2010 Annual School Report
Royal Far West School

NSW Public Schools – Leading the way
Messages

Principal’s message
At Royal Far West School (RFWS) we believe that all children have the right to achieve their potential - no matter where they live, whatever their medical condition or disability and whatever their family circumstances. To achieve this goal, we work closely with families, country schools and regions and with RFWS clinical services to provide information, consultancy, resource advice, professional development and program assistance. We have an increasingly strong focus on working across the state using video conferencing and internet-based video communication for individual, ongoing student support.

I certify that the information in this report is the result of a rigorous school self-evaluation process and is a balanced and genuine account of the school’s achievements and areas for development.

Jenny Rayner

P & C and/or School Council message
The P&C is increasingly gratified by the monetary and moral support we receive from regional P&Cs every year. Many times donations we receive have come as a result of students organising special event days, donating the proceeds to Royal Far West School. This kind of support is heart-warming and helps to keep us going, knowing that the kids as well as the parents care about Royal Far West School.

Gwen Davidson, President, RFWS P&C

School context

About our school
We provide educational services to the clients of the Royal Far West (RFW).

Although we are located on the beachfront at Manly, all students are from country NSW, often from remote areas of the state. All children must be accompanied to RFW by a parent or carer.

Our students, aged 3-18 years, have a range of medical conditions, including developmental, learning, behavioural, emotional and communication difficulties and disorders. At least 20% of our students are Aboriginal. We enrol twice as many boys as girls.

Students are generally short-stay admissions, although children who have surgery may stay for an extended period. Students who have been part of our trial of outreach services using internet technology have been receiving individual reading tuition 3 times a week for over 40 weeks.

During 2010 we enrolled over 1400 students from more than 400 schools and preschools across country NSW. Most of our students are well known to us and may come to RFWS for therapy and ongoing treatment for many years.

We have 5 classes, including an integrated class for students with very high support needs. We have approximately 46 students in the school at any one time.

Staff information
It is a requirement that the reporting of information for all staff must be consistent with privacy and personal information policies

Staff establishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal(s)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Librarian</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrative &amp; Support Staff</td>
<td>6.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.996</td>
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</tbody>
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We are proud to have a full-time Aboriginal teacher and full-time Aboriginal Education Officer on our staff.

Staff retention
No permanent staff members left the school during 2010.

Teacher qualifications
All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>% of staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree or Diploma</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>50%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Financial summary
This summary covers funds for operating costs and does not involve expenditure areas such as permanent salaries, building and major maintenance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of financial summary</th>
<th>30/11/2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance brought forward</td>
<td>127,368.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global funds</td>
<td>70,440.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tied funds</td>
<td>213,003.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>School &amp; Community sources</td>
<td>53,898.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>9,037.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust receipts</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td>473,748.44</td>
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</table>

**Expenditure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and learning:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key learning areas</td>
<td>43,244.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excursions</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extracurricular dissections</td>
<td>1,496.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>395.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training &amp; development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tied funds</td>
<td>117,679.85</td>
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<td>Casual relief teachers</td>
<td>11,318.31</td>
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<td>Administration &amp; office</td>
<td>23,957.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>14,248.05</td>
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<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>17,772.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust accounts</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital programs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenditure</strong></td>
<td>237,621.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance carried forward</strong></td>
<td>236,126.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A full copy of the school’s 2010 financial statement is tabled at the annual general meetings of the School Council and/or the parent body. Further details concerning the statement can be obtained by contacting the school.

Achievement in National Testing
Our students’ academic performance in national testing is reported by their home schools.

**Significant programs and initiatives**
In response to the needs of our students, we have a very strong focus on literacy and on building the capacity of our parents, carers and partner schools.

**Literacy Programs**

*RFWS Reading Assessment Program*
During 2010 our assessment team carried out 464 reading assessments and reviews. All assessments are followed up with individual parent interviews and written reports to parents, home schools and RFW clinical services. Families are provided with easy-to-implement strategies and games for home use to develop skills and a pack of suitable reading materials.

