



School Improvement Unit Report

Kowanyama State School





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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report is a product of a review carried out at Kowanyama State School from 16 to 19 March 2015. It provides an evaluation of the school's performance against the nine domains of the [National School Improvement Tool](#). It also recommends improvement strategies for the school to consider in consultation with its regional office and school community.

The review and report were completed by a review team from the School Improvement Unit (SIU). For more information about the SIU and the new reviews for Queensland state schools please visit the Department of Education and Training (DET) [website](#).

1.2 School context

Location:	Kowanyama Street, Kowanyama
Education region:	Far North Queensland
The school opened in:	1978
Year levels:	Pre-Prep to Year 10
Current school enrolment:	184
Indigenous enrolments:	98.4 per cent
Students with disability enrolments:	7.6 per cent
Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value:	648
Year principal appointed:	2015 Acting Principal Term 1
Number of teachers:	10 classroom teachers and 2 specialist teachers
Nearby schools:	Aurukun State School, Pormpuraaw State School
Significant community partnerships:	Remote Indigenous Area Assistance Scheme, Indigenous Schooling Support Unit, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Kowanyama Council, Kowanyama General Store
Unique school programs:	Indigenous playgroup

2. Executive summary

2.1 Key findings

- There is a clear narrow focus for school improvement.

Students, staff and parents are aware of the school improvement priorities of student attendance and behaviour, explicit teaching, improvement in reading and community engagement.

- There has been modest but consistent improvement in student learning outcomes and attendance.

Student performance in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is comparable with similar schools nationally for school's mean performance. It is 'above' similar schools in 6 strands, 'close to' in 13 strands and 'below' in 1 strand.

- Kowanyama State School has significant issues in staffing key positions which impacts student outcomes.

The school experiences significant changeover of staff in both leadership and teaching positions on an annual basis as a result of its remote location. Approximately 50 per cent of the classroom teachers are both new to teaching and the school this year. The majority of other teaching staff are in their second or third year of teaching. Both the Principal and Deputy Principal are acting in their roles.

The Principal has developed a human resources Workforce Plan to manage staff turnover and support proactive recruitment of personnel for key positions with Regional Office.

- The school promotes high behavioural and learning expectations.

This has been achieved through the implementation of School Wide Positive Behaviour for Learning (SWPBL) processes. Attendance, disruptive behaviour and learning engagement are an issue however, for a number of students. The use of rewards to encourage positive learning behaviour is inconsistent across the school.

- There are many students who have significant ongoing mental health and welfare needs.

These needs are major impediments to student learning engagement and are the cause of a significant amount of challenging and disruptive behaviour.

- Overarching curriculum and pedagogical frameworks are in need of renewal.

Internal and external school curriculum leaders are building teacher capability in regards to priority whole-school programs at an individual level. Discussions with curriculum leaders and teachers reveal that the documentation which supports how these programs come together as a package (Kowanyama Curriculum and



Procedures Folder) is in need of some updating and renewal with teaching staff to reflect current practice.



2.2 Key improvement strategies

- Renew the whole school curriculum framework and pedagogical framework to build teachers' understanding of how the components of key school programs contribute to an overall package for school improvement.
- Work closely with regional personnel to activate the new human resources Workforce Plan. Co-develop innovative solutions to staff vacant key positions in order to maximise continuity of support for students. Formalise long term regional support through the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU) team.
- Review the school rewards systems within the SWPBL process to develop motivating and creative ways of rewarding appropriate behaviour which suit the unique school context.
- Establish a welfare committee which utilises the expertise of external health and welfare personnel to implement proactive case management of students and families with high level needs.
- Consider the development of another arm of the ISSU which provides direct support and sets up sustainable partnerships for the delivery of welfare and mental health programs for students, families and staff through formal agreements.



3. Findings and improvement strategies against the domains

3.1 An explicit improvement agenda

Findings

The leadership team articulate a commitment to improvement which builds on the school improvement strategies that have been in place for some time. This is reflected in an eagerness to support a young teaching team with high quality induction, professional development, mentoring, coaching, and feedback.

The key improvement priorities are student attendance, student behaviour, explicit teaching, improvement in reading and community engagement. There are many artefacts on walls around the school which inform students, teachers and parents of how well these priorities are tracking in terms of improvement.

The school experiences significant changeover of staff in both leadership and teaching positions on an annual basis as a result of its remote location. Approximately 50 per cent of the classroom teachers are both new to teaching and the school this year. High levels of support is provided for teachers to understand the whole-school approaches to attendance, behaviour, and curriculum planning and delivery in order to maintain some level of continuity and consistency for students with their learning.

