

Education Assistant of the Year (Special Needs)

I am privileged to submit this nomination for Karen Warren, Challis Community Primary School (CCPS) as prospective and deserved Education Assistant (Special Needs) of the Year 2017.

I endorse Mrs Warren for consideration based on a foundation of exceptional commitment and service to the students, parents and staff of CCPS and, more broadly, to the Armadale community, consistently demonstrated from initial employment at Challis Early Education Centre in 2005 and from 2015 at the amalgamated school.

Mrs Warren epitomises Western Australian Department of Education's overriding focus on *success for all* through her fierce advocacy of students with additional learning needs; modeling, scaffolding and supporting students practically through her own work whilst tirelessly building collaborative partnerships with parents, teachers and external agencies. In these ways, Mrs Warren provides a daily support for potentially vulnerable children and their families, assisting our school to achieve our vision of *better than postcode results* in social, emotional and academic contexts. Mrs Warren's work thus provides a vital contribution to the continual maintenance of an effective and positive learning community, positively enhancing both student and staff achievement, and through this, empowering our broader network.

As an experienced and highly proficient Level 3 Special Needs Education Assistant, Mrs Warren flexibly uses an extensive range of support strategies to ensure all students are supported to succeed. Mrs Warren applies her *knowledge and skills* in a rich variety of roles at CCPS within the context of her position as Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) across the school. These include working directly with individual students and teaching staff in the planning, delivery and monitoring of rigorous individualised learning curriculums, positive liaison with parents, effective leadership of education assistant staff, mentoring, and the provision of professional learning teaching, non-teaching and parent groups. Mrs Warren's outstanding success as LSC is in part testament to her comprehensive knowledge and skills, and ability to apply this to enhance the experiences of children with special needs across the entire school. Consequently, Mrs Warren provides strong educational leadership. This leadership includes direct line management of 31 mainstream and special needs EA's employed across CCPS. Here, Mrs Warren consults regularly with education assistants to develop strategies to assist teachers in providing educational programs for identified students, assisting them both individually and as a collaborative group. In addition to working in consultation with the Principal to critically and cyclically review and alter performance management (PM) documentation and process for EA's, Mrs Warren puts her knowledge into practice for the benefit of students and staff, liaising individually through PM and monitoring to further develop professional competence and resolution of any concerns. Further, Mrs Warren is cognizant of the need to continuously enhance the positive culture of our school, and as a component of this, the positive culture of the EA team. Consequently, she has built strong positive relationships with all EA's regardless of role, and maintains these relationships through strong interpersonal skills. Mrs Warren's diligence in monitoring her staff means that she is often able to address staff worries before they become concerns, provide wisdom in terms of access to internal and external school resources, and to suggest alternative strategies in challenging situations. Mrs Warren's commitment is demonstrated daily through her meaningful presence within classrooms and means that she is regularly approached for assistance by teaching as well as non-teaching staff, inclusive of AIEOs, on topics including IEPs, SEN reporting, SENAT planning ABLEWA and modification/differentiation approaches. Additionally, Mrs Warren's collaborative style means that EA's regularly approach her for professional leadership advice in effectively managing challenges encountered with students, staff or parents. Mrs Warren's experience and expertise means she assists staff in clarifying their concerns, identifying key issues and in mapping out and deciding upon future actions. Here, Mrs Warren seeks advice from relevant professionals, including the Student Services team and Deputy Principals when appropriate, and consults with relevant policy documentation to ensure her work aligns with departmental principles and school operational/strategic planning. In these ways, Mrs Warren provides continual positive support for staff whilst encouraging further growth – epitomising the Challis Way.

