

GAWURA: THE WHALE INSIDE A SCHOOL

AN APPROACH TO THE EDUCATION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN (KINDERGARTEN TO YEAR 6) FROM THE INNER CITY OF SYDNEY



Gawura

ST ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

Founded 2007



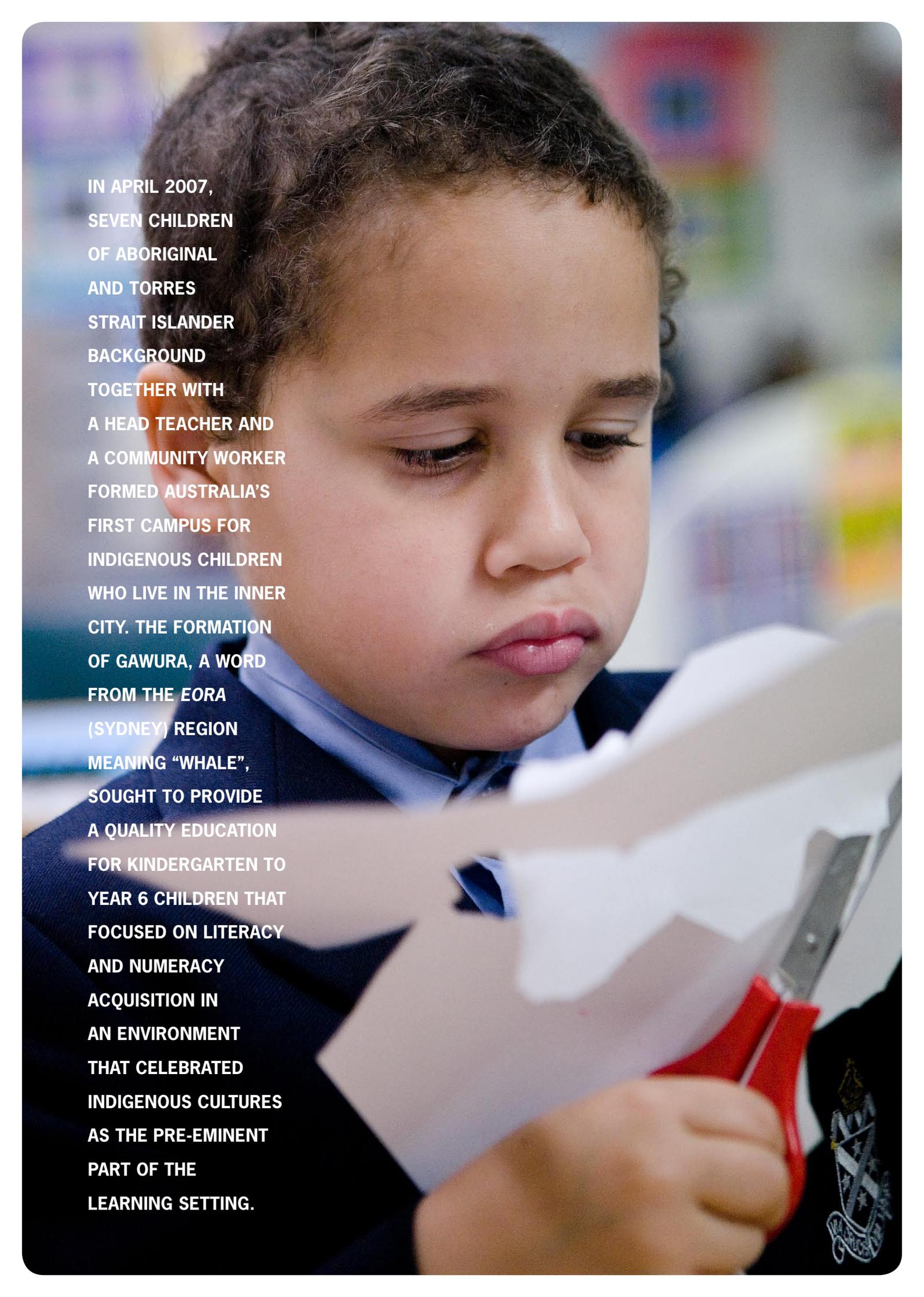
ST ANDREW'S
CATHEDRAL
SCHOOL

Founded 1885

PHILLIP HEATH
HEAD OF SCHOOL

ST ANDREW'S
CATHEDRAL SCHOOL
SYDNEY

SEPTEMBER 2008

A close-up photograph of a young child with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark blue school uniform jacket over a light blue collared shirt. The child is focused on cutting a piece of white paper with red-handled scissors. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom setting with colorful posters or charts on the wall.

IN APRIL 2007,
SEVEN CHILDREN
OF ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER
BACKGROUND
TOGETHER WITH
A HEAD TEACHER AND
A COMMUNITY WORKER
FORMED AUSTRALIA'S
FIRST CAMPUS FOR
INDIGENOUS CHILDREN
WHO LIVE IN THE INNER
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FROM THE EORA
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AND NUMERACY
ACQUISITION IN
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THAT CELEBRATED
INDIGENOUS CULTURES
AS THE PRE-EMINENT
PART OF THE
LEARNING SETTING.