The school's ongoing partnership with the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU) and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' School Attendance Officers (SAOs) are critical in maintaining a strong focus on attendance, behaviour and literacy and numeracy learning. Clear targets and timelines are in place and are understood by staff and students. Teachers are beginning to use data to map and monitor progress in priority areas.

The depth of understanding of whole school programs and the consistency of implementation of related strategies varies from classroom to classroom, depending on the length of time the teacher has been in the school. New and beginning teachers are supported by the school leadership team and personnel from ISSU.

Supporting data

2015 Annual Implementation Plan, Strategic Plan, pedagogical framework, curriculum framework, teacher's resource folder, student-free days agenda, school newsletters, school website, staff, student and community interviews, Headline Indicators, School Data Profile.

Improvement strategies

Embed all elements of the improvement agenda consistently across the school at the classroom level, within realistically paced timelines.

Consolidate teacher professional knowledge of quality teaching and high yield strategies captured in your school curriculum overviews. Make explicit for teachers the links between desired improvements in student learning and performance at the classroom level.



Develop a clear plan for school improvement which identifies timelines and milestones and allows for different starting points for teachers and the contribution of all curriculum support personnel, including those from ISSU.

3.2 Analysis and discussion of data

Findings

The school leadership team views reliable and timely student data as essential to the effective leadership of the school. Reading and attendance data walls are visible in the staff room, with reading data displayed in every classroom and attendance data displayed in most classrooms.

The school has a documented assessment schedule for the annual collection of student achievement data. School leaders monitor achievement, behaviour and attendance data to inform decision-making at whole school, class and individual student level.

One teacher has been identified to collect, analyse and display reading data for the school. In addition, the mentor teacher models and coaches all teaching staff in PM Benchmark to ensure reliable reading data is collected. The mentor teacher works individually with teachers to develop reading data literacy.

The school closely monitors student attendance data, and has a range of proactive processes in place to reward attendance of 95 per cent or above.

A range of behaviour data is collected and regularly reviewed. There is evidence that data has been used to identify flexible attendance for one student and to provide in class modelling and support for teachers who are challenged by classroom behaviour.

School data is discussed on student-free days and in staff meetings. Teachers discuss reading and attendance data with their students and set short term improvement goals with each student.

Student performance in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is comparable with similar schools nationally for school's mean performance. It is 'above' similar schools in 6 strands, 'close to' in 13 strands and 'below' in 1 strand.

Supporting data

School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, classroom visits, interviews with staff, data walls, OneSchool, focus room data and behaviour reports

Improvement strategies

Build teacher data literacy to inform teacher planning.

3.3 A culture that promotes learning

Findings

School staff understand that parents and families are integral members of the school community and use regular home visits by teachers and the leadership team to strengthen the home-school partnership.

The school encourages parents to become active partners in their children's learning and engages them in the process of student management through participation in the classroom learning program and by developing a deeper understanding of their children's learning needs.

The school regards student well-being as a priority and is investigating contextually relevant strategies to provide both academic and non-academic support for students, to address individual needs. This is evidenced by the use of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and recently introduced Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs).

The school uses classroom profiling as part of their coaching model to develop consistent classroom practices for managing student behaviour.

School Wide Positive Behaviour for Learning (SWPBL) processes have been implemented. The use of rewards to encourage positive learning behaviour is inconsistent across the school.

The school has strategies in place to improve attendance. In 2014, student attendance was 78.7 per cent. The attendance in Prep to Year 6 is 86 per cent with a noticeable reduction in attendance rates for students in Year 7 to Year 10. School attendance officers work between school and home to improve attendance.

The leadership team invest in staff well-being and view the school Workforce Plan as a priority strategy for targeting the recruitment of teachers who have the resilience and capability to work in a complex and challenging environment.

The school leadership team understands the need to maintain community confidence in an environment that has a highly transient school workforce.

Supporting data

OneSchool behaviour and attendance data reports, data walls, interviews with school leaders, staff, students and community.

Improvement strategies

Explore and consistently implement a broader range of rewards for positive learning behaviour.

Develop and implement a sustainable workforce management plan to ensure the continuity of school staff.

3.4 Targeted use of school resources

Findings

The school leadership team deploys staff to address the range of learning needs in the school and targets the use of available staff expertise. The mentor teachers provide timetabled daily coaching, mentoring and ongoing support for the ten new teaching staff at the school.

The school budget aligns with both regional and system requirements and prioritises funds to the school improvement priorities.

The current school bank balance is \$1 116 487 which includes 2015 budget allocation for Great Results Guarantee funds of \$234 542, Indigenous Education Program funds of \$398 497 and Remote Schools Attendance Strategy funds of \$575 543.

