



Review of school education in Aurukun

School Improvement Unit
June 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Education and Training recognises the Traditional Owners of the Aurukun area, the Wik, Wik Way and Kugu people, respectfully acknowledging all Elders past, present and emerging.

This report has been prepared on the basis of information available at the date of publication. The information was provided by students, parents, staff and community members of Aurukun, in addition to the staff members of the Department of Education and Training and Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy and other stakeholders.

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Executive summary

The Aurukun campus (the school) of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) is the hub of the Aurukun community. The teachers and staff of the school are dedicated and motivated by a collective desire to ensure the children of Aurukun become successful learners. Collectively, all stakeholders must work together to address the challenges facing the community and to support the school to move forward.

The school was temporarily closed in May 2016 in response to significant concerns raised by staff, including the school leaders, about the safety of school personnel. On a number of occasions school staff were at risk of physical harm, which was reflective of broader law and order issues in the community. The Queensland Government is working across agencies and with the community to address these issues.

In response to the temporary closure, a review of the school was undertaken in June 2016. The review was conducted to assist the Department of Education and Training (DET), CYAAA and the community to identify the school improvement strategies required to meet the unique needs of the Aurukun community, and to address concerns about declines in student attendance and staff morale. The review used the *National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)*¹, which examines the school's improvement agenda by considering its processes for data analysis, teaching and learning practices, curriculum, and community engagement in the specific context of the Aurukun community. This is similar to reviews undertaken across Queensland state schools.

The Aurukun community has had a dedicated school on site since 1974. Since 2010, the school has been operating as a campus of the CYAAA as part of the Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA) network, under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) established in late 2009. Under this arrangement, CYAAA is responsible for the teaching and learning program within the school, specifically the Class program (Direct Instruction and associated behaviour management components) and the delivery of Club and Culture. DET maintains responsibility for the overall operation of the school, including staffing and facilities. This arrangement is supported through a funding agreement between the two parties. In 2015, DET requested Crown Law advice in drafting a new service agreement which was provided to CYAAA for consideration.

A key finding of the review is that the respective roles and responsibilities must be further clarified, with a revised service agreement that outlines clear accountabilities. This would

¹ The School Improvement Unit does not use the performance levels contained within the NSIT to rate schools.

include consideration of the most appropriate governance and operational arrangements to deliver the proposed school improvement action plan.

The review recommends that DET strengthens its support for the day-to-day operation and future development of the school in Aurukun. The DET partnership with CYAAA should continue, with CYAAA engaged to provide professional development, curriculum design and ongoing accreditation services for Direct Instruction (DI) in Aurukun. DET must work collaboratively with community and stakeholders to develop a school improvement action plan focused on lifting educational outcomes for every student in Aurukun.

The DET Far North Queensland (FNQ) region, through an assistant regional director, should provide support for the school leaders to deliver the school improvement action plan, including mentoring and coaching for the principal and teachers. This change would ensure that the school has the opportunity to engage with and benefit from the department's infrastructure, resources and expertise in rural and remote education.

The debate about DI within the education community is acknowledged. A review of literacy and numeracy outcomes in Aurukun, as measured by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), was inconclusive due to the small number of students participating in these assessments. However, for some students, NAPLAN results indicate improvements are being made. It should be noted that, for the majority of these children, high levels of school attendance are also apparent — a strong predictor of success for students.

Like other remote communities, the school has experienced high staff turnover, which impacts on the implementation of teaching and learning strategies. The review found that the school is not providing the full Australian Curriculum to its students through the current approach. It is the conclusion of this review that the richness of schooling has been compromised by the pressure of delivering literacy and numeracy using only the DI approach. Going forward, a more balanced approach, contextualised for the Aurukun community, is required.

To deliver this effectively, teachers must be better supported in their professional development and professional growth beyond a sole focus on DI. The review found that a key focus of the school improvement action plan must be the analysis and use of student performance data by teachers and school leaders, and an understanding of high-yield pedagogies to complement DI. This is important to ensure the diverse learning needs of all students can be supported in the classroom.

To attend secondary school, Aurukun students must transition to boarding facilities or other arrangements outside the community. It is clear that, for some students, the move from a small community to a residential educational program outside the community is challenging. The review found that consideration should be given to provision of a secondary program,

possibly for Years 7 and 8, in the community. This would provide an opportunity to enhance the preparation for those students needing more support prior to moving to boarding school or other arrangements. The aim of secondary schooling provision in Aurukun is to maximise the opportunities for success for every student.

The most consistent message the review team received from community members was a deep desire to reconnect with their school and be involved in the life of the school. As one community member said to the review team, 'Wik problems need Wik solutions'. The Aurukun people view the school as a central pillar of their community — it is a place of learning, a place of safety and a place of calm. Community engagement is at the heart of lifting educational outcomes in Aurukun. The review recommends that community involvement be supported by formal arrangements such as a Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C), and that the principal use the P&C and Elders as a platform for engagement with the broader community.