In some cases where our partner schools in rural areas have been unable to implement a recommended individualized program, we have been able to provide 1:1 instruction through our SOLVE IT ® program (see Target 1, Progress on 2010 Targets below).

*RFWS Early Learning Support Team (ELST)*
In consultation with the RFW clinical services, the ELST screens preschoolers for early speech and language difficulties, and students up to the end of term 2, year 2 for phonological awareness and early literacy skills.
Following assessments (of both RFW patients and their siblings) the team meets with parents and carers to discuss findings, recommendations and possible referrals to specialist services. Families are provided with an individualized take home pack of resources and preschools and schools are offered support through resources and video conferencing.

The ESLT also runs Book Beginnings, to encourage a love of books in preschoolers and to assist parents and carers to read with their children and so help to develop early reading skills. All children are given a book of their choice to take home.

During 2010 the ELST carried out over 130 formal assessments, and over 200 informal assessments. Over 90 children had formal phonological awareness testing. Approximately 25% of all children assessed by the ELST team were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage.

Aboriginal education

During 2010 RFWS received Norta Norta funding that was tied to assisting individual students. After extensive consultation with our families and community, it was decided to adopt a case management model to ensure that all of our students are effectively accessing all available services, both at RFWS, RFW and in their own communities. This initiative has meant that RFWS has been able to work much more intensively with our Aboriginal families prior, during and after admission to RFW.

Our Norta Norta team worked with 250 students during 2010. They used personalized learning plans (PLPs) as working documents, making them far more relevant and useful to students and parents and highlighting their importance to home schools. They linked families in with local agencies in the community, made contact with new families prior to admission to RFW, kept in regular contact with students and families between visits, provided individual tuition to particularly at risk students using our outreach technology, made daily phone calls where needed during critical phases of re-engagement with education, took part in video links with home school staff to discuss successful strategies and resources and assisted families to reconnect with schools where communication had fallen down.

Multicultural education

We have a trained Anti-Racism Officer, an Aboriginal Education Officer and a strong culture of inclusiveness.

Respect and responsibility

The core values of respect and responsibility are explicitly taught, practised and modelled by every member of staff.

Progress on 2010 targets

Target 1

Implementation of Solve IT * outreach reading program

Our achievements include:

- Development of robust technology to provide 1:1 video link using basic computers equipped with good quality web cams and head sets and access to good quality internet connection.
- Development of customized “pod” for the delivery of Multilit individual reading program.
- Digitisation of the paper-based Multilit program to enable easy delivery over the internet.
- Small group of students and schools taking part in a trial of the technology to ensure robustness of the solution prior to period of growth.

This development of this outreach program – SOLVE IT * (School Outreach Learning using
Volunteer Educators and Information Technology, Reading) and the Macquarie University MULTILIT Program (Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy) has been the result of an incredible collaboration between staff at RFWS, the Centre for Learning Innovation (CLI) and some very patient students and country schools.

Target 2

*Extension of the SWAY program to include music as a tool to develop early literacy skills*

Our achievements include:

- Our preschool group teacher, who is a trained musician and music therapist, has added music activities to a number of our existing SWAY lesson plans

Target 3

*Greater use of technology to strengthen outreach support programs to country schools and isolated students*

Our achievements include:

- Video conference with home school is part of formal suite of options considered at clinical case conference for all students
- Trial and evaluation of a number of booking systems with RFW and RFWS
- Allocation of video conference bookings to dedicated administration staff member in RFWS office

- Use of interactive whiteboard for minutes taken during video conference ensure swift approval of minutes for distribution
- Increasing number of video conferences being held (32 between mid-August and end of November)
- Positive informal feedback from parents, clinicians and schools.