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THIS PAPER WILL CONSIDER THE ORIGINS AND PURPOSES OF THE GAWURA CAMPUS AS WELL AS DISCUSS THE TRACKED PERFORMANCES OF ITS STUDENTS ACROSS THE DURATION OF GAWURA'S EXISTENCE TO DATE. IT WILL ALSO CONSIDER THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE GAWURA MODEL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ITS CAPACITY TO BE REPLICATED IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL SETTINGS. THE RESULTS ACHIEVED TO DATE DEMONSTRATE CONSIDERABLE ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF VIRTUALLY ALL CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY IN LITERACY SKILLS.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Before considering the narrative of the Gawura experience it is necessary to provide an overview of recent strategies in Indigenous education in Australia. Over the past decade, the national concern about the educational outcomes of Indigenous children has been gaining increasing attention in the public media and in federal and state government policies. Landmark reports such as *Bringing them Home, the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* handed down in April 1997, provided a range of powerful recommendations that changed the national landscape of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Many of the 54 recommendations of the report were based on the premise that the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians in the history of this nation has been characterised by injustice and profound alienation.

In the search for strategies to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, educational outcomes have been seen as one of the most powerful indicators of social justice for Indigenous Australians. During the first half of the first decade of the new millennium, a series of reports were separately commissioned by most state governments.

In 2000 the Queensland Government launched its *Partners for Success* following a review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Education and Employment in 1999. The Partners for Success plan proposed six new policy areas: Standards of Education; the Development of a Charter between Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities; Focus on Literacy Acquisition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children; Provide for Whole of Government Service Delivery; Provide Employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People within Education Queensland. The subsequent P4S Action Plan (2003-2005) established four priority areas for education: Literacy, Retention and Completion Rates, Literacy Attainment, and Workforce and Leadership in Indigenous Education. The Cape York Peninsula expression of this same P4S Plan became known as *Bound for Success*.

A similar focus appeared in the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs plan entitled *Two Ways Together 2003-2012*. This plan set seven priority areas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people *viz*, health, housing, education, culture and heritage, justice, economic development and families and young people. Arising from this plan, the NSW Government established an Aboriginal Education Review Education and Training Strategy (2006-2008). Among its objectives, the Strategy set the goal: "By 2012, Aboriginal student outcomes will match or better outcomes of the broader student population" (p4). It is clear that time is pressing.

One of the most important recommendations of the *Bringing them Home Report 1997* was the provision of social justice (number 42) and the principle of self determination (number 43 a, b and c). These two principles appear to have been embedded in national and state strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. In South Australia the DECS Aboriginal Strategy 2005-2010 presented four key focus areas: to provide more innovative and cohesive services; focus on participation, retention and attendance; provision of literacy and numeracy; and offering culturally appropriate curriculum teaching. Under focus area three the "DECS commits to addressing the urgent need to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children, especially in literacy, numeracy and retention rates, to a level comparable with that of the school population as a whole" (p4). A similar argument appears in the Western Australian

IN THE SEARCH FOR STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS, EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN SEEN AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL INDICATORS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Plan for Government Schools 2004-2007 under the subheading *Creating the Vision, Aboriginal Education Strategy*.

In 2006, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) provided a report, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008*. The MCEETYA report claimed that the educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians in fact have improved over recent decades.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are yet to achieve equitable outcomes and they have poor post school options and life choices “*perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage*” (p4). The report notes that the Indigenous population is young (40% are under 15 years of age compared to a national pattern of 20% in this age bracket) and draws the conclusion that: “*There is, therefore, an urgent need to challenge the prevailing view that disparity in the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is ‘normal’ and that incremental gains are acceptable*” (p5).

The report calls for a new approach to education (pp16ff), one that moves away “*from explanations of educational failure that focus on the characteristics of individual children, their families and communities (the ‘deficit’ view) towards developing systems and schools that have the capacity to engage all students in learning, including Indigenous students*” (p16).

The repeated emphasis on self-determination (involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making) and educational outcomes (performance of Indigenous children in literacy and numeracy benchmarking) appear in the four major goals that are articulated into 21 Long Term National Goals for Indigenous Education. For example, Goal 14 sets down the task: “*To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years*”. Goal 19 continues: “*To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with limited or no educational experience...*”

This is to be accomplished ideally in an environment that celebrates Indigenous identity: Goal 20: “*To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity*”. The national goals also urge non-Indigenous students to have exposure to and to develop an appreciation of Indigenous culture: Goal 21: “*To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures*”.

The same priorities appear to be informing an understanding of international Indigenous issues around the world. In his address to UNESCO in 2003, Ole-Henrik Magga, the Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, proposed solutions to what he called the dislocation and isolation of Indigenous learners. He argued for “Participation” (empowerment of communities in decision making, employment of Indigenous people as administrators, educators and coaches), “Access” (to educational opportunities on a basis comparable to all other citizens), “Attainment” (skills and graduation rates to the same standard as other students) and “Indigenous Languages” (recovered and supported). So it can be seen that there are patterns forming both within and beyond Australia to the education of Indigenous peoples.

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CURRENT INDIGENOUS EDUCATION OUTCOMES DATA: THE CASE FOR CHANGE



Despite considerable efforts made during the past decade at state and national level and in contrast to the MCEETYA report findings, the ACER Education Review entitled *The Case for Change* (2004) argues that there have been few advances made in supporting the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

Changes to policy and practice in this field are required because education outcomes for all Indigenous students do not appear to be improving. Additionally, there has been no significant reduction in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' learning outcomes over the last decade. This distressing, but inescapable, response to the question of why the existing policies and substantial funding are not generating a greater improvement in Indigenous learning outcomes is that we really do not know. (p51).