Overwhelmingly during consultations, stakeholders indicated significant goodwill and passion to deliver the best outcomes for every Aurukun student. It is clear from the review process that the complexity of issues and the uniqueness of the Aurukun community call for stakeholders to be clearer about their roles and accountable for outcomes, and to work together collaboratively to deliver high-quality education so that every child becomes a successful learner.

Key findings and recommendations

The review identified findings and recommendations under four central themes, and across the nine domains of the NSIT.

The four central themes identified during the review are:

- **governance and operational arrangements**
- **engagement of the Aurukun community**
- **secondary education provisions**
- **Direct Instruction.**

Governance and operational arrangements

Stakeholders and community members interviewed for the review advised that they want DET to provide greater support for governance and day-to-day operation of the school, and the future direction of the school. The review also found that the roles of DET and CYAAA should be further clarified through a new service agreement.

Recommendations

- DET to develop and oversee a school improvement action plan responding to the recommendations in this review.
- DET to strengthen its support for the governance and day-to-day operation of the school, with CYAAA contracted to provide professional development, curriculum and pedagogy licensing and design, and ongoing accreditation services for DI, and a new service agreement between DET and CYAAA be implemented that identifies clearly the roles and responsibilities of each party.

Engagement of the Aurukun community

Members of the community and stakeholders interviewed spoke of a strong desire to have a greater relationship with the school.

Many community members reported that they feel they have been excluded from the school, and are not consulted in relation to the school curriculum, teaching practices and the school's overall direction.

We want the P&C started again to connect the school with the community.

Parent

Community members reported little understanding about the curriculum within the school, and were unsure if it meets community expectations. Parents expressed a desire to be better informed about what is taught at the school.

Recommendation

- Develop a coordinated approach to engagement through the development of a parent and community engagement strategy (as part of the school improvement action plan) that includes:
 - re-establishment of the Parents & Citizens' Association (P&C) as the primary parent consultation body
 - strategies focused on student attendance and wellbeing
 - involvement of the community in supporting induction for new school staff
 - opportunities to engage parents and community leaders in the development of relevant and contextualised curriculum approaches.

Secondary education provision

Many parents, community members and local partners articulated significant concerns about the level of support provided for post-primary students within the community, including students who may not transition successfully to boarding school.

Staff, school leaders, parents and the community identified that these school-age students play a significant role in the disruptive behaviours within the community. Parents and the community expressed a strong desire to have a coordinated approach to the provision of services to this group of young people that will provide them with real opportunities.

The CYAAA leaders also indicated a desire to improve the transition approaches for students, and to have a greater role in supporting students into secondary schooling. It was also acknowledged that the services provided to students who disengage from boarding school require attention.

Recommendation

- Revise arrangements and supports for post-primary students, including:
 - considering resuming secondary provision in Aurukun for Years 7 and 8

- working with families and Transition Support Services (TSS) to identify the needs of students for junior secondary and transition to boarding school
- building a partnership between TSS, parents, community leaders and other stakeholders to monitor post-primary students who return to the community
- providing alternative education options, including distance education and vocational education and training, for disengaged youth.

Direct Instruction

The DI pedagogy adopted and implemented at Aurukun has provided a consistent language and focus for the teachers in a school where high turnover of staff exists.

Staff and community members believed that the school must take a balanced approach to the use of teaching practices within the school, and that DI should be one, but not the only, approach incorporated into the teaching practices at Aurukun school.

I was chastised about moving away from the script. I was told if you can't follow the script with fidelity then Aurukun is not the place for you.

Teacher

It is clear that there are challenges associated with the implementation of the school's 5C — Class, Culture, Childhood, Club and Community — education model. These include poor student attendance; a narrow curriculum, focused on literacy and numeracy, delivered through DI during school hours; and the voluntary nature of the Club and Culture component. This has resulted in the Australian Curriculum not being taught consistently.

Recommendation

- Broaden the teaching and learning approaches to include a range of high-yield strategies and contextualised curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students in Aurukun delivering all core requirements of the Australian Curriculum during the compulsory hours of schooling.

Appendix A: Review of school education in Aurukun, Terms of Reference

Purpose:

To complete a review of the Aurukun campus of Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) using the *National School Improvement Tool* (NSIT), developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The NSIT consists of nine domains:

1. An explicit improvement agenda
2. Analysis and discussion of data
3. A culture that promotes learning
4. Targeted use of school resources
5. An expert teaching team
6. Systematic curriculum delivery
7. Differentiated teaching and learning
8. Effective pedagogical practices
9. School-community partnerships.

The review involves an analysis of the school's performance data, as well as interviews with the school community including staff, parents, students and relevant external stakeholders.

At the completion of the review, the review team will present its findings in the form of a written report, within two weeks (to the Director-General), to guide the school improvement activities into the future.

