Wiripaang Public School
Learning about learning in a school of love and sunshine

Context
Wiripaang Public School is in Gateshead near Newcastle in NSW. Established in 2013, it is an amalgamation of Gateshead Public School and Gateshead West Public School. The school has an enrolment of 228 students, 29 per cent of whom identify as Aboriginal. Wiripaang Public School has a strong affiliation with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) of 179 (2015/16 average). Positive Behaviour for Learning and Early Action for Success are implemented in the school, supporting student learning and wellbeing.

Enhancing community consultation
Wonnai, a yearlong transition program, is conducted for children in the year prior to Kindergarten. The program focuses on the development of language, the provision of early intervention where necessary and encouragement for parents to engage in their children’s early learning. In Term 1 Wonnai begins with a two-week playgroup supporting children and their parents to become familiar with the school. In Terms 2, 3 and 4 the children visit the school every Tuesday from 9:00am to 2:00pm. They also have opportunities to work with Kindergarten teachers and attend special school events. The school learning support officer working on the program is a member of the local Aboriginal community and plays an important role in providing a connection between the school and local families.

The school uses an app (application) to communicate with parents about events and school news. Text messages are also sent to remind parents of events that are coming up. The school’s Facebook page celebrates student achievement and relays good news stories. The principal developed meeting protocols for Parents and Citizens (P&C) meetings to encourage productive conversations. The use of inclusive language was important to the formation of connections between parents and the school. Staff work closely with parents to support them to meet their children’s needs.

The Early Action for Success Instructional Leader ran professional learning activities for all staff and interested parents to enable them to use the language of learning. Student achievement data about learning, the Literacy and Numeracy Continuums K-10 and the zone of expected learning was shared with the community in regular sessions and during parent/teacher interactions. Two simple, specific goals were established for each student. Teachers reported progress on these goals to parents through letters and one-to-one meetings. Students and parents could see the student’s progress displayed in classrooms.

Achievements
Since 2012 the Wonnai program has run successfully. Coupled with Best Start, it has provided children with a gentle start to school. Most students beginning Kindergarten have participated in the program. Wonnai has encouraged parental involvement in the school and empowered parents to approach staff to discuss their children’s learning.

Because of notifications on the app and reminders sent by text, hundreds of parents and family members now attend school events rather than the six to ten in previous years. P&C meetings currently have 20 to 25 attendees who are helping to guide decisions in relation to the school budget and the formulation of the school plan.

Three years ago, only 20-25 percent of students in K-2 were performing at an appropriate stage level. After intense work as part of Early Action for Success, this has increased to 80-90 percent of students. Across K-6, students are now able to talk to teachers, their parents and other students about their achievements in literacy and numeracy. They can also talk about the cluster they are on and what they need to do to move to the next cluster. Students have made impressive progress and have become accustomed to the high expectations that are now part of the school culture of doing your best, being in class and no excuses.

Sustainability
The school intends to use strategies including Filmpond, recordings of school performances and film of students participating in various activities to further include the school community in the life of the school. YouTube and podcasts, particularly related to learning achievements, will teach parents about their children’s learning, keep them involved and enable them to engage with the school while at home.

For more information on Wiripaang Public School visit their website.