

## Strengthened and culturally informed relationships between key stakeholders at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School: Aboriginal Education and Engagement role

### **Purpose**

To develop strong and culturally sensitive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, through the employment of an Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer (AEEO). This role was intended to ensure that relationships work in the best interests of each Indigenous student at the school, as defined by the student and their family members. Related initiatives focused on increasing engagement with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and improving cultural competency in school staff and leadership.

### **Target group**

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (n=44) enrolled at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School in 2019 and 2020, and their families, local AECG representatives, as well as all school staff and leadership.

### **Activities**

This aspect of the project commenced with engagement of the local Aboriginal Employment Service, leading to employment of an AEEO in September 2019. Activities and support provided by the AEEO included:

- Leading personalised learning plan meetings for all Indigenous students, with engagement and facilitation of relationships with families, teaching staff, and learning support staff.
- Planning of a BBQ evening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, school staff and leadership to develop a sense of community.
- Leading engagement with the AECG, including attendance meeting support and attendance.
- Development and planned implementation of a cultural competence professional learning program for school staff, unfortunately delayed due to the resignation of the AEEO and COVID-19 disruption.

### **Outcomes**

The AEEO engaged Indigenous students and their parents, the AECG, and school staff, in ways that were positively received and effective for all. Feedback from key stakeholders demonstrated improved connections between school and home, and strengthened and culturally informed relationships with individuals, families, and the broader community. Progress towards outcomes was limited due to the AEEO commencing a position elsewhere in Term 1 2020, immediately followed by the significant disruption caused by COVID-19.

### **Learnings**

Our single greatest learning was the necessity for a school to have at least one AEEO or equivalent in their school. Finding the right person is also vitally important. All students need role models, they need people with whom they can personally and culturally identify. For our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this is of even deeper importance.

*“Upon the appointment of the Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer we had a young Aboriginal man in Year 12 who was unfortunately on the path to non-completion due to non-attendance. Today he is studying at university. The AEEO was able to work with him, his family, and the school to solve the school-based issues and help him achieve what he needed to gain entry. He gave the Welcome to Country at our Year 12 Graduation service.” (Project Lead, Project report)*

Feedback from Indigenous students about the Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer:

*“She was a really good support system. Someone I could talk to about everything.”*

*“Before I went to talk to someone about stuff, I went to her for advice.”*

*“She achieved a lot. She organised the Wiradjuri lessons and the AECG stuff.”*

*“She talked to Mum and Dad all the time. It was good.”*