Making every day count

Case study three

North West Queensland primary school

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- 410 students
- 20% Indigenous students
- 9% English as an additional language or dialect
- Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value – approximately 960 with 65% of students in bottom and bottom middle quartiles

1. Develop a positive school culture

Build the student voice

Have a student suggestion box.

"We have a student council with a boy and girl representing each classroom, who organise the events that we get awarded with." (Student)

"I like [our school] because you can make a difference." (Student)

Have activities and places that students enjoy

"The Yarning Circle – that's where we can go off if we want to relax and stuff." (Student)

Create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment

Use 'buddy benches' for the students to use when they would like someone to play with.

"You walk into this school and it's got a nice environment, a nice aura within the school, where kids are happy, parents are smiling, teachers are communicating with you. You get that feeling." (Parent)

2. Communicate high expectations of attendance

Set high expectations

It is important for staff to take ownership of the cultural shift needed to improve attendance.

Positively share the message

Awareness about attendance and its importance for academic success takes precedence over rewards.

"If you are missing lots of school days, you will miss out on something important and you won't be able to learn. Our school motto is about every student learning and we can't really learn if we are not at school!" (Student)

"The statewide attendance average] is 93%, but the school sets [its attendance target] at 95%. I'm happy to go with that because we are pitching for the A." (Principal)

3. Record and follow-up student absences

Welcome students who arrive late rather than penalise them.

"He didn't like arriving late, so he didn't come. So we found a strategy whenever he comes late, he comes and sees me and I will take him up to class. Then he hasn't arrived late because he's been with me. There won't be that, 'Why are you late?' it's just 'Come on in. Let's get going'." (Principal)

4. Monitor student non-attendance

Share the data positively with students by using attendance trackers in each classroom.

5. Provide intervention and support

Address barriers

Support families in hardship in ways that remove the 'shame factor'.

"While we have an expectation that students come to school wearing the school uniform, our message is just come to school, if you don't have shoes or uniform that's fine we can help you with that. Or wear whatever you need to wear and that's fine. Who cares what you look like, just come to school and we can help you." (Community representative)

A 'place and face' for Indigenous students

"A lot of Murri kids, if they have got an Aboriginal face there they feel comfortable. Murri people need that place and face in school where we feel safe … We won't get that education if you don't have someone there to understand us." (Indigenous Community Representative)

"We have got the support there with the breakfast club, with the lunchtime space that they can hang out and go and drop in and talk to support staff including the guidance officer and school chaplain" (Principal)

Queensland Government