Mrs Warren further applies her knowledge and skills to assist students at CCPS through facilitation of collaborative planning with staff and parents. As LSC and Special Needs EA, Mrs Warren assists in the implementation of specialized education intervention programs, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy, through timetabling, monitoring and communication with specialist services, whilst overseeing the various academic intervention programs run daily at Challis by EA's. Mrs Warren's work is informed by, and dependent upon, strong communicative relationships with external service providers and EA's. To ensure a
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culture of continual growth, Mrs Warren facilitates regular EA team meetings. These meetings reflect a structured approach to building a positive learning culture within the EA team, including sessions of relevant professional learning (PL), communication of core information, and structured opportunities to reflect on success and brainstorm solutions as a group to assist collegiality and skills building. Mrs Warren's facilitation of this group, and her ability to access relevant staff to present and share expertise, makes her an influential leader whose skills assist in building positive culture. Further, Mrs Warren works with family groups in advocacy of SN children. Through her long-standing employment at Challis, Mrs Warren possesses a wealth of contextual knowledge of families, as well as highly developed interpersonal skills. These skills are regularly used by Mrs Warren to the benefit of Challis students; Mrs Warren confidently and compassionately organises and chairs case conferences with the SN families, often including members of administration, teachers, additional EA's and representatives from other agencies including the Department for Child Protection (DCP). In these case conferences, Mrs Warren consistently demonstrates exceptional knowledge of children's accomplishments, techniques currently used at school to assist progression and potential home support. Mrs Warren's ability to build trusting and thoughtful relationships with all parties, based upon a foundation of strong learning knowledge, means that her work daily builds positive experiences for Challis students. This assists our community as a whole in better integrating the link between home and school for the benefit of their children.

Mrs Warren's focus on ensuring success for all students at means that she is a driven and diligent defender of the right for students with SN to access a responsive and inclusive education reflective of their individual requirements. In the context of independent public schooling and competing strategic and operational responsibilities, this means approaching conventional situations with *imagination, initiative and resourcefulness*. Mrs Warren demonstrates these traits through her careful consideration of learning approaches taken within classrooms and provision of alternative strategies and her willingness to liaise with external services to secure additional support for SN students. This has been evidenced by her role in developing learning support plans for identified students as a valued member of the Student Services Team; a specialised group of psychologists, speech and occupational therapists, social workers and support workers unified by a school Student Services Manager in partnership with Curtin University, and through her provision of staff PL on effective and creative use of existing school resources, including games and ICT. In 2017, one further example of Mrs Warren's *imagination, initiative and resourcefulness* was evident through the implementation and management of the Challis STRIVE program.

At the conclusion of 2016, students across CCPS were grouped into 2017 classes following extensive consultation. However, as the 2017 school year began, it became apparent that a disproportionate number of classes included students with significant diagnosed learning disabilities, including Intellectual Disability (ID), and imputed disabilities, additional to projected class numbers, and that this was not reflected in EA FTE, thus potentially negatively impacting upon CCPS's ability to cater for their unique learning needs. Following concern early in Term 1, Mrs Warren investigated this matter in a creative way with an emphasis on ensuring best learning for all, initially via data collation and analysis. Familiar with all aspects of disability resourcing, Mrs Warren identified SN students historical and new to CCPS, gathering statistical data around previous learning achievements and needs, as well as on current DRF. Additionally, Mrs Warren monitored the culture and learning within classrooms, through formal conversations with a cross section of staff as well as through information gathered by way of classroom observations and support, and built on this by facilitating school psychologist classroom observations. Analysis of this data revealed that early childhood classrooms (pre-primary to year two) contained a significant number of students with learning needs that impacted upon their ability to access mainstream curriculum, and that current staff resourcing could not provide sustained individual support. With these operational constraints in mind, Mrs Warren applied an innovative approach to make a positive difference. With an evidence-based foundation, Mrs Warren consulted with Principal Lee Musumeci to creatively approach alternative solutions. Following extensive discussion about alternatives in staff timetabling, student grouping and in-class support, Mrs Warren planned the development of what would become STRIVE. STRIVE is an alternative approach to central mainstream placement for ECE with ID; a small group program tailored to student learning needs guided by rigorous IEPs and supported by an intensive and collaborative team of EA's in collaboration with teachers and parents. This meant targeted social and academic teaching in a STRIVE classroom, with reintegration of students during breaks and afternoon mainstream class sessions. This dynamic approach meant a classroom responsive to individual student need whilst ensuring STRIVE students maintained a social, academic and emotional connection to their mainstream classroom and teacher. The innovative nature of STRIVE allowed for resourcing to be focused on the program, resulting in a high 2:1 ratio of students to staff, allowing for a responsive program inclusive of practical life skills and adventures, such as

