key to sustaining partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The ability to provide multiple and diverse opportunities for the community and each family’s participation is important as is getting to know the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and recognising and valuing their cultures. Formal and informal opportunities for participation are observed in the schools.

As one principal noted ‘It became really evident that the kids that were succeeding, the Aboriginal kids that were doing quite well, their family, not necessarily their parent, but family were involved in some way, shape or form in the school.’

A community member notes ‘For this to be successful we need to be real partners with shared contributions.’

Teacher and parent

Two people who have the same interest in the child, working together have a greater effect than working alone.

The foundation for good parent teacher relationships is frequent and open communication, mutual respect and a clear understanding of what is best for each student.

Feeling connected and confident is most likely to happen when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents know and feel comfortable talking to the people at the school. One simple way to do this is by just having a conversation whenever there is the opportunity to do so. Formal interactions between teachers and parents, for example, sharing of data about how students are progressing, are also evident at the schools.

La Grange

Various events, like assemblies and special days are held to encourage parents and community members into the school. This year staff have been encouraged to get parents back into classrooms to see what is going on. Rather than provide tea and coffee in the staffroom, teachers are encouraged to invite parents into individual classrooms on every possible occasion and morning tea for these events is provided in classrooms.

The school continues to send newsletters to the community and these outline what is going on at the school. There are also display cabinets around the school, store and the community office which display student work.

School and community work together to run a number of programs for the students. Secondary student participation in weekend football depends on their attendance and behavior at school, this has resulted in increased attendance and a decrease in behavioural issues. The school also runs an Auskick program for the community at the school. After school music and basketball programs are run through the community with teacher support. School resources are used by the community to run school holiday programs and the school staff work fairly closely with the rangers to run programs for children on weekends and holidays. Teachers also participate in these programs and they are seen as good cross cultural learning.

Teacher and student

The relationships that characterise effective and sustainable school community partnerships are applicable to teacher and students. From What Works experience, the starting point is recognising some fundamentals about students:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be given respect;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ cultures and the relevant implications of those cultures must be respected;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be taught well; and
- Teachers have a core belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to learn to high standards.

Such an approach might be described as culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching assumes that learning will be promoted when the concepts and skills taught are placed within a frame of reference that is meaningful to the student.

What Works experience identifies proven strategies including ‘making regular use of the culture, life experiences and knowledge of students to make connections with other curricular content’ and ‘using teaching materials that deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in an accurate and relevant way as a conventional part of the content of the curriculum’ (NCS, 2010)

Other What Works research findings indicate that norms of positive relationships appear to be a critical factor contributing to improved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes. This is supported by an ACER (2011) longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ literacy and numeracy learning that revealed student ratings of school climate (e.g. the learning environment and teacher student relations) were significantly related to literacy and numeracy achievement.

Capacity Building

Effective and sustainable School and Community Partnerships require capacity building of all parties. Schools need to ensure that their staff are given the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, learning about family and community dynamics and improving communication between school and home. Likewise, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families/

community members need to be given information on the way schools operate and in some way the mystique of schools needs to be unravelled for them.

External consultants

The significant value of using an external What Works consultant in the SCP process was highlighted by schools involved in this project. In some contexts, agreements are commenced because of community dissatisfaction and broken trust with the school. In such situations the What Works consultant provided an independent voice that was respected by the school and the community.

The external consultants assisted the process by creating an environment where the community and staff could feel that challenging existing practice and suggesting new ways of doing business was okay.

The value of an external consultant was highlighted as a factor important to all stages of developing, implementing and sustaining a SCP.

Ngalangangpum

Ngalangangpum School is a 'two-way' school which has historically encouraged involvement of families and community members in teaching of traditional culture, language and beliefs. However in the recent past, this practice had lapsed or become ad hoc.

Through the School Community Partnership Agreement, the teaching of Kija language has been revitalised and included on a regular basis, along with prayer in language, as significant parts of the school's curriculum and practice.

Elders and families attend the school on a regular basis and are increasingly involved in all areas within the school, from the front office to supporting teaching in classrooms. Informal visits to the school also occur with community members dropping in to the school. This has been encouraged by the school making identified resources available for community members to use if support is needed for 'community business.'

As well as providing assistance to help the community, the Principal and staff use the opportunity whilst visitors are 'a captive audience' at the school to keep them up to date on what is happening, share news and/or follow up on matters related to their children or family members.

Drouin

The School and Community Partnership at Drouin is active, however from time to time issues within the community or the school can impact the effectiveness of the partnership. Parties recognise it is vital that relationships between staff and parents are strong and that they can work closely to deal with particular issues. This partnership focuses strongly on the student with the clear aim to improve outcomes for each Koorie student in the school.

The Action Plan

The action plan developed from the discussion made it clear that all parties had an important role to play and in analysing what part staff and community could be involved in. 'We were able to establish responsibilities and actions to ensure the best outcomes for our Koorie students.'

Discussions occurred regularly between the school council and whole parent community ensuring everyone was aware of what was going on in the process.

Parent-Teacher Relationships

As a result of the SCPA there is 100% attendance at parent teacher interviews. This was achieved by having a conversation with each parent to determine suitable times to meet and altering the school program to suit the needs of the community. The Koorie education worker was instrumental in ensuring that parents were present. This also provided opportunities for the development of personalised learning plans which then identified responsibilities for teacher, students and parents.

Capacity Building

'As a result of the partnership we were all working collaboratively but needed to build capacity of both staff and community so we held TAFE courses to build literacy – which in turn lead to the employment of one of the participants as an aide in the classroom, another participant was employed by the school to teach dance across the school. Community were also involved in sessions run after school for students to support homework.'

'Community people worked closely with staff to plan units of work, with a Koorie perspective. The communication between staff and parents has led to staff being more focussed on understanding the needs of Koorie students.'

