Renewing Rural Teacher Education:
Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures
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1 ABOUT THE STUDY

1.1 THE RESEARCHERS

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1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW: TERRANOVA

Attracting and retaining high quality teaching staff for rural and remote schools in Australia is a major sustainability and quality issue for every State and Territory. It is also a major concern in pre-service teacher education, particularly for those universities that have a commitment to rural and regional areas. In 2008, the research team (above) received funding from the Australian Research Council for a three year study of schools and communities where sustainable practices around staff recruitment and retention had led to satisfaction from community members, parents, staff and bureaucracies: Renewing Rural Teacher Education: Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures. The project has come to be known as TERRAnova (renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia). The study was designed in order to identify the nature of successful teacher education and recruitment strategies that made making rural teaching an attractive and long-term career option at both primary and secondary levels. Our research hypothesis was that, just as ‘it takes a community to raise a child’ in the words of the Nigerian proverb, it takes a community to keep a teacher. The set of Case Studies forms a key means of testing this hypothesis, allowing us to identify and describe features of particular schools and communities where the retention of staff appears to be a successful feature.

1.3 THE NEED FOR RESEARCH INTO STAFFING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

This research has come at a time where nationally, we face a crisis in attracting and retaining teachers and other professionals to rural areas. There are repeated national projections of teacher shortfall which will affect all schools, with significant numbers of the current ageing teacher workforce expected to retire in the next five years. This shortfall will be most felt in rural schools and communities, as traditionally these are the schools identified as harder to staff. Australia’s future depends upon each citizen having the knowledge, understandings, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just, and open society (MCEETYA Adelaide Declaration, 1999). High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision.

Students in rural, regional and remote Australia have the right to an equitable and quality education, and it is an imperative for all education stakeholders to ensure that they have access to it. Share, Lawrence and Boylan (1994) argued that the Australian rural economy and rural education policies are inextricably linked, in that rural restructuring – notably significant demographic change – exert pressure on the availability and quality of education and training. Educational researcher McSwan (2003) has analysed data on rural economic change, arguing that in terms of rural schooling, a depth of resource in human, social, cultural and economic capital is crucial to sustainable community development (p. 22).
'The rural problem’ for Australian schooling has troubled state governments across three centuries now, and history shows that the range of suggestions and solutions to what has become a perennial issue of attracting and retaining teachers for the bush have never had more than temporary success (Green & Reid, 2004; Skillbeck & Connell, 2003). The staffing of rural, regional and remote Australian schools impacts on the quality and equity of educational experiences for the people in these areas (HREOC, 2000; Sher, 1991; Sharplin, 2002). The NSW Public Education Council’s 2005 report supports this link between staffing and quality, particularly in the so-called ‘hard-to-staff’ schools with a continued history of staff turnover.

This ‘staffing churn’ results in a perceived lack of commitment from the school to the community it serves, disengagement of school staff from the community itself, and unwillingness among students and their families to provide a commitment to education that is not met in the schools themselves. Most commentators on rural and remote education reiterate the challenges associated with staffing rural and remote schools. An Australian Education Union study (2003) indicated that 54% of Principals in rural and remote NSW had experienced teacher supply problems, with 57% stating that the problem had got worse over the previous year (p. 27). A survey by the NSW Primary Principals’ Association found that 92% of respondents were experiencing difficulties in finding casual teachers (Vinson, 2002).

1.4 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The analytic work of this study has been to develop a theoretical framework for assisting newcomers to rural communities to understand what we are calling ‘Rural Social Space’. This has been developed as we strive to understand what keeps people in rural communities, and the nature of the strongest forms of knowledge for the preparation of rural teachers – i.e. a theoretical argument for understanding rurality today, and to assist teachers and leaders in coming to know and prepare for teaching in rural communities.

This is emerging for us in terms of the interrelation of three key factors: economy, geography and demography, that we see as connected both in practice and in place. It is the practice of place that provides and produces social space, and the way in which these factors interact and interrelate that suggests ways in which rural social space can be rethought and represented in ways that do not produce symbolic deficit in relation to rural teaching. (Reid et al., 2008)

This is the ‘new ground’ – in fact, in terms of our project title, TERRAnova.

1.4.1 Rural Social Space

The model on the following page conceptualises rural social space as the relationships that have developed over time between and among these factors in any particular place. Our aim here is to demonstrate how these relationships constitute rural social space in ways that can be understood and demystified by teacher educators, employers and communities, for teachers and students moving into it for the first time. Drawing on the work of Donehower, Hogg and Schell (2007), we are defining ‘rural’ as essentially complex: “a quantitative measure, involving statistics on population and region […]; as a geographic term, denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a cultural term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities” (p. 2). This parallels the important concept that is developing as a way of understanding the need for sustainability at the level of ‘the triple bottom line’ (Hugo, 2001; Suggett & Goodsr, 2002) - and a concern in all we do for ‘people, planet and profit’.
We have conceptualised rural social space in these terms. It is the set of relationships, actions and meanings that are produced in and through the daily practice of people in any particular place and time. Rural social space is represented here as situated within a network of government policy relating to and governing the practice of people, place and profit in any location, and in this way the model illustrates the significance of the rural to the sustainability of the nation as a whole.

Fig 1. A conceptual framework for understanding rural social space

Rural social space, by definition, is not a generalised or universal concept – it is the particular set of events, or practices, performed in a particular place over time, that have produced the ‘place’ that we experience in the present. Society and space interact, so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people one meets and interacts with, and the things one does together in their environs. Some aspects of rural social space in a community may be determined more by its geography or environment, others by its economy or the work and industry that are carried out there, and still others by its demography, or the people who live there … but it is the way in which these interact that produces a particular experience.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

This project seeks to discover the nature of successful strategies for preparing, attracting and retaining high quality teachers for rural and remote schools. The team has worked across six Australian states in a study that was conceived as a national partnership between teacher education researchers whose pre-service programmes produce graduates for positions in rural schools. To conduct this research, TERRAnova has sought information in three ways:

1. An annual national online survey for pre-service teachers who have taken up university and state incentive schemes for rural teaching experience.
2. A longitudinal follow-up study of teachers who have taken up positions in rural and remote schools, with follow-up focus group interviews each year.

3. Case studies of rural schools identified by communities and systems as successful in retaining good teaching staff.

The surveys and follow-up interviews with teachers who have taken up positions in rural schools provide a strong evidence base about the attitudes of pre-service teachers about rural schools and teaching and the ways that these change over time spent living and working in rural communities. The case studies do something quite different. They allow us to collect, select and present evidence that we have found, in the site, that we suggest may be pertinent to the phenomenon we are studying here – schools that are seen as successful in attracting and retaining good quality teachers for their communities. A case study approach allows us to build exemplars of rural schools that run well, and that do not suffer from rapid turnaround of teachers that characterise many other schools in ‘difficult’ places. A case study allows us to contribute this knowledge to the disciplines of education studies, rural education and teacher education. As Flyvberg (2006, p. 219) notes, a “discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one”.

These twenty case studies were produced from research visits conducted in 2008 and 2009 in rural schools around Australia. The case study sites were selected to provide a varied cross section of the forty-eight nominated schools in terms of the location, size and nature of the school population that they represent, and after validation of the nomination by the educational jurisdiction responsible for the school. Five nominated schools were selected in NSW, four in Queensland and Western Australia, three in Victoria, two in South Australia and Tasmania. Only one school was nominated from the NT, a remote one-teacher school, where the teacher has worked for over thirty years. Although this was deemed an interesting situation, it was not selected as a case that could provide information about how the school community attracts and retains new teachers beyond a minimum three-year period. All nominated schools were plotted on a map of Australia, and selections of case study schools were made on the basis of geographic, economic and demographic differences characterising the school communities.

The development of these case studies has relied on the generosity of the Principals, staff and communities associated with each school, and the Project is indebted to their honesty in their interviews and the professional commitment to research that they have demonstrated by participating in the study. While participants in positions of responsibility in the schools are identified by their position names, all other participants have been designated as either Beginning (less than 3 years since graduation) or Experienced teachers, or as Community members. The names of the case study towns have been used throughout this study, though all participants and other locations have been anonymised within the text.
The
NEW SOUTH WALES
Schools
Corowa High School was selected for study from the nominated schools because it is situated in a small community with a medium to low economic and social base.

2.1 THE COMMUNITY

2.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Corowa

Corowa is located near the banks of the Murray River on the New South Wales side, close to the Victorian border. The town is situated three hours drive from Melbourne, four hours from Canberra and six hours from Sydney. The Corowa Shire includes many smaller towns such as Hopefield, Wahgunyah, Howlong and Rutherglen on either side of the Murray River, and geographically these towns are close together, with many various networks of serviced and non-serviced roads linking the towns together. It is close to the Rutherglen wine region and as such the Corowa Shire is home to a wide array of small to medium sized enterprises ranging from tourism and hospitality to manufacturing and agriculture.

Corowa has what is described as a ‘Mediterranean’ climate. Conditions are excellent for growing grapes, grain and grazing. The terrain is flat and on either side of the town there are vast sheep and wheat farms.
Many of the interviews, in the case study, highlighted that school staff felt Corowa was well placed geographically to access other locations and amenities:

> I guess Corowa’s not a bad location because if you want to get your city fix, it’s only three hours to Melbourne, or there are regional centres, Albury and Wangaratta so it’s a fairly good location.

(Experienced Teacher)

The town also has great historic significance and is known as the ‘Birthplace of Federation’. The following excerpt from the Local Shire History site outlines the ‘peoples’ motion’:

> It was at a conference in Corowa in 1893 held by the Federation Leagues of Australia, that a resolution was passed paving the way for the eventual formation of the Australian Commonwealth. Until the Corowa Federations League Conference, the Federation Movement had been largely a political movement. However, following the passing in of the unanimous “peoples” motion to the Corowa Court House, the Federation Movement became a popular people’s movement.


### 2.1.2 Demography: the people and community of Corowa

Corowa and its surrounding area has a population of 10,975 and is growing steadily. It appears an attractive place to raise a family and as the ABS statistics (below) highlight, all age groups reflect growth in the population.
Positioned on the edge of the New South Wales and Victorian border, Corowa reflects the different cultures of each state. Both Rugby League and AFL, for example, are represented and the town receives news from local communities on either side of the state divide. Many of the teachers and students travel across the border from Victoria to work and study. Despite the fact that many teachers choose not to live in the town, there is a strong sense of community identified by the staff.

I think the sense of community that we have. Nearly half our staff don’t live in Corowa. But when you’re in Corowa, you are together. (Female Experienced Teacher)

For a town its size, Corowa has an exceptional selection of sporting facilities. The town boasts one of the largest golf courses in the Southern Hemisphere. Many of the teachers, both male and female described the access to sport and other recreational opportunities as a major reason why Corowa was an attractive place to work.

Well, definitely sport’s a big thing. There’s all sorts of different sports clubs. You’ve got football clubs, netball, there’s swimming clubs, and we’ve got a rowing club. So sport’s definitely a big thing for the area. I am still trying to learn the AFL rules. There’s fishing on the river, just travelling on the river. For the older families, when my parents come down they like to visit the wineries over in Rutherglen. So from what I’ve seen every weekend I try and get to a different town, head off in a different direction. I still haven’t managed to get to any of the towns out west yet. (Beginning Male Teacher)

Corowa is a town well placed for access to various amenities and services and although there is not necessarily very much choice within the town itself, the teachers and community members described the place as well located to provide access to education, health and social services. As one of the teachers describes below, there was no feeling of isolation evident:

And I had a friend, he moved from here to there and he drove me round Sydney showing me things and I’m thinking, we got that, we got that and we got that, what are you so excited about? And in fact I go to the CBD in Sydney more often than he does. You know he lives in his little suburban, and that’s fine, it’s just the suburbs surrounded by bush. There’s not a lot of difference between living here and living anywhere else now, except it’s better. (Experienced Teacher)

Below, a beginning teacher also describes not knowing about Corowa as a place to live but that on investigating its location felt confident to accept the teaching offer:
Yeah. Well, I’d never heard of the place. I was on prac at the time in Wollongong and some of the teachers who were there had worked down here before or holidayed down here and said nothing but good things about the area. So that helped me decide and when I saw where it was, how close to Melbourne it was and centrally located to everything around with Albury close to it, Wagga two hours north, you’ve got Wangaratta half an hour south so there’s a lot of major centres around so it’s not completely isolated. (Beginning Teacher)

The town appeared to have a good sense of itself, its history and its place in relation to other places. It appears as a stable community with mostly home occupiers and 70% of the population living in two parent families. The Information Centre advertised free Corowa promotional multimedia DVD’s and there had obviously been some investment in marketing of the town and its local natural and man-made features. The local library was located in the main street and boasted a number of community based projects. There was evidence of local art work and community art groups.

Interestingly, the community has almost 44% of its population with a post-school qualification. This community attitude of valuing education and learning is also reflected in the teaching qualifications and attitude of staff, with many of the teachers choosing to take up further studies in education or the creative arts more broadly.

2.1.3 The Economy: production, work and industry of Corowa

Wheat and sheep are the two dominant agricultural industries in the area, with the third being viticulture. Large companies including Uncle Toby’s and (pork industry) also have factories based locally, and the Murray River and nearby wine region has drawn tourists from across the country and beyond. The presence of these industries has resulted in relatively low unemployment. Corowa could, therefore, best be described as a low-medium socio-economic area.

Corowa has long been a place for holiday makers, attracting boating, fishing and water sports, and with local caravan parks and hotel accommodation in the town. Recent drought and water shortages, however, have greatly impacted the town’s water tourism, and recreation opportunities have consequently suffered. The tourism industry has instead looked to its closeness to the Rutherglen wine region for promotion of its economy.

Some of the teachers described the students in the school as coming from mainly working class families, while others viewed the students coming from middle class families. Overall the town had a mixture of work opportunities. An experienced teacher (below) discusses the variety of employment opportunities:

In Corowa we have one employer of 600; Uncle Toby’s. We have another employer of about 600 which is a giant pork processing industry. We have got the wine and tourism trade which is big and we have got agriculture. Within about a half an hour of here we have got Charles Sturt University, La Trobe University. We have got Wangaratta with about 25,000 people. We have got Yarrawonga where homes are selling for large amounts and we have got the lake there. We have got Albury Wodonga which is the largest inland city in Australia I think, it has everything. This is not the bush, the issue is it’s not about attracting people to the school; it’s about attracting people to the life that they can live while working at the school. (Experienced Teacher)

The Principal described the local abattoir and pork processing industry as the most significant employer of the town and it was clearly an employer of the majority of the Year 12 students who
decided to take a gap year and work for the year after finishing school. Many of the teachers described the work as “disgusting but pays really well”.

Principal: *It’s central and decentralisation and say QAF or the abattoir pork processing relies on grain coming in and transport being the same and it’s geographically okay.*

Interviewer: *And I suppose those industries then bring other industries?*

Principal: *Well both those industries employ from very low level workers to scientists and accountants and actuaries. They are great industries to have because there is a variety, for example, my year 12s who are finishing this year, a lot of them will work there for 12 months and make very good money and then go off to university.*

Unlike some of the other case studies from the TERRAnova project, the town’s youth appeared to stay in and around the town, with enough employment and education opportunities nearby. There was a local youth centre that had been established by the local minister to try and address the needs of young country students.

Housing and land prices are affordable on a teacher’s wage, with some of the teachers discussing this as an added reason to stay and work in the town. One of the beginning teachers in his interview described purchasing his first block of land for $50,000.

Throughout the town there was evidence of housing growth and an exploration of how some of the old industries could be renewed. For example, an old mill was going to be turned in to a chocolate factory.
2.2 THE SCHOOL

"Here, it's really close, and you really care, and the kids really care”.
(Female Experienced Teacher)

Corowa High School is the only secondary State school in the town of Corowa. It is a co-educational 7-12 school with an enrolment of 513 students. There are 41.9 full time equivalent teachers, 513 students, of whom 268 are male and 245 are female.

It is ranked as a 2-point school according to the NSW Department of Education remoteness scale and in terms of appointing teachers to ‘hard-to-staff’ rural schools. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 88% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 3% Indigenous students.

Corowa High School appears to have an excellent academic reputation, as reported on the school website, they have a figure above the national average of students going on to higher
education. The school’s website highlights that in recent years Corowa High School has received four Minister’s Awards for Student Achievement, and Director General’s Awards for Literacy and Leadership programs.

The Principal describes the student population and the recruitment of students to Corowa High School in the following way:

*We attract people from as far as Broklesby, some of our students leave home at 7:30 in the morning and get home at 4:30 off the farms. About 30% of our kids come in off farms. We attract people from across the border, from Woogunya especially. The students we attract are basically working class people… it’s a working class town. We have, I believe over the last three years especially, reduced the amount of people going to private school and each year we get a number of people coming back. For example, there is a Catholic Private School in Wangaratta and a number of people go there because they are serious about Catholic education. I have got no issue with that and there are also some big independent schools in Albury, there is a bus that travels there every day, but I believe the percentage of people are coming back.* (Principal)

Throughout the case study the teachers identified both the supportive staff environment and excellent student and staff relationships as the two key reasons why this school was selected as a successful school in recruiting and retaining teachers. From all data collected, the staff and parents described the school as a close-knit group working together for the needs of all students.

One community member described the school as ‘one family’:

*I’d like to think all high schools are like that, maybe they are, maybe they’re not, but they’re all in their different faculties, but they just all, they’re just one big family.* (Parent and Community Member)

Many of the interviews revealed that a number of the staff, both beginning and experienced, had been placed through the NSW Department of Education transfer point scheme without knowing very much about the school or its community. Many had opted at the completion of their teaching degree to be placed anywhere in the state and as such often had only short notice to re-locate to the school.

