Lightning Ridge Central School

It’s about learning, not behaviour

Context

Lightning Ridge Central School is a Kindergarten to Year 12 school in the opal mining centre of remote north-western NSW. The school has an enrolment of 425 students with 44 per cent of students who identify as Aboriginal and 12 per cent of students from a language background other than English, including 28 different nationalities with Filipino or Serbian the dominant languages. Two-thirds of students come from mining camps with no fixed address, electricity, water or sewerage. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 154 (2014/15 average).

Enhancing community consultation

The principal noted that most of the school’s communications with parents were related to behaviour and wanted to “get them talking about learning, not behaviour”. The school developed strategies to improve community consultation including:

- approaches leading to deeper conversations related directly to the needs of parents and community members and how they link with those of the school
- the reintroduction of parent and teacher interviews and utilising the opportunity of having parents in the school to consult with them on the school plan
- the establishment of commitment classes in the secondary school. Students were able to apply to be in the class and if accepted, committed to high levels of engagement. The establishment of the classes was accompanied by professional learning for teachers related to teaching practices
- consultation with the community including local Aboriginal Elders and the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to ensure that the school plan reflected community expectations
- capitalising on all parent and community events in the school, such as Local Blokes’ Day, Grandparents’ Day and after school activities, to collect information on what the community wanted for the school
- partnerships with local businesses and agencies such as the Australian Opal Centre, IGA supermarket, the Lightning Ridge Men’s Shed and Medicare, in which the leadership team visited the community partners and also participated in community events.

Achievements

Whole-school actions for improving community consultation and engagement resulted in:

- the belief among parents that providing input and feedback is valued, that they will be listened to and that their ideas can bring about change
- over 100 parents of secondary students attending parent and teacher interviews with focused discussions on student learning
- improved student engagement and learning for all students as all classes are now commitment classes with high, medium and low support provided for each stage
- reduced teacher time on behaviour management with teachers reflecting on their teaching practices and reviewing students’ progress every five weeks with regular parent meetings
- increased partnerships with community members resulting in a greater number of initiatives for students.

Sustainability

The school plans to increase positive, informed discussion involving a wide cross-section of parents and the community. It believes that the more consultation it has with parents and community members, the better the school plan will be and the more successful the students will become. It will develop personalised learning plans for every student and use the planning meeting to seek consultation with parents. The school will consult with parents on trialling a new report format in the primary school and the use of a new website called MGoals to support Aboriginal students in achieving their goals and aspirations. The school is developing alliances with Goodooga Central School and Collarenebri Central School to enhance the educational and social opportunities of all staff and students across these schools.

For more information on Lightning Ridge Central School visit their website.