The ACER review suggests that there are serious difficulties in the collection of data on this issue. In the past there has been a lack of data both qualitative and quantitative and this has undermined the strength of well researched strategies to improve educational outcomes. In part, this arises from the disparate nature of Indigenous populations in Australia. However, it also reflects the relatively low priority afforded this kind of research in our past.

According to the MCEETYA report cited above, 30% of Indigenous people live in major cities; 20% live in inner regional areas; 23% in outer regional areas; 9% in remote areas and 18% in very remote areas. The growth rate of Indigenous populations is 4% per annum, which is twice that of projected figures for the rest of the population. In 2003, the total percentage of Indigenous students in the school population was 4% and 87% of these are located in government schools. The wide diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presents a challenge for policy makers and education service providers around the country.

Yet there are 15,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under the age of 15 years living in the Sydney metropolitan area. The challenge goes beyond education services and into the juvenile justice system. According to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Report citing Australian Bureau of Statistics figures suggests *that in 2002 - 2003 Indigenous young people (that is, those 10 to 17 years of age) were detained at 10 times the rate of all young people in Australia* - <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/SocialJustice/statistics/index.html>. This is an indictment on the national conscience and cries out for a more far sighted remedy.

The case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes is well established. According to the ACER Education Review referred to above, in 2001 76.9% of Indigenous children achieved the reading benchmark in Year 3 compared with 92.5% of non-Indigenous children. However, by Year 5 the performance declines to 62% compared with 87.4% in the non-Indigenous population. Numeracy scores are similar. It should be noted that the national benchmarks do not speak to higher order proficiency, where the gap widens even further. It has also been noted throughout state and national systems that school participation data suggests a marked difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates and that this gap widens as the years of schooling progress.

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CURRENT INDIGENOUS EDUCATION OUTCOMES DATA: THE CASE FOR CHANGE

More recently, the performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the inaugural National Assessment Programme Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) 2008 provoked Justine Ferrari to write in *The Australian* (13 September 2008) that “*nationally one in 10 students fail to meet minimum literacy standards for their year and 5 per cent fail to meet minimum standards in Maths, with only students in NSW, Victoria and the ACT performing above the national average in all areas.*” She argued that the performance of the “*Northern Territory, with its large population of Indigenous and remote students, continues to lag far behind the rest of the nation, with about one-third of its students failing to achieve minimum literacy and numeracy standards*”.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard argued that, “*on average 90 per cent of Australian students acquired the minimum standard in literacy and numeracy, the focus must be on those students struggling to keep up with their peers.*” She concluded that “*these students were usually from Indigenous or low-income families*” (*The Australian* 13 September 2008). Such reasoning suggests that Indigenous and disadvantage in this country are interchangeable terms.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to set in place a new model for Indigenous education and to conduct systematic and long term research into the elements of this programme that lead to success or otherwise. Gawura is one response to this matter of profound national conscience.

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ST ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

GAWURA: THE ORIGINS

Against this backdrop of such unremitting disadvantage, in 2005 I had the opportunity to visit a series of small schools known as *Vuleka* (Enlighten) in Johannesburg in the Republic of South Africa. This collection of school campuses were established to provide a highly structured approach to literacy and numeracy acquisition for Primary school aged children from Soweto and other low socio-economic groups in the post apartheid city. At the time of visiting, there were four campuses operating on church land or in under-utilised church buildings throughout well-to-do suburbs of Johannesburg. The newest of the *Vuleka* campuses specifically targeted African children with social or emotional needs.

The mode of instruction of *Vuleka* consisted of what might be termed traditional teaching with a focus on acquisition of benchmarked skills in literacy and numeracy. The children's progress was marked out on progressive charts and the focus was on continuous improvement in all classrooms. The progress of the children, by all accounts, had been very impressive. Funding for *Vuleka* had been provided by private effort from a combination of modest school fees and substantial philanthropic donations from the corporate sector.

In the middle of 2005, St Andrew's Cathedral School (SACS) formed a Task Force of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors from the Redfern community to consider whether the *Vuleka* model could meet the pressing needs within our own city. With the memories of civil unrest in Redfern following the tragic death of Thomas TJ Hickey (14 February 2004) still so fresh in the public mind, the School sought to offer a "*quality Kindergarten to Year 6 education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a caring, Christian environment emphasising standards of literacy, numeracy and social skills that are the foundations of life*" (SACS Gawura Information Booklet p2).

The School's concept sought to provide a small school campus for up to 25 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the inner city located within the Redfern area or in an area near to where the children lived. The environment was to be one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities were not merely a component of "bolted on" curriculum perspectives but were the *cause celebre* of daily life. The size of campus emphasised personalisation and intimacy as a component of engagement with the academic programme. The plan to involve high degrees of contact with Gawura families and the local community informed the choice of locations in Redfern and the inner city.

CONTROVERSY

After several months of investigations, somewhat unexpectedly the media broke the news to the Sydney public under the headline "*A College of Dreams*" (SMH 21 May 2006). The article declared:

One of Australia's oldest private schools plans to establish a school for Aborigines to try to raise education standards among Indigenous children. The school will be built in Redfern or Waterloo, with assistance and guidance from St Andrew's Cathedral School.