In Queensland, all state schools have a school review once every four years.

The School Improvement Unit (SIU) review will not consider matters outside the NSIT, unless they are directly related to the teaching and learning outcomes of students, as per existing SIU review protocols.

The intent of the review is to examine the performance of the Aurukun campus of CYAAA against the nine domains of the NSIT. It is to ensure the teaching and learning at the school is meeting the specific needs of its students and community.

Team:

The review team will consist of six highly experienced principals² and an external reviewer from the Nous Group.

The team will liaise with Internal Audit of DET for matters relating to governance and financial accountabilities.

Timelines: The review will commence on Tuesday 31 May 2016.

² This number was expanded to 11 reviewers to maximise the data gathering requirements of the review.

Appendix B: Review methodology

The review was conducted by a team of accredited reviewers from DET's School Improvement Unit (SIU). The SIU was established in late 2014 to monitor and support the performance of Queensland state schools. The unit is independent from the delivery arm of schools and reports to the Director-General.

Reviewers were carefully selected to provide depth and breadth of educational experience, as well as a proven track record in rigorous review of school performance. All are serving Queensland state school principals. Between them they have completed more than 180 school reviews across Queensland. The team was supplemented by an external consultant from the Nous Group.

The SIU conducts school reviews using the *National School Improvement Tool* (NSIT) as a framework for evaluation. The NSIT was developed by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER)³, drawing on findings from international research into the practices of highly effective schools. Its nine domains are set out in Appendix A.

The review process explores each domain individually, and evaluates school practices overall. The reviews are a thorough examination of a school's performance and operations, and identify where and how the school can improve.

The review of the Aurukun campus of CYAAA consisted of:

- pre-review audit of the school's performance data and other school information
- desktop review of documents supplied by CYAAA leaders
- extensive field work to collect qualitative data, with more than 180 stakeholders interviewed, including staff, students, parents and community members (see table below)
- three site visits to the school and community by the members of the review team
- site visits to Hope Vale and Coen campuses of CYAAA, incorporating observation in classrooms and review of school resources and student work
- site visit to Broadbeach State School to observe DI in classrooms and review school resources and student work
- The Director-General visited Aurukun on 7 June 2016. The visit comprised a tour of the Aurukun campus, including classroom observations and discussions with a range of stakeholders including the Mayor of Aurukun (via teleconference), campus principal and teachers, the regional police inspector and a representative of the PCYC.
- The Director-General conducted a teleconference with the Wik Women's Group following this visit.

³ ACER (2012), *The National School Improvement Tool*, developed for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Stakeholder consultation table

The following stakeholders contributed information and perspective to the review. The information was collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews, and verified through multiple points of follow-up contact.

Stakeholder group	Individuals
CYAAA leaders	Executive Principal, CYAAA Business Services Manager, CYAAA Director, CYAAA Implementation Manager, CYAAA Head of Curriculum, CYAAA
GGSA	Founder and co-chair, GGSA Data analyst, GGSA
Cape York Partnerships (CYP)	Manager, CYP Manager, O-Hub Executive Policy Officer, Cape York Institute
Aurukun campus	Principal (substantive), Aurukun campus Principal (acting), Aurukun campus 53 parents and carers 25 students, three former students 20 teachers Six teachers engaged at Aurukun campus following the temporary closure Community teacher 13 teacher aides Two school cleaners Administration officer Groundsperson Two former principals, Aurukun campus Two former teachers
Aurukun community leaders, Elders and groups	Mayor, Aurukun Shire Council CEO, Aurukun Shire Council Director, Community Services, Aurukun Shire Council Four elected council members, Aurukun Shire Council Community worker, Aurukun Shire Council Wik Women's Group Family Responsibilities Commissioner Justice Group chair Justice Group mediator Mens' Group chair Executive Director, RD CORP Waste Water Sewerage Management Supervisor
Partner schools	Principal, Hope Vale campus Head of Curriculum, Hope Vale campus Teacher, Hope Vale campus Instrumental music teacher, Hope Vale campus Languages teacher, Hope Vale campus Principal, Coen campus Principal, Western Cape College Two former principals, Western Cape College
DET	Director-General Deputy Director-General, State Schools Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services Assistant Director-General, State Schools – Indigenous Education Regional Director, Far North Queensland region

DET (cont'd)	<p>Assistant Regional Director, Far North Queensland region Director, Regional Services, Far North Queensland region Director, Human Resources, Far North Queensland region Transition Support Services Officer, Far North Queensland region Remote Area Teacher Education Program teacher coordinator Principal, Broadbeach State School Two teachers, Broadbeach State School</p>
Partner agencies	<p>Sergeant, PCYC 10 members, PCYC Two police liaison officers Regional police inspector, Cape Patrol Group FN District Executive director, Queensland Music Festival Executive director, Regional Development Corporation</p>