The strong links with the Indigenous Student Support Unit (ISSU) teachers provide the school with regular specialist staff to extend the range of coaching and mentoring for beginning teachers and teachers new to the school.

The identification and engagement of appropriately trained and interested teachers to the remote school location remains an issue, despite school leaders strategically making links with universities to attract new graduates. In 2015, the school has been unable to staff all teaching and specialist positions, despite repeated regional and state-wide enquiries.

There is no whole-school process to oversee the full range of school data which informs emerging student needs and budget implications. There is no representative group to regularly monitor student achievement and well-being data and targeted programs which meet the identified student needs.

Supporting data

Budget overview report, interviews with Business Services Manager (BSM) and school leadership team, human resources workforce plan

Improvement strategies

Explore the budget implications of providing new graduates with an in-school handover period at the end of the year prior to commencement of teaching at the school.

Establish a 'welfare committee' which utilises the expertise of external health and welfare personnel to implement proactive case management of students and families with high level needs.

Develop programs with key stakeholder groups which address resilience, trauma, self-esteem and anti-anxiety issues with students and families.



3.5 An expert teaching team

Findings

The school leadership team has developed a Workforce Plan that annually invests in identifying, attracting, developing and retaining the best available teachers for their context specific teaching environment. The school undertakes rigorous processes for the selection of teaching staff.

There are a range of strategies in place which supports teachers and builds their capability to teach effectively in the context specific environment.

The school leadership team make effective use of the ISSU and school-based mentors to provide support for teachers learning how to teach in linguistically complex classrooms.

The school leadership team has appointed a teacher with linguistics training and deep pedagogical content knowledge in the Language 4 Learning (L4L) framework, to develop teachers' capability teaching linguistically complex students.

The school leadership team plans for the effective use of ISSU staff, and school mentors to ensure all teachers have the opportunity to work with and learn from experienced teachers.

Specific induction including coaching is provided to all teachers in explicit teaching, which is the underpinning pedagogy of the school mandated pedagogical framework.

The school leadership team makes effective use of the Remote School Service team to provide differentiated support for graduate teachers to engage in reflective practice using the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

Beginning teachers value the high level of professional support provided through the school coaching model of 1 coach to 4 teachers. The model provides for daily contact with teachers and includes modelling, co-teaching, feedback and professional dialogue.

Supporting data

Workforce plan, interviews with staff and ISSU personnel

Improvement strategies

Continue to develop the multi-layered coaching, mentoring and feedback processes delivered by school leaders, mentor teachers and ISSU staff.

3.6 Systematic curriculum delivery

Findings

The school is developing a context specific approach to curriculum delivery. This is achieved by adopting pedagogical and curriculum initiatives that scaffold learning for students through explicit instruction of the mainstream curriculum, and which address the identified and relevant language demands of their students. In essence, the school provides a strong focus on foundation learning that develops literacy and numeracy competency.

Extensive work has been completed by support staff to develop units of work for English and Mathematics through the use of the *Break it Down, Build it Up* curriculum planning model. The staff involved in this initiative include a school linguist, on-site mentors and the Northern Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU).

There is a curriculum framework document in place. The framework provides an overview of the school expectations of curriculum delivery, but is not known to most of the staff as a result of the high staff turnover. Similarly, there is a comprehensive range of school policy documents and curriculum delivery standards for learning and behaviour in the Kowanyama Curriculum and Procedures Folder, but these documents are not understood by the new members of the teaching team.

A strong focus on reading is evident by the regular tracking of student reading levels based on PM Benchmark and PROBE. Timetabling of daily literacy and numeracy blocks are specific and maintain a strong focus on reading. This approach has translated into modest but consistent progress, as noted on NAPLAN student relative gain in reading across the school.

Expectations of curriculum planning and delivery outside of English and Maths are not clear.

Supporting data

Interviews with staff and school leaders, teacher planning, pedagogical framework, classroom observations, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, school website, school newsletters, student-free days agenda, Annual Implementation Plan

Improvement strategies

Review and update the Kowanyama Curriculum and Procedures Folder including the whole-school curriculum framework. Consider current evidence-based research in regards to curriculum and pedagogy to inform decision making.

Renew the curriculum leadership team and teachers' understanding of the school's preferred curriculum approaches. Ensure that the coaches and mentors of individual programs understand how the component they support aligns with the vision of the whole-school curriculum framework and philosophy of the school.



Map and monitor the significant adjustments being made to curriculum planning and delivery in the upper school against the Australian Curriculum (AC) standards to ensure a vertical alignment of the curriculum across the school.