External Facilitator

'The What Works consultant brought parties together through the discussion. She encouraged and supported non judgemental comments. The beauty of this program is it focussed on moving forward. Discussions were healthy and encouraged open and honest communication and a preparedness of all parties to listen to, value and respect individual needs.'

La Grange – a case study

What has contributed to a sustainable School and Community Partnership at La Grange?

In 2009, La Grange Remote Community School worked with the Bidyadanga community and the What Works consultant to develop a School and Community Partnership, in which they agreed to work with the community towards improving outcomes for all students at the school. The partnership agreement was signed off, but what makes it work?

Over the past two years a What Works consultant has spent time in the school and community talking about what has changed in the school in relation to practice, and how the school has been able to work with the community to engage them in a more meaningful way. There are a number of ways this works.

The principal has been at the school for ten years, she began as a teacher and then took on the role as deputy principal before becoming the principal in 2011. Having lived and worked in this community for many years, she knows the importance of building good relationships with parents and caregivers and is constantly supporting teachers to find ways to do this too.

All staff in the school see building relationships with community as a vital part of their role as teachers working in a remote community school. They are all committed to constantly finding ways to nurture rapport with their students and also strengthen relationships out in the community.

There is a very strong team of Aboriginal staff employed at the school who are all well connected to the community. Their role within the school is valued by all and they provide a connection between the school and community.

The principal and her two deputies work very closely with the staff employed from the community to make connections. The Attendance Officer, the AIEO and others provide a vital link and support within the community. The principal is kept up to date with happenings in the community through regular discussions with

all of the AIEOs. She works closely with all of them to ensure that what is going on in the school is reflective of the needs and direction within the community.

Embedding SCP actions in school plans

At La Grange RCS, actions within the School and Community Partnership have now become linked to and embedded in the school development plan. This has meant more accountability for the actions outlined in the partnership agreement. Prior to this, the partnership was a document which had no formal accountability framework around it.

Ways of connecting with community

The connection between teachers and parents/families has now become embedded in the school's strategic plan. The leadership has included this in the review plans so that there is some accountability around teachers and families working together to improve results.

Examples of connections include:

- Walking school bus – rather than this being seen as an attendance strategy alone, it has become an opportunity for all staff to get out into the community. This is now included as a part of yard duty and teachers are rostered onto this task. This happens in the morning before school and the teacher responsible walks around the community picking up students and having conversations with families as they go.
- Shop visits – this is done by early childhood teachers and occurs on a regular basis. Teachers and AIEOs visit the community store in the morning and take samples of student work with them. This gives teachers the opportunity to talk with families about the learning that is happening in their classrooms.
- Positive Home Visits – all staff are responsible for visiting parents and sharing positive news and/or work about their child. These visits are recorded on a Home Visit Register.

- Parent Volunteer Strategy – parents are encouraged to take an active part in the school.
- Assemblies/special days – these activities bring a lot of families to the school. At every opportunity, teachers are encouraged to have parents into their classrooms, so rather than having a big morning tea, teachers and students host their parents in classrooms. As well as getting parents in to look at what is happening in the classroom, this also provides opportunities for teachers and parents to talk together. These are always positive interactions.

Strengthening relationships with the community

The principal and staff are involved in working with the community outside of school. One of the ways that this is done is by staff becoming engaged with the Indigenous Karajarri Ranger program in the community. This program works

to get the students involved in caring for the environment in a cultural way. Programs are run on weekends and school holidays, teachers are encouraged to participate as well. This gives them an opportunity to be involved with community in a more informal way.

The school is involved with a number of programs within the community. When building programs happen within the community, the opportunity is taken by the school for secondary students to be involved. In the past, this has led to work placements and apprenticeships. The community supports this and plays a key role in working with the school and the outside agency to build working relationships.

Staff are encouraged to participate in sport programs like football and basketball programs which are community run. There is an understanding within the community that student involvement in these activities depends on their attendance at school – this is a community direction which the school fully supports.



Key factors in the sustainability of School Community Partnerships

‘Making a School and Community Partnership is just the beginning. There needs to be a plan for action which is shared, that says who is responsible for what and when things are to happen by. (NCS 2010)’

Although the pre-conditions establish a basis for School and Community Partnership Agreement sustainability, by themselves they are not enough. Sustainability relies on a variety of factors at the school, community and system levels. Some key factors are planning, leadership, accountability, capacity building, induction and succession planning.

Planning

The responsibilities described in a SCP specify certain actions agreed to by various parties. A SCP should be accompanied by an implementation or action plan to make sure what is described actually happens. A specific SCP action plan needs to be drawn up, implemented and monitored. It also needs to have a strong link or alignment with any whole school improvement or strategic plan. A good plan has a number of parts (NCS 2010):

- objectives or goals which say what you want to achieve;
- targets which will say in more detail what and by when you want to achieve;
- performance indicators, things you can measure, which will tell you how things are going;
- strategies which will help you reach your goals and targets; and
- responsibilities, which say who is going to do what.

The schools frequently referred to the guidance provided through What Works consultants and materials. The publication *What Works. The Workbook* is highlighted as a very useful tool to help develop an implementation plan.

A key factor influencing sustainability therefore is the extent of planning for implementation. Sustaining the SCP also requires constant focus on jointly maintaining the SCP as a high priority among school and community. Leadership is critical to this.

Leadership

It was evident that leadership at the school, community and regional or system levels is very important to sustaining a SCP. The school visits clearly demonstrate that when effective leadership exists, the potential for sustainability is enhanced and, when it does not, SCPs falter.

Mount Lockyer

All meetings in the school include the Principal and where ever possible, Elders from the Mount Lockyer Community. The school regularly works with the Elders Circle through an Attendance Plus initiative, family trees, cultural advice, presentations and general support to the school as required.

Principal Leadership

School leadership, especially leadership performed by the principal, plays a critical role in all stages of a partnership – establishing, embedding and sustaining it. Information gathered from the school visits shows that the importance of this role cannot be overstated. The principal’s position enables them to observe and understand what is happening with parents and in the broader community. The principal also understands how the whole school is organised and how it might respond positively to the community. As a result they are in a privileged position to observe and act.