Below is an example of how a beginning teacher described the phone call he had received informing him that he had been placed at Corowa (but has since stayed for three years):

**Beginning Teacher:** They called me up, we finished in December and they said, “Well basically during the week we’ll give you a phone call and tell you where you’re going”, and then the phone rang and they said, “You’re going to Corowa.

**Interviewer:** Did you know anything about Corowa?

**Beginning Teacher:** Very little, I roughly knew where it was but that was it okay, I knew it was somewhere near Albury and that, yeah that’s all and then I, before then I’d never been south of Sydney…”

Another beginning teacher who had received a scholarship to study his final year of a teaching qualification also describes his placement experience. This teacher has been re-located and bought property in the area to build a house with his family:
Beginning teacher: *The phone rang they said, Got a placement for you. You’re going to Corowa High School. Do you want to take it?* I had no idea where this place was, coming from Wollongong.

Interviewer: *And you said yes.*

Beginning teacher: *And I said, “Yes. Sure, why not.”*

### 2.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

Corowa High School was nominated as a successful school for recruiting and retaining teachers for three main reasons:

- The school’s staffing record overall with evidence of long term stability with beginning teachers staying for longer than three years;
- A positive mentoring and staff support culture;
- Excellent staff and student relationships.

The school has been able to recruit and retain teachers due largely to a particular working ‘culture’ or environment. A school culture that is best described as particularly supportive and values highly the importance of positive student-staff relationships and maintaining high expectations for students, quality teaching and high aspirations for rural students.

The work culture or environment could be described as:

- Resourceful, both across staff and by utilising individual staff’s personal and professional strengths, and;
- Supportive with formal and informal mentoring and network support;
- Aspirational, with a focus on quality teaching.

Many of the teachers interviewed valued life-long learning and had been active in further higher education studies or professional learning opportunities. Many had Master’s degrees or were keen to be involved in further study in the future. Many of the teachers had entered teaching after graduate studies. A few had come from scholarship opportunities. Most valued highly the opportunity for a rural teaching experience and many had come from large regional communities such as Wollongong, Albury, Newcastle and Armidale.

The school has a balance of experienced and beginning teachers and the Principal appears to also be targeting new graduates.

#### 2.3.1 Mentoring and co-operative approach within the staff

All of the teachers spoke about the strong mentoring culture within the school. A majority of the interviewed teachers spoke about who they had been mentored by, and in turn, who they were mentoring. Staff constantly referred to the mentoring as involving both professional and settling into the community type of advice. Below, a female teacher who had been at the school for seven years described how she mentored a new male beginning teacher:

Teacher: * Mostly it’s social support. Andrew came in, he’s a city kid, coastal city kid. *
COROWA HIGH SCHOOL

Interviewer:  \textit{This is the one I'm going to interview?}

Teacher: \textit{Yes it is. He came in, he didn't know where Corowa was, and he got this position, and he came in and they said “Right, you're his mentor”. No worries. So in the beginning it was about keeping him here, you know, and I'd sit there and say right, where are you living? How long? Okay. You've got to go and get to know the community. You've got to become part of the community. People need to know that you belong with us, once they know you belong, you'll be fine. Which he did. He then started playing tennis, and you know, he got very interactive with parents and stuff, and he fits in wonderfully well. And now he's building a house here, has got a new baby, so he's, you know, he's set up and hopefully he'll stay, cause he's excellent. You know, he tries really hard. So...}

Analysis of the information collected during the site visit strongly suggests that the Principal and his leadership team in this school have enabled others to take on a leadership role and build supportive and effective mentoring relationships. The Principal describes the process below:

\textbf{PRINCIPAL:} We'll do an induction program, they are buddied up with a person, they have got a head teacher to look after them, as well as that they have got a mentor to look after them. They are inducted through a logical process. Socially we do simple things like to make sure there is a barbeque to welcome people as they come in. I think as a school we do it fairly well, this year we have three first year out teachers. Some people find Corowa very attractive, for example, one woman has four children, she is living in Albury and she is selling up in Albury and moving to Corowa. The other two guys started here, single 22, 23 years olds and they have actually changed and moved to Albury because there is more night life. So it just depends, so some people like one way and some people like the other. But here you have also got an option.

Further references to the mentoring culture are described below:

The help goes both ways, the mentoring works two ways. I'm working with Fiona*, first year out in my room, she helps me with all my computing problems you know and the other day I needed a game with our kids away, but I wanted games that were historically based. I didn't just want rubbish and I had a white board which I've learnt to use and she gave me the sites and they were perfect. I didn't know they were there. So there is that co-operative ethos I think. (Male Experienced Teacher)

That was one of the things coming out of this re-training program is that you get a mentor so my mentor was one of the other mathematic teachers and you know he was great, he was mainly an informal mentor, there was never any formal sit-down like are you doing this, are you doing that, it was mainly informal. (Male Beginning Teacher – within 3 years)

So the staff are really close knit. (Male Beginning Teacher)

And even before they put in all the mentoring programs and everything that's in place now, we had mentors here. And my mentor has retired, but he still comes back part time, so he's still here, and he still watches over me. Even though I've been teaching for long enough to be, like I mentor Robert* who's next on your list. Bob* is still my mentor. He's like my dad at school. (Female Experienced Teacher)

Of particular interest in this case study was the constant reference to ‘the tree’. The tree was located on a nearby parcel of land close to the school grounds. The ‘tree’ had become the place
for the teachers to meet after work and chat about their day away from the public glare. The tree had become a place to foster the strong staff relationships and offer support and an opportunity to relax in a safe and supportive environment.

And a few of us made friends between faculties and so that friendship thing is a really important, the ability to be able to walk into any staff room and chat and talk and the tree breaks it down. It breaks down the age thing and it breaks down the faculty thing. (Experienced Teacher)

2.3.2 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

The school had a group of beginning teachers, of which most had stayed more than three years or were hoping to continue at the school. While many came to the school without knowing much about the school or its community, once they had started teaching at the school they did not want to leave.

The reason the school has been able to recruit and retain teachers appears to be due to a mixture of high staff morale, staff leadership opportunities and a culture of high student expectations and achievement that seemed key to teachers enjoying their work at Corowa High School.

2.3.2.1 Opportunities within the school

Teachers commented on the broad range of opportunities they had to influence decision-making and implement new initiatives. This noted, opportunities to take on new responsibilities did not necessarily equate to ready access to promotional opportunities.

Many of the teachers talked about having greater opportunities for leadership and higher levels of autonomy in the ways they shaped the curriculum to meet the needs of their students. These two reasons in turn led to greater teacher satisfaction with their teaching career. Teachers describe these opportunities below:

A place like this actually offers more opportunity if you're young and you want to come and work here. More opportunity to be autonomous in a way, belonging, but autonomous. You're not a number. (Male Beginning Teacher)

The positives, I mean I love this school. I waited a long time to get in this school. I was offered positions all over the State and I said no, Corowa High School's the only one on my list, that's where I want to go. It's a great school. You know, if you want to change something, you change it. You go and see the Principal and you know, walk in and say ‘Chris, I want to open a homework centre,’ and the only problem with that is he will say ‘I didn't think of it’. (Experienced Female Teacher)
Two experienced male teachers commented specifically on the expectation that all teachers would contribute to decision-making within the school:

… our principal certainly doesn’t get out of the way and let us get on with it and they never have, they’ve always interfered the bastards, but they allow you to do things… They both have a lot to say, but we’ve had quite powerful senior teachers, like me, like Dave S, like others who are respected enough by the executive to be able to say, let’s try this, let’s do this … (Experienced Male Teacher)

You’re also expected, and this is leadership, Chris expects everyone in the school to contribute and he harasses those who won’t contribute. (Experienced Male Teacher)

… we have committees in the school that are genuine school committees … (Experienced Male Teacher)

It was expected that all teaching staff would contribute to decision-making via school committees. Recommendations from school committees were held in high regard and frequently adopted. Staff, including junior staff, were also encouraged and supported to implement new initiatives and programs in response to student need.

In reflecting on opportunities within the school, one female teacher commented on waiting for a number of years before a position came up. She had worked casually for seven to eight years before retirement of a senior teacher meant that there was an opening for her. This same teacher noted that long contracts mean that people who are ineffective cannot be moved on:

We feel hopeless because once you’re in, you’re in. (Experienced Female Teacher)

This has ramifications for teachers interested in seeking promotion, as without movement, new positions do not necessarily become available:

So that’s probably the limitation with the rural areas, to be promoted you probably do need move, or wait 20 years for somebody to retire. (Male Beginning Teacher)

They stay and they stay and they stay, and you know, because people settle, and have families, they just stay for 20 years and you’re stuck in a position you don’t necessarily want to be in. (Experienced Female Teacher)

Another experienced staff member also mentioned his intention to apply for a promotion, but noted that this could not happen unless the person in the role he was interested in moved on.

2.3.2.2 High expectations of students and a focus on quality teaching

Another aspect of staff satisfaction leading to the desire to stay at the school was the close staff-student relationships described by the teachers. Staff stated that they felt increased opportunities to learn about their students both in the school and community. One teacher described the change in the school culture for the past number of years which had led to student focused teaching:

It became much more child centred in terms of their welfare, their wellbeing and welfare wasn’t just tucked away. (Male Experienced Teacher and Leader)

This too appeared a significant reason why teachers wanted to stay. Teachers did not discuss significant behaviour management issues impacting on their work.
I think it’s probably easier, because the student numbers are down, it’s easier to identify the problems before it becomes too much of a big issue. And then there’s support in place, like I said, the staff probably not only support each other, the students as well. So they pick up learning problems and problems early on and at the start there’s active work. Teachers spend their free periods off helping kids with literacy around the school so it’s really supportive. I can’t think of anything else to describe it. (Male Beginning Teacher)

Frequent reference to the benefits of ‘really knowing’ students, parents and the community was also evident:

You’re encouraged by knowing the kids, by knowing the teachers, you’re treated more as an individual, less as a number, you’re not one of 110 teachers or 120 teachers. (Experienced Male Teacher)

There is a strong research base emphasizing the significance of quality relationships between teachers and their students’ families and community (Howley & Harmon, 2000; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) argue that these teacher-family partnerships play an important role in supporting students to achieve their educational goals.

The Principal was also particularly active in recruiting students to the school and bringing students from the private sector back to the public sector. He and the staff had identified excellent school results and marketing these results as one of the ways of attracting students and in turn, quality teachers to the school.

We have done a lot of promotion. We push our positives, for example, we have a section in the newspaper every second week about what’s happening in the school. We have a sign out the front of the school which two or three times a week has positive messages on it… that wasn’t happening before. Today, we start bringing the local feeder primary schools, the schools from grade four. Tomorrow we have a grade four extension going on here. Today we have about 110 year fives doing a maths extension day and on the 3rd December, we have grade six primary schools coming in. Next Monday we have all the Principals from the feeder primary schools sitting down with our Maths and English staff working on literacy and numeracy strategies and analysis and the performance this year and how we are going to improve it next year. All those things have basically kicked off in the last couple of years. I suppose we are being aggressive in trying to get the good word out there. And I suppose we take seriously what the community says and thinks. For example, yesterday we were approached by the RSL. They are running out of the elderly who can march on Remembrance Day, in the heat, and they asked for our help. So we provided a group of Year 11 and 12 boys and girls dressed in WWII uniforms and they were able to march. You don’t have to do that, but it helps our community and not that you do it just to score points, but you have got to get out there and show people that you are prepared to do it. (Principal)

2.3.3 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

Unlike some of the other case studies within this project, the community’s contribution to the retention and recruitment of the teachers did not emerge from the data as significant in the retention of beginning teachers. For example, the community did not appear to actively participate in organising housing for new teachers or participate in orienting the new teachers to the town.
However, the community members and parents who were interviewed did demonstrate a strong belief that all the teachers were valued and valued their students in school and community settings. The following two responses illustrate the community focused approach to teaching:

Staff, teaching staff, have been wonderful. We are losing a lot of our older staff now, though. There’s a change where we’re getting the new ones in. But they’re dedicated. Dedicated staff, they really are. (Parent and community member)

Well they go out of their way to help the kids. And I know most of them, if there’s kids with problems I know there’s some teachers, who will, going back to when my daughter was at school, her maths teacher took time off in year 12 but he still came and tutored them and, you know, and was looking after them, and they really look out for their kids. And if they’re out down the street, and see the kids, you know, they all talk, and say gidday… (Chaplain)

### 2.3.4 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

The Principal and leadership group demonstrated a strong commitment to pre-service teacher education and were keen to have pre-service teachers within the school. They were keen to provide experiences for city-based students to highlight the positive life and career opportunities of country teaching. The Principal describes the school’s attitude to such State-based teacher recruitment initiatives:

The Beyond the Line program started a couple of years ago to give people who have never been to the bush an idea of what is out there. And there’s two ways that they can do it. For example they can come and have a five week stay here at the school and we have got a girl Bronwyn* staying here and she’s in her fourth week now. But also they do a bit of a travelling show where next week we have three Wollongong students or four possibly coming and staying for three days and we sort of show them what the school is like and take them out onto the river around town.

Understand that the average Australian doesn’t get away from the coast and a lot of people have never travelled inland before. There is nothing wrong with that and we all suffer from that. But to get people out and to show them the possibilities. Coming here, we could sell this place tomorrow, but I promise you all the people that leave here think it’s a great place, it’s not hard to do, it’s not hard to sell. (Principal)

At the time of the case study there was one pre-service student, Bronwyn*, who had extended her country experience from the Beyond the Line NSW experience. Below she describes the benefits of the program:

I think it’s a great program to try and get people out into the country. I actually went on a Beyond the Line bus trip as well run by the Department in June I think, so we went out to Parkes and I actually went to Canowindra High School which was a good experience. I think it’s good just to see what it’s like in a country school. Well yeah, even though on that bus trip I wasn’t actually teaching, yeah it’s just good to see what the community is like and what it’s going to be like teaching out here.

Yeah we’ve been to Albury, to the movies with one of the teachers here which is really nice. She’s a first year out, so like relatively the same age and so we went out. We’ve been tripping around to the local towns, like we went to Beechworth and Yakandandah last weekend and yeah the Principal took me water skiing last weekend which was good. So
everybody has been really concerned about what we are doing on the weekends which is nice.
(Pre-service Teacher)

2.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

2.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

1. Decreasing numbers – water availability in the Murray River and drought
2. Good publicity
3. Opportunities for professional learning and development

While Corowa High School is well positioned geographically, the issues for this school appear to be the same as for the other case studies. The school is constantly competing for student numbers to ensure its viability. Teachers’ commented on river tourism and how as a consequence of drought and the introduction of poker machines in Victoria, various sporting clubs along the Murray are no longer viable. The impact of drought on agricultural industries is a further consideration. These factors have a bearing on student numbers as families move to find work.

Another challenge the school faces, tied in many ways to student recruitment, is the constant need to highlight ‘positive’ stories about learning in rural schools. Selling positive stories to parents about rural schools, who often believe ‘bigger is therefore better’ or private is better than public when it comes to providing educational choices for students, is a constant battle.

Recruiting quality teachers, while obviously not as difficult at Corowa, still appears to be an ongoing focus, with the school facing a loss of experienced teachers to retirement. Partnering with universities that offer teacher education courses and providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience the college were among the key strategies already in place, but as demand increases, further action may be required. Further, teachers at this school wanted to be professionally engaged and have opportunities to network. Consequently, the difficulties associated with accessing external professional development were identified as a barrier. If these development needs are not met, there is a risk of losing teachers to urban schools. Partnering with education networks might help the school to provide a greater range of professional learning opportunities internally.
Lightning Ridge Central School was selected as a Case Study site because it is a school in a small community with a low to medium economic and social base.

3.1 LIGHTNING RIDGE: THE COMMUNITY

3.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Lightning Ridge

Lightning Ridge is located in northern NSW 6km off the Castlereagh Highway, in the Walgett Shire, approximately 750 km north-west of Sydney, 380 km north of Dubbo, 200 km west of Moree and 750 km south-west of Brisbane. As one of the interviewees for this case study, the wife of the Mayor and former School Council President, who has lived in town for over 40 years, says: “It’s very handy, it’s very central, eight hours to everywhere.” Its primary service centre is the town of Walgett, 75 km to the south. The area contains the world’s richest deposits of the unique black opal and this is reflected in the large numbers of mining leases and fossicking mounds visible throughout the district.
Charles Nettleton was the first professional miner to discover the mining potential of the area in 1902. His mining site, and the location of the original settlement, was originally part of Angledool Station. First known as Wallangulla, the name of the town was changed to Lightning Ridge soon after World War I, when legend has it that a goat was struck by lightning during a storm (http://www.visitnsw.com/town/Lightning_Ridge.aspx).

Temperatures often reach the high 40s during summer, although below ground the temperature remains a comfortable 22°C all year round. The town has access to abundant hot water from a bore into the Great Artesian Basin and offers two hot water pools for bathing. There is also a tap available for the public to access the mineral water. However, this is dry country and people living in some camps around Lightning Ridge have to buy and cart water for drinking and household use.

The opal fields of Lightning Ridge are created and recreated on a daily basis by human activity. This constant, unique creativity helps keep the heritage of the opal field alive. Hummocks of chipped stone and rusty machinery lie in the open air. Residents of the opal fields build their houses on their claims, or live in caravans, some with rainwater tanks attached to gather scarce water. For them, the machines, mineshafts, corner posts, signposts, pudding dams, dwellings and earthworks are intimate parts of their landscape – important factors in developing and maintaining their sense of place and belonging.