Explore innovative ways for students to access other curriculum areas outside of English, Maths and Science, for example, integrate History and Geography into a cultural studies program for the whole school.

Use high quality professional development, coaching, feedback and supervision processes to embed evidenced-based teaching strategies and build consistent curriculum delivery across the school.



3.7 Differentiated teaching and learning

Findings

Staff demonstrate the belief that, although students are progressing at different rates, every student is capable of successful learning when provided with appropriate opportunity and support.

The school has prioritised a differentiated approach for the delivery of the teaching of reading. Two mentor teachers have been allocated by the school to support teachers understand where each student is in their learning, and identify starting points for teaching.

Teachers are beginning to assist students monitor their own learning and set achievable goals for reading and attendance. Mentor teachers support class teachers identify and develop strategies which inform individual student learning goals.

The school provides parents with ongoing feedback on their child's learning through regular home visits and phone calls.

Class teachers liaise with the special education teacher to identify appropriate adjustments for students with disabilities, and collaboratively develop ICPs for these students.

ILPs are developed for every student to clearly identify their current attendance and reading levels, their aspirational goals and document strategies to help them focus their learning.

Teachers document their class differentiation strategies in OneSchool curriculum unit plans.

The range of challenging and engaging programs to extend high performing students is limited.

Supporting data

Individual learning plans, individual curriculum plans in draft, OneSchool curriculum units, interviews with school leaders and staff.

Improvement strategies

Identify and implement a range of challenging and engaging programs for high achieving students, for example, the School of Distance Education Programs.

3.8 Effective pedagogical practices

Findings

The school leadership team recognises that consistent delivery of quality teaching practices is critical to improving student outcomes.

Explicit teaching is central to the school's pedagogical framework and has been in place for a number of years. Other complementary pedagogical practices used by the school are not evident in the framework. Teachers are at varying stages of understanding and applying the pedagogical model in classrooms.

There is a growing sense of collective responsibility for ensuring further improvement in student learning among staff and the community.

Students describe their teachers as highly supportive and caring.

The school has documented the teaching of reading, but it does not include a whole-school reading framework which teachers can use to guide planning. There is a strong focus on the regular tracking of student reading levels using PM Benchmark and PROBE to demonstrate improvement in reading.

The Language for Learning (L4L) program, which has a strong emphasis on oral language development is a key feature of the English program. This program is aligned to Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) units and the AC content descriptors and achievement standards. The L4L program effectively supports the *English as a Second Language* learning needs of Indigenous students. The use of Bandscales to map and monitor student progress has been introduced.

The school provides coaching support to assist teachers implement explicit teaching and L4L.

Extension programs for potentially high achieving students and the school's approach to teaching higher order thinking skills is yet to be developed.

While there are some support provisions for students with special learning needs, there is little evidence of a strategic approach for the planning and delivery of support for students with diverse learning needs at the classroom level.

Supporting data

Curriculum planning documents, interviews with staff, school leadership team and parents, artefacts, School Data Profile, school website.

Improvement strategies

Revisit the whole school pedagogical framework with teachers. Consolidate teacher professional knowledge of quality teaching and make explicit the links between desired improvements in student learning and performance at the classroom level.



Use high quality professional development, coaching, feedback and supervision processes to embed evidenced-based teaching strategies and build consistent teaching practices across the school.



3.9 School and community partnerships

Findings

The school leadership team is building partnerships with community groups and organisations to improve educational outcomes for students, for example, Women's Group, Men's Group, Justice Group, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Recreation Centre, Council and General Store.

School leaders are developing strategic relationships with respected community members which enhance positive outcomes for students in the key issues of attendance, student welfare and behaviour.

Kowanyama State School, in partnership with Department of Aboriginal Affairs, operates a transition support service which results in a significant number of students transitioning to boarding school for secondary schooling. There are currently 50 students from the school attending boarding schools across the state.

The school leadership team is developing partnerships with the University of Southern Queensland to recruit teachers suited to the site specific context of Kowanyama State School.

School staff conduct routine home visits to build and enhance teacher-parent partnerships that contribute to improved student attendance, achievement and wellbeing.

A strong partnership with ISSU provides the school with access to support and intellectual resources for new teachers working in a context specific environment.

Supporting data

School website, interviews with staff, students, parents and community representatives, Annual Implementation Plan, school newsletters, school opinion survey

Improvement strategies

Build on existing partnerships and identify potential local community partners to enhance learning opportunities for all students, for example, work experience and school based traineeships.



4. Follow-up timelines

- School to publish this report on their website within two weeks.
- School to meet with the assistant regional director to discuss review findings and improvement strategies.
- Action plan to be developed and submitted to SIU and Region within 3 months of receiving this report.