



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

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

Improving outcomes for Indigenous students

INFORMATION FOR INDIGENOUS PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

## How schools work

- Who's who, and what do they do?
- How and where do you get information about your school?

*All schools differ in some ways: some are large with multiple campuses, some are small with only one teacher. Some have Indigenous Education Workers, some have not. Some have very active parents associations, some even have local Indigenous Education Consultative Groups who provide advice and direction on the education of Indigenous students.*

*You need to find out for yourself how your own school works. This pamphlet will help you understand your school and how you can get involved.*

**CONVERSATIONS > RELATIONSHIPS > PARTNERSHIPS > 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. EVERYTHING STARTS HERE...**

# Who's who, and what do they do?

## The front office

When you come up to the school someone at the front office will welcome you and help you with what you want.

 *The staff in the front office will be able to find people for you or, if those people are busy, front office staff will make a time for you to see them.*

## Indigenous Education Workers



Josh Wanganeen,  
Koorie Educator  
at Echuca College  
(VIC)

Indigenous Education Workers (they have different job titles around Australia) work closely with students, teachers, parents, community members and local government and non-government agencies. Not every school has an Indigenous Education Worker.

There are other people who support Indigenous students, eg, Community or Home Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Education Consultants or Community Education Counsellors. A small number of schools also have specialist resource teachers for their Indigenous students.

 *Get to know your school's Indigenous Education Workers and keep in regular contact with them.*

## The Principal

The Principal is the educational leader; that means the main person responsible for what happens in a school.

- **Policy and direction of the school:** The Principal works with staff and other members of the school community to decide the policies and direction for the school. In government schools this will be affected by the policies that govern all schools in the system. Principals don't have the power to change these government policies on their own.
- **School budget:** The Principal is responsible for the way the school spends its money.
- **Staffing:** The Principal has to ensure that the school has the staff it needs. In some government schools, most Catholic and all independent schools Principals will have a big say in deciding who will be employed at the school. They are responsible for making sure the staff work effectively.
- **Pastoral Care:** Principals often look after serious student welfare and behaviour problems. This is often complex and difficult work which can take up a lot of their time.

- **Parents:** Principals keep in contact with parents, as often as possible with good news, but sometimes with bad news.
- **Community:** Principals are the contact for other people and agencies like the local council, health and welfare agencies, the police and other community organisations.

 *If you feel you need to speak to the Principal, make sure that you have spoken to teachers and other support staff first.*

## The Deputy or Assistant Principal

Big schools have Deputy Principals who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. Some schools have more than one deputy, each one with particular responsibilities.

## Coordinators, Team Leaders, Faculty Heads

These are people with responsibility for parts of the school. The bigger the school, the more there are. Some schools divide themselves up into sub-schools, each of which will have a leader or head.

In secondary schools, there are often people in charge of parts of the program, for example Faculty Head, Head of Department or Coordinator in charge of Maths. They look after what is taught in their subject areas, pass on news from central bodies about what is to be taught and organise development for teachers who teach in that area.

Some primary schools have Team Leaders who work on developing learning programs with groups of teachers. They make sure that what is being taught in one part of the school fits with what is being taught elsewhere.

Many schools have Coordinators who are responsible for the pastoral care, welfare and behaviour of students, most commonly at Year levels. Their jobs vary a good deal from school to school, but very often they include following up on attendance.

 *Coordinators like to get to know parents and quite often organise social get-togethers or barbecues. They also play a role in organising more formal parent-teacher 'nights' where student progress is discussed. They are also often the first port of call for serious problems of classroom or school yard misbehaviour.*

## Teachers

It's not the Principal your child spends most of their time with, it's his or her teacher. There is a separate pamphlet on this called 'Teachers and teaching'.

# How and where do you get information about your school?

## The School Plan

All schools have a plan outlining the school's main priorities, what the school will try to achieve in terms of those priorities and who is responsible for what is to happen when.

## Information about students and their performance at school

Every school has information about student performance. This information includes data about how well students have performed on statewide and national testing in literacy and numeracy. Secondary schools will have information about how well their students have performed in their final assessments at Years 11 and 12, and quite often about where they ended up after leaving school. They also have information about enrolments, attendance, suspensions and students who leave.