Residents are familiar with who made things or who brought them there; what work they have done and where, and which opals they helped to find. The places are connected to where good or bad fortunes were found, who worked the ground, the parties which took place or the inventions which emerged from an intrinsic need. Even if the places and things were there before them, people know their meanings in their own lives and times (http://lightningridgeinfo.com.au).
Driving into town from the south along the Castlereagh Highway, I am struck by the colours, the sky and the solitude out there. Properties are large, and there are few homesteads to be seen from the road. After years of drought, I pass drovers herding sheep along the ‘long paddock’ beside the road, while the fenced land stood parched and brown. I see the first School Bus sign 65 km from town, and realise that some kids have a long ride into school each day – longer than in any of the other towns I have studied for this Project.

This land was the original homeland of the Yuwaalaraay people, and is currently part of the Murdi Paaki COAG area. It is hot, dry and dusty, and as I turn off the highway there are signs welcoming tourists to visit the town, to stay in the motels and caravan parks, see the sights, and perhaps stay and fossick for opal themselves. Ahead, the highway heads north to Queensland, to Dirranbandi, St George and Roma.

The political borders of the state become secondary to social relations in remote areas like this, and as the Principal noted:

“a lot of people relate to Queensland here, the Queensland border is only 50km away, and the kids play sport in St. George […] and one of our doctors in town is based in St. George, he comes here two days a week, and there used to be an aeroplane service from, well there used to be a plane service here actually.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Within the NSW DET, though, the inclusion of Lightning Ridge in the Western Region of administrative support and oversight means that the School is connected with others focussed on Dubbo, rather than the closer centres of Moree and Armidale. This is an administrative change, but appears to be one motivated on a more informed understanding of social relations: as the Principal also noted; “I think also the Indigenous communities have a greater affinity with Dubbo.”

3.1.2 Demography: the people and community of Lightning Ridge

Lightning Ridge’s population is said to be rather variable, as the transient miners come and go from the town. In fact, the official population sign on the highway, as you enter the town states: Lightning Ridge – Population ?

Part of the attraction of the place is the popular legend that the town is home to thousands of other residents apart from those who are happy to fill out official census forms – people who prefer to remain ‘off the record’ and not easily locatable. Local government information suggests that up to 80 000 visitors pass through the town each year as tourists. There is also a regular turnover of service professionals such as police, nurses, and teachers.
By all accounts, the people who live in Lightning Ridge are proud of its diverse cultural heritage and reputation for producing and attracting wonderfully eccentric characters. One of the ways this eccentricity comes through is via the varied built environment which has developed over time. The town is famous for its eccentricity, and features homes built from empty beer bottles along with other ornate constructions on the diggings as colourful aspects of its attractions for tourists. The old hospital building was recycled as the pre-school in the 1970s and an Anglican church was recommissioned for the Serbian Orthodox members of the community to use for their worship.

The ABS figures above indicate that the population of the town is growing, and that the historical aspect of a male-dominated frontier mining town is no longer the whole story, as there is a growing number of families and children in the community, although singles and couples without children still predominate.

Several of the teachers commented on the attractions of the multicultural nature of the community:

“Well I like the fact that even though I like it you can, you can go down the street and there’ll be different people all the time different I really like the multicultural aspect of it and I like the fact that it’s a mining town but everybody sort of just gets together and helps each other out a lot”. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
“Well to me, you know new people come into our community, you know if their heart is in the place, you know, they become a part of our community and that, you become a local. I think a bit sooner.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This comment is indicative of the difference that marks Lightning Ridge from most other rural and remote communities: there is no sense that people have to live here for generations to be considered ‘local’. The community is accepting of all (new)comers and its celebrated open-mindedness and freedom as a community means that many people find it accepting of difference, and a comfortable place to ‘live their own lives’ without the constraints of many of the conventional social mores. At the same time I was struck by the number of churches in town, as if people feel the need, in their constant witness of the majesty and awesome vastness of the landscape, to meet spiritual needs in this way.

This is perhaps the most racially diverse of all the communities studied in this Project, yet there is little if any evidence or mention of racial tension in interviews and around the town. While cultural and linguistic difference produces challenges for teachers supporting children in learning standard literacy, it also provides opportunity for other social and cultural awareness and interchange that is less available elsewhere. As one teacher noted:

“It is quite a unique community you know. A gentleman made this quote a long, long time ago and I always remember it, you know, because we have got such a multicultural community here, you know, 58 or 68 different nationalities here. And he said you know, “It’s not the colour of your skin that matters here, it’s the colours that you get in your opals.”” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

A Head Teacher in the school, who had moved there a year previously after growing up, living and working in another school in the same School Education District, noted the difference between this community and other rural places:

“It is very different from Drowerton. Even though we’re in the Hubton group of schools, this is a unique school. It’s not prejudiced in any manner or means. I haven’t heard a prejudiced comment, because we’re all from different nationalities. The kids is all, one particular boy in Year 7 said to me, “Why can’t you say my name properly?” Cause I called him ‘Nafan’. And I said, “Because I wasn’t born in Australia, Nafan,” I said, “And that was my maiden tongue, my first language, we don’t say ’th’ we say an ’f’.” After that, he was fine, that was it. He accepted what it was. So yes, they’re very open in that way. Their backgrounds are very different, like, low socio-economic, Cobar’s quite high with the mines.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As this teacher intimated, there are issues of poverty and family disintegration that impact on the schooling of children in the town. For instance, the Principal noted the difficulty of decisions that need to be made about student welfare, and the importance of the use of professional judgement in some cases, rather than simply following policy rules. The effect of policy designed for ‘elsewhere’ can often have deleterious effects on the lives of students and teachers in places that are socially different:

“And you know we’re a bureaucracy with rules and regulations for everything but in fact there is significant internal inconsistencies within those rules and regulations … so for instance suspension. Suspensions are a very interesting thing. It says quite clearly you know if there is violence, one should impose a long suspension which is four days or more, four to twenty-one days. But what do you do if you know by imposing that suspension the kid is going to get a belting at home and then you have to make a DOC’s referral and you are in
breach of your child care responsibilities, that’s a huge ethical dilemma. The other thing is I suppose somewhere in the world at some stage, suspension must have made a difference to a child’s behaviour but I am not aware . . .” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal’s comments here point to the crucial need for professional experience and the capacity for ethical reasoning in people taking up leadership positions in such locations:

“Oh and we have children with huge issues. A previous principal used to notify DOCs if a child came three days … if there were three occasions on which a child came without lunch … I don’t do that, I just organise for them to get lunch, but probably according to the guidelines I should. But altogether we’ve had this year 8 kids, I think, who DOCs have come and taken from the school, taken from their parents. Well out of a school of 400 that’s huge.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Weighing up the effect of children being removed from classrooms on teachers, and school workers, and the other children in the classes, as well as on the children themselves, is not a simple matter – but it is an everyday aspect of the work of principals in ‘difficult’ schools like Lightning Ridge.

Yet this community and its school were nominated for this Project as a success story – an unusual school and one suitable to be studied in this national inquiry into schools which manage to attract and retain teachers in rural and remote locations, and the sorts of difficult conditions that characterise this community. Unusually too, this school was nominated by several people who are ex-teachers, as well as by members of the community itself. The ex-teachers were people who had begun their teaching at Lightning Ridge and had worked together there during these formative years, forming a social and professional bond that had led to them remaining in touch for up over a decade and a half, and meeting up annually in one of their current locations, to have a Lightning Ridge reunion. As a local community member noted, too:

“I might also add that our lifelong friends to this day, our friendships that were formed in those early days as teachers, were what they call floating population.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

3.1.3 The Economy: production, work and industry of Lightning Ridge

Lightning Ridge is an unusual community in other respects, too. Apart from the hard and dusty work of mining, undertaken mostly by individual fossickers who come to try it out, or ‘escape’ a past way of life, and who get the ‘bug’, the economy of this town relies predominantly on tourism and service provision. The major forms of employment include: Education, 4.5%; Accommodation, Cafés and Restaurants, 4.1%; Other Mining, 4.0%; Community Services, 2.7%; and Personal and Household Goods Retailing, 2.5% (http://www.abs.gov.au). Agriculture in the Walgett shire includes grain and
sheep farming, and there are large pastoral holdings, on which the early miners had first staked their claims to mine for opal, which remain successful businesses today.

The following extract from an online site providing tourist advice provides an insight into the importance of the tourist industry to the community, and indicates a little of the affect of Lightning Ridge on the visitor. Even the most world-weary, who might initially see the putative attractions town with scepticism, quickly identify and note its charms:

It reeks of an environment trying a touch too hard to be attractive to tourists. The one and only road leading into and out of town is lined on each side with billboard after billboard featuring opal-related attractions and opal stores. You see a lot of the same adverts over and over again too - on not only billboards, but lining fences, and even painted and plastered into the general surroundings. It’s a little over the top.

But somehow it also adds to the character of Lightning Ridge, which is quirky and whimsical. There is so very much more than meets the eye if you want to discover its colourful underbelly. Allow yourself to stay a while. Head to the bowling club or one of the handful of cafés to meet some locals, and stay long enough to get to know them. If you do, you’ll see a whole different side to Lightning Ridge that is fascinating.

"In the old days of mining here, people came here to disappear. You rarely knew anybody’s name, and those names you knew were probably fake nicknames in any case. You didn’t ask much about somebody, and they didn’t tell too much either," said one person about the opal rush that started in the early 1900s and converted Lightning Ridge from a deserted piece of land to a bustling mining town.

People came from all over the world and bought (or squatted on) "claims": access to small pieces of land with permission to dig shafts to mine for opal. Anybody could and still can do it; for a few thousand dollars you could set yourself up with a claim, a trailer to live in, and much of the equipment you need to operate your small and practically instantaneous mining business.

And although there are still a number of mines and miners in Lightning Ridge, many of the big miners and prospectors are starting to do their active work further afield. It was when this started happening that the town collectively and individually had a choice to make: pack up and move shop, capitalize on the already steady stream of visitors to town wanting to see what "opal fever" is all about. And so it was that tourism became the main draw (and a large income source) for Lightning Ridge. (Dunn & Bedford, 2008)

Lightning Ridge is not a wealthy community. The MySchool website indicates that in 2009, 99% of the school's population sat within the bottom quarter of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (in 2010 the figure dropped to 59%), making this, on the surface, an unlikely school to study as a ‘success’ story for rural education. Its results on annual NAPLAN tests are not extraordinary in comparison with other Australian schools generally, though students at this school achieve consistently higher results than those in other ‘like schools’ around
the nation. There is not enough small industry in the town to ensure that families can keep their young people close as they leave school and need to earn a living, and students at the school need to travel to Walgett, Dubbo and other locations even to have access to work experience in the VET courses.

However, this community is unique. It exists only because of the opal in the local environment, and it is proud of the unusual social and economic fabric that has been stitched together by its inhabitants over a century of hard work in the heat and dust of this low mountain ridge.

3.2 THE SCHOOL

The history of Lightning Ridge records that there was a schoolmaster on the diggings in 1911, and in 1912, a decade after the first opal parcel as found on the Ridge at Wallangalla, a consolidated school was opened. During the Second World War, when few miners worked the diggings, the school serviced about 50 children.

Today, Lightning Ridge Central School offers a comprehensive education from K-12 for the children of the town and the small outlying communities. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that in 2010 the school had 43% Indigenous students, and 11% of the children come from backgrounds other than English. It had 37.1 full-time equivalent teaching staff, 394 students, of whom 208 are male and 186 are female (http://www.myschool.edu.au).

Students and their families bring a wide variety of cultural heritage, all of which contribute to the diversity of this isolated community (http://www.lightningrc.schools.nsw.edu.au/sws/view/2522.node). The youth of the town is well catered for, with an Olympic-sized swimming pool, skate-park and youth centre as visible markers that the community recognises their particular needs and has worked to support them.
The MySchool statement indicates that the school is physically attractive, with new buildings and facilities. As one of the teachers noted, the school is exceptionally well resourced:

“Well yeah, the funding that this school gets is crazy. It’s literally millions and millions, while I’ve been here there’s new buildings and there’s still another million dollar building going up now and three million dollars of improvements happening now and that’s after they’ve had numerous buildings, like the big classroom block, big gym and a library.”

(Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Officially classified as ‘Remote’, the school attracts significant funding from equity programs, and in 2009 was in receipt of funding from the Priority Schools Program, the Country Area Program, and the NSW Schools in Partnership program.

There are a number of strong curricular programs on offer to students in the secondary years, including vocational and arts education programs, and the school has achieved considerable success with its music and dance, with students participating in the Schools Spectacular. Students in the primary years participate in the annual Special Forever art and writing project based in the Murray-Darling Basin, and the school has embraced the NSWDET’s Reading to Learn approach to literacy instruction as a means of addressing historically comparatively low achievements of students in state and national tests of literacy and numeracy. CAP [Country Area Program] funding is used to support these efforts by bringing, for instance, popular children’s authors to visit the school and work with students, as well as raise interest in reading.

The school produces a regular monthly newsletter for the community, with both high production and interest quality, making itself a key hub for local civic activity, including information about continuing education, domestic violence and mental health issues, and images and work samples from students of all ages. The Principal had been in his position for about 18 months at the time of the site visit, and has taken a positive and energetic approach to managing the school and the expectations for students, attempting to ensure that they receive a high-quality experience in the school setting that is not ‘disadvantaged’ because of their remote location.

A Yuwaalaraay language program has been in operation in the school for several years now, and provides compulsory education in the local Aboriginal language for secondary students. A report of this on the NSW Board of Studies website celebrates this achievement in language curriculum, though notes that there have been difficulties in the maintenance of the program over time:

The Yuwaalaraay Language Program at Lightning Ridge Central School has been established for some time and is very much a community program. The Community Language Tutors are employed through a local Aboriginal organisation and the Yuwaalaraay Language Program has its own room in the school where lessons take place. An unexpected outcome of the Aboriginal language program is that students feel safe to come to the Language Room to talk about problems and this is testament to the welcoming environment provided there.

The Yuwaalaraay Language Program has been a part of the Aboriginal Languages support activities with the Board of Studies since 2004. They have had many successes, some of which are described here. The two Community Language Tutors have both been completing teacher training and have been most committed to the Yuwaalaraay Language Program.

The Yuwaalaraay Language Program in Lightning Ridge has operated for many years, during which time there have been many changes and achievements, but also many
difficulties. This is the nature of Aboriginal language programs and it is expected this program will continue to find innovative solutions to their problems because of their commitment to teaching Aboriginal languages (NSWBOS, 2007).

As one of the teachers involved in this program noted:

“Lightning Ridge is a unique place I believe because of the different nationalities we have here, the multiculturalism within the town which comes into the school, I think there is over 60 different nationalities so we have within the school and with the language, local language being spoken, so some of those kids are bilingual, probably trilingual so we learn about one another’s languages through the process as well.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

3.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

3.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

In earlier times, as a local community member, who had arrived in the district as a first year out teacher over forty years ago said, recruitment of teachers for the school was not an issue – teachers were ‘bonded’ to the NSWDET after completing their state-funded training, and were sent here to serve their employer – with due acknowledgement of the hardships that this would entail:

“Back in those days, the teachers were guaranteed that if they came and did their rest and duty...... which was three years ... They were assured of a good position on the coast. ... Or somewhere where they choose to be.

So they came out there as young teachers and they had a good life. A lot of them married, local graziers girls...... or else they moved on. Some of the girls that came out there, one is still the Assistant Principal at Ruralia School. I think they came out and they were eager. Back in those days you know, and you know, to get a job there were lots of teachers and to get a job... ... they would go wherever they were sent virtually. There wasn’t a choice.

They just, the life back then was fabulous...... and it was a better life in the bush than it is now, in some respects. Those teachers back in our early days, they came not knowing what to expect. The heat, the drought, all the adverse things... were made better by the relationships that were formed with the people, the close knit community, the aboriginal children who just hung off every word...... they loved and respected each other. They used to spend their own time with the sport.

See this is something that very rarely happens these days, for a lot of reasons. The teachers, we noticed over the years, the change. Teachers aren’t prepared to have that out of school interaction. We do have a couple of exceptions here... There is one, he and his little son… when the teachers are playing football here of a weekend, they are down there watching them. He takes cricket, he organises the cricket for the children of a weekend and this is what used to happen all the time in the olden days.

I was told, ‘You have a position at Ruralia, you will be on the train and bus and the mail cart will pick you up.’ And that’s how they came to Ruralia. And so they came, but also knowing as I said, if they did their time, they would get their position of choice. Nowadays some of them have a choice, some are so keen that when they have finished college they will go wherever. Some come begrudgingly, which is sad. Those that come begrudgingly do learn to
There are several other, younger female teachers in the school who have married in to the local area and have taught at a number of the schools around the region – variously all over an hours’ drive from their homesteads. For a male teacher who arrived in the town nearly a decade ago, the story was slightly different: This teacher, who had finished his pre-service teacher education in Victoria, had been seeking full-time employment in NSW. As he tells the story:

“In Portville I was doing casual blocks of classes there and just wanted to get full time work, so I actually went to the DET, the staffing people, saw them face to face and said I just want, I’m tired of waiting, just give me a full-time job. If you’ve got one, I’ll take one. And they said there happens to be a full time job starting next week. It was about five days away at Lightning Ridge, so I had to put together stuff and drive up here and it was the start of the year, like we start a week later here so, it was the start. They had already started school in Portville and I hadn’t, I’d actually lost my block that I had from the year before, because they had a new principal who changed everything and I was upset, and then I thought well stuff this, I want to get full time work somehow… So I saw the Department and there was a fella there that was really good. He said there’s a full time job in Lightning Ridge, so that’s where I was about four or five days later.