A range of principals' actions that appear to be consistent across contexts were identified from the visits. These fall into some broad categories:

- Principals consistently communicate a clear vision based on high expectations for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They articulate how the school will achieve that vision through working in partnership with community, parents and staff.
- Principals demonstrate a profound understanding of the school's relationship with parents, families and community. They are seen in the community and connect with community leadership to develop their understanding. They appreciate the implications this context has for the school and student outcomes.
- Principals organise their schools in ways that respond positively to their parents, families and community.
- Principals support and build the capacity of school staff and the community to achieve effective agreements.

Communicate a clear vision

It is clear that SCPs are sustained when principals' actions convey a clear and important vision for the agreement. The vision and actions are clearly informed by some strongly held core beliefs:

- the learning capacity of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – that all their students are able to learn to high standards.
- the importance of family and community in being able to support and influence their children's school education.
- valuing the importance of incorporating student cultural identity in school operations, in particular in the teaching and learning process. Principals recognise that such an approach promotes students' positive self-identity and connection to schooling.

These beliefs provide the principal with an instinctive strategic perspective for pursuing a vision of improved outcomes through a SCP. Principals understand that an authentic relationship with parents and community is something the school can act on and, by doing so, can influence key factors that support and engage students. As a result, these strongly held beliefs enable them to think and act strategically.

For these reasons principals see the intrinsic value of a partnership designed to improve outcomes, not just because it is something to be ticked off.

Principals work with parents, community and staff to develop a shared vision in a SCP.

Understanding of the school's relationship with parents, families and community

Connect with community

Principals in schools with sustainable SCPs demonstrate a profound understanding of the school's relationship with parents, families and community. They make connections with parents and the community and its leaders. They:

- are seen in the community;
- listen to parent and community wants for their children;
- consistently hold conversations with the community and are not prepared to simply accept that things are going well;
- constantly check for understanding and agreement about school directions and actions; and
- lead and encourage staff to make connections.

These principals show deep commitment to resolving issues, step back when appropriate, acknowledge people for their efforts and provide progress updates to community and families.

Principals commented that the What Works external consultant and the What Works support materials were invaluable during the establishment phase of a SCP.

Fraser Park

Community say 'our principal is caring compassionate and tough; she sets the example for others to follow – she attends community events and celebrations including funerals and is welcomed because of her respect and connection – she is flexible and forgiving.'

The principal treats informal connections with importance. She makes home visits. The principal and Elders and Grannies have established a shared knowing and respect where all parties listen to hear ideas.

The appointment of an Elder as a Student Support Officer facilitates connected leadership as does the mentoring of a parent to become a Student Support Officer and a Family Partnership Driver.

While the principal primarily drives the agenda, a new Well Being Coordinator, the ACEO and two Aboriginal Student Support Officers are beginning to take leadership. The ideal will be for these Aboriginal Community Leaders to drive the Family Partnerships in the school and invite school leadership to activities they have planned and facilitated.

Connect with community leadership

Principals view the School and Community Partnership as being about connecting leadership – leadership within the school and leadership within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Principals see it as vital that leaders are identified within the community and the school, and that they work together to support the process of conversations, building relationships and forming partnerships.

Principals seek out such a leader to act as a mentor and guide, recognising the critical role of community leaders. They use staff such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and Participation and Community Engagement (PACE) workers in appropriate ways to establish connections.

Help build community capacity

A significant part of connecting with community is supporting community leadership capacity building activities. These actions help community members become more confident in the roles described in SCPs.

Organising the school to respond positively to community

In essence, principals make it happen within the school. They design and implement processes to support and nurture the partnership and allocate sufficient resources of time, money and staff to ensure its success. This support is provided to community, parents and staff.

Community and parents

Principals support and welcome families into the school and try to build parents' confidence to be involved.

They ensure the SCP has a prominent profile around the school and it informs what actually happens across the school. They put in place processes and meetings that provide ways for continual review and renewal of the SCP.

Mapoon

The Head of Campus (HoC) is a Wik woman. She is highly respected across the Cape. The teacher aides are from Mapoon. The HoC works well with them, and they are actively involved in the community. The What Works consultant led the consultation around the development of the SCP, supported by the HoC. The HoC demonstrated high level communication skills with the community. As a member of the senior team of the Western Cape College she brings to the community a high level of understanding of college operations.

Staff

Principals engage and support staff in establishing, implementing and maintaining the SCP. They do this by:

- articulating why a SCP is important. The theory of action they convey to staff is 'if we establish a SCP and gain support of community and families then we can positively influence our students' engagement and outcomes.' They involve staff in all the conversations;
- designing the ways and means for the school to establish and implement a SCP;
- articulating the responsibilities for school staff that will appear in a SCP, particularly what it means for teaching practice. Principals establish role clarity for teachers and other staff, including AEIO staff about what a SCP might mean for their specific duties;
- designing processes to support staff to fulfil their responsibilities. They provide support to teachers, to build their understanding of community, culture, implications and culturally responsive teaching;
- aligning or incorporating the SCP into school strategic and/or improvement plans; and
- maintaining a high profile through symbolic actions such as displaying it, acting on it.

Leaders consistently modelled the roles and responsibilities they wanted to see in the school as a result of the SCP.

Accountability

The processes designed to support staff and others also form a basis for accountability systems to ensure that responsibilities described in a SCP are acted on. As a result, the evidence points to accountability at various levels as being an essential factor in the sustainability equation. Principals have an important role to play in sustaining a partnership by working at three particular levels of accountability:

1. Accountability to community
2. Internal school accountability
3. Regional and system level accountability.

Accountability to community

In the very first instance, accountability to community is essential for sustainability. A school and community can design processes to regularly monitor how well these roles and responsibilities are being performed.

A good accountability basis for sustainability has been established if there is a well documented action plan that contains clear roles, is regularly monitored, reviewed and

refined. Processes for monitoring progress observed at the schools include regular meetings to discuss how the SCP is going, reports to the community and families about progress and change, and a regular agenda item at school council/board meetings.

Internal accountability

A principal can clearly influence what happens within the school in relation to the SCP. The same processes that provide guidance and support to teachers can also form the basis of a school's internal accountability system.

Such a system focuses on delivering on the school's responsibilities and roles as described in a SCP.

Internal accountability starts with the SCP being complemented by more detailed plans, for example, school strategic plans, improvement plans and operational plans that flesh out the expectations, roles and responsibilities of the SCP.

Alignment between the SCP and other school plans is important to ensure SCP goals are reflected in whole school goals, targets and strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes.

Other internal accountability mechanisms include:

- curriculum planning – how elements of the SCP, e.g, approaches to teaching, are incorporated into planning work programs and curriculum units;
- performance review and professional development plans for principals, teachers and other staff; and
- regular formalised reporting on SCP progress and performance.

Strong internal accountability mechanisms are essential to maintaining and sustaining a SCP. In some of the school revisits it was observed that even when external system or regional level accountability and support are weak, a school could sustain the SCP through its own support and internal accountability. The perception of schools, community and the What Works consultants was that stronger external support will assist even more.

In some instances the What Works consultant revisits have acted as an external accountability trigger, resulting in school and community revisiting and reviewing the SCP. This sort of impetus might be the role performed by the region or system.

Building capacity

Mount Lockyer

The school supports the SCP Committee in developing meeting agendas and documents, processes and procedures for planning the way forward. The SCP Committee has been able to identify members from the community who have expertise or interest in a particular area to lead specific strategies or programs.

La Grange

The leadership team and the AIEOs participate in the Stronger Smarter training to build leadership skills. Community leadership is made up of the AIEOs, of which two are significant leaders, one male and one female, who lead the interaction between home and school. The school also invests a considerable amount of its funds towards building the capacity of its Aboriginal staff.

The two significant community members guide the principal in how she and the staff communicate with parents. They also provide advice on issues within the community and act as a barometer of community perceptions about the school. Due to the cultural sensitivities at times it is necessary to meet individually with men and women to discuss issues. One of these staff members meets with the women and one with the men. Staff and AIEOs form teaching teams. AIEOs help to develop positive relationships between home and school and support staff in home visits.

Community leadership is developed via the Bidyadanga Council. The school invests significant funds in the training and mentoring of its Aboriginal staff and are developing all AIEOs toward leadership.

Fraser Park

At least two SCP Family Meetings are held each term. Parents have been engaged in education programs to facilitate their learning, providing workshop presentations to local and statewide forums, and in decision making regarding school resourcing of a designated Learning and Meeting Space for Parents. A SCP Forum has links with the Governing Council. School and Community have examined the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014 to ensure the SCP and Site Action Plan goals and targets align. SCP action is monitored, with an expectation that teachers will provide evidence of their SCP aligned actions during discussions of Personal Management Plans when meeting with the principal.

Induction and succession planning processes

A characteristic of the schools, particularly those in remote communities, is the often transient nature of teaching staff. This characteristic is a key stress point for the sustainability of a SCP. Having support and accountability processes in place, as described, does assist with providing guidance to newly appointed teachers. However it is clear that induction and succession planning is required to maintain the profile of the SCP in schools with frequent teacher and principal changes.

The schools have effective induction processes that ensure new staff are aware of the SCP and the implications it has for their teaching and relationships. Teachers are provided with programs designed to build their understanding of cultural and historical appreciation of community and an understanding of the English as an Additional Language linguistic and social conventions that students bring to school.

Other schools have a staff induction process that comprehensively provides new staff with a cultural and historical appreciation of the community and the SCP. The program is delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of staff. It includes real stories and personal family histories that provide details about the community to assist new staff members to understand the context in which they are working.

Schools that embed some sort of succession planning for new principal appointments that incorporate the SCPA potentially have more sustainable partnerships.

Accountability

At Fraser Park the SCP is recognised as one of three priorities in the School Site Overview Improvement Plan. The priority is titled Community Partnerships Initiative. Actions described in the improvement plan include:

- working with the ‘What Works Team’,
- forums for Aboriginal Parent Voice,
- partnerships with Aboriginal Parents,
- a Plan for action,
- formal SCP reviews, and
- training for staff.

Milestones used to measure progress include 100% of Aboriginal parents involved and two Aboriginal parents on Governing Council. Resources devoted to the priority include supporting community participation, a community partnerships budget and use of What Works materials. The principal and the Aboriginal Community Education Officer jointly lead the priority.

Mount Lockyer has been very proactive in reviewing its Operational Plans, particularly the content and governance of the SCP. This has brought significant change through greater community engagement in school processes and decision making. This year the school has attempted to develop the skills of the community group to self govern the SCP. The group plans meeting agendas and schedules, and has a designated Chair and Secretary. As a result the community is proactive in running meetings and dealing with relevant issues. The approach is building positive relationships with the community; fostering trust, empowerment and respect for Aboriginal culture and identity through ownership of SCP meetings.

Implementation of the SCPA at La Grange is embedded in the school development plan. It is also a part of the teacher review process, with developing relationships with community a mandatory requirement for teachers. The school now has greater influence over staff recruitment and involves community members in selection processes. A condition of employment for teachers is developing relationships with parents/caregivers and agreeing to school strategies to achieve this.

At Drouin, the beginning of each year includes a session working through the staff handbook. Attention is drawn to the partnership agreement – responsibilities of staff are revised, clarified where required, and units of work are developed with a Koorie perspective.

Western Cape College – a case study

The Mapoon Partnership

Establishment of the School and Community Partnership at Mapoon illustrates how a SCP can drive the way a school works with its community to improve student outcomes. It also illustrates the pre-conditions and factors that make a partnership sustainable.