*If you are talking to your school about how things can be improved for your children this sort of information will be valuable.*

## Codes of Conduct or School Rules

All schools have statements saying how they want students to behave. These statements are usually called 'Codes of Conduct' and talk about the sorts of behaviour the school tries to encourage as well as behaviour that is discouraged and not allowed. Sometimes, these documents will say what will happen if the rules are broken, or describe the process for dealing with misbehaviour.

Often the Code of Conduct has been drawn up with the help of students and parents, and when things go wrong, it will be the agreement referred to.

## Policy about the education of Indigenous students

Some schools have their own policies in relation to the education of Indigenous students. But the main policy about the education of Indigenous students comes from governments and education systems (government and Catholic). These policies are supposed to direct what schools do, and are useful to know about. Your school should have information about these.

*Ask your school about its policy in relation to the education of Indigenous students.*



*Dianne Williams, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer at Mt Lockyer Primary School (WA) works with parents at their school-community partnership meetings.*

## How decisions get made

This will vary from school to school, however some processes are common.

### The Principal

As mentioned earlier, the Principal is the main person responsible for what happens, and does not happen, in a school. But even in one-teacher schools, Principals will ask other people for advice and support.

### Committees

In bigger schools, many of the ideas about the running of the school are discussed in committees set up for this purpose. Schools almost always have committees or groups who meet about the program or curriculum of the school as well as student welfare, and often also for a variety of other purposes. Some operate all the time; others will just be set up to do a certain job, like run the NAIDOC Week celebrations or a sports carnival.

*You could ask whether there is a school committee set up to look after the interests and progress of Indigenous kids. Who's on it and how could you join?*

### Staff meetings

Where there is more than one teacher, all schools have staff meetings. In these meetings staff are informed about what is going on in the school, staff raise and discuss issues and make certain decisions about the day-to-day running of the school.



# How and where do you get information about your school?

## School Council or Board

Most schools have School Councils or Boards which make decisions about the overall direction of the school. Councils or Boards do not manage the school on a day-to-day basis and they are not there to discuss individual students or issues between students or teachers. But they can be very important. They deal with issues like: developing the school plan, education policy, community relationships, buildings and facilities.

The Principal is a member, but not usually the Chairperson. Other members are generally elected from teachers, parents and sometimes students and people from the community.

In some schools, most of the Council or Board is made up of Indigenous people. In others, there are places kept for Indigenous parents and/or community members.

 *Is your community represented? If not, could it be? You need to have the time, but you don't have to be an expert. You can learn as you go along.*

## Local Indigenous Education Consultative Groups

Some schools – and you will probably know whether yours is one already – have groups consisting of Indigenous parents and community members who provide advice and direction to the school about the education of its Indigenous students.



*Merle Rose (left), parent and Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group member with Murray Smith (School Board chairperson) and Lyn Keating (Principal) at the signing of the Drouin school-community partnership (VIC).*

## Parents associations

Many schools have parents associations. Their main purpose is to help build relationships between the school and parents, and for parents to come up with ways they can support the school. Often this takes the form of raising funds, but they also put forward ideas about what they would like to see happen in the school.

### If you've got a problem ...

Talk to someone at the school about the problem as soon as you can. It is always best to talk to the person who has responsibility for sorting out the problem. If this is not possible, or you don't know who is responsible, find someone at the school that you feel comfortable with to talk through the issue.

If you don't get satisfaction, there are complaint procedures that you can make happen which might involve people from outside the school. While it is the Principal's responsibility to tell you about these, Indigenous Education Consultative Groups often know the right way to go about things.

But let's hope you don't have a problem. Good relationships with the people who work at school can help sort out things before they come to a head.

**Good relationships are a two-way street. You've got a part to play.**



**What Works.  
The Work Program**

This pamphlet is part of the *School and Community: Working Together* series of publications which can be downloaded from [www.whatworks.edu.au](http://www.whatworks.edu.au).

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