I didn’t know where it was, I had to look it up on the internet and it was, the first day here was… The first day was, it was really hot and I got here just in, on the staff development day but I missed that, I got here after that. So I was in time for the first day of class but it was so hot when you get out, so it would have been 40+. But they had a house. Yeah, they’ve got good teacher housing, the school year was starting the next day so I had to be there that day.

I’d been three years at Portville and a little bit around Seaside area, I’d done some casual work, just day to day stuff, but it all adds up. Well that’s all I wanted was a full time job and that was the way to get it, just say you’ll go. Actually go in to see them and say you’ll go anywhere and if you’re at the right time, they’ll have something for you. At that time, it was only two years. So you only have to be here two years and you can go.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This teacher had stayed at the school for 8 years, and towards the latter period of his stay he had met and married another teacher, who had arrived at the school four years earlier by a different means again:

“Oh the principal was looking for just a temporary worker for a, you know, casual worker for classes. We needed you know I think, somebody, she actually did RFS stuff when she came the first year and he was just desperate for someone. He rang around and found somehow through somebody, got on the phone to her and she came up. A lot of people do that, they come up because of temporary work, I don’t know, everyone’s different, but I don’t think that I would have come up just for that. I came out because I was offered full time work. But a lot of people come out because they’re offered a temporary block so I guess they’re hard to get too, if you’re looking in the coast too, so maybe that’s just some stability for them.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Yet one example of a teacher who had come for temporary work and stayed, contradicts the popular myth that teachers can pick up work easily in remote locations such as this. This teacher described her employment history:
“This is my sixth year in Lightning Ridge. I didn’t come and go. But it took me three years to get a permanent position in Lightning Ridge, so this is the third year of my incentive contract. I trained at Portville Uni. After graduating I worked for about 12 months on a purely day to day basis, in Portville. And from that working day to day then I was offered a temporary block at Suburban Public. And I was there for nearly three years. About two and a half years. Just rolling temporary blocks … doing varying roles. And going in to my third year there I was only offered I think it was two days a week for the next year, so I had to explore other options. The trouble was, because I’d already spent so long at that school that I’ve lost my other contacts at other schools.

Yeah. So, yeah. In the end I just bit the bullet and thought well they need teachers out West, I’ll go there, ‘cause I had to work. I had to work. Financial commitments, yeah. So I had to work and really did not enjoy day to day teaching, day to day casual teaching. It was soul destroying actually. It’s not a nice way to earn money as a day to day you know, just to walk into a school at 8:30 in the morning and have to teach from nothing. It’s not a nice experience.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another teacher was born in the area herself, attended the school and has returned there to teach, contributing significantly to the local Indigenous language program in the school:

“Okay, I have lived here now for 54 years. I came here when I was three years old. My mum and dad worked out on a property out towards Karalia. Yeah I came to school here and it seems like I have never left this place. Because I believe that people coming in here, they have to have the passion for teaching, you know. And to come here, we have, our community is unique, even though it’s a very small community, so you need to have that passion for teaching, you know, you need to make Lightning Ridge your home while you’re here.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Yet another teacher, again from the coast, had accepted a promotional position as Head of Social Sciences and Arts at the school as a quicker way of gaining promotion within the NSWDET than in metropolitan or coastal areas:

“Well people have done that in fact if anything out here it’s easier to work your way up because there’s more chance to. Like there’s often young people are in their 20’s that are execs or deputies or principals, you know you’ve got people in their late 20’s running their schools. That won’t happen on the coast.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There was still another source of teaching staff that the school has been able to attract. These are the group of retired professionals, or ‘re-treads’, who have made the commitment, as a life choice or because of a financial need brought about by changes in life circumstances after retirement, to come back to teaching. The Principal has actively sought out staff who he knows from previous schools to take up temporary appointments, for instance:

“This is my third year; I actually retired in 2004 … the end of 2004, and then life situation changed and I needed to go back to work. So I did about nine months of casual work, then I did a three month stint at Farmer. I retired from Squatter High. That’s where I knew the Principal from. And then I did a year at Treechange but these were temporary appointments. And then I was looking for another position. The other position had finished and I was given three schools: one in Drovert, one in some other little place I’ve never heard of, and one at Lightning Ridge. And I thought, ‘Well, I’ve never been to Lightning
It can be seen from these interviews that there is a range of motivations and means of recruitment at Lightning Ridge – people come and go, and a hard core of staff remain to provide the backbone of the school for the students and community. As the following comment from a long-staying teacher suggests, there is lack of judgementalism among the community as a whole that allows those who fit in to stay, and those who don't to move on, while those who stay believe they are well served by their employer:

“I don't know, they find it's not for them. Not everyone likes it, but I mean you've sort of got all your comforts, you've got the teacher housing's top standard. There's nothing wrong with what we've got at the moment, me and my wife are in a three bedroom house and it's beautiful. We've had a lot of visitors lately, family come up and there's just heaps of room for them. Two bathrooms and everything, so there's heaps of space for them and we're paying, I don't know, $27 a week or a fortnight or something. It's 10% of what it should be anyway, it should be $270.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Not all interviewees reported similar stories of long-term staffing retention and identification with the life and work at Lightning Ridge, of course. Another teacher noted that there is a regular turn-over of staff in the school, and that this is not viewed as a negative situation for the school. For this teacher, the opportunity to meet and work with a range of new colleagues is viewed positively, as validating her own professional knowledge:

“I think because we have such a diverse range of teachers coming out, we have fresh new people just out of uni and we have others who have been out of the workforce and then have come back in and I think it's just interesting just meeting those different people and helping them along the road. Because I have been here for such a long time I know a lot of the kids and I you know if a teacher's having problems with a particular child I'll go well how about we try yada, yada, yada, and that, that's really helpful.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As noted above, not all of these newcomers find the lifestyle conducive to personal and professional well-being, and this does cause some concern for long-term colleagues. Even while summing up the whole school in a positive light, the following extract provides a clear account of the effects of regular staff mobility on those who stay:

“It is good. I find the main problem is that with people here short term, just going off a little bit on something here, is that their heart's not in it 100% when they're here. Like that's what I find makes it hardest to work here … is that not everybody, like everyone's thinking about where they're going next and it's like a place in between A and B, like they're coming from something and they're working to get a, you know, transfer to whatever, Coastville or something. And you can see that their heart's not in it 100% in where they are here at Lightning Ridge. And they're so happy when they get their transfer, so it's sort of like, did they really enjoy it here at all? You can't tell people to enjoy a place, that can't be done, but at least, I think people, if they come to a town, they've got to try and embrace it for what it is
and any town can be a, this is a good place 'cause it's original and different to your normal average town. I think the kids would certainly be aware that teachers come and go a lot. And the other teachers, yeah, I think they're the ones that are sort of more in it for the, actually putting their heart into it a bit more. You can see, whereas if you're only here a couple of years, you're not, your head's never really here. You're sort of thinking, always thinking about…” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

3.3.2 How has the school and community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

“And again with working out here, to be honest, I mean the kids see so many different teachers and it's such a big turnover that they rate you according to the length of time you stay. So that if you survive the first term, you're okay and then if you stay the next term, you're super cool and then they sort of accept you increasingly from that point on. And again, it's so different to a metropolitan school where they accept you anyway, you're just another person.” (Executive Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In pointing to the difference between students in metropolitan schools where they do not expect to ‘know’ their teachers, and rarely live alongside them in the same locality, this experienced member of the school executive rehearses the established knowledge about rural teaching – that you cannot hide who you are in the ‘fishbowl’ of a small community. Because of course, you are not ‘just another person’ in a rural town, you are a teacher, and the things you do are noted by your colleagues, your students and their parents.

In a town like Lightning Ridge, there is not the social infrastructure that characterises many of the other communities studied in this Project. I was surprised by a contradiction in the experience of people who had been in the school for a short time, and those who had been here longer. An Executive staff member, who had taught for many years in other rural communities, indicated that settling in is always difficult for new people in town:

“It is hard, but to be honest, the best way, the most successful way is, not to cling to the teachers, but to actually go to places where there's town people and meet them and spend some time, just casually, it doesn’t have to be anything sort of formalised. The other thing, the other probably key thing would be is to be involved in something. Whatever your interests are, if there’s a squash club, join that, be involved in that, even if you're no good at it, it just gets you that link with the community, that as a teacher, you don't get.” (Executive Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

However, a long-term local community member noted that it has been unusual in Lightning Ridge for this to occur – noting that new teachers in town seem to connect with their colleagues rather than with the locals, and regretting this lack of social contact:

“I think that can make a difference if they don’t, because they do seem to stick to their own social group. That’s one thing that we have noticed, there is not a lot of intermingling with the community. See in Otherton you just had your community and everyone just mixed with everyone. But here you find that you seem that they seem to stick to their own.

And it happens in Otherton also. It's more so than here. Otherton is a much ‘clique-ier’ town and you have graziers and you have teachers and you have — here they just seem to either socialise at home or go to the pub in their groups.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)
Within the school, beginning teachers are regular arrivals, and this comment provides an indication of why the strong bonds that have formed among teachers who have been together at Lightning Ridge might occur:

“Because we’re all sort of in, we’re all in the same boat and a lot of us are all are young teachers so you sort of get in and help each other out and the community’s good, if you ever need for someone to come in there’s never any, there’s never, never any hassle and when you need to talk to parents about a student, they’re always really receptive.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Issues of the geographical location of the place are also important here – and how rural social space is constructed differently from what might be expected by teachers who arrive here, without access to prior information. One of the common pieces of advice that new teachers are given by those more experienced ‘country teachers’ is to become involved in sport – and the teachers at Lightning Ridge do agree with this:

“So I think that’s a really important thing out here like I think sport’s an important part in any community, it’s always a good way to bring people together.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

However, such advice must be tempered by the effects that the geography of the town has on what happens in its social life. One teacher reported, for instance, that out here, the nearest sporting events are actually in Queensland, which has different school holidays, and is even on a different time zone during the summer months when NSW operates a daylight saving program. So it is difficult to participate in ‘sport’ in the way that can be done in other communities around the state. As another teacher noted:

“When I first got here I was playing Aussie Rules, so I really missed playing that sport. I’d always done that, and that sort of was something I usually thought that I missed most. ‘Cause there’s none of that here, it’s all Rugby League, that’s right yeah.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The community of Lightning Ridge does not have the general economic and cultural capital that characterises communities with high levels of participation and involvement in the running of their school. However, there is an active P&C committee, and committed parents who give of their time, expertise and energy to enhance the school and its opportunities for their children. There is not a large number of staff members who have children in the school, though one
teacher, who had been at the school for six years at the time of the interview, noted the personal and professional benefits she thought accrued from having her daughter in the school:

“Oh definitely. It certainly does. You have a whole different perspective on community and people’s families and certainly interacting in the community you’re not always a teacher. So at some time you’re somebody’s mother as well you know. So it does humanise you. And yeah, it gives you that opportunity to interact with people in the community where you don’t have that power relationship or that authority relationship. Where you’re on the same level at some point. So you know, I have students in my house every day of the week as well, so you know, you learn a lot more about the community and the families here by having kids here certainly. And even just from the simple perspective of having a reason to have a conversation with someone else. Just having something else to talk about. And having something else in common, so that isn’t school based. It can be very intense when all of your friends and all of your social network are all teachers and all they do is talk about teaching and school and the situation and things that happen at school. So I think it certainly, yeah, is an outlet to be, yeah, to be a normal human being rather than just a, you know, just a teacher. So I would say definitely that has saved me in a lot of respects.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

After two three-year terms at the school, this staff member has reached the time when she is able to move, should she choose, and her family is considering the impact on her daughter’s education in this regard:

“Well we’re sort of now turning our attention to when it would be appropriate to take my daughter out of school, so to move school. And I don’t think going into Year 10 is a good time to move her. So we’re going, we’ve decided that we’ll wait until she’s finished her school certificate and then we’ll make our decision based on how we feel and family: I would be happy for her to do Year 11 and 12 here. She’s got everything she needs, and the ratios are much, much smaller. Much better odds, yeah. Exactly. The only issue is that there’s not the range of choices.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This statement suggests a high level of confidence in the academic offering of the school, and in the core of experienced staff who can not only provide a satisfactory level of teaching for students, but also high-quality support and mentoring for the younger, less experienced teachers who are appointed to the school.

A beginning teacher in the Primary school area, who had been moved to Lightning Ridge from another school in the district, part-way through his first year of teaching, noted the difference that this support had made to his development:

“Oh definitely oh yeah, if I’d stayed in Anotherton I think I wouldn’t even have evolved as a teacher as much as I have after being here because I’ve learnt so much from everybody here and I’ve learnt ... I’ve learnt a lot, I learnt more in the one term I was here than the three terms I was over in Anotherton about teaching ... And I learnt very quickly because we just have that experienced staff, we have a teacher mentor who’s now the DP, who’s just
absolutely fantastic, she just she was just amazing.” (Beginning Teacher, Site visit Interview)

A Head Teacher, who had taken up this position at the school in the current year after several years of consultancy work in the region, talked about how this support played out when she arrived at the school. There had not been a Head Teacher in this area in the previous year, so this beginning teacher had not received the sort of mentoring that had been available to others:

“I had one – she was actually a new teacher last year, but she didn’t get much support from her acting head teacher that was here, so I felt that she was the one I supported the most. She was very much, ‘Can I do this?’ and some of her ideas were great. ‘Go ahead. Try it. You’ll learn by the experience.’ She was also incredibly willing for me to come into her room and she used to come into my room, because I – she was actually, great teacher, was teaching in chunks, whereas I could actually integrate all the chunks together and she said that’s what she couldn’t do, so now she’s looking at the bigger picture … And she’s starting and I can see in her development that she is integrating, locking them together instead of just isolated chunks of mathematics, so she’s been a delight. The other person I have in mathematics, he’s not even high school trained and he certainly takes on board anything that - he’s primary trained …” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The problem of lack of specialist staff in remote schools is a continuing issue – and although Lightning Ridge clearly does not have a consistent complement of these across all areas, those who have been there longer and have had the benefit of mentoring and induction are able to support each other in the ways that they can, when new staff members feel they need support:

And you know, they sort of had a bad day and just collapsed and ‘That’s it for them!’ And so we need to sort of stop that because you’re going to have lots of bad days. You know, I’ve had plenty I’ve had more good than bad but you’re going to have the bad ones and you’ve got to get over them and learn from them and, you know, there needs to be people here, support people. And that’s why it’s good they have a group, I mean the group of teachers that we have here at the moment are really helpful towards each other and that’s what you need. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Such emotional support is not enough for sustainable teacher development, though, and the need for professional development among staff is a high priority for the Principal and Head Teachers. As one Head Teacher noted:

Like, to get away for professional development, you’ve got a day to somewhere and you’ve got accommodation and so if you’ve got a young family, well? It’s okay for the likes of me, I’m fancy free. I can go anywhere and I’ve done lots of professional development, which has made me the better teacher that I am, but being out here at Lightning Ridge, because then you also have the problem, who’s going to cover your classes? This makes it a problem. Like, the expense-wise, you asked [the Principal] what his budget was for professional development and it’s gone. It’s gone by the end of the third term. It’s gone, because of the distance you have to travel and then your accommodation on top of it. (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

However the Principal of the school has tried to make sure that these problems of distance do not impede the capacity of staff to access professional development opportunities – making sure that even the newest teachers are able to attend meetings in more central locations, using school funds to support this in ways that would again seem unusual in other contexts:
Yeah I mean our District is the size of Belgium I think, it’s just astounding, and I find the travel is very difficult for people … Yeah so we have a school car. I bought that for the staff for training and development because people, particularly one-car families, they would isolate their partner and given they’ve got to go to Hubtown and all over … so we’ve got two school buses, each seat 12, and a car. Now the deal is they take the car, the further the distance, the higher the priority and if you are taking someone with you. Yeah, and so we’ve saved a lot of money doing that. We pay the mileage yeah, but it’s horrendous because I mean Hubtown’s three hours away, Regionalia is three hours away and they are the two most common places. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The school also makes use of technology to connect with other schools and teachers for support, professional activity and interaction. The new Head Teacher of Maths, for instance, makes regular use of ICT in her work:

“The connected classrooms is going to make a difference … Definitely, definitely. And that’s why I want to stay in the Hubtown group of schools. We’ve already got a rapport with the other math teachers. We’ve already worked on programs. We’ve worked on common syllabuses and yeah, I’m quite familiar with all of the teachers in the Hubtown group of schools and that’s …

Oh, well, like, we have regular conferences, either on line or we go to some place, Droverton, wherever and because you know you’re not in isolation – okay, I had 2 Unit students this year, okay? And 3 Unit, 2 and Unit. 3 had two, Droverton had three, so between us all, we had a group and when I got on line and discussed, ‘Look, my kids are stuck on here’ or ‘What can I do for this kid that had Aspergers? What can we do?’ and yeah, it was just good to have that rapport in the Hubtown group of schools. And it – just to have that support and even to compare, like, we all sat the common exam, so for the trial it was common and we could say, ‘Yeah, well, this one did well, whereas this one needs area here’ and you would have something to compare them to.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There are several illustrations here of how teachers work to help themselves, and provide support for each other in the difficult situations of isolated schools. However one teacher realistically concluded a positive reflection with the reminder that the situation does not suit everybody, and that access to a positive experience for a teaching term at Lightning Ridge is not the case for all of the teachers, all of the time:

“But you know I think some students, some teachers that come out here just don’t access that in the right ways, yeah.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The smallness of the professional community as well as the social community in Lightning Ridge means that some appointments do not work out for the teacher or for the school. In these cases, the people do not stay. Some do not even begin:

‘We’ve had people: I remember sitting in the Principal’s office one day and we were talking, ‘cause I was the Fed rep at the time, and they were saying, ‘Oh, we’ve got so-and-so turning up today. They’ve accepted a temporary appointment.’ And they get a phone call and it’s this person we’d just been speaking about, and they were sitting outside the post office and had gone to the public phone at the post office and was ringing up saying, ‘I’m not staying.’ Drove into town, took one look at the place and said, ‘You’re joking,’ and drove out of here. We never saw them: never actually saw them here. And it happens. People drive into town, we’ve had people who’ve driven into town and haven’t even bothered to ring up, but when they’ve
This is the sort of story that framed the conceptualisation of this study, of course – and it highlights the concern in this work to focus on how the experience of teachers who stay happily in rural and remote schools like Lightning Ridge can inform the content and conduct of initial teacher education. In seeking to find ways that would better prepare new teachers for what they will find and how they can best connect into and work with the schools and communities in rural locations, those who have been there, and done that, have much to contribute.