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ST ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL SCHOOL GAWURA: THE ORIGINS

Reactions to the article sparked far more controversy than preliminary discussions, with views ranging from laudatory (*SMH* Editorial 21 May 2006) and enthusiastic (*Redwatch/SMH* 28 May 2006) to accusations of a misguided new paternalism or even a new apartheid in Sydney (*Redwatch* 4 February 2007).

There were few compelling arguments against the educational model proposed, other than the perceived segregation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from non-Indigenous children in the classroom setting. However, the location of the proposed school campus (Redfern Community Centre) proved the most provocative part of the plan. It sparked controversy amongst some who felt that an independent school even for only part of the day should not be permitted to use a public facility, particularly one as sensitive and symbolic as the Community Centre, which was located on The Block. Out of respect for these concerns, the School withdrew its Development Application (*"Private school Aborigines Suffers Redfern Setback"*, *SMH*, 4 February 2007; also *"Private School Drops Redfern Plan"* 18 February 2007; *"Stumbling Block for School Plan"*. 6-8 April 2007). With this decision, objections to the model seemed to cease.

However, the School never abandoned its plan to offer a new approach to Indigenous education. The search for a site finally resolved with the decision to establish Gawura within its own city high-rise campus. As a highly urbanised setting this decision seemed to be counter intuitive to Indigenous stereotypes. However, we have already seen that 30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in cities and over 15,000 children live in the Sydney metropolitan area. So one of the many stereotypes was obliterated, the Gawura Task Force was delighted and the whale within a school was born on 24 April 2007 (*SMH* 15 April, *ABC Radio PM* 26 April 2007).

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GAWURA: A WHALE WITHIN A SCHOOL

The selection of the name of the Campus was the decision of the Task Force and other advisors. According to *Macquarie Aboriginal Words* (p71), in the Sydney language Gawura (pronounced ga-war-ah) means “whale”. The whale was a sacred totem for Eora people, a symbol of endurance, power, kinship and hope. The Task Force affirmed that “*God saved a nation through the belly of a whale and this is our dream for Gawura*” (Gawura Information Booklet, 2007 p2). The space set aside within in the School was known as the “Rooftop” classroom which was refurbished from floor to ceiling with the assistance of private donations and decorated with murals that reflected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. All children are in the classroom together although key stages are taught in separate areas. The close kinship connections between the children are supported through a single campus structure where brothers, sisters and cousins can attend classes together. Learning is a community experience for the children in Gawura and the common theme is Indigenous identity.

Gawura delivers the NSW Board of Studies curriculum focusing on literacy and numeracy acquisition. The tools for benchmarking academic achievement include:

- Progressive Achievement Tests Revised (PAT R) Comprehension, Vocabulary, Mathematics (Years 3-6);
- Progressive Achievement Tests Revised (PAT R) Reading - 4th edition (Preparatory to Year 2);
- Probe Reading Assessment;
- Running Records;
- SA Spelling;
- Waddington;
- Mathematic Diagnostics;
- Ongoing testing; and
- Worksamples.

Strategies in Reading Development include:

- Guided reading - reading schemes used PM Readers, Barrie Readers, Spalding (remediation), graded cloze and comprehension; and
- Shared and independent reading.

Strategies in Writing Development include:

- Modelling, joint and independent construction of texts;
- Teaching focus - Word level - vocabulary and spelling; Sentence level - syntax, punctuation, editing and Text level - purpose, structure, language features;
- Writing process - Plan, draft, edit, conference and publish;
- Writing scaffolds;
- Differentiation through outcome and product; and
- Phonemic, visual, morphemic, mnemonic and resource spelling strategies.

Strategies in Numeracy Development include:

- Modelling, drill and rote;
- Hands on activities;
- Concrete material;
- Concrete to abstract concepts;
- Differentiation of outcome and ability groupings; and
- Integration of Working Mathematically.

The classroom consists of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. Sensitivity to and respect for differences among Indigenous people has been an essential part of the formation of self-confidence and mutual respect.

THE SELECTION OF THE NAME OF THE CAMPUS WAS THE DECISION OF THE TASK FORCE AND OTHER ADVISORS. ACCORDING TO *MACQUARIE ABORIGINAL WORDS* (P71), IN THE SYDNEY LANGUAGE GAWURA (PRONOUNCED GA-WAR-AH) MEANS “WHALE”... A SYMBOL OF ENDURANCE, POWER, KINSHIP AND HOPE.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



The following section considers the key achievement indicators of the Gawura children since their arrival in the School. It is now universally understood that Indigenous people come from a multitude of differing nations and tribal or community contexts. A respect for these mutual differences has been of the utmost importance to providing a culturally sensitive approach to education. Table 1 shows the broad diversity of the Gawura community. Within the NSW Aboriginal category, families come from at least four discreet nations.

The staff resources involve one Head of Campus, one Teacher, one Community Liaison Assistant and one Head of Aboriginal Perspectives (Kindergarten to Year 12). The work of Gawura is also supported by volunteer teachers or assistants. The small class size is a crucial strategy for engagement in the academic programme because there is nowhere to hide underachievement. It has made for a challenging professional experience for the educators.

