Context

Parkview Public School is located in Leeton, a town in the Riverina region of NSW. In 2016 the school had 353 students of whom 25 percent identified as Aboriginal. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 139 (2015/16 average).

The school leadership team aimed to change the image of the school within the community in order to gain an equitable representation of local student enrolments and develop a harmonious and productive relationship with the local Aboriginal community.

Enhancing community consultation

Parkview Public School is a member of the Leeton Community of Public Schools whose purpose is to achieve strong public education unification in the area. Some of the benefits included robust sporting competitions, which were highly valued in the community, and creative arts events, which led to the development of Shine, a creative arts showcase. The school also participated in town activities including weekend sporting competitions and large community events. Senior students participated in several community programs involving the local Men’s Shed and two retirement villages.

The school established a playgroup, Winhangara (hear, think, listen), specifically for Aboriginal children from birth to five years. The playgroup ran for two hours per week and was staffed by a teacher from the school, an Aboriginal school learning support officer and the principal. The preschool program was followed by a 17 week transition program for children starting Kindergarten the following year. The transition program took place one day a week.

The school successfully engaged with the two key Aboriginal organisations in the town. The president of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) provided invaluable advice and leadership to the school. In turn, four or five staff members supported the AECG by regularly attending meetings which were held six to eight times a year. The Leeton and District Aboriginal Land Council provided a formal structure for school leaders to plan programs and events and was invaluable in providing advice on urgent issues. Stronger relationships with Aboriginal families were achieved by increasing their involvement in the development of personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students. Members of the AECG are currently working with students and staff to build the Wiradjuri garden within the school grounds as a community project.

Achievements

The student population of the school has increased from 157 students in 2009 to 353 in 2016. The Leeton Community of Public Schools has expanded and now includes Leeton High School and other smaller schools in the area. Currently 25 children regularly attend the Winhangara playgroup which has facilitated Aboriginal parents’ knowledge of what is happening in the school and has also broken down barriers and increased the confidence of parents when approaching staff. The collaboration of the school, the local AECG and the Leeton and District Aboriginal Land Council facilitated the development of a range of consultative decision making strategies. A defining event was the involvement of the whole school in the Key into Country program, a two day course led by members of the AECG. The program enabled staff to develop a deeper understanding of issues related to Aboriginal culture and the history of local Aboriginal people.

Sustainability

The team at Parkview Public School remains committed to a culture of inclusion and respect. The development of leadership density is seen to be an important element in achieving this. The school will continue to provide a broad range of options beyond the core curriculum for students to expand their life choices and have opportunities to excel in their areas of talent and interest. These options will be found from within the school and the wider community.

For more information on Parkview Public School visit their website.