3.3.3 What does this school and community teach us about improving pre-service teacher education for rural teaching?

“Keeping in mind that our induction processes have improved immensely since I came out… They’re a thousand percent on what they were, but they’re still, I think there’s still a lack of preparation in terms of what they do in their training to sort of prepare them for that massive cultural change that they hit when they come out West. And we sort of try to correct that on a school level, but it’s, I think there’s still room for improvement.” (Executive Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Preparation for the culture of the places they might be asked to work in was reiterated several times during the Site Visit Interviews as a key feature of teacher education that needs to be improved. Teachers at Lightning Ridge made several comments about the ‘sort of person’ who is most likely to ‘succeed’ as a teacher in a place like this, and these comments suggest that, much like everywhere else, there is no one personality type that will enjoy the challenge and lifestyle of a remote location. They did consistently note, however, that those who make the most of the experience do share a key capacity to ask for help:

“I think you’d have to be very flexible, you have to be really open-minded, you have to be a bit sort of out there sort of person you know not … but there’s nothing wrong with being quiet and shy because I am you know, quiet and shy. What else, I think you have to be on a mix with people, go and ask for help that’s the biggest thing, don’t just sit in the classroom and just you know freak out, get out there and you know and ask people because there’s so many people, especially in this school.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Several teachers spoke about the need for pre-service teachers to be better informed about the nature and potential for teaching in rural communities. One said:

“I think more real life people coming in because I can’t recall ever having been lectured or tutored by a person at University that had been out West and actually taught the kids … I’d have like to have known a lot more about that. I would have liked the opportunity to come out and meet Indigenous kids.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
Another spoke of the impact that one enthusiastic speaker during his pre-service teacher education had had on his motivation to seek work in the bush:

“We had, when I went to Uni in Victoria, and a guy came to speak to us in a big auditorium and he was just one of us. You know he’d just been out for a couple of years, but he came and spoke to us about where he’d been, and I don’t remember where it was, but he really switched everyone on and got everyone thinking about what he’d done. Like he was very motivating, so that’s something that I think would help, like if you’re talking about helping people at Uni, getting them out here, that’s a way. You need one of them to speak to them about their experience, a positive experience here and someone that can speak well and turn their heads into thinking that way. That will work.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

All of the beginning teachers interviewed at Lightning Ridge had experienced the NSWDET Beyond the Line program, where student teachers are provided with the opportunity to make a trip to a school in the rural west of the state. All of them claimed that this program was instrumental in their decision to take up a position in a rural school, with two accepting Beyond the Line scholarships after the experience. These scholarships provided them with financial support for their final year of teacher education and committed them to teach out west for three years after graduation. As a long-term resident of the town said, too:

“I was very excited when the people first turned up here from Beyond the Line because I thought this is what we need to let them come out, have a look around ...” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

However, all of those who had had experience with the program, either as participants or as hosts or organisers for the student teacher visits, suggested that in its current form, it does not achieve its full potential:

“Yes well I think about 20 of us went from Portville that year but then it sort of, I’ve heard that it’s dropped off a lot but I you know, I just found it such a good, I found it a good experience going to Riverton. But I would have absolutely loved the opportunity to come out to these little communities then and met these indigenous kids. Because that’s, like for a lot of teachers that go out from the coast, they’re, they’re scared of coming out here ... I would have loved to have come out here and actually to meet those kids and I know the Beyond the Line Program comes out here still but I think they need to give it a bigger push because all, well lots of people don’t really do that.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

“I think that the Beyond the Line Program really falls short so like the Beyond the Line Program that I did, we went out and that, but like after this experience there wasn’t any follow up or anything else.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

“It’s coming out consistently. More than, I mean, does do a good enough job? Beyond The Line is too short. They need to actually do their prac out here or try and …” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

It is clear from these comments that while this DET program is effective in itself, it needs to be more fully embedded in the pre-service program. The following comment from a long-term resident of the town, who works in the school and is committed to the community, highlights the need for this sort of program, providing as it does at least an initial understanding of what rural and remoteness means in terms of geography and environment:
“Yeah, this is a very, very important part of their training, you know, that they get that opportunity to come out and look and have a look around and see because it must be quite daunting, you know, for people to come from the coast, out to here you know and be appointed. Get in their car, come out and see, you know and I can understand why … I am not quite sure, I can’t think if it’s ever happened here, but I know of other places where you know, they have driven into town, especially young ladies …” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There is a need for more adequate preparation, follow-up and extension within the pre-service teacher education curriculum. The ‘tourism’ approach works to sensitise and raise awareness of the nature of teaching in rural communities, but it clearly does not (and cannot in its conception and design) attend to the important complexities of rural social space, and the differences this produces between rural and remote communities.

It is an understanding of the place and the nature of rural teaching that marks the difference in successfully ‘acclimatising’ to what makes teaching more difficult the further away from a metropolitan centre the school is located. The out-of-school exposure for teachers is not easy to grow used to, and it is important that pre-service teachers are at least informed about the way that this operates:

“I think, no I don’t think, no it is partly their training as sometimes they’ve got unrealistic expectations: they come to a small community and then they sort of think well, well we’ll go out and you know socialise on the weekend and they don’t realise the community is really very watchful of what you do. And I think they find it you know, you’re a little bit like in a fish bowl with people looking in and some of the younger one’s just can’t cope with that. But I think that they are possibly people that have never been to the country, have never lived in a small town.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

While this can be disconcerting for some people, others find it welcoming and friendly. As described by an experienced teacher, who had been appointed to the town as a Head Teacher, teaching in this place means that teaching practice needs to be for this place:

“Does it mean anything for how you teach? I think it does. I think I’d, because I try and relate what I’m teaching to the environment, so I’ve had to change, instead of sheep grazing or horses or that, I’ve had to change to opals, you know, and mining and what affects that, so I had to do a bit of background knowledge. Like, the kids, I had to bring in scraps of rocks and say, ‘Right, sort them. How do you sort them?’ and then they would do that and show me how they saw.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

However, there are some professional dimensions that are very difficult for pre-service teacher education programs to fully prepare teachers for. One teacher noted that, although she felt really unprepared from a behaviour management perspective, the issue was:

“… even deeper than that, from a psychology perspective. And it was something, yeah, personally I would have really liked to have done in my teacher training was to have some
Several participants also noted that the nature of this particular school here means that the techniques of managing and designing the learning environment for students in this particular rural social space need to be dealt with here, on site, rather than in general terms, and that skills of classroom management must be built on the foundations of the theoretical basis that is acquired in pre-service teacher education.

“I still believe that there’s things that we can be doing locally that will make new teachers’ paths a lot easier. Look, I think student management is super critical because a lot of these teachers have been in the upper classes, you know in the top classes, they don’t know that underlining that there’s a group of people who have no interest at being at school … and they’re there. And they’re the ones they’re going to be teaching when they first go out. I mean I suppose that was the biggest thing that I discovered. And that’s one of them, but again, look the other one is that they need to be exposed to the possibilities of coming out west and just the expectations. Just the fact that everything is so far away and you need to sort of galvanise yourself in terms of working out ways to keep your connections there, but realise the fact that you’ve got a job to do here.” (Executive Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another aspect of teaching in this (and other) small rural schools is that there is a fairly good chance that secondary teachers will be teaching out of area. As the Principal noted: “When at uni you don’t get told you can be teaching anything …”:

“I would really like the students coming out to know the curriculum – to know the syllabus. As a math consultant, I went to Remotham and this girl’s been teaching maths for 2 years and I said to her, ‘You start with the syllabus. Where’s your syllabus?’ She says, ‘What does it look like?’ So she wasn’t math trained and they – you know? Or whoever was in charge of that girl, should have reinforced, ‘This is the syllabus. This is the document we teach from. This is where you start.’ Yeah. She just, and she was a good, like, she was PE and she was a committed PE teacher, but she just didn’t – so maybe support for that kind of thing … for out of area teaching.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

And while it is, of course, practically impossible for any pre-service teacher education program to prepare maths teachers to teach history, for instance, or science teachers to teach visual arts, it is certainly important that they know that this is a possibility, even if only in a short term, acting capacity. Pre-service teacher education can at least prepare them for what to do if they are placed in this situation, so that they know that seeking assistance is an indicator of professional responsibility rather than inadequacy:

“You get told, you know, with me it was through technology and textiles you will teach that, well I came out and I was teaching history and at one stage I was teaching music. Well you didn’t get trained in any of that so you really need to, to go out and get information … So that is something that they lack.” (Experienced Teacher, Site visit Interview)

In summary, it seems that Head Teachers, the school executive, more experienced and peer colleagues are all sources of support within the school setting, and that when newcomers to the school are in need of help, their support is immediately forthcoming. For more sustained or expert professional development, teachers need to leave town, or, where a particular form of professional development is seen by the Principal to be applicable to a number of staff, participate in the school setting itself. The costs of this are high, though this is a priority for the current Principal, and it means that teachers and students all benefit. However there are still
areas that remain ‘hard to staff’ in the school. As the Principal noted, priority for staffing some
curriculum areas goes to locations with higher populations:

“Our curriculum suffers a little bit; it’s very hard to get good Maths and Science teachers out
here, those in particular, so young Robert who was here yesterday” (a recent ex-student
who had just received his HSC results and visited the Principal to share them
and seek advice about how to access the courses he was eligible to enter at
University) “hadn’t done Chemistry, I think we didn’t have a Chemistry teacher at that
time, you see and the choice would have been doing it by distance which is an unsatisfactory
alternative.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Robert had done very well in his HSC, but the lack of Chemistry in his subject profile meant that
he was rendered ineligible for almost all of the medical and pharmaceutical science courses he
could have entered. As the first in his family to finish high school, let alone consider university as
a real option, this student exemplifies the sorts of residual disadvantage that characterises many
of the smaller rural schools around the nation, and particularly those in remote locations such as
Lightning Ridge. His case illustrates the importance of schools working to the best of their
capacity to provide high-quality education for their communities, in that, although there were
only six students in town who completed Year 12 in his year, those six set a new standard for
others in their families, campsites and neighbourhoods, who are able to see, through them, the
possibility of another life other than out on the margins.

3.4  FUTURE CHALLENGES

3.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective
recruitment and retention of teachers?

“Well it’s not hard, you just need to find someone that’s really into it and give them incentive
to do it, but if any, there’s plenty of pluses, like there’s not just the money side, that’s a big
one, but there’s lots of personal things you get out of it too and that’s probably something that
nobody regrets. Like I’ll never regret, once you do it, but it’s just a big step to take in the
first place especially, people used to living in the city.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit
Interview)

While it may not seem hard to those who have experienced the benefits of teaching in a remote
school setting, even this teacher notes the importance of ‘incentives’ in attracting people to
places that are consistently ‘hard to staff’. The importance of incentives to attract people to take
up positions in remote locations such as Lightning Ridge appears to be a key feature for the
future sustainability of quality educational provision for students in these communities. The
harshness of the environment, combined with the distance from the sorts of social structures
that many of the teachers have grown up with in their home locations, means that even though it
is working successfully as a school, the Principal and Executive cannot afford to reduce their
vigilance and attention to staff and student well-being for even a short period.

In this light, the nature of the incentives that have kept people at the school are important, and I
have already noted the importance of schemes such as the NSWDET’s Beyond the Line in alerting
students to the potential of places like this as future workplaces. Certainly those people who have
come and made the most of the opportunities the school provides claim that they have benefited
from the experience:
"It really is like worth someone's time coming out for four or five years because you set yourself up. You learn a lot, you grow a lot in a lot of ways." (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Several participants talked about the time that one could reasonably consider optimal for the school and for the person's own development:

"I think three years is enough, two years is too short because the first year you sort of struggle through, the second year you do it okay easy and then the third year you can really hone in your skills, you can really you know, look at the program and think, 'No I don't like that let's refine it, let's make it better'. I think four years just, especially for the ones that are from the city I think four years away from the social and the going to the movies and for going out for dinner would be just too much ..." (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

For those who have made the move, the financial rewards have been a considerable factor in convincing them to stay on. In thinking about what sorts of incentives might convince pre-service teachers who do visit the school on the Beyond the Line trips, a Head Teacher stressed the importance of letting them see the sorts of benefits that do accrue to teachers who take up positions in the town:

"... I'm just thinking of teacher housing. If they could put, like, the flat I'm in is quite self sufficient, Everything's in there that you would need, so then ...The only thing that wasn't in there was a TV, which didn't worry me anyway, but I brought my own furniture across finally, so maybe having teacher housing available for them, 'cause that's what – $15 I'm paying a week. And then they're living in the community and that's what they need. They need – that's how I feel anyway." (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There are considerable financial advantages for teachers out here. Bonus payments after three years and again after five years are well received by those who get them, but the subsidised housing, and the shorter school terms so that families can return to the city or coast regularly enough to maintain relationships and networks, were more often mentioned as reasons that people have been able to stay in this community for as long as some of them have. And as noted above too, it is the longer-term core of experienced teachers that is important here, ensuring that new teachers do have mentors in their areas, and do receive the sorts of support from their colleagues that is necessary for them to feel that they are accepted and developing as a professional.

A unique idea that was raised in one interview suggests that teachers (and other professionals) who work to serve the public in difficult or remote areas should be rewarded by the government of their state or territory for the service they provide:

"A friend of mine came up with a great idea: as a thank you for teaching in a remote area [the government could] issue each teacher who's taught for more than two years or three years in a remote area a certificate for free registration. It's only $360, but ... it's a thank you, it's a thank you. It costs the government effectively nothing. That's just $360 they don't get, but it makes people feel appreciated. Yeah, yeah. A little note from the Department with a signature from the Premier saying, 'Thanks for committing to working in a rural area. Here's free rego.' And it's not much, but it's ... No one ever says 'thank you'." (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
This teacher considered that this sort of recognition would probably be more effective than the larger financial bonus offered to teachers for staying, and would probably cost about the same amount to fund. He also rehearsed a more elaborate solution that he believed would be far more attractive to engage and sustain teachers as members of a professional community:

“We’ll okay. I think the three thousand after three years is, five thousand after three years is a joke. That’s just money, that’s not what you need. I would suggest that if the Department was to say, ‘Okay, you give us 10 years in the bush in maybe two schools; we’ll give you one year on half pay retraining sabbatical leave so you can go back to uni for a year, do a couple of refresher courses in your subject area, maybe up your qualifications.’ Half pay for a year after you’ve done 10 years at two schools, so they’re getting the benefit of an experienced teacher: someone who’s not just starting out. If you can see the gravy at the end of that, you’ve maybe got your masters or you’ve maybe, like for instance, I’m science: I’m like 30, over 30 years since I was in college; I’ve had no formal retraining, it’s all been what I’ve done myself. I would say in actuality, I’m in desperate need of retraining from the point of view of, ‘Go back to uni for six to 12 months and brush up.’ But there’s no provision to do that.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

He elaborated on the scheme at some length, stressing the positive impact that this could have on a number of rural schools:

“You arrive at a school and you see Year 7 through to Year 12, and that’s basically six year stints at schools; but five to 10 years. If you set 10 years [as a timeframe], you would make a contract with this person. You say, ‘You give us 10 years, we will give you a one year half pay sabbatical leave.’ And so I think this way you can say, ‘Well look, anybody who wants to go west, put them on a 10 year contract option. You want to go west? Right, here’s a 10 year contract. You do five years here, five years here, you do a year’s retraining, and then you’ve got to apply for a head teachers job.’ You’ve got experience; you’ve had two schools experience.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This approach to the idea of incentives for rural teaching is of interest to us in conducting this inquiry. Its focus on staff development suggests benefits for students, school communities, other teachers, the Department and the teaching profession as a whole. The Principal also highlighted the importance of continued professional education as an enhanced incentive for rural and remote regions – particularly for schools like Lightning Ridge, where there is good level of experience and proficiency among existing staff:

“I’d love something like a two year internship where beginning teachers came up but they were still [University] students. Possibly they’d get a Masters degree at the end of it, so they were still your students, with say half a teaching load. I reckon that would be a great collaborative project with the school and the university as partners. Where they had a good mentor, the ability to reflect on their practice in situ, and getting Institute accreditation at the same time, etc, etc. And it would have the effect of highlighting that we can all improve, polish up you know.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Although he considered that such a scheme would probably be seen as impractical (“it would cost a fortune!”), his thinking here provides a new way of conceiving of teacher education as more than simply pre-service training, carried out in one place, in preparation for teaching at another. From experienced professionals working hard to provide education in one of the most difficult and remote areas of the state, these sorts of suggestions are important and timely. It is significant to conclude this case study of the work at the Lightning Ridge school with ideas from staff here about new forms of teacher education that would support them in their work, as these ideas
LIGHTNING RIDGE CENTRAL SCHOOL

provide a fertile ground for extended research and cooperation between schools, systems and universities attempting to solve the problem of ‘staffing the rural school.’
4 TEMORA HIGH SCHOOL

Temora High School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

4.1 THE COMMUNITY

4.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Temora

Well I think it’s a pretty dynamic little rural town. It’s got so much in it with the museum out here, the air show and that. I mean one of my great thrills is being in a kayak out on the lake just out of town here, just the big damn thing, and they come in over the top with some of those big jets, in over the top, and they’re only just like above you and that is just such a buzz. It is, it is! (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Temora describes itself as a charming rural town located in the middle of New South Wales’s lush Riverina agricultural belt. An added plus for the town is that it has purportedly gained the
TEMORA HIGH SCHOOL

reputation of being the state’s ‘friendliest town’ (http://www.temora.com.au/pages/abouttemora/). Temora is located on the Burley Griffin Way, which links Canberra with Griffith, and is approximately 90kms north of Wagga Wagga, 450kms south-west of Sydney, 220kms north-west of Canberra and 300kms west of Wollongong. Temora’s location is an ideal stop over destination as it is positioned on the most direct east-west route between Sydney and Adelaide, and the most direct north-south route between Melbourne and Brisbane (http://www.temora.com.au/pages/ location-and-map/).