**Target 4**

*Development of primary to high school skills package*

Our achievements include:

- New program operating in upper primary classroom targeting key skills for high school. The program, which applies the basic principles of Accelerated Literacy, uses Kokoda as a metaphor for moving on to high school. The program identifies qualities that foster resilience and the ability to cope in new and challenging environments.
- Overwhelmingly positive feedback from children and parents with extraordinary level of engagement:
  
  “...last night I drew a picture of soldiers walking along the Kokoda track for you... how does this story end, I need to know... Those men were really brave and I want to be brave like them...” (Student comments)
  
  “…My child’s been dying to get back to class... I wanted to take my child to the beach but he wants to come to class instead... my child can’t stop talking about Kokoda... it’s fantastic...” (Parent comments).
Target 5

Aboriginal cultural knowledge embedded into all programs

Our achievements include:

- High level of staff training in Aboriginal cultural knowledge
- Excellent resources across all classes and shared areas
- Positive feedback from families and visitors
- Bush tucker garden completed and available for all to use
- Wellumbulla Education kit (currently awaiting final approval from AECG)

Key evaluations

It is a requirement for all NSW public schools to conduct at least two annual evaluations – one related to educational and management practice and the other related to curriculum. In 2010 our school carried out evaluations of communication (in particular Video Conferencing) and Transition/School to Work.

Educational and management practice

Communication: within our unique setting, communication is at the heart of how effective we are in teaching and learning; how well we can plan; how management allocates resources and priorities; and how well we build a culture of knowledge sharing and collegiality. For the purposes of this evaluation, we addressed communication with our partner schools.

Background

The key focus for RFWS is to build the capacity of our families and their home schools. In order to do this, we need to facilitate effective and timely communication. In the past, this has taken the form of written reports, telephone calls and emails, with a limited number of video conferences. We believe that video links are highly effective, but acknowledge that they are costly, taking considerable time to arrange and involving significant numbers of personnel at RFWS, RFW clinical services, home schools and parents or carers. This evaluation sought to find out if schools and parents felt that the video links were helpful. Tools used were telephone calls, emails and semi-structured interviews.

Findings and conclusions

Most schools were keen to take part in a video conference and were more than willing to release personnel. The majority gave very positive feedback after a video conference, even when very difficult issues were discussed during the link up. Schools valued the opportunity to ask questions directly of specialist personnel. Schools that had taken part in one video link were highly likely to contact RFWS to request another link in the future. Parents were almost universally supportive of video links, valuing the opportunity to address difficult issues in a collegial atmosphere.

Comments following video links:

“Thank you...It was excellent. I wanted you to know that we wouldn't have been able to get the outcome we did without that video conference...the school are going to do what you suggested. I went away feeling so much better”. (Parent)

“Thank you so much for your efforts re .....Thought I’d let you know that we are now about to submit his application for funding. Without your assistance I don't know how we would have achieved this outcome. It certainly is all about working together to achieve the best outcome for children like...” (Early Intervention, Region)

Future directions

In 2011 we will send out questionnaires to all participants in video conferences with the
minutes to enable a more detailed analysis of the effectiveness of video conferences. We will also work with RFW clinical services to develop a more streamlined model for setting up video links to ensure that they happen in a timely manner.

**Curriculum**

**Attendance and Retention**

**Background**

Many of the students that we work with at RFWS are completely disengaged from education, with no plans to continue at school until the end of year 12 and no idea of what they might do when they leave school. In response to this lack of engagement and direction, we have a fully-trained Transition Advisor in the school who is released 4 afternoons a week to work with our at risk adolescents. We also have a high school program that features the development of resilience, self-management of behaviour and an integrated School to Work program that emphasizes work-related skills and practical, student-directed activities. We decided to evaluate the effectiveness of both of these strategies by student discussions and interviews, parent meetings and formal transition planning sessions.

**Findings and conclusions**

We found that our students and their families are overwhelmingly positive about the programs that we are running with the high school group at RFWS. The most common theme was how much our students love to come to our school and how different it is at their own school. Our challenge is, of course, how to take that positive engagement and redirect it back into the students’ own schools. Parents and students were also very positive about the transition program and felt that it did help to strengthen engagement with school back at home.