A What Works consultant worked with the Head of Campus to lead and support the agreement process.

The partnership preamble extract contains a clear aim to improve ‘cradle to employment’ outcomes for students. It identifies who the agreement is between, acknowledges community and culture, and makes a commitment to consultation with and participation by community. It melds local themes for action with clearly measurable ‘closing the gap’ targets. As such, it establishes some pre-conditions for success and sustainability.

The Agreement

“This Agreement is in partnership with the Western Cape College and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers, children and community members of Mapoon. The implementation of this Agreement includes an annual Action Plan and will be guided by the following overarching aims, principles and themes.

AIMS

- Work collaboratively to improve cradle to employment outcomes for Mapoon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Provide a shared foundation and understanding to drive education, training and higher education outcomes for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Mapoon;
- Strengthen relationships, by changing the way that the College does its business and by enabling parents, families, and communities to provide strategic direction on College initiatives;
- Establish the trust and respect of, and work in a transparent manner with Mapoon community by formalising productive and sustainable partnerships.

PRINCIPLES

- Acknowledge Mapoon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and their connection to country and their strong family and cultural connections within the Western Cape region;
- Consult with Mapoon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and ensure their participation in the implementation, monitoring and sustainability of the Community Partnership Agreement and the Annual Action Plan.

THEMES

Key messages and concerns are captured and identified by the community at a variety of community forums. These themes align with the Council of Australian Governments

Closing the Gap targets. In the 2010 forums the areas identified were:

- Ensure a strong relationship between our Indigenous parents and Community members and the College;
- Attendance is maintained at not less than 90%;
- All Mapoon students complete Year 12 and move into work, training or higher education;
- Parents are engaged in the governance and operation of the College;
- The College supports the community in the promotion and implementation of Mapoon’s historical and cultural values;
- A joint College and Community Education and Training Partnership Committee will oversee the relationship and develop an annual Action Plan;
- Ensure Closing the Gap targets are met.”

COMMITMENTS

We the undersigned members of Mapoon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the Western Cape College agree to establish formal processes to ensure the best educational outcomes for our students

Western Cape College commits –

- to develop with the community an annual Action Plan to address identified needs;
- to participate on the Education and Training Partnership Committee;
- to implement and meet objectives outlined in the annual Action Plan;
- to report progress regularly against the Action Plan;
- to appoint an officer to support and coordinate the quarterly meetings;
- to report quarterly on student outcomes;
- to transparently commit Western Cape College resources;
- that each College Accountable officer has the implementation of CPA Action Plan written into their role descriptions;
- to work with key non-Government organisations and Government organisations to ensure that all resources available are deployed to address the annual Action Plan.

Mapoon Community commits to –

- maintain an education and training partnership committee;
- meet regularly at least once a term;
- collaborate with the College in the development of the annual Action Plan and its implementation;
- help meet & monitor objectives outlined in the Annual Action Plan
- commit community resources where appropriate to support the implementation of the annual Action Plan;
- support the implementation of Mapoon’s historical and cultural values;
- support the college to achieve 90% attendance.

Community Partnership Agreement process – Mapoon and Napranum

The graphic below illustrates the community and college consultation process the What Works consultant and the Head of Campus used to lead the agreement's development.

The process begins with activities designed to establish a state of readiness through community consultation. It then moves through the phases of developing the agreement, implementation and ongoing monitoring, reporting and evaluating of it.

Each agreed theme in the SCP forms a strategy which is complemented by an action plan. Each plan describes actions, who is responsible for them, a time frame and resources required for implementation.

The process and outcomes illustrate the importance of leadership, planning, accountability and the use of external support as factors critical to sustainability.

Community Consultative Phase Mapoon and Napranum

By – end of term 2 and early term 3 2010

- Networking with key community agencies;
- Attend 2 Aboriginal Shire Council meeting and discuss CPA process and aims;
- Hold 2/3 community forums to identify key themes & areas of concern;
- Capture feedback to community using Key Issues Table of concerns from forums;
- Identify key community members to become members of the CPA (Mapoon & Napranum).

Campus Consultative Phase Mapoon and Weipa Campus

By – mid term 3

- Present Community Key Issues Table to Head of Campus;
- Identify key staff members from each campus who will become members of the CPA;
- Hold staff forums to identify key issues & themes from a campus perspective.

Joint Partnership Development Campus and Community Mapoon and Napranum

By – end term 3 for Mapoon, end term 4 for Napranum

- Joint forums will be held to determine the key objectives, vision, structure of CPA, formalise key concerns and targets;
- Look at branding – name, logo etc;
- Negotiate Official Launch dates and processes
- Invites, location, master of ceremonies

Partnership Implementation Phase

Mapoon will begin implementation of CPA during term 4 Napranum may begin implementation early 2011

- Working groups will be established to role out, achieve key objectives;
- Determine how performance indicators/targets will be met;
- A meeting schedule will be developed
- Key roles will be identified (Chair & Secretary)

Monitor, Reporting & Evaluate Phase End 2010 – end 2011

Continual after Implementation Phase

- Develop a monitoring tool
- Set key dates for reporting back to community during community forums on progress;
- End of 2011 evaluate success, achievements and areas for improvement.

The Mapoon Campus 2013 Attendance Improvement Strategy

The attendance strategy was developed in conjunction with the Mapoon parents, families and the Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council. It illustrates the process for community consultation on student attendance and the resultant action plan designed to address one of the key themes identified in the agreement.

The strategy includes:

- goals;
- a description of the Mapoon context relevant to attendance, as developed by parents and community;
- keys to improved attendance;
- ‘traffic lights’ to monitor attendance rates;
- a flowchart depicting the process for managing absences;
- a statement of a culture of high expectations and shared responsibility; and
- a description of expected roles for students, school, parents, teachers, community and the WCC leadership.