My journal notes about the geographical environment of the town of Temora suggest a prosperous aspect to the place:

Driving around town – wealth evident in the houses, Federation style bungalows and large family houses (‘Einfamiliehauser’ comes to mind, unbidden, from where? Perhaps because I drove along Deutscher Street this morning, close to the school, and winner of the Temora Best Street competition in 2000, as the sign says!). These houses are on the hill, like the high school, looking down to the town and out to the flat land all around. (Field Notes, Site Visit)

Charles Sturt passed through this area in 1829, and the history of the town states that Temora was founded in the 1850s after the first white settlement had occurred in 1847, with selectors establishing large runs on what was then Wiradjuri country. It is thought that the Temora district was a meeting place for the Wiradjuri, and a camping grounds in winter when it was too cold and wet to camp near the watercourses. Scarred trees and stone tools have been found in the area. But the arrival of white settlement proved fatal to Temora Wiradjuri and there are very few Indigenous people in the area now.

Gold was discovered in the area in 1869, and with over 20,000 people subsequently thronging to the gold diggings, the district was proclaimed a gold field in 1880. Some large gold discoveries were made, including the famous Mother Shipton nugget, which was scandalously stolen while on display in London after presentation to Queen Victoria. As the gold declined, the township at Temora continued as the service centre for a developing wheat growing district. The railway reached Temora in 1893 and was extended to Lake Cargelligo and Griffith, reaching Ariah Park in 1907. German settlers played a part in the foundational pastoral days of the Temora district since as early as the 1850s, with more German settlers taking up land here during and after the gold rush at the time that the township began. Today, German names and the ancestors of the first German pioneers maintain a presence in every aspect of Temora’s life – and this history is clearly registered in the street names, as noted
above. August Ludwig Deutscher, for instance, was Temora's unofficial mayor in the early days (http://www.temora.com.au/pages/history/).

The Shire of Temora has been active in terms of development and expansion of the geographic resources. There is no permanent running water in the area, and creeks run into the Lachlan River. To make the most of seasonal water, the Council has built and developed Lake Centenary, outside of town, which has become both a local and tourist attraction. As one of the teachers said:

*As I've seen the town it's even improved in a lot of things it has here even while I've been here. They've put a lake in out there. They can't do that now. I know Cootamundra wanted to do a lake, they can't do it because of water restrictions on their catchment. They can't dam them now. So they've got this lake out here which is about a 60 acre lake. I kayak out there, I'm going to go out there fishing. It's great. We go out there for staff do's. We've got a school set of canoes we take out there. It's pretty popular if you're into water skiing and that. That's an asset for the town. Very big asset.* (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

4.1.2 The Economy: production, work and industry

Temora's main tourist attraction is its impressive and award winning Temora Aviation Museum. Temora airport was the site of the biggest and longest RAAF Elementary Flying Training School during World War II. It was established in May 1941 and training ceased in May 1945. A total of 2741 pilots were trained on Tiger Moths at Temora (http://www.aviationmuseum.com.au). The museum commemorates the sacrifices the pilots made during the war and has a very impressive collection of aviation memorabilia and restored airplanes.

According to ABS records, the workforce of Temora is divided thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers and Administrators</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professionals</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespeople and related workers</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced clerical and service workers</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate production and transport workers</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary clerical, sales and service workers</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers and related workers</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The local Information Centre website provides well organised and useful information about the town (http://www.temora.com.au/pages). It notes that agriculture plays an important role in the Shire’s economy, with local agribusinesses including grain merchants, machinery dealerships, fuel distributors, stock and station agents and one of the largest woolbrokers in NSW. The main agricultural industries of the area are wheat and sheep farming (for meat and wool). Local farmers take their environmental responsibilities seriously and as a result there are many local LandCare groups active within the district. Additionally, there are a few beef and pig farms and more farmers are diversifying by developing niche industries such as deer, ostriches, olives and honey (http://www.temora.com.au/pages/ agriculture/).

The Temora Agricultural Research and Advisory Station has developed significant trials over the years, with a wide range of wheat and oat varieties being bred on site. There are many active LandCare groups operating within the district, which organise annual tree planting to support the sustainability of the environment, and an annual soil conservation competition promoting sustainable agriculture. The sustainability of the soils of the region is a key issue for farmers and agricultural researchers alike. The council’s strategy to rebuild Temora involves what a member of the Council called ‘a movement away from the agricultural side’ but certainly into aviation and other industry. As he noted, though:

… that’s been fairly successful you know, we haven’t suffered the downturns of some communities, we’ve still suffered downturns but you’ve got to expect that … I think if you were to sit down and talk to some of the businesses you can see that they are suffering, I mean they’re really you know whether we like it or not you know there’s, we can sugar coat anything but at the end of the day it’s an agricultural community and if the agricultural community, the people in the agricultural community have no money... then it’s just not circulating and you know there’s, that’s just unfortunately well unfortunate or unfortunately it’s a fact of life but unfortunately you’ve got prolonged drought. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

With the council local environmental strategy and plans to enhance and expand the population of Temora, employment has been created for tradespeople and service industries in the town. A community member noted that there are new houses being built in Temora though the community has a shortage of skilled workers, several of whom relocated in the last 2 years during the drought. For the town to retain workers, a strategy of ‘growing their own’ has been initiated, involving the school and the new TAFE, which has brought better facilities to train skilled workers.
In a rural community we don’t take things for granted – we value what we have and we look after it – because we have had things taken away in the past … It’s not like in the city. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

4.1.3 Demography: the people and community of Temora

The churches are obvious – Lutheran, a big church close to the school; Catholic, a beautiful convent St Anne’s and school near the Council Chambers. Baptist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army – just on my trip from the motel this morning. (Field Notes, Site Visit)

Local history suggests that the German settlers who came to Temora placed a high value on education for their families, and that with a large Roman Catholic community also settling in the area, both religion and education have been characteristic features of the lives of the people for well over a century. And this population appears to have been very stable. As the Temora Shire (2006, p. 8) reports, a large proportion of the population (over 90% in 2001) was born in Australia, and over 95% of the Temora population use English as their first language.

The ABS data also indicates that there are few Aboriginal people living in the town, and although the proportion of the population has increased between 2001 and 2006, Aboriginal students at the school comprise less than 2% of the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People:</th>
<th>Indigenous persons:</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2141</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>2327</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People:</th>
<th>Indigenous persons:</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>2351</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

In more recent years there has been a great effort within the community to orchestrate and promote Temora as a place to live, in an attempt to resist the depopulation that has characterised many, if not most, rural townships in recent decades. Temora has been featured (as the friendliest town) in a large media campaign to attract new residents and businesses, and it appears that this has been successful – as the figures above indicate a slight fall in population in
the five years between 2001 and 2006, typical of most locations during the drought period over that time.

Stability seems to be a factor in the capacity of the town to remain a successful and viable community. 75% of all dwellings in the town were owner occupied in 2001, and the Shire Council has a clear goal to develop the town, with a Community Strategic Plan for the next 20 years coming into place. This has been the result of a series of interactive community workshops and written submissions from residents of the town to develop and structure a plan to make progress towards the community vision (http://www.temora.nsw.gov.au/council/11668.html).

As my field notes suggest that this campaign may well be working – and also that people in Temora do appear to be interested in education:

In the motel, checking in, an older man with beard and ponytail greets me – his younger companion checking in another European couple just ahead of me. They have been talking and the visitor says they will go and see the museum tomorrow – they’ve already been to the airport … The young man takes over, looks at my card, “You’re from the University, are you a teacher?” I tell him I’m up at the high school to visit …

“Oh, it’s a good high school here”

“Are you a graduate?” I ask.

“No, but my father is. And he’s an intelligent and well-educated man.”

Such an interesting comment … We move off the topic to room keys and breakfast orders, but this morning checking out, we talk again … And [the School secretary] has just told me that she went to school with the father – a retired forensic pathologist who has returned to Temora after retiring – his family were brought up elsewhere, but he’s returned to take up this motel business here. (Field Notes, Site Visit)

Another local business man, Deputy Mayor of the Shire and Chair of the District Education Fund whose father had been a student leader at Temora High when he was at school, and who is one of several generations of his family who have attended Temora High, noted that his family have donated two family scholarships out of their love for the school. He noted that he had made friends there from all walks of life during his senior years at school – including among the teachers, principal, and support staff. He characterised them as – comfortable people, who genuinely cared about students. As President of the local Rotary Club, he praised the school for the strong relationship it maintained with the community.
There is a medical centre and a public hospital in town, providing general and some specialist services, including a maternity wing, and with an aging population, the town also provides aged care facilities. However, locals see that servicing medical needs is a challenge, particularly in terms of maintaining health and well-being during drought. A local businessman noted that:

*It’s important to look out for friends and neighbours – and this happens now.*
*Our local people shop locally, supporting our own businesses. The council has spent million on upgrades to main street... all this is a feature of our new start.*
*The Strategic Plan outline the Shire’s intense commitment to new people – community to welcome newcomers – and of course we need new professionals, with their families ... An’ we are inviting these …* (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

As well as this, though, the Temora council provides a Youth Worker and has developed a number of venues and facilities that encourage and support local activities. As one of the teachers noted:

*I think things like they’ve even done, like doing up the street, the theatre is new only this year, things like that. The golf course is out there at 18 holes, grass greens. The stadium here would be one of the best stadiums and I’ve got a lot of connection with volleyball, stuff like that. So we’ve run comps for years. We get kids away in state terms from here because it’s the best stadium down here. Best floor, best everything. So it’s really, really good.* (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

One of the striking things about my observations on the Site Visit to Temora, already noted above in my field notes from the motel, where the son of an ex-student of the school praised it as ‘a good school’, was the general feeling that the school has really been a central part of the life of the community. The Principal reported, for instance, that there are regular reunions of ex-pupils who return to the town, and that many local people see that financial and physical support for the school is a worthwhile contribution.
Well the class of 1964 they've had their reunion this year, I've just been notified. They contacted the P&C, our school P&C, and they said, 'Look on the weekend we decided', there was about 70 of them came and their partners, and they said 'On the weekend we decided in the last minute that we'd like to put some money together and just contribute it to the school because you know, the way we feel' so and the P&C said 'Wow' so they threw all this cash in a hat, and what they're making is a donation of $1,000.00 to the school. So that was sort of just the class of 1964 came for one weekend to get together. So they obviously feel good about the school. And as the number of reunions that take place in Temora, and the fact that the school is, for all of them, a focal part of coming back, you know, and it's usually the Sunday morning, and spending time in the school, and just the, you know, the really nice gatherings that they are … (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Because of the close connection of so many local people with the school, there is a continuing sense of its importance in the life and fabric of this community. An administrative member of the school staff, a long term local who has raised her own family in Temora noted:

I think we're in a good position. We're not Wagga and that suits a lot of people, they'd prefer a smaller environment, smaller school where people get to know people, and you get to feel as if you are involved and if something goes really good, somebody always knows. Everybody puts in just that bit extra effort and we're extremely lucky here in Temora, in the community. We have such fantastic backup from people. When you talk to [Council Member], he will tell you. He and his parents they were all ex students of the school, they came and said we would like to donate a prize for Presentation Day so each year they give a prize, you know. And the Lodge, they do the same thing. We've got Rotary, we've got them right behind us, it's great, they run that great program for the Year 9 kids and Year 9 can be a really 'iffy' age. (School Administrative Officer, Site Visit Interview)

In summary, the people of Temora appear to have built a strong and stable community, with a strong commitment to traditional values of church and family, perhaps as a legacy of the predominant German and Irish settlers who contributed to founding the town in the early days. With few Indigenous or non-English speaking migrants living in Temora, and with no history of a mission culture, the community appears to have few social problems resulting from racial conflict, and a traditional sense of social obligation and social service. The community is proud of its school and its children, and their achievements, ensuring that the school is well-supported by individuals, as well as community and service groups.
According to the school’s website, Temora High School has recently been selected as a ‘Centre for Excellence’ due to its consistent strong results while catering for a wide range of students (http://www.temora-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/sws/view/690823.node). The High School caters for students from Year 7 through to Year 12. The 2010 school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 91% of its students in the lower and middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 2% are Indigenous students. It has 37.4 full time equivalent teaching staff and 368 students, of whom 200 are male and 168 are female (http://www.myschool.edu.au). It draws its students from surrounding areas and currently has four main feeder primary schools. The Principal noted that historically, the school has played a significant role in the process of community building:

The other thing too, and it probably hasn’t been mentioned, is that a lot of these kids went to different primary schools. They went to Temora West, Temora, they went to Stockinbingal, they went to Sebastopol and they went to Ariah Park. But the one constant in all these parents’ lives, whether they be rural farmers or whether they be town people, the one constant is that even though all these kids came from different primary schools, they’ve all ended up in the one high school. And that’s been a thread that can run through the people from these different towns. So Combaning people, their children go to Temora High, Stockinbingal kids go, you know, in the main, go to Temora High, Ariah Park kids either go to Central School out there but increasingly they go to Temora High and all the, you know, I mean Reefton and Gregan and all the outlying towns, smaller towns – Temora High School is where their kids all go, so it’s been the central focal point of secondary education, not just for Temora parents. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Furthermore, the school is unusual in that for most people in the region, it is the school of choice. As the Principal and several community members said, local farmers have not traditionally sent their children away to boarding school, secure in the knowledge that Temora High will provide them with the quality of education they desire. One parent, a migrant from
TEMORA HIGH SCHOOL

Hong Kong, did send her first child away to a Sydney boarding school when she first arrived in
the town, after placing him in the Catholic school for primary. She did not find this a satisfactory
solution, and regrets it now. Her younger children have remained at home and attended Temora
High after completing primary education at the Catholic school. My notes from this interview
indicate that she noted how her family came from Hong Kong:

... where Catholic schools are top notch, and we thought that would be the case here too,
though it didn’t work for my older son. Everyone is at public school there, the word is that
parents care if they pay – but after sending him away, his HSC score was only 80 – this
boy is changing his course at 26 still! My 2nd child did well in the HSC, and had more time
with mum – though he’s not happy in Canberra. The youngest child is not so academic –
needed tutoring in English – maths – but the teachers gave extra lessons. Any problems I go
to school, they’re very happy to help. Temora High School is good because of the people. The
school atmosphere is created by teachers, girls in office, cleaner, everyone in the school and
especially the principal – and it works because the school produces high HSC results, even
compared with Wagga – only a small country town, not big but good. (Parent, Site Visit
Interview)

The school prides itself on both its academic and sporting achievements in addition to its
contribution to the local community. As one of the teachers said:

Well I still think a school like this,
why it’s done so well over the years,
we’ve got a few good programs
running that we run … the seniors
particularly and get really good
results. Any kid that goes here can
score, that’s capable of scoring,
we’ve had kids coming out of here
with 99 UAI’s. We do it, and it’s
not just one off, there’s a lot of
kids. So we have a program here,
we got a Premier’s award years ago
called Failsafe. Yeah, it’s like a
self evaluative program of working
and I think that’s a big asset to the
school.

We provide a really broad
curriculum and I think that’s good. And that’s one of the challenges I see to keep that broad
enough, that kids will not need to go somewhere else to do any subject. I mean I’ve had both
my boys go through here and I know what they gained out of it. They’re done very well and
I think part of it was yeah, the curriculum we had here and the support to do really, really
well. See this is it. It is for life. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The Failsafe program that this teacher refers to is indeed an asset to any student aiming for
further education. Flexible Assisted and/or Independent Learning SAFE is a program for all students
in Years 11 and 12, providing them with the skills to study, the support to plan and structure a
study program, and regular practice in the habits of study. The program operates each
Wednesday, and ensures that students have at least three hours each week to plan and conduct
their own work and study. This is in addition to other free periods for study during the week,
and to their set school homework, not a substitute for it. At the end of each three hour session,
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the students must evaluate what they have done and reflect on their progress. It can be clearly seen that this structure provides them with both the embodied and meta-level understanding of what study actually is – and ensures that every student has completed a considerable amount of additional practice with difficult aspects of particular subjects, wider reading around particular topics, or research and skills development in areas where these can be enhanced for excellence. Unlike other schools, where senior students are permitted to study ‘off campus’ or have free time when they are not timetabled into their classes, the Failsafe program requires Temora students to be there. They work in the library, on their own, and always with a supervising teacher who can assist with problems, incidental queries and support.