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excursions to the local shopping center and incursions from services such as police and fire departments. Mrs Warren developed the proposal, lesson planning and staff induction/training, and worked with relevant DPs, Student Services Manager and staff to ensure initial concerns were addressed. Following collaborative student selection, Mrs Warren conducted a series of case conferences with parents of prospective students, explaining the outcomes and rationale for STRIVE and offering inclusion in the program. All parents chose for their students to join, with many expressing relief and gratitude for the school's willingness to flexibly cater for their SN child. Following development, STRIVE was implemented in week six of Term 1, with an individual classroom for participants. In addition to programming and overseeing the program, Mrs Warren led the teaching of the program four half days weekly, collaborating with staff to continuously review, assess and alter approaches reflective of formative assessment and observations. As the year continues, Mrs Warren's innovative and creative leadership resulted in continuous gains in student achievement. Student success, evidenced by student engagement and positive articulations, achievement in relation to individual learning plans and goals, and teacher feedback, led to a continual improvement focus. This focus has led to the integration of external support services, such as Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy, within the learning curriculum of STRIVE, and involvement of relevant classroom teachers in STRIVE for an hour or more a week to ensure even stronger continuity between the program and mainstream education. Parent feedback sessions, facilitated through termly case conferences, reflected a strong support for the STRIVE program, and commitment to the success of Mrs Warren's innovative approach on the overall achievement of a core group of students, and more broadly, upon the growth of teaching strategies and responsiveness of both teaching and non-teaching staff across CCPS. In these ways, Mrs Warren's innovation and creativity have proven inspirational.

Finally, Mrs Warren's work as an outstanding EA (Special Needs) is exemplified and supported by her *service to the whole school community*. A key member of the CCPS leadership team, Mrs Warren works tirelessly to identify opportunities to best serve Challis students and the Armadale community as a whole through her work across school administration and with community stakeholders. For example, as LSC and EA, Mrs Warren contributes to school leadership and strategic direction. These contributions include input into independent public schooling review processes, School Board, data improvement planning for students with special needs and Challis Business Planning/Operational Planning including target setting and annual revision. As a member of the core distributed leadership team at Challis, Mrs Warren attends weekly leadership development meetings, where she works intensively with other school leaders, led by Principal Lee Musumeci, to critically analyze and extend her own leadership skills, using evidence based research and reflective activities to deepen her practice. In this context, Mrs Warren has enhanced her connection to school leaders across the primary school, working respectfully to engage in disciplined dialogue on contemporary school based issues and to consolidate knowledge across phases of learning. This learning is embedded across the school by Mrs Warren's leadership across the non-teaching sector as well as through her positive relationships with leaders across the school.

Additionally, Mrs Warren is instrumental in leading annual reporting requirements around SEN reporting. Here, Mrs Warren works individually and collaboratively with education assistants to ensure consistent understanding of implementation of SEN planning tools developed by teachers, and provides additional support to teachers and parents in understanding SEN reporting. This intensive work in 2017 included provision of whole staff professional learning, whereby Mrs Warren co-developed and presented informative sessions targeted around developing and setting up individual planning tool using SEN and SENAT resources. These sessions were followed by individual support at point of need, resulting in consistent development of SEN planning across the school, and wide shared understanding of the language of SEN reporting. Mrs Warren supports this work through individual case conferencing meetings with parents at point of need, whereby target parents are assisted to understand, interpret and contribute towards their child's learning plans. These services assist in building positive empowerment of staff and community members beyond those working directly with students with special needs, ensuring Challis Community Primary School continues its journey towards success for all.

In these ways and countless others, Mrs Warren demonstrates her outstanding commitment to both the Challis community and public schooling in Western Australia. I thus seek and support her nomination for 2017 Education Assistant (Special Needs) of the Year.