Table 2 reveals the distribution of enrolment, with 10 students in Kindergarten to Year 2 and 15 students in Stages 2 and 3.

There are key indicators that the Gawura programme tracks, including student attendance and parental participation in school events. For the first two semesters, attendance by Gawura students ranged from 84% to 95%, depending on the circumstances of individual families. Table 3 reveals the rates of parental participation in community events both within and beyond Gawura activities.

A significant number of Gawura children are brought to the School by bus each morning operating on a selected route through Redfern and surrounding suburbs. Attendance rates are vulnerable to family issues such as illness or bereavement in the communities. In this respect, Gawura is similar to any school with Indigenous students in the country.

The engagement rates of the Gawura community in events suggest a relatively high level of participation in Kindergarten to Year 12 whole School occasions.

The academic progress of the Gawura students suggests better than predicted rates of achievement. Tables 4 and 5 below show that in 2008, the level of achievement has risen from 7% (mid 2007) to around 50% of students achieving stage outcomes.

It can be seen that over the first two terms good progress has been sustained and can be predicted to rise.

Tables 6, 7 and 8 show case studies of three Gawura students whose performance reflects the trends noted earlier in this report. Gawura staff members observe that progress is not necessarily linear and consistent but is susceptible to external issues that impact community life. This is hardly surprising.

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KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

TABLE 1: ORIGINS OF STUDENTS IN GAWURA (MID 2008)

ABORIGINAL NSW	20
ABORIGINAL OTHER STATES	1
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER	2
ABORIGINAL / TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER	2
TOTAL	25

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF ENROLMENT (MID 2008)

YEAR	STUDENT NUMBER
KINDERGARTEN	3
YEAR 1	5
YEAR 2	2
YEAR 3	2
YEAR 4	1
YEAR 5	8
YEAR 6	4

TABLE 3: GAWURA FAMILY REPRESENTATION AT SACS COMMUNITY EVENTS AND MEETINGS

EVENT / MEETING	TOTAL FAMILIES 2007	TOTAL FAMILIES 2008
BUS USE (TRANSPORT TO AND FROM SCHOOL)	62.5%	55%
P&F, PARENT ADVISORY MEETINGS	50 %	30%
MOTHER'S DAY	-	67%
GRANDPARENTS' DAY	29%	40%
FATHER'S DAY	50%	46%
TERM 2 SACS SHOWCASE CONCERT	100%	100%

TABLE 4: STAGE 1, SEMESTER 1, 2008. YEARS 1 AND 2 (OVERVIEW) - STUDENTS OPERATING A STAGE APPROPRIATE LEVEL

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2
LITERACY	60% (3 STUDENTS)	50% (1 STUDENT)
NUMERACY	60% (3 STUDENTS)	50% (1 STUDENT)

TABLE 5: STAGES 2 - 3, SEMESTERS 1 AND 2, 2008. YEARS 3 - 6 (OVERVIEW) - STUDENTS OPERATING A STAGE APPROPRIATE LEVEL

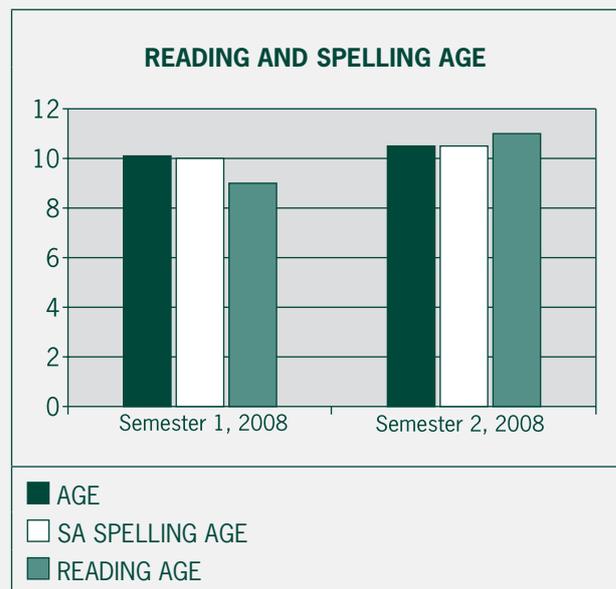
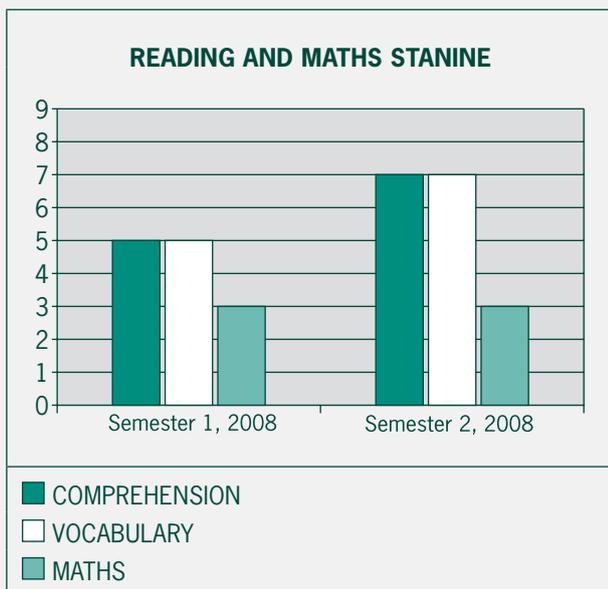
LITERACY	SEMESTER 1, 2008	SEMESTER 2, 2008
WRITING	13% (2 STUDENTS)	46% (7 STUDENTS)
SPELLING	46% (7 STUDENTS)	46% (7 STUDENTS)
READING FLUENCY	46% (7 STUDENTS)	46% (7 STUDENTS)
READING COMPREHENSION	46% (7 STUDENTS)	46% (7 STUDENTS)
NUMERACY	SEMESTER 1, 2008	SEMESTER 2, 2008
NUMBER	20% (3 STUDENTS)	53% (8 STUDENTS)
WORKING MATHEMATICALLY	N/A	20% (3 STUDENTS)