**Future directions**

In 2010 we need to carry out a sustained evaluation of our high school program and linked transition program. We now know that the programs are very well-regarded by our families, but need to strengthen the links with home schools to ensure that positive changes are being built on and maintained post enrolment at RFWS.

**Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction**

In 2010 the school sought the opinions of parents, students and teachers about the school. Responses from the whole of our school community were overwhelmingly positive.

A sample of responses is presented below.

“Your staff displayed a high level of expertise, a sense of courage as evident in their commitment to push boundaries ensuring equity and equality for Indigenous education...” Ngyanni Indigenous Corporation.

“It is a very sad moment for me to be writing this letter knowing we will never return. Therefore I just wanted to express our deepest thanks for the experience we have had with everyone at RFWS...the support we have been given and the
understanding and compassion along with the assistance to x’s school is something we will never forget” (Parent, moving interstate)

“...X has responded enthusiastically to SOLVE IT – she finds it fun and empowering, whilst knowing that it is helping her. Our small, isolated school was eager to work with you to implement the program” (Parent of child on outreach reading)

“Words are not enough to express how much we thank you” (Parent)

“It certainly is all about working together to achieve the best outcome” (Region)

Training, Accelerated Literacy, early speech and language development and transition. The average expenditure per teacher on professional learning at the school level was $1045, with a total of $14, 813 being expended on professional learning across the whole school. There were no new scheme teachers working at RFWS during 2010.

School development 2011-2013

RFWS has a 3-year plan to improve the educational outcomes for our students. The plan addresses the devastating literacy and numeracy problems for our students, the very poor attendance and retention levels of our students at their home schools and the low levels of educational achievement of many of our Aboriginal students. Our School Plan, 2011-2013 may be viewed on our school website.

Targets for 2011

Target 1

Improved literacy levels for students

Strategies to achieve this target include:

- Expansion of Solve IT outreach reading
- Greater use of video conferencing to up skill preschools and early years teachers in development of pre-reading skills
- Use of Solve IT centre to implement preschool early speech program

Our success will be measured by:

- 50 students being supported by Solve IT ® and trial of 3 students working on early phonological awareness program
- Quantitative evidence of reading gains in SOLVE IT ® students
- Early Learning Team setting up 1 video link a fortnight with home preschool or school to provide professional development activities.

Professional learning

During 2010 all staff took part in a range of professional learning including child protection training and working with students with a range of disabilities including autism, challenging behaviour, learning difficulties, mental health issues, intellectual disabilities and communication disorders. New staff members were trained in Aboriginal cultural awareness. Staff also attended training in sustainability, a number of software packages including computer animation, Multilit
Target 2

*Improved numeracy skills*

Strategies to achieve this target include:

- Research into existing numeracy programs and selection or development of numeracy assessment tool
- Development of practical reporting framework and resource kit
- Trial of outreach support

Our success will be measured by:

- Assessment program, including reporting and resources, in place by second semester 2011
- Collaboration with University of New England to trial outreach support using SOLVE IT Centre

Target 3

*Improved attendance, retention and engagement of Aboriginal students who attend RFWS*

Strategies to achieve this target include:

- Case management of all ATI students
- Use of PLPs as shared document with families, home schools and RFWS
- Greater use of video conferencing with home schools and families to build strong and positive links

Our success will be measured by:

- Families bringing PLPs with them each visit
- Increased number of video links involving Aboriginal students
- Data from home schools showing improvements in attendance and retention
- Interviews with families and home schools

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**About this report**

In preparing this report, the self-evaluation committee has gathered information from evaluations conducted during the year and analysed other information about the school’s practices and student learning outcomes. The self-evaluation committee and school planning committee have determined targets for the school’s future development.

Jenny Rayner, Principal

Lynda Edwards, Assistant Principal

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**School contact information**

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School Code: 5504

Parents can find out more information about Annual School Reports, how to interpret information in the reports and have the opportunity to provide feedback about these reports at: