

NOVEMBER 2017

Inspire

Stories about WA's top public school principals, teachers and support staff



Department of
Education

Making magic

Unicycles lined up outside the classroom, complex algebraic equations written on the whiteboard, gigantic real-life whale ribs leaning against the wall and cars powered by mousetraps lined up in a row on shelves. This is the classroom of Carl Sanderson.

Meeting Carl for the first time and catching him in action, it's clear he's an amazing teacher. His students are enthralled by his every word. He's a tall man, loud and boisterous. He's humorous and full of fun. Yet

there's a softer side to his story that he's not afraid to share.

"I live by the saying that nothing in life worth having comes easily," he explains.

"My father passed away when I was five which was obviously a life changing event for my mother who was left with four young children. As devastating as this was, I believe it was a defining period of my life. It made us resilient and strong – and I learnt that life doesn't always go to plan."

It was this experience that Carl believes

made him a better person and, ultimately, a better teacher.

"I'm always telling my students that the willingness to work hard, persist when things are tough, and being able to bounce back from setbacks is far more important than IQ," he says.

For the past five years Carl's been teaching a class of the brightest students at Wattle Grove Primary School in Perth's hills.

It's an innovate concept where the 10 most academically gifted students from Years 4, 5 and 6 are in a class together, with Carl at the helm to challenge and inspire them intellectually, physically and emotionally.

While the academic outcomes have been outstanding, the lessons stimulating and every project exciting, Carl is focused on shaping individuals who are proud of themselves.

"The best piece of advice I've ever received is to be true to yourself, don't just follow the crowd," he says.

"I'm always talking with my class about people such as Nelson Mandela and Rosa Parks – people with moral courage who didn't stand by and let wrong things go unchallenged.

"Being true to your own beliefs and being prepared to stand up for them – that's what I want to pass on to my students."

There's no denying Carl is true to himself, which is one of his most endearing and likeable characteristics.

"People say that I have a good sense of humour, but not a conventional one. I have a love of the absurd and the ridiculous," he smiles.

"I'm a proud science geek! I'm always in demand for quiz nights – I love facts and odd bits of useless information. I mean, who doesn't know that there are seven parts to a spider's leg?"

Joelle Greenway, chair of the school board, says Carl's passion for lifelong learning is inspiring.

"Helping students become more resilient and persistent is crucial to them achieving their potential."

"Carl's classroom is a place where questions are posed rather than answers provided. Students are challenged to succeed," she says.

"He demands high standards and intellectual rigour from his students to ensure they are completely immersed in the learning process."

In the classroom, Carl tells a good story.

"I think I inherited some of my parents' sense of the dramatic," he says.

And with more than 29 years of teaching behind him, he has many stories to tell.

"I teach my students circus skills – riding unicycles, juggling and spinning plates.

It's an excellent way to develop coordination, cross-brain switching, persistence and social skills," he explains.


"At the end we put on a big show for the junior primary students.

"One year I had the bright idea of including a magic act. I love being in my workshop at home and making things so I designed and built a box that would allow my student magician to saw a student assistant in half.

"As I've always been an upper primary teacher, I made the mistake of not considering the sensibilities of my young audience.

"When my magician sawed the assistant in half, terrified five year olds were convinced we had killed her!

"To this day, I'm pretty sure there is a group of young adults who would still remember that act."

Apart from the fun, surprising and sometimes outrageous experiences, Carl hopes his students will remember that, in his classroom, they were in a place where they could be themselves, a place where difference was celebrated and valued. 



WA Premier's Primary Teacher of the Year finalists
Top to bottom:
Anthony Horn, West Beechboro Primary School; Alexandria Guthrie, Roebuck Primary School; Jessica Stevens, Baynton West Primary School



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WA PREMIER'S
SECONDARY
TEACHER OF
THE YEAR



Building robots, engineering remote controlled submarines and researching wildlife in the wetlands – authentic, real-life and hands-on experiences for students are central to Jade Warrington's teaching.

"Jade just isn't afraid of getting her hands dirty. She does everything she asks of her students," says colleague Lorraine Ellis, head of science at Newton Moore Senior High School.

The science and engineering teacher – who is also the school's STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) coordinator – is a self-proclaimed "Lego fiend" and "nerd full of lame science jokes".

She's also the master of invention. Designing and making models alongside her young inventors, she doesn't put a lid on what they do.

Being 'real' is something that comes up a lot with Jade. She knows that her actions and words have a great impact on students and wants to be a positive role model for the world's future scientists.

You can often catch Jade and her students working in the school's onsite wetlands or experimenting with soil and coffee. Students in one of her Year 9 science classes have worked with the City of Bunbury to plan and research sites for Osprey nests in the Leschenault Inlet mangroves. Students in another class have taken water samples of Koombana Bay and surveyed the local dolphin population.

"It's really rewarding to see students step out of their comfort zones and work together to try something new," she says. "Through group work and problem solving, I like to make sure students are confident when they go out in the real world and look for jobs.

"My classes deal with real life, it has meaning and students are contributing to their community."



WA Premier's Secondary Teacher of the Year finalists

Left to right:

Hayden Brown, Broome Senior High School;
Tyril Houghton, Bunbury Senior High School;
Judith Gauci, Willetton Senior High School

She recently introduced her students to a 3D printer and says they were blown away.

"Many hadn't seen one in action, some hadn't even heard of a 3D printer," she says with a smile.

"Seeing students make a connection between what they are learning and what is happening in their lives, or realising that how they are learning will help them in the future, that's really rewarding."

With an 11 year career under her belt, the mother of two says she never takes what she does for granted.

"Teachers come into contact with many students throughout the course of the day, week and year. They are in a position to make a positive impact on so many lives – it's a privilege not to be taken lightly," she says.

Not only does she take a whole-class approach in her teaching, she also considers each student's learning style.



It was during her time as a year coordinator that she learnt just how much of a difference teachers can make.

"A student in my year group had lost interest in school towards the end of Year 12 and probably wouldn't graduate," she remembers.

"I arranged for him to complete his work during breaks at school with access to a computer, books and the internet – things he didn't have at home.


"He was really reluctant to complete his work, and not impressed with the fact that I was so persistent. During breaks, I'd go out and find him in the school grounds when he didn't turn up."

Her efforts were worth it – she got to see him graduate at the end of that year.

"His mum told me he was the first person in his family to finish school and he said I was the reason he finished school and got into TAFE," Jade says. "Ultimately he made good choices



that set him on track – but it's nice to think you can play a small part in putting someone on the right path to a better future.

"I am an extremely lucky person because teaching is not my job, it's my vocation." 

"It's really rewarding to see students step out of their comfort zones and work together to try something new."

INSPIRING
invention

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WA PRIMARY PRINCIPAL
OF THE YEAR

Respectful LEADERSHIP

"I love seeing children learning and feeling excited about what they have achieved."



WA Primary Principal of the Year finalists

Top to bottom:
Ian Hastings, Jandakot Primary School;
Lyn Macauley, Bannister Creek Primary School;
Adriano Truscott, Wiluna Remote
Community School

Respect is a powerful and emotive word. It's defined as a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities or achievements.

It's a word frequently used when people talk about Lisa Criddle – and indeed it's a word she says has shaped her life.

"I was raised with respect being a key value in our house as a child and that still comes through all the time in my thinking when I interact with people," she says.

Today, Lisa is principal of Allendale Primary School in Geraldton and, over the last seven years, she's built a true sense of community in the school.

That's never easy in a school which has a complex student population, with many students starting school with significant language challenges and many transient families in the area. Lisa not only understands this complexity but embraces the multicultural blend of families that make up the school community.

Deputy principal Jennifer Gadsby sees firsthand how Lisa works to build trust and create a vision for a school of excellence.

"The school community has a keen sense of ownership and commitment to the school, with trust in Lisa. They're very proud of the positive reputation of the school and the achievements that have been made," she says.

The chair of the judging panel for the award, South Metropolitan Regional Executive Director Sue Cuneo, witnessed this too.

"Lisa works very well with the Aboriginal community due in large part – in the words of those we spoke to – to her genuine respect for and commitment to culture and inclusivity," she says.

Parents talk about how the motto 'Strive to Succeed' permeates every classroom and extends into the lives of their children. Their respect for Lisa is clear.

Lisa is at the centre of the school's approach to teaching and learning, leading to a marked improvement in students' literacy and numeracy achievements. As a Teacher Development School for early childhood education, English and maths, teachers mentor colleagues from other schools across the region, sharing their knowledge and expertise.

"Lisa believes in building the capacity of teachers to achieve the best learning opportunities for students," Jennifer says.

"She's instigated collaborative planning sessions, built strong evidence-based teaching practices, implemented peer and classroom observations, supported action research into

effective reading instruction, and refined data analysis processes.

"Under Lisa's leadership, our school is on a powerful trajectory of improvement."

Lisa's impact in the school is mirrored in her impact across the region.

"She's recognised for her work with other principals in the network and through the leadership role she plays in the region's professional learning strategy," Sue says.

"Through her, and the school's involvement in these things, staff see how others go about their business and then adopt or adapt various new approaches to teaching and learning to benefit their students."


For Lisa, it's often the simple things that make the most difference.

"I love seeing children learning and feeling excited about what they have achieved," she says.

"I love talking with children about their weekend and what they've been doing. I love interacting with parents and staff each day to hear about their successes and challenges, and what makes school great for them.

"I love going into kindy and pre-primary if the day has been extra challenging to be part of what they are doing."

From a childhood in Geraldton playing sport, riding bikes and playing schools – as the teacher, of course – Lisa's goal for the future is to continue to be the best principal she can be.

"I'll do this by having a go at new ideas and inspiring others to grow professionally," she says with a respectful smile. 



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"We always say to anyone 'you walk through the college gates, you're part of our family'. We treat everyone that way."

FAMILY

comes first

When Armando Giglia smiles, and he frequently does, it's impossible not to return the gesture. He's instantly likeable and laughs readily – often at himself.

Yet he's not ashamed to admit that there are days when his job as principal brings him to tears. A heartfelt thank-you letter he received recently from a student he had taught decades ago brought tears of gratitude.

Tears also fell when a troubled young refugee student at a previous school, who would only settle down by walking around the grounds with Armando, finally shared the gut-wrenching reality of war and confessed his parents had been murdered and he had killed to survive.

Armando is a big-hearted man and his deep-seated empathy for others is the foundation of everything he does as principal.

When he was offered the chance to take charge of the brand new Butler College five years ago, he opened the school with 290 students under three pillars that underpin every aspect of college life – knowledge, integrity and respect.

"The knowledge part is easy. We're a school and I really believe we should always be learning – and challenging ourselves to do just that," he says. "When staff or students do something, I want them to do it because it's the right thing to do, nothing else, because it is right – that's the integrity. Then there's respect; you need to respect others if you are going to respect and believe in yourself.

"It goes back to the golden rule – treat others as you would like them to treat you. It's a simple philosophy, but I'm simple, so I like that!" he laughs.

It's true, there is a refreshing simplicity about the way Armando leads Butler College and ensures that its now almost 2000 students go from good things to great.

"I knew from the start our greatest strengths as a college would come from the relationships we develop and the people who make up our community," he explains.

"To me the most important tool in a teacher's arsenal is their interpersonal skills. You need very good interpersonal skills if you want to work here.

"It may sound like a cliché, but we're a family. We always say to anyone 'you walk through the college gates, you're part of our family'. We treat everyone that way."

With 38 years' experience in Western Australian public schools, 16 of those as a principal, Armando has met the challenge of developing a truly inclusive school at Butler College, and at Mirrabooka Senior High School before that.

More than 200 teachers and nearly 80 education assistants take pride in the achievement of Butler College's three pillars as much as they do in improved Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment results and impressive ATAR predictions for the college's first graduating group of Year 12s this year.

Butler College board chair Mike Ellis says the strength of Armando as head of Butler College is his ability to attract and retain high quality staff.

"All bar one of the college's original foundation staff have remained at the college and dozens are currently working on applications for Senior Teacher, Level 3 Classroom Teacher, and promotional positions as a result of Armando's culture of continuous development and support for their careers," Mike says.

Armando's management skills were put to the test in 2015 when the college doubled in size.

The addition of more than 600 new students and the need to induct 70 new teachers and education assistants saw him


safely guide the 'Butler College family' through significant and ongoing change.

"Using the experience of being a principal and on the WA Secondary School Executives Association management committee over numerous years, there have been many changes at the college during its first five years," Mike says.

"All have been completed within budget and with the continued support of staff, students and families as reflected in our glowing community surveys."

Armando explains that many students at Butler College have come from other lands and are torn between two cultures. More than 300 students have special needs and get additional help with their learning.

"Every single student has classes in our specialist education area so they are in close contact with our students with special needs. It builds understanding," he says.

"It's not a bad little place is it?" he laughs as he gazes around the expansive collection of buildings that make up Butler College. "The buildings are fantastic, but the people are better – I really mean that. The people inside are better." 

**WA SECONDARY
PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR**



WA Secondary Principal of the Year finalists
Left to right: Damian Shuttleworth, Carine Senior High School; Cheryl Townsend, Ballajura Community College; Saeed Amin, Broome Senior High School



Student goals in FOCUS



A broken neck and three months in a brace gave Debbie Yates plenty of time to pause and reflect.

“It made me realise how important friends and family are, and how much I love my job,” Debbie says.

Having switched gears a couple of years earlier at 37 years old to study teaching, the mother of three already had successful stints in human resources, recruitment and her own career consulting business under her belt.

Time out to recuperate from her injuries after a car accident last year crystallised in her mind that she’d made the right move to work at Ashdale Secondary College and have an impact on teenagers in the classroom.

“I love having a laugh with my students and that feeling you get when the class is

working together on a great project,” the information and communication technologies, STEM and photography teacher explains.

“Caring for students across all facets of their education is so important – like knowing how they’re going in other subjects and helping them with things that aren’t related to my class, such as how to write a resume and advice about interviews or maths problems.”

Head of Science Learning Area Matthew Titmanis knew as soon as he met Debbie that she would do great things.

“Even as a first year teacher, she was brimming with confidence, had a flair for creative ideas and, most importantly, was passionate about student achievement,” he says.

In her time at the school, Debbie has spearheaded a number of changes across the school.

Her STEM Champions workshops link to local primary schools, bringing younger students and their parents to work together on projects. These have been widely successful and have ongoing positive impacts as the students move into secondary education.

“The STEM Girls’ Day Camp to empower female secondary students to take control of their futures has been one of the most successful events our school has ever run,” Matthew says.

“This success was down to Debbie’s ability to challenge students, and build effective partnerships with the wider community.”



WA Beginning Teacher of the Year finalists
Clockwise left to right:
Kristy McKay, Melville Senior High School;
Katisha Barrett, Allendale Primary School;
Ashley Wright, Ashdale Secondary College

“A great day at work for me is when I know I have connected with my students.”

An avid reader, Debbie recalls the impact of her own Year 2 teacher, Colleen Riley.

“She was so supportive and went out of her way to foster my inquiring mind and love of books. She even arranged for me to go to another school’s library after I went through all the books at my own school!” she laughs.

Debbie says many students have had an impact on her in just two-and-a-half years of teaching – all for different reasons.

“The students in my Year 12 photography

class have so much personality and I’m going to miss them all at the end of this year. I’ve taught lots of students in this class for two years and it’s made me realise how important it is to develop rapport with students and get to know them individually,” she says.

Her students certainly appreciate her efforts – such as Year 12 student Felicia Plaiche who says, “Mrs Yates is a kind, creative and intelligent teacher. I like the advice she gives us to always improve.”

Continually striving to get the best from her students, Debbie’s short-term goal is to refine some of the subjects she teaches, making activities more meaningful and bringing in more authentic learning opportunities.

On a personal level, travel with her family is top of the list.

“I travelled around Australia twice with my family when I was a kid,” she says. “We had so many adventures and I developed a love of the Australian bush.


“I’d now love to travel to Europe with my family and introduce my own kids to the history and culture of another part of the

world. I’d also like to visit schools in Finland to see how they work and are structured.”

It all seems a far cry from her first job. Working on her family’s Christmas tree farm from the ages of 12 to 20, she did everything from selling trees on the roadside to planting, counting stock and even making deliveries to corporate clients dressed as Santa’s helper!

It was early experiences like these where her organised, friendly and driven personality came to the fore – ideally setting her up for her later vocation as a teacher.

“A great day at work for me is when I know I have connected with my students – the lesson really works and I can tell from their smiles and engagement that I’ve got through to them,” Debbie reflects.

“I want them to know that I genuinely care and I’m interested in each and every one of them.” 



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WA EDUCATION
ASSISTANT
OF THE YEAR

Striving for THE BEST

When something is meant to be, it will be – and when Karen Warren finally stepped into the classroom, it was a long time coming.

Growing up playing ‘school’ with her sisters sparked a dream that became reality as young Karen began to study teaching.

Everything was falling into place – until life got in the way.

Having to say goodbye to her studies, she began working in banking where she stayed for the next 21 years.

It would take something significant to get Karen back on track.

That significant moment came when Karen was confronted by the third armed hold-up at the bank in six months. She pulled the pin on banking and revisited her childhood dream of life in a classroom.

She went on to study to become an education assistant with a focus on children with special needs. The decision, she says, was the best she ever made – and that sentiment is shared by her colleagues and students at Challis Community Primary School.

“We work with children who face all sorts of challenges in their lives,” she says. “It’s incredible to see their faces light up when they achieve something they don’t think they can.”

She’s a fierce advocate of students with additional learning needs and works tirelessly to help every student succeed.

Recently, after identifying an opportunity to transform the way students with special needs are taught in the classroom, Karen developed an innovative program called STRIVE.

STRIVE ensures these students get intensive and tailored support, while giving them time in mainstream classes to maintain social and academic connections with their classmates and teachers.

“We now have 12 students in STRIVE who work closely with staff to achieve their



WA Education Assistant of the Year finalists

Top to bottom:

Marie Dunne, Butler College;

Linda Tulip, Greenwood College;

Peta Hooper, Cassia Primary School

"We work with children who face all sorts of challenges in their lives."

unique goals in literacy, numeracy, and life and social skills,” she says.

The results speak for themselves, with Karen reflecting on a story which shows it’s all worthwhile.

“A Year 1 child with an intellectual disability and significant speech impairment came to us, not able to recognise her feelings and barely speaking one word answers. Since joining STRIVE this year not only is she able to clearly communicate her feelings but she’s exceeded our expectations in reading and writing too,” she smiles.

It’s this commitment to have a positive impact, as well as her incredible experience and expertise, that makes her a well-respected leader at the school.

Leading a team of 31 education assistants, she has a way of instilling confidence in her staff and helping them develop strategies for students that really make a difference.

“We have an amazing group of staff who support each other, laugh with one another and work together to get the best possible outcomes for students,” Karen says. “I’m proud that we go above and beyond for students each and every day.”


While never far from the classroom, as learning support coordinator Karen works closely with students and teachers to deliver individual learning programs, builds strong relationships with parents, mentors her peers, provides professional learning and coordinates parent groups.

And there’s no denying that her valuable contribution to the school has a flow-on effect.

According to her colleagues, Karen has created an effective and positive learning community which has not only improved student and staff achievement, it’s also empowered the school’s broader network.

But it hasn’t always been smooth sailing.

“In 2016, I was very ill and it took many weeks to diagnose the problem,” she explains. “This experience helped me understand how short life is. It made me learn to enjoy the smallest things in life and live life to the full – because you never know when it could be taken away from you.”

Just as she helps her students to overcome adversity, throughout her illness Karen never showed signs of slowing down, and her innovative and creative leadership is continuing to take the school to new heights. 



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WA ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER EDUCATION OFFICER OF THE YEAR

THE GIFT OF education

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Jeanette Hayden knows only too well the reality behind Nelson Mandela’s inspiring words.

She felt happy and included at school – and wants the students at Merredin College to feel that way too.

An Aboriginal and Islander education officer at the college, Jeanette – who’s affectionately known as Jen – says she loved school. “I went to school every day because I wanted to learn,” she recalls. “Mum always said that if we kids didn’t go to school we’d never get anywhere in life.

“I want my students to feel the same way – to look back on my classes and remember them as fun and happy times.”

Jeanette went to Karrinyup Primary School and later Scarborough Senior High School before moving back to Merredin where she was born and now calls home.

She admits that completing Year 11 and 12 at TAFE when she was 20 years old was hard but helped her get to where she is today.

For the last 15 years she’s been working with Aboriginal students in Merredin, first as an education assistant at North Merredin Primary School and then as an Aboriginal and Islander education officer at Merredin Senior High School, a role she has continued since the schools amalgamated to form Merredin College in 2012.

With a determined focus to see students grow up and “make something of their lives”,

she wants them to go to school every day as she did.

Her positive impact on students at the college in the Wheatbelt east of Perth is undeniable. With 600 students from Kindergarten to Year 12, it’s a big country school.

Jeanette welcomes every Aboriginal student and their family to the college when they first enrol. She organises transport to take students to and from school. She goes to homes to discuss children’s absences. She makes sure children have food to eat and uniforms to wear to school.

Alongside this, she also teaches Noongar and has introduced professional learning for her colleagues to provide extra support for Aboriginal students.

In a recent school survey, every single Aboriginal parent confirmed they felt welcome at the school – and Jeanette was identified by many as the person behind that.

“I know from my own personal experience that education is vitally important so what I do in getting students to school is the first part of that process,” she says.

And there’s been a significant improvement in the attendance of primary school-aged Aboriginal students.

Principal Beverley Stanes says Jeanette is a crucial link between the school and the Aboriginal community.

“She plays a significant part in bringing the school and the Aboriginal community together by meeting regularly with parents and providing a greater voice for the Aboriginal community,” she says.

“She’s well respected in our community and provides a great deal of historical information to deepen understanding of family relationships and cultural sensitivities.”

Jeanette says she’s easy going but tough when she needs to be. It’s this toughness that’s helping her realise her goal of seeing students succeed after secondary school.

“A couple of years ago I worked with a student in secondary school,” she recalls. “He wanted to be a diesel mechanic and I had to push him to get his marks up to what he needed.

“He graduated from Year 12, won an apprenticeship at a mine up north and is now a qualified diesel mechanic at that mine. He has since bought a house, a car and a motorbike – and is only 23 years old.

“If you want to achieve anything in life you cannot give up. That’s the best piece of advice I have ever received.”



WA Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer of the Year finalists

Top to bottom:
Kelly Wylie, West Beechboro Primary School;
Isobel Bevis, John Tonkin College;
Laycee Coles, East Narrogin Primary School

“If you want to achieve anything in life you cannot give up. That’s the best piece of advice I have ever received.”



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**WA SCHOOL SERVICES
STAFF MEMBER
OF THE YEAR**

*"People will
always remember
how you make
them feel."*

WORDS

T H E P O W E R O F

An idyllic childhood on a farm in a small Wheatbelt town was where Michelle Dirks dreamt of one day becoming a famous author.

She loved writing stories and poetry as a child. Her Year 7 teacher even told her he wanted to read a book penned by her one day, so it came as no surprise to those who knew her when she decided to become a journalist.

"I worked as a journalist for many years and, although I absolutely loved the job, it came with some challenges," she recalls.

"There was no such thing as GPS when I started and I was useless at reading road maps! People would draw me mud maps so I could find my way around. For some strange reason I kept those mud maps for years until I couldn't shove any more into the glove box 'just in case'. To this day, one of my greatest fears is being lost."

It was the human interest stories that the self-described 'directionally challenged' journalist and now student support coordinator at Rockingham Senior High School was drawn to. She loved speaking with people and discovering what made them tick. It was one reason



**WA School Services
Staff Member of the
Year finalists**
Left to right:
Kathryn Dillon,
Armadale Senior
High School;
Lisa Mitchell, East
Kalgoorlie Primary
School;
James Roelofs,
Esperance Senior
High School

she decided to go back to university to study counselling.

Michelle is now part of the school's student services team, counselling students and mentoring staff so they too can better meet the needs of students.

There's no doubt it can be a difficult job. She and her colleagues often hear sad stories when working with students with complex backgrounds. But this doesn't mean you won't hear laughter coming from the office. Michelle says they prevent compassion fatigue by not taking themselves too seriously and taking the time to enjoy the company of staff and students.

She's in what she calls a privileged position of helping students and staff. She enjoys forming meaningful bonds with them through initiatives to boost the confidence and mental health and wellbeing of students.

She goes into classes to check on students, organises events like Mental Health Week and Multicultural Week, and arranges for inspiring experts to speak at the school. She mentors students who want to follow in her footsteps to pursue careers in youth and social work. She's also set up a Buddy Zone for students who need extra support.

Her tireless dedication to helping students has made her an invaluable asset to school staff and no one appreciates her support more than the students. A thank you note from a Year 11 student perhaps best sums it up: "Thank you for helping us throughout all the tough times

we have had. With all your thoughtfulness and generosity, you have taught us many life lessons. Thank you for all the times that you have been there for us."

While her career is about helping others, she also knows the importance of self-improvement and looking after herself.

"I'm passionate about learning as much as I can so I can make a difference in the world," she says. "I can't imagine a time when I won't be improving my knowledge."

She's currently studying the neurobiology of trauma and childhood trauma. "My dream is to work for the United Nations and fly to countries where they have experienced a traumatic event and work with those affected," she says.

One of the most important lessons Michelle has learnt from her own experiences is that nothing is forever. The pain we sometimes feel, she says, can be fleeting or prolonged but it's not forever.

A diagnosis 10 years ago meant seven weeks of radiotherapy and chemotherapy. She kept this difficult news from almost everyone because she didn't want to burden them and thought she'd be stronger going through it on her own. In doing so, she learnt some valuable life lessons.

"It was a really difficult journey and I spent a lot of time thinking about who I was and what I wanted in life," she says.


"I started practising mindfulness and

began to understand the importance of being at peace with myself. That experience made me stronger and more willing to live life and create wonderful memories. It also taught me that I'm actually stronger when I have the support of those who love me."

Michelle's a fighter. She fights for her students even more fiercely and, when they leave school, she wants them to remember her as someone who cared for them and never gave up on them.

"A couple of years ago I went to the wedding of a student I had counselled for three years," says Michelle. "She had been severely at risk and was twice admitted to a mental health unit."

"When she left school I referred her to an external counsellor but I continued to meet with her occasionally. When she was planning her wedding she asked me to help and I was so happy to be involved. Watching her get married was a highlight of my career."

"She wrote me a card that I will always treasure, thanking me for caring and for always believing in her. People will always remember how you make them feel." 

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WA PREMIER'S EXCELLENCE IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AWARD

It's February 1957. In a cave on the side of the Parmarrjarti Hills just south of Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley, 20 children are sitting at desks on the sand floor doing lessons. They are the children of the Gooniyandi people who have come off the river and the Walmajarri people who have come off the desert to live and work on Gogo Station. It's the first day of school and this is the first station school in the State.

Five years later, a single classroom and teacher accommodation are built just 400 metres from the cave school.

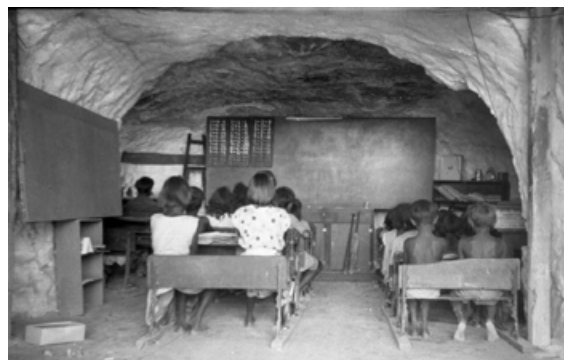


Photo courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia BA1240/32



WA Premier's Excellence in Aboriginal Education Award finalists

Left to right: Broome Senior High School; East Kalgoorlie Primary School; Wiluna Remote Community School

Today, 100 students attend Bayulu Remote Community School.

"The community has a strong affinity with the school that goes back to the cave school days," says principal Leon Wilson.

"We see that affinity at assemblies, NAIDOC Week events and sports carnivals where the generations prior – parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts – come in to reminisce, look at old photos and share stories with our students.

"We're a unique school. With the generations that have come through here, there's a really strong bond between the community and school. The school has always been viewed by the community as one that is effective."

It's a sentiment shared by Cissy Nugget, one of the school's six Aboriginal and Islander education officers (AIEOs) who were all past students of the school.

"I came to the school in 1968 and now I'm back here teaching all the grandkids," Cissy says.

"My oldest sister and other family members were at the cave school and that's where education started. Our family was very proud of that, and we take school and education very seriously. We have pride in it."

Unlike many remote community schools, Bayulu is not in the community. Each day, students catch a bus to school from six communities – Bayulu, Gillaroong, Karnparmi, Joy Springs, Ngalingkadji and Mimbi.

It's everyone coming together that makes the school such a close knit community.

"The word that describes the Gooniyandi and Walmajarri people as one mob is Parmarrjarti," Leon explains.

"That's the name of our school council, the Parmarrjarti School Council, because it's saying that at this school we are all one mob. You put your purple shirt on and those divisions by language or community go out of the window once you're here."

Deputy principal Jane Salt, who has taught in the Kimberley for much of her career, describes Bayulu as a big family.

"The staff are given Aboriginal skin names so they feel a sense of belonging and we work cross-culturally to see learning outcomes improve," she says.

That endeavour is embedded across the school.

"At our last planning session, we talked about having a focus on curriculum, effective teaching and early childhood education. We know that early intervention is the most effective way to ensure our kids can read, write and have a good grasp of numeracy," Leon says.

"It's also about consistency with relationships, instruction and curriculum delivery. For example, one teacher uses a particular language to describe a concept and another teacher the following year uses the same language. The data flows through as well because everyone is doing the same thing.

"This helps our kids enormously because nine out of 10 don't speak standard Australian English at home."

It's this focus on strong relationships with students and the community as well as the tangible commitment to every student's learning by all staff that makes this school stand out.

Jane says staff work closely with the six AIEOs and are leading the way in implementing the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework.

"I always ask the AIEOs first about decisions that have an impact on the school," she says.


"They play a key role in developing our school vision and plan; they'll be here long after the current teachers have left."

Perhaps Charlene Davis, who has worked at the school for 11 years as an AIEO, best sums up why the school is such a success.

"Everyone at the school is a leader and a

role model," she says. "We aren't just AIEOs here, we all wear different hats. We are all grandmothers, aunties, mothers.

"A good day for me is seeing a lot of kids around, happy and playing together and in the classroom doing their best. I remember going into a staff meeting and Leon had the NAPLAN results that showed us how our kids had moved up. That melts my heart when I see our kids growing.

"We are proud of them and proud of the teachers we've got. They push our kids to be the best they can be and we want that to continue." 

"The community has a strong affinity with the school that goes back to the cave school days."

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CAPTURING LEARNING moments

WA PRIMARY SCHOOL OF THE YEAR



"We want our students to be curious, lifelong learners."

In the classroom and in the nature playground; with robots, books and models; talking, running, playing and sharing – everything Jolimont Primary School does is captured as a learning moment.

With 280 students and 45 staff, it's punching above its weight and growing rapidly with a 25 per cent increase in students in the past two years.

"We want our students to be curious, lifelong learners," says principal Barbara Iffla.

"We take both a professional and personal responsibility for their learning. We have a clear moral purpose to work as a team, share our expertise, use research-based teaching practices, and analyse data to enrich students' education."

High quality teaching is a defining aspect of the school, with an emphasis on feedback for students and staff. Teachers go into each other's classes to observe lessons, and support improvement and progress.

Children learn through hands-on and creative activities. In devising the nature playground, for example, students, parents and staff hopped on a bus to visit other playgrounds; and guest speakers talked with students about safety to help them come up with a design which was then built.

For student council elections, the school calls in the WA Electoral Commission so students learn about election processes.

Alongside this sits differentiated, formal and explicit instruction – with plenty of room for teachers to show their individual style and flair.

"We embed our strategic directions through a coaching approach to ensure understanding and practice in every classroom that leads to improved student outcomes," says associate principal Natalie Oddy.

"We track student progress and this is underpinned by a strong approach to curriculum differentiation from Kindergarten to Year 6.

"Our students perform incredibly well on national assessments. On average, 70 per cent of students now achieve in the top 25 per cent of the State."

As a Teacher Development School for early childhood education, humanities and social sciences, teachers are regularly observed by colleagues from other schools seeking to improve their teaching.

For students, there are five priorities which Barbara says are supported by the school community "with delight".

"First, we challenge our most able students," she explains. "We vary what we teach and how we teach.

"Second, we look at how top performing nations teach maths and use this. So we teach mathematical thinking to solve

non-routine and multi-step problems. Third, for humanities and social sciences, we use a guided inquiry approach for students to develop critical and creative thinking.