Goals

The SCP goal is to lift student attendance to 90% consistently. Development of the attendance strategy identified two additional complementary ‘goals’:

- To build a stronger understanding in our school community that good attendance increases life choices and results in higher achievement; and
- To build a strong culture of shared responsibility for student attendance between students, parents/caregivers, teachers and the administration team.

The Head of Campus chose to use the Engoori process from the Stronger Smarter philosophy to draw out community strengths and challenges.

Context

Consultation for the strategy involved the school and community identifying critical issues which affect school attendance. These were:

WHO ARE WE?

- close community – one big family
- strong community – overcoming injustices
- proactive, responsive
- doors open to everyone

- community supportive, proud of children
- respect one another
- priority for education
- culturally motivated

BEHAVIOURS WE NEED TO CHALLENGE

- parents feeling shame re. clothes, food
- community influences – partying, alcohol, drugs, Thursday nights
- teasing at school
- engagement with learning
- lack of respect from parents and children
- parenting skills
- turning the negatives to positives
- parents adapting to a routine (more responsible)
- school as a safe place

CHALLENGES

- Thursday nights
- teasing/Bullying programs
- Cairns Show
- length of stay of staff
- access to attend funerals etc
- Mapoon long weekend
- unexplained absences
- Child Protection removals
- Promoting Success – reinforcement- weekly attendance prize
- informing parents of progress – weekly

Keys to attendance

The attendance improvement strategy identifies three keys to improved attendance:

- A culture of high expectations and shared responsibility;
- Monitoring and intervention; and
- Purposeful and engaging teaching.

A culture of high expectations and shared responsibility

Statement of Expectation:

Mapoon Campus expects student to attend every day unless illness or a serious family emergency prevents this. The school expects that families make every effort to schedule appointments, family activities/vacations outside of school hours and/or during school vacation time. The school target for attendance for an individual student is 90%.

Communication of expectations:

The attendance strategy is endorsed by the School Council.

The attendance strategy is endorsed by the Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council.

The attendance strategy of the school is given to each parent.

The attendance strategy is introduced at key parent events, for example, the New Parent Evening and discussed at all enrolment interviews.

The attendance strategy is displayed at all key organisations in town.

Key messages about attendance will be displayed regularly on the sign board.

A school information pamphlet about the importance of attendance is distributed in the first mail out of the year.

All staff members speak regularly to students and families about the importance of attendance and have a clear understanding of the attendance strategy of the school. Students are advised of their attendance statistics four times a year, at the time of reporting, using the traffic lights process. The school sets clear targets for attendance annually.

Celebration of excellent attendance rates:

- The school community celebrates successes at both the individual and whole school level:
- Community organisations sponsor monthly attendance prizes
- Student attendance targets displayed at key organisations
- End of year attendance party created
- Awards given for improving attendance

Action planning

A range of actions was identified by school and community. One example is a group of initiatives designed to reduce the impact of the Cairns Show on student attendance. Responsibility for each action is listed in the plan, along with a time frame and resources required for implementation.

Action	Who	Time
1. Review Mapoon show holiday possible SFD.	MASC, HoC	Next council meeting
2. Explore options for prepaid charter or alternative arrangements to Cairns.	MASC	Next council meeting
3. Trial school holidays over four weeks to include show holiday (June/July).	HoC	Term 4, 2012
4. Present issues to combined Mayors meeting/Council meetings.	Mayor	Next meeting
5. Combine Cairns show with possible Australian Zoo visit.	HoC, P&C, LASR	
6. Incentives first week back to encourage attendance.	HoC	

Monitoring and intervention

A flowchart is used to illustrate the processes for monitoring attendance and interventions. This is supplemented by a ‘monitoring attendance traffic light’ approach based on five attendance rate levels.

Level	symbol	% attendance	School Response
0	danger!	0–50%	School/contract developed, other local agencies contacted for support, WCC Attendance process followed for reporting
1	red light	51–75%	Referral to Head of Student Services
2	amber light	76–85%	Daily contact with parents, contract signed between parents & school
3	green light	86–90%	Entitled to participate in non-compulsory events such as Junior Rangers, fun days, under 8’s
4	thumbs up	90%+	Reward

The Western Cape College materials were developed by Baressa Frazer, Head of Mapoon Campus.

The schools

Charleville State School

Charleville State School is located 760 kilometres inland from Brisbane on the traditional lands of the Bidjara people. The town of Charleville is the centre of population in the Murweh Shire and is home to 4,550 people (891 families). There are approximately 750 Aboriginal people living in Charleville, about 40% of whom identify with the Bidjara people. The Bidjara language is only spoken by a few people, none are closely connected to the school. There are currently 68 Aboriginal students in Charleville State School, out of a total of 225.

In 2008, when the What Works consultant was invited to work with teachers on using the What Works planning materials, staff morale was low, the community was in conflict with the school leadership, and there was considerable friction in the community between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents and carers. Lines of communication between key players and groups were non-existent. It was against this background that the principal requested some support to engage community and develop a School and Community Partnership.

East Kenwick Primary School

East Kenwick Primary School is located in the metropolitan southern suburbs of Perth, in Noongar country. East Kenwick Primary School is a metropolitan primary school catering for 459 students from Kindergarten to Year 7. It has an enrolment of 65 Aboriginal students, primarily Noongar people, who are 15% of total enrolments. The school community is made up of 267 families and 52 school staff.

The discussions around a School and Community Partnership were triggered because issues arising in the school were similar to those impacting the community such as attendance, poor behaviour, low achievement and low completion rates. The What Works consultant worked with a group of key parents and community, and the school administration team to engage them

all in the process. The focus was to have the whole school community collaborate – staff, parents and key community members. Collaboration worked through improved lines of communication; involvement in school activities; and community involvement in the development of school policies on such things as behaviour and reporting guidelines.