What we’ve given them here, when they go to Uni, as far as we’re concerned, they’re able to manage their time. They’re able to get in and do it and it’s not the, sure, we’ve had great HSC results and we’ve done our course and we’ve done the dot points and we’ve scored well but they walk out of here, you know, they’re in your hands and if we haven’t given that preparation they’re going to do it hard. And particularly country kids, they haven’t had access to a lot of the extra bits. ( Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As the Principal noted, too:

And that’s one of the reasons why the success rate of Temora kids when they go to tertiary institutions is very high. They don’t fall out because they’re used to doing the work, they’re used to doing study. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The regular success of Temora students in the NSW HSC examination is well publicised in the community, and this means that parents across the whole cross section of the local society are happy to send their children here, rather than sending them away to school:

One thing we have never had to worry about is in a lot of schools people send their children away to boarding school. The private schools … It’s, I don’t know whether it’s a German, Irish thing, but they just don’t send them away here, to boarding school. They send them to their state high school. Now, and for that reason, that’s important to understand that the smartest and the brightest have been sent away from a lot of towns. Smartest and the brightest don’t get sent away from Temora. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

This is an important factor in understanding why Temora High School is able to attract and retain its teachers. It reflects the fact that Temora has become what Teese et al. (2008) call a ‘fortified’ school site, one that is “rich in financial and cultural resources of students and the expertise and experience of teachers” (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2008, p. 18). They contrast schools like Temora with what they call “exposed’ sites, poor in many ways and taxed with competing academic and social demands” a description that can be applied to many rural schools in less supportive spaces. As they go on to say, “we should expect marked differences in curriculum culture” (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2008, p. 18).

In addition to the academic program, the school provides a full range of other activities to suit the students’ interests and abilities. There is an agricultural farm plot for students, visual arts and music classes, which have resulted
in musical productions involving the whole community, excursions to the National Gallery and other arts events, and has introduced a Stage Band in recent years. The school has well-equipped technology training in a wide range of VET areas. There is also a program for gifted and talented students and a full Special Education program for students with special needs. This is a point of pride for the school community, and the school receives significant support from the community for enhancements and equipment for the facilities and programs. The school has a large sporting program, and many students excel in this area, having benefited from the high quality equipment and infrastructure the community has provided.

From the interviews conducted during the Site Visit, it is clear that there is a significantly strong core of teachers in the school who have stayed here for many years, with several remaining in Temora for their entire careers, and raising their families in the town. This has resulted in significant benefits for the reputation and community satisfaction with the school. It has also meant that these teachers know their own community. For example, in the year preceding this study, one teacher had made a camping trip to the Northern Territory, visiting Kakadu and other national parks during his Christmas holidays. Aware that although his own children had many opportunities to travel away from the town on holidays, there were others in the school who could not afford holidays away, he sought approval to make this family holiday a school excursion, and, taking the school bus rather than his car, to subsidise costs, was able to make the trip available to all interested high school students.

What I noted was the benefits of this sort of staff stability – of teachers caring about education for their own children thus ensuring that there is high quality teaching and extra-curricular activity available for all. As the Principal noted:

*We’ve got kids doing Physics next year through distance ed. We get no staffing at all for distance ed students. They do it through DE and yet we’ve got teachers who are prepared to sit down for a period, an hour period or two, a week, to tutor those kids, not that they have to because it’s not our responsibility. It’s the teacher over at the distance ed, who’s their teacher, but we’ve still got teachers at the school that are prepared to tutor them, to make sure that they do well in those subjects. So that’s just that little bit extra.* (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

This stability also means that staff have personal investments in their work place, and can realise their own good intentions and good-will towards the community over time. They take pleasure in the community, and care for the place where they have ‘lived a life’. The school administrative officer related the story of how one teacher had taken it upon himself to care for the trees in the school grounds during the worst of the drought, coming in during the summer holidays and digging around the trees to enable water to reach the roots. While such generosity and care for property that is not his own may well be unusual in other places, it is something that is notable about the school community in Temora:

*I mean you might have noticed we’ve got really quite nice gardens here. But they just don’t happen. … I come in at six o’clock every morning and I put all those taps on - because we’re only allowed to use water from six in the morning till eight in the morning. And our general assistant doesn’t get here, and he can’t get to the taps until quarter past seven, and by the time he does his rounds, he can’t get them, the ones we want on, so they’re only getting about half an hour of water if you know what I mean. … I do that, but so do other people, yeah, … and that then allows two hours of watering, which then keeps the school looking really good. Now many other teachers do little things like that, so that the kids at this school can benefit, and the first thing that people say about Temora is ‘Oh gee you’re lucky, you’ve got beautiful gardens and beautiful lawns’ (and not that you ever say anything), but*
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luck has nothing to do with it. Somebody has to put the work in. Somebody has to make the effort to get it like that. And what they don’t see is that somebody does come up at quarter to six every morning and turns the right taps on, or that somebody takes kids away on the weekend, or that they are prepared to work out of their school hours to help certain students, you know. (School Administrative Officer, Site Visit Interview)

This sort of care and investment often has unseen effects, and while the teacher may have taken pleasure in keeping the natural environment alive while the school was empty, his work meant that the efforts the school had put in to maintenance was not wasted – and other people continue his efforts. The teachers’ attention to the environment in which the children learn was also appreciated in another, perhaps unexpected way:

Well the oval is another thing, it is green and when we were in the midst of the drought and I am talking like dust storms every second day, there was a little boy off a farm. He was about 15 I think and he said you know I love coming to school, I said why Mark, and he said ‘cause I can go and sit on the green grass at lunchtime, he said, there is nothing green between here and home and he said there’s certainly nothing green at home. (School Administrative Officer, Site Visit Interview)

It may well be that few people notice the effect of the small services to the school that the principal and staff make because they care about the students and the school. But these things do make a difference. One of the activities that the school provides, that is very much noticed, appreciated and commented upon, is the regular newsletter that is sent to the whole community. As a community member noted, the “newsletters are excellent – pretty to look at – updates us as to what is happening at the school and around town-things like Local Government Week, or Sporting Carnivals” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview).

The newsletters available in the community were of a very high quality – full colour, substantial and well designed and laid out, with many photographs of students engaged in the full range of academic, vocational, sporting and cultural activities that the school provides – reports from subject departments, and photographs of staff and community members engaged in these with them. These texts send a clear message that, the school has a part to play in the community.

Discussing this with the Principal, I raised the issue that the newsletters illustrate his approach to leadership in the community as well as the school – and how well received this assumption of responsibility has been. In the first newsletter of his tenure, for instance, as a new Principal in the school after the very successful
tenure of his predecessor, he took the time in the newsletter to introduce himself and his vision for the school in great detail. In the second one he wrote on the importance of parents looking after children, and raising them in a strong system of values, so that the larger role of the school in community-formation was highlighted. The Principal reflected on this:

And in this town, and in my Principal ship, I’ve never limited my leadership to just being a part of curriculum or academic. I’m the number one pastoral carer of these children. I have five children of my own, and for the hours that [our students] are at this school, I consider that I’m a parent to them, and I have to lead the looking after not only their academic wellbeing, but also their moral wellbeing, their physical wellbeing, and I do relay that to parents. I not only put it in the newsletters but I talk to parents at the many nights that we have, about the importance of staff, myself and parents working together as a team, to complete the student’s holistic development and it’s not just the curriculum development. And I think it’s one of the reasons why this school has been successful over time because it’s just not an academic school, it’s about developing the whole character and staff are prepared to be part of that process. It’s about building in them all the qualities and all the values that we think are good in Australian society, and not just paying lip service to it and that stuff.

(Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The attraction of the newsletters to the wider community has led to another form of newsletter within the school as well, an equally high quality production that is newsy, representative, informative, and full of stories that indicate good relationships within the school at all levels. As the Principal explained:

The Temora High School News is put out by the school on a regular basis, and the other little mag is put out by the Media students who take on the role of, you know, let me say a quasi-information service of what’s going on in the school, in between. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The student newsletter is an important part of the school life. When I visited Temora in May, there had already been six issues since the start of the year. Its presence in the school means that students who might not fit in to the sporting, academic or arts activities have something that they can contribute to the school through their media studies, and they have the experience of authentic learning activity, that develops marketable communication and production skills of working with digital technologies, and to a tight production schedule. Its production means that they often work outside of the formal curriculum. The effect of this newsletter (and its quality production means that it is an investment in communication with the school community) is also to build the status and community regard for the school:

It happens all the time and in that media class they’re not only doing the work that’s required to pass that subject, but they’re constantly working on stories and information, and so there’s almost nothing that happens in the school that escapes the media attention, the internal media attention, and in that respect I guess it’s publicised regularly to parents and the students, about our successes, and I think that seeing is believing. If you keep it in front of people’s eyes, that this is a successful school and that we do achieve in all these ways and methods of getting the message out. Every assembly that we have, we talk about those things and we reinforce the fact that it’s a doing school, then the mentality of the students inevitably is that it’s a doing school. And so we don’t get into that malaise, that wholesale malaise, that some schools are afflicted with where kids say ‘Oh whatever’. It’s the ‘whatever malaise’, you know … ‘Who cares? Why would I do it?’ The majority of the kids in this school, the majority are doers, and therefore the malaise, or that ‘whatever’ syndrome is in the minority. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
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As the Principal noted too, this activity has other pay-offs for students that may not be measured in the short term:

*Well some of the Media students have gone into journalism but many of them don’t, but they retain those communication skills and of course in today’s society, the skills that they’re developing here, editing and pasting, and it’s also the skills in terms of critical analysis of issues and looking at, you know, ‘What’s the full story here? Do I need to research this further?’* (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In summary, then, Temora High School is a school that does care for its students and takes pride in their achievements – over both the short and long term. There is excellent communication between the school and the local community, with the school leadership understanding the importance of building information and open communication processes. This has led, over time, to community members sharing the sense of pride in the achievements of students, and attempting to support the school in every way they can, in order to sustain its outstanding record and reputation.

All of the schools that were nominated for this study are schools where the community has said to us as researchers: “We’re proud of them. They get good teachers for our kids, they keep teachers. They teach our kids well”. What we have found across the set of Cases, though, is that everybody does things differently. In Temora, I was struck by the efforts of the school and the Principal with regard to communication, keeping the community informed and up to date and maintaining the good regard for the school in the community. The Principal saw this as a key part of his responsibility in the position, and has a strong rationale for this sort of effort:

*And, I guess, why wouldn’t you? We are their school, so we’re part of that community. The school is part of the community, so I guess what we’re essentially doing is saying, well as part of your community this is what we do. We’re reporting back. It’s about accountability — and accountability is critical in a school. Those organisations that want to hide things, there will be suspicion, and there will be a lack of trust. It’s all about trust. It’s them trusting that what we’re doing is the right thing. The one thing that I’ve always stressed to the staff and to myself, whatever school I’ve been in, is that transparency is almost critical, as part of the process. If you don’t want people to see what’s going on, then they’re not going to understand what’s going on.* (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

4.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

4.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

In this Site, it is clear that the retention of teachers is significantly influenced by the nature and pleasant lifestyle of the community of Temora for those teachers who have been appointed there. There has not been a high turnover of staff at Temora High School during the two decades or so in which its reputation as a ‘good school’, where teachers are retained and the community is well served, has been built.

As the Principal noted, they don’t very often get new teachers coming into the school:

*Well, nowhere near as many as other schools. ... because the turnover rate is so low. No, [though when it does happen] promotion’s part of it. Not all staff who seek promotion can be promoted within the school. So you will get staff leaving to take up promotions elsewhere.* (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
The school saw the retirement of a long-standing Principal in 2008, who had been there for 15 years, and had earned the respect and affection of the town, forging strong links with the community, building the sense of collegial community among the staff both within and outside of school, that has made the town a place where teachers have wanted to stay.

There’s always been a high degree of collegiality between the teachers in the high school and the two state primary schools in town. High degree of interaction – they not only have a lot to do with one another because they’re involved in town activities and sport, but they tend to socialise a fair bit. Like Friday afternoon is traditionally drinks afternoon and in many schools it’s gone by the by. One of the great things about Temora is most people live in town, so you can go for a drink and then you can walk home or catch a taxi. But the tradition of going on a Friday afternoon, we go to the Railway, that’s the Railway Hotel, the tradition of going and enjoying a quiet drink of a Friday afternoon is still a tradition in Temora and the State school teachers, the two primary schools and the high school, still mix in those circles as well … (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Another staff member added to this, indicating the way that traditions in Temora have endured over time… pointing to one that has been going for over 20 years at the time of writing:

“We’ve got a social group in town which we’ve had since 1986, which is a golfing group and it’s across all the schools, so all the teachers and sometimes not teachers, and that’s really good. Every Thursday bar none. Rain, hail, shine, snow … we go out and just play six holes. Six holes and we have, look it’s varied from 20 people down to half a dozen at times but it just keeps going on, yeah, really good. So they’re, like socially, very yeah, socially sporting and now a bit of culturing. I’m involved with a band in town, yeah, so, stuff like that. Yeah, jazz band at the moment so that’s fun. It is, it’s very full. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

But there are of course some new teachers who are appointed to the town each year. One of these, at the time of this Site Study, was in fact the Principal himself. In his first year after taking up his position, he talked about the difficulties of taking over leadership in a successful school – and the challenge involved in taking on the responsibility of ensuring that the success of Temora High School is sustained under his own leadership – particularly as the Principalship of Temora is such a highly desirable and therefore visible appointment:
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I mean leadership in any organisation’s critical. People need to be led well. And leadership isn’t always making all the decisions, it’s allowing people to come to some sort of consensus and agreement but giving them the framework, the parameters in which to do it, and so I think good leadership is about encouraging, it’s about cajoling, but it’s particularly about setting goals, setting, having the vision and I think, I can’t speak of the principals before, but the principal who was here before me, you know, in his own way, had that vision. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

I have noted above how this Principal has attempted to share his own vision with staff and community, from the very beginning, and as an experienced Principal he is clear that this work needs to be backed up with his own sustained commitment to Temora as a place. He considered that he would need to commit about:

… seven or eight years, to put that [vision] into place. In the schools that I’ve been at, I’ve been able to develop that vision with the assistance of staff and community. Allowing that vision to come to fruition sometimes from a state of being in a malaise gives all stakeholders a feeling of success. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

This awareness of the time and effort involved in successful school leadership highlights the importance of the interrelated aspects of rural social space falling into alignment in ways that work to produce Temora as a place where people want to stay. Unless the location, economic situation and social fabric of any place have already produced a place that works as a community, it may be difficult for individuals to sustain such a long-term commitment to the school.

To illustrate this further, I will draw on my interview with an ex-teacher who had been placed in a nearby town on transfer in his second year out, and then two years later, had applied for a job with the Temora Shire Council in order to live in Temora with his partner, who was working at Temora High. This young man was able to provide a valuable account that contrasted the recent experiences he had across three rural settings. His first appointment was to a small town in another region, located in a remote area over three hours from a major centre. He recalled the situation in this first school as a:

‘worst case scenario’ for a 1st Year out teacher, even though there were only 250 students — there were no programmes, and mostly temporary teachers. (Community Youth Worker, Site Visit Interview Notes)

Even though this teacher had grown up in a regional location himself, he was used to a bigger school – at his own there had been over 1,000 students, and he had no preparation for rural teaching in his pre-service teacher education as a Phys Ed teacher, so that when he first arrived at Othertown he had immediately thought:

… where are all the kids? The only benefit was the kid culture and good staff-student relations – but teaching and being involved in sporting was difficult – teams had to be scraped up –It was potentially a really nice school, but it’s obvious that with no incentive it would be hard to staff. (Community Youth Worker, Site Visit Interview Notes)
This teacher had requested a transfer to Temora during his first year at this school, when it was already clear that his girlfriend was happy there. He did not manage to get this, but was appointed to a nearby town. He believed that the Principal at the time had:

… pulled a swiftie to organise a place for me at [a nearby town, less than an hour away from Temora] – She had talked to him [about the options they had as a couple who wanted to be together] … and he needed a counsellor – so I got a transfer to Nearby – and I was there for 2 years. (Community Youth Worker, Site Visit Interview Notes)

He and his partner chose to live in Temora rather than Nearby, which, in comparison was “a bit smaller, and closer to Wagga.” The couple had bought a home in Temora, and had become involved in sporting and other activities in the community. He contrasts the Nearby and Temora school communities in this way:

Here in Temora there are longer term staff … at Nearby, because they are closer to Wagga, it’s mainly a drive in staff. Here it is really strong that the town has a lot of ‘like-minded people’ … the kids are wonderful – and everyone is so willing to help. In Nearby, the teachers are not local – so the families don’t know the teacher – whereas here they are really proud of the school. You know, I’ve thought about it, and even if we could ‘transport’ everyone to Nearby, it wouldn’t work – the school alone wouldn’t work in other families, in another community. Changing a community via the school is too hard… it’s too long term – but if we brought the Nearby staff to Temora there could be success. And it’s to do with the whole location as well as the people – in Nearby good kids go to Wagga!

And there is a real sense of pride in community here, for instance everyone was worried about the fact that some kids were lairing around and we woke up one Sunday to find black tyre marks on the street… well the kid’s father dealt with that, and it’s never happened again. Temora really does have a good sports programme. (Community Youth Worker, Site Visit Interview Notes)

He taught for nearly two years at Nearby, but became well connected to the community in Temora through his sporting interests. As he told the story:

After football training one day after the ‘Black Tyre Marks’, we were having a drink and they convinced me to put in an EOI for the council’s new position in health promotion. The Council wanted to learn from the fact that our kids would do that, and it seemed as if it meant there was a lack of direction for youth. So I put in my ideas about developing a youth centre – as a PE teacher I had done the things that they would be needing, like event management … and here I am. (Community Youth Worker, Site Visit Interview Notes)

This teacher would have needed to teach for another year at Nearby before he could have sought a transfer to Temora High, and when he was offered the Council position, he resigned from the NSWDEET, and has been working successfully with young people out of the school setting in his new role. However, he and his partner had plans to leave Temora in the following year, as she suffered from ill health, and even though she had “loved this school”; she wanted to be nearer to their families as they began to start their own. He commented on his apprehension in making the move because it means that he will need to seek work again in another school, and in a temporary position.