"Our fourth priority is for teachers to explicitly teach strategies for students to read and write successfully as part of a broader literacy program. This includes higher order thinking skills and an emphasis on inferential comprehension.

"Our final priority is innovation and STEM – science, technology, engineering and maths – which includes robotics and coding to challenge and extend students' problem solving and computational thinking."

The judging panel describes the school as inclusive, happy and productive, with thorough self-assessment and planning processes.

"We saw a school where students and their learning are central, where the board and staff are actively and genuinely involved, and where there is rigorous debate about teaching," says panel chair Alison Ramm, Wheatbelt Regional Executive Director.

"We also saw evidence of outstanding leadership and numerous examples of shared

leadership across the school."


The board and parents and citizens' association are integral to the school's success. The P&C seeks advice from the board and principal about how funds raised can best support student learning.

Board chair Michael Hodgkins is pleased with the school's strong position.

"The board is one of the many strong links between the school and the Jolimont community, and we're pleased with our close partnerships with the P&C and City of Subiaco," he says.

"Our role in planning and evaluating school policies and programs is continuous – and we provide a network of support and accountability for the school's leaders."

The staff are proud that the school has risen to the challenge of being 'small but mighty'.

"This year, 'joy' has been a focus as we celebrate and recognise the tremendous efforts of our students, staff and community. We are looking forward to building 'wonder and curiosity' in 2018," Barbara says. 



WA Primary School of the Year finalists

Clockwise left to right:
Subiaco Primary School;
Narembeen District High School;
Rockingham Beach Education
Support Centre

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Wave OF SUCCESS

An ambitious goal to land Carine Senior High School in the top five public schools in the State is no pipe dream, according to the judges of this year's WA Secondary School of the Year.

In some times past, the 44-year-old school on Perth's famous northern coastal strip had been known locally for its successful surfing program among other things. And, some might say, a fairly laidback 'surfer' attitude.

Today, its students embrace an abundance of opportunities – while still nabbing surfing titles – and their academic results and other achievements have surged. Optimism permeates the school along with the salty air.

No longer 'cruisey Carine', parents are seeking it out for their children to get a top class education.

Students are enjoying learning from inspiring teachers. Like Isaac Flake, who says, "One of my teachers told me that we



"With Carine, there is such a cultural sense around school improvement."

WA Secondary School of the Year finalists

Left to right:
Esperance Senior High School
Margaret River Senior High School
Melville Senior High School

come to school not only to learn, but to gain a love for learning and to come to think for ourselves."

Awards judge Jim Webb, who has seen hundreds of schools in his career, was struck by an overwhelming sense of positivity.

"With Carine, there is such a cultural sense around school improvement and it's performing well above expectations," says Jim, North Metropolitan Regional Executive Director.

A few years ago just one in five senior students completed a certificate II or higher vocational education and training qualification while at school. Academic results were not where they could have been.

A sea change in leadership in 2014 saw Damian Shuttleworth come on board as principal.

The driven and friendly skipper with a passion for fitness immediately set about changing the school's direction, vesting staff, students and parents with the confidence and space to have their voices heard about what they wanted from its education programs.

Now, seven out of 10 students leave school with a certificate II qualification and some even with a more advanced certificate III. Students can study in a range of areas from automotive and business, to engineering, digital media and technology.

Academic results are also on the up, as seen in Year 12 results and students taking out individual academic awards.

An educator for 20 years with a broad suite of skills, Damian says the role of principal is extremely fulfilling.

"The best part of my job is speaking with students. You know when students genuinely think a lot of who you are and what you represent," he says.

Part of this respect has been won by his down-to-earth style, characterised in his annual arm-wrestling challenge with students. "I'm undefeated!" he laughs.

Rapid transformation across the school – most visible in a new uniform and the reinstatement of a house system and faction carnival at the students' request – was possible because the whole school community has taken on responsibility for continuing improvement.

When the judges visited, they took care to speak with the most important people – the students.

"What they told me is that teachers and staff really listen to them," Jim Webb says. "The improvement is so well ingrained, the kids are saying that it's cool to achieve. They also know exactly who to speak to if they need to raise an issue. And they know they'll be listened to."

In the words of Year 11 student Struan Nel, who has been selected as a 2018 class prefect, "We're unique at Carine because we're one big family – we make sure we all succeed and strive for greatness together."


There's a real and deep cultural commitment from everyone, from the principal down, to provide the best education for students.

"School planning is impressive – the students have a strong voice and the staff can articulate the school's focus areas and their

part in building the business plan," Jim says.

Specially appointed associate principals, supported by performance managers, monitor every student to make sure they are on the path to achieve personal success.

The rising results are proof that the new ways are working. Outstanding leadership, creative use of school resources and team work are key ingredients to this success – with a strong feeling in the school community that everyone is involved, everyone is important.

Clearly the school has not reached the crest of the wave; it's still rising. 



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