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

TABLE 6: CASE STUDY 1 - STUDENT PROGRESS FROM SEMESTERS 1 TO 2, 2008

Screening Results using: Australian Council of Educational Research Pat R Mathematics, Vocabulary & Comprehension Testing, South Australian Spelling Test.

ACADEMIC YEAR OF STUDENT	AGE (YEARS AND MONTH)	TIME PERIOD	COMPREHENSION 1-9 STANINE	VOCABULARY 1-9 STANINE	MATHEMATICS 1-9 STANINE	SPELLING AGE LEVEL EQUIV.	CORE SPELLING %	READING FLUENCY AGE LEVEL EQUIV.
5	10.1	SEMESTER 1, 2008	5	5	3	10.0	0	9.0
5	10.5	SEMESTER 2, 2008	7	7	3	10.5	N/A	11.0

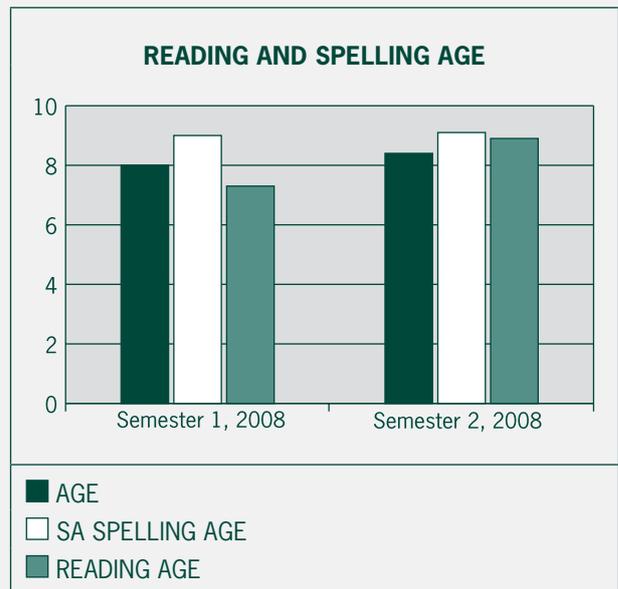
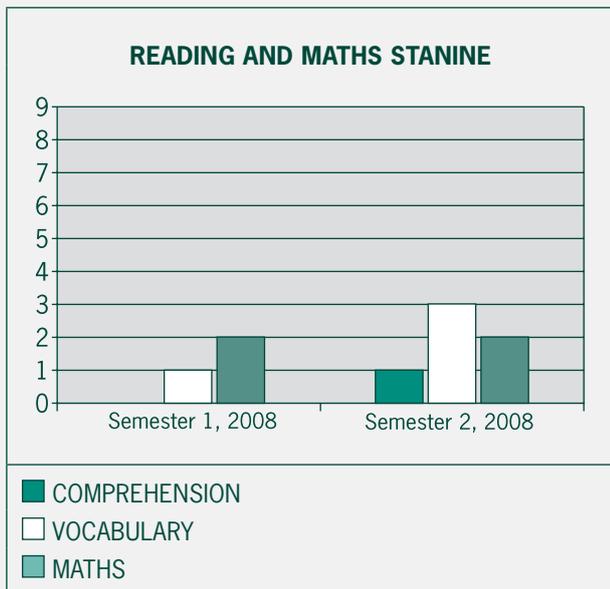


KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

TABLE 7: CASE STUDY 2 - STUDENT PROGRESS FROM SEMESTERS 1 TO 2, 2008

Screening Results using: Australian Council of Educational Research Pat R Mathematics, Vocabulary & Comprehension Testing, South Australian Spelling Test.

ACADEMIC YEAR OF STUDENT	AGE (YEARS AND MONTH)	TIME PERIOD	COMPREHENSION 1-9 STANINE	VOCABULARY 1-9 STANINE	MATHEMATICS 1-9 STANINE	SPELLING AGE LEVEL EQUIV.	CORE SPELLING %	READING FLUENCY AGE LEVEL EQUIV.
3	8.0	SEMESTER 1, 2008	0	1	2	9.0	70	7.3
3	8.4	SEMESTER 2, 2008	1	3	2	9.1	N/A	8.9