Fraser Park Preschool – 7 School

Fraser Park Preschool – 7 School is situated in the rural city of Murray Bridge approximately 80 kilometres from Adelaide. Fraser Park is situated on Ngarrindjeri Land – People of the River Murray and Coorong Lakes. Although there is a strong connection to the Ngarrindjeri culture, the parent community has a diversity of Aboriginal heritage. Ngarrindjeri language is taught at the school.

The school is the centre of a Learning Together program. This is aimed at developing improved access to programs and literacy skills for families of children 0–3 years in the Murray Bridge area. Families and children work together. There are currently 80 students enrolled in the school and Child Parent Centre, 40 of whom are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, representing many different cultural groups from across Australia including the Ngarrindjeri, Pitjatjantjara, Narrunga and Kurna peoples.

At the time the School and Community Partnership was developed, there were two parents of Aboriginal students on the governing council and they had an active parent group ‘Families Working Together’ which met once a term. Although the community was always invited to be involved and engaged in numerous school activities, attendance at these activities was only significant if the children were performing.

At this school, although leadership and staff were committed to developing positive relationships between families and encouraged parents/carers to become involved in the school, this was not optimum. It was at this point that the principal sought support from the What Works consultant in a partnership process.

Christ the King Catholic School Djarindjin Lombadina

Djarindjin Lombadina School sits across the two communities of Djarindjin and Lombadina in Bardi country on the Dampier Peninsula, approximately 200 km north west of Broome in Western Australia. It is the only school servicing these two communities. Djarindjin Lombadina School has a long history (over 100 years), it was formerly a Catholic mission.

There are approximately 80 students in K–10 at Djarindjin Lombadina School, apart from four children of staff, all are Aboriginal. There are only a handful of students in the Years 8–10 class with most secondary students going away to boarding schools. Aboriginal students are Aboriginal-English speakers.

The school has had stable leadership, with the current principal completing five years of service in 2011. Teaching staff has also been relatively stable. The current group of teachers is very experienced (including two people who are ex-principals, in other schools). Aboriginal staff, including Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATAs), tends to change over periodically each year.

At the time of considering a School and Community Partnership, the relationship between the Djarindjin Lombadina School leadership and the Aboriginal community was strained and community members identified limited interaction between staff and community, especially outside school hours.

The school accepted an invitation by the What Works consultant to be part of a pilot to develop School and Community Partnerships in Catholic schools in Western Australia.

Drouin Primary School

Drouin Primary school is on Gunai Kuarni land. It is a P–6 school which currently has an enrolment of 198 students. 13% of these students are Aboriginal. The school worked with parents during 2008 and celebrated and signed a School and Community Partnership in 2009.

Previously, the Gippsland Regional Education Office has made a number of unsuccessful attempts to change community perceptions of the school. Community and school relations were fractured; both the school personnel and community members had very negative views of each other. The process of developing the School and Community partnership was in some ways imposed on the school and Koorie community, however both parties could see the need to do something about improving their relationship and working together to improve the

experience for the Koorie children at the school. Several staff from the Gippsland Regional Education Office supported this partnership. They provided administrative support, as well as keeping the conversations going in community between meetings. The region's contribution in this process was immensely valuable. This school and community aim to work together to build a school community where students are encouraged and supported to take pride in their identity and culture. 'School Smart, Culturally Strong'

La Grange Remote Community School

La Grange Remote Community School is situated in the Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community in the Kimberley region, on Karajarri country south of Broome.

Bidyadanga community is made up of people from five language groups. People from the Nyangumarta, Mangala, Juwaliny and Yulparija country moved from the desert into Bidyadanga and the Karajarri people accommodated these people into their country. Community members today still identify as being from one or more of these language groups.

As the largest Remote Community School in the state, La Grange RCS caters for the educational needs of all school aged children in the Bidyadanga community, classes range from Pre Kindy (2 and 3 year old) to Year 12. The school is a part of the Stronger Smarter program. The school is an integral part of the Bidyadanga community and two parent groups, the School Advisory Group and the School Council, play active roles in the running of the school.

This school originally worked with the general What Works materials. At that time the WA DET Kimberley District Education Office were looking at how they could get School and Community Partnership processes going in all of their Kimberley schools. Formalised School and Community Partnerships are a priority in Aboriginal education plans in the Kimberley and so the principal was also working to organise some support in this area. A consultant from the district office accompanied the What Works consultant at each of the visits.

The Aboriginal staff at the school formed a group who led the process. This group also involved councilors from Bidyadanga council. The principal was involved with the Aboriginal education group and provided strong leadership for the group.

Mount Lockyer Primary School

Mount Lockyer Primary School is located in the northwest corner of the boundary of the City of Albany, in Noongar country. The majority of the school population comes from the immediate Mount Lockyer area. A small percentage of students come from the surrounding rural areas. The school was established in 1954 and has gradually grown over time. Pre-Primary to Year 7 students are on site.

At the beginning of 2011 Mount Lockyer Primary School became an Independent Public School in the Department of Education. Being an Independent Public School provides the flexibility for individual schools to meet the needs of their own communities. This school operates in the belief that strong links between parents and wider community support student and school improvement.

Prior to beginning the partnership process, this school worked closely with a number of Noongar families in the region. The development of a formal SCP with all families was the next step for the school. In this situation, the What Works consultant worked closely with the Aboriginal staff at the school, who initially led the process with consultant support. There is strong belief in this school that enhanced student outcomes occur when schools work in partnership with families and the broader community.

Western Cape College

The Western Cape College comprises two campuses located in north western Cape York Peninsula, in Far North Queensland. It principally serves the eleven traditional owner groups which are Alngith, Anathanangayth, Ankamuthi, Peppan, Taepadhighi, Thanikwithi, Tjungundji, Warrangu, Wathayn, Wik and Wik-Waya, and Yupungathi as well as the mining community of Weipa. Between the two campuses is the place where, in 1606, the First Peoples of the Australian continent probably first sighted Europeans when the Dutch ship Duyfken made land fall after a voyage from the Dutch East Indies.