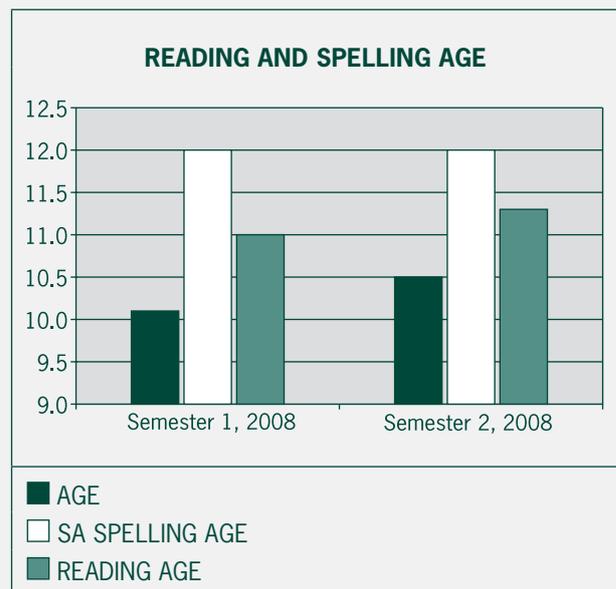
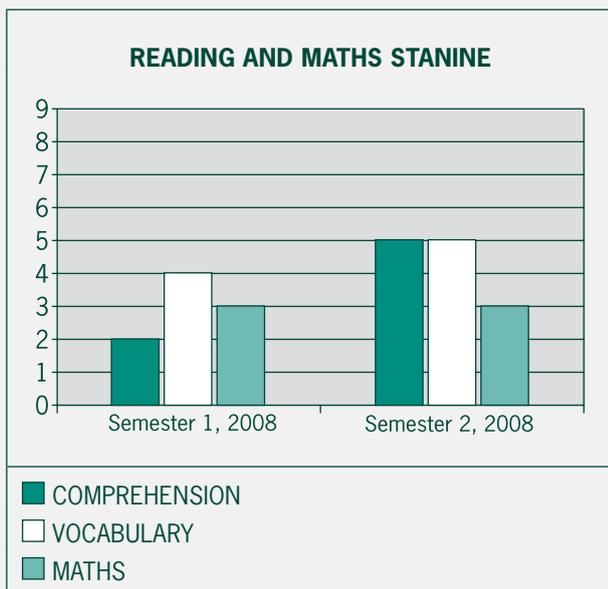


KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

TABLE 8: CASE STUDY 3 - STUDENT PROGRESS FROM SEMESTERS 1 TO 2, 2008

Screening Results using: Australian Council of Educational Research Pat R Mathematics, Vocabulary & Comprehension Testing, South Australian Spelling Test.

ACADEMIC YEAR OF STUDENT	AGE (YEARS AND MONTH)	TIME PERIOD	COMPREHENSION 1-9 STANINE	VOCABULARY 1-9 STANINE	MATHEMATICS 1-9 STANINE	SPELLING AGE LEVEL EQUIV.	CORE SPELLING %	READING FLUENCY AGE LEVEL EQUIV.
5	10.1	SEMESTER 1, 2008	2	4	3	12.0	63	11.0
5	10.5	SEMESTER 2, 2008	5	5	3	12.0	N/A	11.3



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

2008 YEAR 5 NATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY RESULTS

Table 9 shows the recent data derived from the NAPLAN tests that were conducted in May 2008. It can be observed that the performance of Indigenous students at Year 5 shows better than state average Literacy achievement levels when compared to other Indigenous students, particularly in writing where the average performance is higher than state average for all students. As noted earlier in this paper, achievement levels in numeracy have been significantly depressed as shown in Table 9. The School has established the objective to bring achievement levels of Indigenous students in line with those of the non-Indigenous students of the whole school population for this age or stage. The NAPLAN tests and their equivalent serve as important benchmarks to set new targets for future achievement.

TABLE 9: YEAR 5 NAPLAN 2008 RESULTS - SACS / GAWURA / STATE COMPARISON

LITERACY	MEAN				
	READING	WRITING	SPELLING	GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION	OVERALL LITERACY
SACS	521.5	514.3	492.7	534.5	517.8
GAWURA	459.1	513.9	463.4	510.3	491.0
STATE	494.4	495.5	498.5	504.5	497.4
STATE INDIGENOUS	433.4	437.2	446.8	434.1	438.1

NUMERACY	MEAN		
	NUMBER, PATTERNS & ALGEBRA	MEASUREMENT, DATA, SPACE, & GEOMETRY	NUMERACY
SACS	509.3	513.6	512.2
GAWURA	382.0	433.4	411.6
STATE	489.7	488.0	489.1
STATE INDIGENOUS	426.6	427.3	426.8

KEY FINDINGS

It is apparent that after a relatively short time the students of Gawura are progressing at a greater rate than otherwise could have been anticipated and are beginning to bridge the gap that exists with non-Indigenous learners, especially in literacy acquisition. In addition to academic achievement the performance of Gawura in such dimensions as attendance rates, community participation rates and parent engagement in the governance of Gawura continues to be at a very high level. The relationship between these features is not a coincidence.

In addition to higher than predicted progress in achievement, there is very strong evidence of engagement by the wider community of St Andrew's Cathedral School. Year 11 students have established a Homework Club for the children of Gawura where they provide individual assistance for homework activities and reading. The effect of this goes well beyond supporting academic outcomes. It is evidence of very strong engagement and identification from the non-Indigenous community of the School.

The Gawura children have friends in the Secondary School and look forward to progressing there to further their education. A Society and Culture Personal Interest Project (PIP) of a Year 12 student, Paige Sinclair researched the attitudes of the School community to the formation of Gawura. In the only research of its kind so far conducted, she noted that over 90% of those responding gave high or very high approval scores for the School's participation in the provision of education for Kindergarten to Year 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children despite their general comment that they do not have much cause to encounter the children from day to day.

Further research in the years to come should attempt to isolate the key features of the Gawura approach that contribute to positive educational outcomes for learners. Among these features are the following:

- i. Cross age education that sets kinship links ahead of age and stage division that separate family groupings in western education system. Gawura provides a single "campus" structure where the 25 children are educated in the same room with two teachers and a teachers' aide. The room itself is segmented in two to three spaces with a gathering place for community celebrations or meetings.
- ii. With small class sizes, it is impossible for Gawura children to mask inadequate progress. Individual learning plans are accommodated within a nurturing yet open setting. Deficiencies in literacy and numeracy or in socialisation are very evident in a small community where there is strong rapport with the class teachers and support staff.
- iii. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities are the heart of the programme.
- iv. Engagement with the non-Indigenous community of the School occurs against the backdrop of a confident celebration and affirmation of Indigenous identities.
- v. Parental involvement in all policies and planning of Gawura programmes has been an integral component of this strategy. The Gawura Parent Advisory Council functions as the key decision makers on such matters as staff selection, curriculum priorities and the selection of the Indigenous language study.

THE SCHOOL HAS ESTABLISHED THE OBJECTIVE TO BRING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN LINE WITH THOSE OF THE NON-INDIGENOUS STUDENTS OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL POPULATION FOR THIS AGE OR STAGE.

KEY FINDINGS



- vi. Pathways from Gawura into the Secondary School help to break down anxiety about progression through the education system. In 2009, four children will progress to Year 7 studies. They will remain in the same School and become part of the main stream classroom environment though they will retain the role of *Gawura in the Secondary*. They will join six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students already in the Secondary School.
- vii. The importance of Early Childhood and Stage 1 education. The School has cultivated relationships with two Preschools that have high percentages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. An Early Childhood educator attends Gawura one day per week to assist with Early Stage 1. The preliminary evidence is that these important foundations will have a lasting impact on the academic achievement and socialisation. It is encouraging to note the high priority that Indigenous families place on participation in formal education. The School regards early engagement as a crucial strategy to support the long term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

IT IS APPARENT THAT AFTER A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME THE STUDENTS OF GAWURA ARE PROGRESSING AT A GREATER RATE THAN OTHERWISE COULD HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATED AND ARE BEGINNING TO BRIDGE THE GAP THAT EXISTS WITH NON-INDIGENOUS LEARNERS, ESPECIALLY IN LITERACY ACQUISITION.

CONCLUSION

The formation of Gawura in 2007 occurred in response to the overwhelming evidence of underachievement and social disadvantage among people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. As a day school in the centre of the city of Sydney, St Andrew's Cathedral School regarded its best contribution to this challenge to be offered to urban Indigenous people who live in the inner city suburbs of Redfern/Waterloo and nearby, where there is a considerable concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The model demonstrates a sound application of national strategies that echo throughout Australian education systems.

The approach of Gawura education was to focus on literacy and numeracy attainment such that the children achieved at a level at least commensurate with non-Indigenous children at the School. The pre-eminence of Indigenous cultures and the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities in a nurturing environment provided the essential backdrop against which this academic achievement was to take place. Strong processes of consultation with Gawura families from the outset were intended to preserve a sense of Indigenous community engagement with the education being provided. Students were also afforded access to the resources and the institutional narrative of St Andrew's Cathedral School, which was founded in 1885.

The difficult origins of Gawura in 2005 and 2006 reflect the complex nature of public policy with respect to the provision of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The further complexities of inner city Sydney with its long history of unsettled land issues and disadvantage, especially in Redfern, had a profound impact on the formation of Gawura and on the decision to offer a "school within a school" in the city. Unwittingly, this strategy has been critical to the successful blending of an avowedly assertive approach to Indigenous cultural education whilst retaining access to the wider community of the "host" school.

The remarkable, even spectacular evidence of progress made by the children of Gawura suggests that one or more of these elements contribute to positive educational outcomes for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The steady and systematic approach to literacy and numeracy acquisition strategies coupled with high levels of parent and community involvement provide a strong partnership that meets many of the National Goals for Indigenous Education referred to earlier in this paper.

The positive regard of the St Andrew's Cathedral School community has been an important feature and, in a sense, provides a microcosm for a genuine and profound experience of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It is the strong view of this writer that such a model as Gawura is worthy of close consideration with a view to replicating some of its key features in other settings for Indigenous learners both here in Australia and internationally. The passionate financial commitment of so many people that are largely unconnected with the School has been integral to the formation of Gawura and will remain so in the future.

The education of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a matter of social justice in our land.

"How can we as a school and as a community stand with hands in pocket and wait for governments to act when the original people of our land continue to be the most disadvantaged people in our country?"

(Phillip Heath, on the occasion of the formal opening of Gawura, St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, November 2007).

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A close-up photograph of a young boy with light brown hair, wearing a blue school cap and a blue suit jacket over a light blue shirt and a dark blue striped tie. He is smiling and clapping his hands. The background is blurred, showing other people in a crowd.

THE EDUCATION
OF OUR ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER
PEOPLE IS A MATTER
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PHILLIP HEATH,
HEAD OF SCHOOL



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