Western Cape College – Mapoon Campus

Mapoon community is situated on the traditional lands of the Tjungundji people and is 75 km north of Weipa and 170 km south-west of the tip of the peninsula. It commenced as a Presbyterian church mission in 1891. In 1963 the leaders of the traditional owners were infamously removed and taken to be settled at

New Mapoon near Bamaga and some of their houses at Mapoon were burnt to the ground to prevent their return. Through the sheer determination of the people, the community was re-established in 1985/6. Mapoon's population is approximately 360, with 45 homes, a store, new council chambers, a school and a health clinic

The Mapoon Campus has an enrolment of approximately 35 students. The campus caters for Pre-Prep to Year 6. Year 7 and beyond students are offered continuing educational opportunities in Weipa, and accommodation provided at the Western Cape Residential College.

The Mapoon campus initiated the School and Community Partnership because the Mapoon community indicated they were not being well supported by the main Weipa campus. The Executive Principal and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were key leaders in the development of the partnership with the support of the What Works consultant.

Western Cape College – Weipa Campus

The Weipa Campus of Western Cape College is the administrative hub of the College. The campus has approximately 900 students, 53% of whom are Indigenous, from Pre-prep to Year 12. Approximately 170 students attend daily from Napranum community located on the outskirts of Weipa township.

Napranum Community was originally established as Weipa Mission station to cater for those Aboriginal groups south of Mapoon. It had its own state school which was closed after the Western Cape College was created in 2001. The continuing challenge of ensuring a quality learning environment for Napranum students and to build strong working relationships between the community and college, led to the college initiating, a community school partnership process in 2010 in parallel with the Mapoon process.

The recently opened Western Cape College Residential Campus is attached to the school. It is designed for students aged between 12 and 18 years who come from Cape York and the Torres Strait communities.

Development of the residential facility and its potential impact on the campus, caused considerable community stress and threatened the college's viability. The success of the Mapoon and Napranum partnership agreements led the school to undertake a similar process with the Weipa mining community. The process has been very successful in changing attitudes within the township and college.

Ngalangangpum School – Warmun

Ngalangangpum School is located on the lands of the Kija people. It is a co-educational Catholic school of about 120 students from Kindergarten to Year 10, serving the Warmun Aboriginal Community in the Kimberley. The principles of the school were founded on the symbol of the Mother and Child, representing a two-way process. There is an expectation on the staff and community to work together to ensure that the school provides an education in the context of the rich culture of the people. In this way, students learn to value traditions of both helping them to cope with contemporary living, without losing their cultural identity. There is a focus on religious education – the Ngapuny way – through the school community. In conjunction with the community, the school endeavours to integrate Aboriginal culture, Catholic faith and life.

This School and Community Partnership commenced at a time when leadership changes associated with the appointment of the school's first lay principal, were redefining the roles and expectations of the school and the community. When the current Principal was appointed, they prioritised renewal of school and community relationships, giving community a presence and voice in the school. Unfortunately, in March 2011 catastrophic floods affected Warmun which resulted in the entire community and school being evacuated to Kununurra for six months. School buildings and most homes were completely destroyed. Consequently, progress with the School and Community Partnership was delayed while the community dealt with the impact of evacuation, relocation to a temporary camp in Warmun, followed by gradual resettling of families into new or refurbished homes.

The What Works consultant has continued to work with the school and community in development and implementation of the School and Community Partnership. The partnership focus included addressing the social and community impact of floods on the school and its families. The process has also provided an opportunity to engage the community in the planning and design of new facilities and to collaborate with other stakeholders who have an interest in contributing to the re-establishment of the school and community.

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Acknowledgments

Acknowledgement is made to the schools involved, in particular the principals, staff and community and the What Works consultants.

**National Curriculum Services – What Works.
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The What Works materials are based on a three part analysis of the way teachers and schools generally work to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Building awareness; Forming partnerships; and Working systematically. The website (www.whatworks.edu.au) provides resources to support all of these.

The Workbook is the central support for targeted, systematic action.

The 'School and Community: Working Together' series supports the development of partnerships between schools and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and includes

- *Conversations, relationships, partnerships: A resource for Indigenous parents and communities*
- *How schools work: Information for Indigenous parents and communities*
- *Teachers and teaching: Information for Indigenous parents and communities*
- *Learning at home and at school: Information for Indigenous parents and communities*
- *Engagement (the big issue): Information for Indigenous parents and communities*
- *Conversations, relationships, partnerships: A resource for school staff*

The 'Core Issues' series includes:

- *Core Issues 1: Setting Up For Success* suggests ways in which schools might best be set up to maximise success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- *Core Issues 2: Reducing Suspensions* explores positive alternatives to suspension and ways they can be implemented in schools.
- *Core Issues 3: Literacy* explores questions about what it means to develop genuinely effective literacy.
- *Core Issues 4: Numeracy* tackles important questions about the meaning and importance of numeracy.
- *Core Issues 5: Student Engagement* discusses attendance, participation and belonging.
- *Core Issues 6: Boarding* looks at current practice in this small but growing area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.
- *Core Issues 7: International Perspectives* is a report of the DEST/OECD seminar held in Cairns in May 2007.
- *Core Issues 8: Education and Student Health: The Big Picture* looks at some of the health issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the part schools and teachers can play in dealing with them.
- *Core Issues 9: Using Data to Close the Gap* is designed to help build the capacity of schools to take action informed by evidence.
- *Core Issues 10: Using Personalised Learning Plans* aims to assist teachers and schools to deliver effective personalised learning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- *Core Issues 11: Principals as leaders in literacy – a strategy for literacy improvement in primary schools*

All these and other print materials are available for download through the 'Publications' link on the website, where you can also sign up for eNews, to keep in touch with the What Works project.

Experienced What Works consultants are available free of charge to work with schools on the materials.



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