Although they are leaving the town at this stage of their lives, this couple has contributed significantly to the well-being of the community of Temora, and have gained much from their
experience. The teacher who is the partner of the young man I interviewed arrived as an outsider to Temora and has remained working at the High School for an extended period of time – in all spending almost over five years in the town. School counsellors are in strong demand, and her willingness to stay meant that this school has been able to provide a careers and counselling service that many rural students are not able to receive – again adding value to the community and adding to the capacity of the school to sustain its reputation.

4.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

The example above provides a clear account of how Temora’s success in retaining its teachers can be seen as an effect of a strong historical reciprocity of shared intent between the school and the community. There is a general sense in Temora that a large part of the population has some investment in assisting the community to function well, and the school to succeed. As a member of the school staff put it:

I thought why do teachers chose to stay in Temora? It’s easy because the kids are great, we’ve got a stable population, the majority of our students are from homes with two parents and have family support. It’s not unusual to find generations that have gone through. I have a lovely time, you know I remember your father at school, all that sort of stuff. Now all of our kids aren’t angels and not all teachers can necessarily get the best from their students, but I feel that Temora students generally are responsible and calm and responsibly well behaved and it makes it a cooperative learning environment. (School Administrative Officer, Site Visit Interview)

From the point of view of the Shire Council, a successful school is important for its strategic planning for the future development of the town. In an interview with a Manager of one of the sections of the Temora Shire Council, the willingness of the school to participate and involve its students and staff with the wider community is much valued:

There’s again several ways to look at it. The first one is that we view ourselves very fortunate to have an educational institution like the high school in town it’s … the calibre of the students, it puts out their attitude, it’s just the output of the student body means all is well for us. Because we [Council] are the front line in terms of you know vandalism and social issues, and we don’t see that as much in Temora as you do in other places. The other thing is that I guess that we’ve been fortunate that the school participates in events. We’ve got a youth council, and we’ve … and we have council meetings where we invite youth to participate and all that sort of thing. The new cinema was an initiative of the youth group. So there’s a whole range of sort of linkages between the community via council and the school. (Shire Council Manager, Site Visit Interview)

It can be argued that Temora, with its history of initial prosperity from the influx of settlers seeking gold and pushing away the Indigenous inhabitants to other areas, its subsequent settlement by an industrious community of German and Irish Catholic farming families whose
strong Christian values included respect for education and community service, has developed into a rural social space that has many benefits for sustainability and success.

I like the fact that it is small enough that you know people and people know you, people know you by your reputation, I love going shopping at the supermarket in the afternoon, I never have to wait, you know because the kids work down there in the afternoon after school or whatever or they are ex students and come over here Mrs Ballard, I’ll open up for you, I mean I’m not the only one that gets that treatment but it’s really nice. I think I’ve got kids now in their early 40’s who still call me ‘Mrs ……..’ and I say, ‘Oh look, you left school a long time ago!’ (School Secretary, Site Visit Interview)

This social history, in correlation with its geographical location and climate that has allowed primary industry to prosper, and other industry to diversify and grow, has resulted in a rural social space that we can suggest may be more conducive to the retention of teachers and other professionals. As a place, Temora has advantages over other places, and its schools therefore have advantages over schools located in other places in attracting and retaining good teachers.

As the Principal noted, Temora has some geographical and environmental disadvantages, but these are not too much of a problem:

The physical challenges are probably there. It is hotter. There’s not the access, or the closeness, or the proximity to beaches and that sort of thing. But I just think it’s, when people come here they often come from other rural areas and from the coast and they find that there are complimentary things to get involved in, in terms of cultural type things and activities, sports, and maybe you do have to travel a little bit, if you want to be involved in some areas, you know, some of the arts and drama, and if you want to join a theatrical society you probably have got to travel to Wagga but I think one of the other strengths of Temora is that it’s only a reasonable driving distance from a large centre. It’s not as if it’s two hours. It’s only three quarters of an hour down to Wagga. And it’s only a couple of hours across to Canberra, on a good road. (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

We have seen above, for instance, the contrast between this place and another place, Nearby. Nearby is geographically located just a little bit closer to a larger centre, Wagga Wagga, so that the ease of travel means teachers and students focus on the larger centre rather than the community itself. This has meant newcomers to the township are less likely to purchase property there; and the more itinerant professional and local population means that it is less likely to experience the sort of social cohesion that characterises Temora, where the community leadership cares enough about small issues in relation to its youth (or old people, or theatre-lovers) to do something to support their needs, and make their lives better. Not all places can develop these characteristics, even if they wish to. One teacher commented on the attractions of Temora for her, again in comparison to other schools where she had taught:

Parent support. If there is a problem and there rarely is but if you have to go to a parent you would have their support no matter what. And that’s the same at [Smalltown] – the kids are amazing, they’re so innocent and naive, but so well behaved and they know if they do the wrong thing they’re going to get in trouble at home. Whereas I’ve worked at other schools where it’s: ‘My mum is going to ring up and get you sacked!’ … completely different. And that’s the same here. Very similar generally, lovely kids It’s a hard one. Being out at Smalltown, though, it is a fish bowl and such a small school. If you don’t get along with someone there’s not really anyone else to turn to but the politics are the same anywhere. But here, this is a lovely sized school and going from 56 kids from K-12 to here with 400 is a nice stepping stone I think rather than being thrown back to 1200 kids or something like that. (Mid Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
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The smaller town of Ariah Park, close to Temora, and with a K-10 Central School to serve its community is an example of towns like Nearby and Smalltown. Children in Ariah Park must leave to attend senior high school. Many teachers in Nearby go home after school, so that the close connection between school and its community does not develop in a way that allows emotional ties to develop between people and place. The schools at Nearby, Smalltown and Ariah Park are harder to staff than Temora, even though they share similar economic and environmental profiles. The particular histories of these locations have left them less attractive as rural social spaces for teachers to live and work in for a long time. As the Temora Principal related above, some families choose to send their children past Ariah Park to the larger High School in Temora. Part of the Temora Shire, Ariah Park is developing as a historic village, seeking to retain its individuality as a supplementary tourist site associated with the stronger hub of Temora, so that it can sustain itself as a community.

This example also illustrates the strong reciprocal relationship between the Temora community and its High School, which, as noted above, are so strongly interrelated that the School’s success is seen as an outcome of the town’s values and cohesiveness. Although we might agree that “Changing a community via the school is too hard”, it is clear that there are things that are done at Temora High School that do actively contribute to community cohesion and values - that do work to make the community proud of its school.

And while there is such an irregular turn-around of teachers in Temora that community members and staff did not have a ready repertoire of talk about ways in which the community makes an effort to welcome those who are new to the school, both a community member and the Principal responded in a way that suggested that individual circumstances dictate the approach that is taken:

Well look truthfully I don’t really know, but we had one young fellow that came here from Newcastle a few years back now, he was fresh out, and I am a member of the Masonic Lodge and his father was a member of the Masonic Lodge and they rang Temora and found out, so his father came and saw us and we just helped him get himself going, went to an auction sale and bought a few bits of furniture for him and ‘cause he didn’t understand and got him settled into a house and he’s now married and got two children of his own and he’s still here and I think he still likes the place. Yeah well it’s a good way to have a connection that’s for sure. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

The only one I can think of is just the council runs a support program for any new residents and so they are a part of that, but nothing apart from that, although you know with teacher housing for example, I have a good working relationship with the real estate people who run the teacher houses here so we make sure that our, the new staff have got accommodation when they arrive and that they are looked after. (Principal, Pre-Visit Interview)

Another community member also spoke of the Council’s increasing role in welcoming newcomers to the town, and noted that teachers are part of this regular process undertaken by the Council endorsed ‘welcoming committee’. A community member who had arrived in the town some years ago as a migrant from overseas remembers:

The welcoming committee – I got a Rotary info bag, council show bag, with information about churches/schools/clubs… but I think you need time to be here, not just a month, you need to experience country life for a while before you know what you need to do. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)
This sense that newcomers need to experience the life of the town before they know if they will want to make Temora their home was echoed by several participants, with one indicating that welcoming a new person to the community is a two-way process, and that “New teachers should get to know the community, and they have to be willing to give it a go – the impetus for making friends has to come from the person” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview).

A teacher who moved to Temora more recently than many others noted that she has found considerable satisfaction in living in the town:

*The biggest thing I love is the sense of community and feeling like you're part of something, you don't get that in Newcastle, I've never experienced that. Getting to know the council and I volunteer down at the theatre and just feeling like you're part of something is really important. And how highly school teachers are respected in the community was something again I didn't experience.* (Mid Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In summary, then, I have argued here that the rural social space that characterises Temora as a community has been very conducive to the retention of teachers in the High School. The town is pleasant, friendly, as its publicity claims. I found that myself as a visitor. However the continuous work that is done by the council, and the school, in ‘talking up’ the success of the school and the town in their respective publicity and outreach remains important work to be done if the success of this community is to be maintained. As I discuss in the final section, participants are fully aware that there are problems in Temora – that it is not a ‘perfect’ place by any means, but that it has produced a social space that community members consider worth working to sustain.

### 4.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

*The thing that we do have exposure to, is we have a lot of practicum teachers come through this school. We've had a very good relationship with CSU for a number of years. We've got two teachers at the moment as part of the Beyond the Line program and they come for six weeks. We actually organise teacher housing for them, for the both of them, for the whole six weeks. We'll call it part of their Beyond the Line program. But it's from Wollongong University. And it's quite an extensive program. Goes for six weeks. But one of the things we did is if somebody's coming in for six weeks, and teaching in two different faculties, we want to make them comfortable. So we organise, there were two, when we were able to do it because there were two vacant teaching housing houses.* (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

As the Principal notes here, the stability of staff at Temora High School has made it a regular target for requests for practicum placements for students from the local University, CSU, in Wagga. Several members of the community also argued that this is very important for pre-service teachers, and as the next three excerpts indicate, they see this from a number of perspectives:

*Country prac is very important to understand kids’ isolation and life – getting on bus at 7am – no internet connection – understanding that it sometimes means keeping kids’ books because they don’t bring them back. And also, it’s easier teaching, learn to relax in the classroom, you could relax and try things that wouldn’t be game to do in big city schools.* (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)
It’s vital for student teachers to see how rural communities make things happen – to see first hand how the P&C makes a difference – earning money, assisting people to make things happen, including maintaining parks and gardens. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

It makes a difference when people see teachers making an effort outside of hours. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

These three comments speak to the educative value of a community-based placement for pre-service teachers, and to the importance of the student being in the place for a sustained period of time. All the community members I spoke with in Temora were concerned with the need for pre-service teachers to have this experience, highlighted the need for them to be prepared to come with an open mind and willingness to learn about the whole community, not just the school. Comments like the following suggest that this community does have interaction with students when they are here on placement, and that they do take an interest:

It’s important that their Uni preparation stresses that there needs to be a commitment to make an effort and go outside their comfort zone when they come to a place – accept all invitations… as well as learn from the older generation of mentors. (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

One of the pre-service teachers in the school at the time of the Site Visit reported that she was finding her rural placement very helpful, and spoke of the range of benefits she felt she was receiving from her time at the school:

I find that the staff here are so professional in their mentoring of you as a prac teacher that you feel, I feel more than ready. I mean I’ve only been here two and a half weeks but I’m already applying for jobs and feel comfortable applying. Like, I’m not nervous about the prospect of being in a fulltime teacher role. And I think that getting the picture of rural lifestyle is just as important. It can be just as vibrant – and painting all the positive aspects of what it is to be part of a community and what you can achieve out here. And also something that draws me and is the added responsibility you take on in a country school and that professionally you could be taking on a few different roles way earlier than you would ever get in a city school. (Pre-service teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As this study is interested in teacher retention in rural communities, the attitude of these pre-service teachers to the idea of staying in the town for a considerable period of time was raised in the interviews. In discussing the idea that students and community appear to benefit from the presence of long-staying staff with a strong commitment to the school, one of the pre-service teachers noted that while she agreed with this need, at her current time of life she could not see herself as a ‘stayer’ in any position, even though she acknowledges the contingency of this position:

I’d say I think that’s perfectly acceptable or realistic. But I wouldn’t make it any longer than three years. No. I mean for someone my age, I probably wouldn’t stay in a school for three years at most. And then look at, you know, I could be – I could think differently in three or five years time but I definitely would be wanting some change. Whether that was a change of role in the school or changing schools or changing location but definitely I think after three years I’d be seeking it. (Pre service Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There is a general consensus among participants that their efforts in supporting pre-service teachers who take up a practicum placement at Temora is important work in preparing students for teaching in rural communities.
An enormous amount of them are probably from the coast, and probably don’t have much pre-history in terms of understanding what rural living is about. And rural living can be very satisfying, but in a town of 5,000 and 6,000 people, there’s probably not the range of activity that they’ve, or the closeness. So to that extent, yeah, there’s probably a lack of knowledge as to what it’s like. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The lack of knowledge that the Principal refers to here highlights the importance of pre-service teachers having the opportunity to find out what it’s like to live and work in the country, as well as to understand the best ways to relate to and teach country students. As with the comment below, the Principal here is pointing to the role of teacher education in creating partnerships with schools like Temora, where students are provided with every opportunity to increase their knowledge and experience across a fuller understanding of rural teaching.

Teaching is not just about teaching things. And many [student teachers] probably don’t understand that that’s only half the job. The other half is to get involved. And that can sometimes be difficult for them right from the beginning because there is so much emphasis on preparing lessons, classroom control and that sort of thing. But the universities need to give them an understanding that the other half of teaching is getting involved in the holistic aspects of the school. I’ve noticed that only certain teachers get involved in a broad range of things, you know, the holistic life of the school, as year advisors, and girls and boys advisors and other programs. The ones that do, do a fabulous job, but it makes it easier in all rural schools if those teachers coming in have a really good understanding that this is part of the life of the school. (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

4.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

4.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

In recent years, the majority of people who have left this school have retired. And that’s continuing at present, and it will continue into the future. And the last Principal retired in 2008, so you get your turnover in this school at the moment through top retirement, and I think many teachers who came to this school in the 1980s, when this school was growing, decided to stay. Now many of those teachers are coming to the end of their teaching career. So what I’m expecting in the next five to seven years is a reasonably strong turnover of staff at Temora High. The staff at Temora High in ten years’ time will have a very different look. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In this final discussion of the challenges that this study leads me to suggest may be facing Temora in the short to medium term future, I want to focus on the issue of sustainability, raised by the Principal, above. At this point in the school’s history, a major challenge for him is to continue the legacy of success that he has inherited. This Principal has indicated that he is prepared to commit himself to an 8-10 year time frame in order to sustain the success that
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Temora has experienced in recent years, and introduce and consolidate his own vision for the school. While this is the major challenge, there are other issues, perhaps more complex and difficult that were raised obliquely in my interview with the Principal, and explicitly in one of the Site Visit interviews with staff. This is the issue of tolerance of difference, and it becomes a question of any form of rural social space that has been developed by people with strong ideological consistency. The social space of Temora appears to have been produced within a particular set of shared values among the community members. It has produced a safe, supportive and caring community that looks after its own and is justifiably proud of their achievements. But it appears that this may not always be as open and accepting of people who do not share these values, or the cultural expressions they produce as the Council’s publicity promises. It is this that may well produce a significant challenge for the future attraction and retention of teachers, unless the town is able to cater more fully with the sorts of social difference that challenge the values and beliefs of the majority of the community.

In this chapter I have selected several extended extracts from my interview with the Principal in which he talks about the large challenge he faces due to the aging of the stable staff profile at Temora High. The Principal’s comments indicate that his grasp of the issue is strong, and that he has thought through the complexity of the situation that he needs to address as Principal, clearly and carefully. The value of these comments in explicating my analysis of the ‘Case’ of Temora as a school that has successfully retained its teachers is clear, as they go some way towards providing an elaboration of our understanding of why the school has been so successful to date. The congruence of issues for this Principal and the research study itself is strong. While the sections of the interview that are presented here speak directly to the issue of sustainability in this place, Temora, they point to the sorts of work school leaders and systems need to be prepared to engage in to sustain – and perhaps even engender staff retention in any rural social space.

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Because we have many teachers who are approaching, or are in their 50s, and many of those have been here since they were in their mid 20s, there’s been that period of constancy and now there is a period of change. So one of the challenges to me as a leader, is to manage this. When I took this job I basically had to make a commitment to myself to be here long enough to manage that change process. And I think that probably the panel was looking for somebody who wanted and was capable of doing that, because if I were, for example, looking to be here for two years or three years and then move to another position, it probably wouldn’t serve the best interests of Temora High, given the demographics at the exact time and given the nature of where we’re going in the next six or seven years.

So there will be a change, and even this year there’s been a period of quite dramatic change in the staff, and that will continue for at least another four or five years, and as the leader I’ve got to manage that change, and still encourage staff, train them, have them brought up to speed, and all that experience that we’ve bad will be in some way, it will go out the door. But we’ve got to leave enough of it behind in the staff that are coming in.

I think about it constantly. Yes. I never stop thinking about where this school’s going to go. Temora High, in terms of my professional life, Temora High is my life, so I’ve got to constantly think about the issues, and I not only do it by myself, I’ve got a very good Deputy Principal here too, who is nearing retirement in the next couple of years and I have a good executive and staff who I discuss these issues with.

But we talk about it constantly, and with executive in particular, with the head teachers, we meet regularly and we also talk about many issues, about where we’re heading, what we need to do in order to achieve what we want to do. How do we keep the impetus of this school,
and the culture, going, even though we have, we've got a change of staff? Yeah. And that's a real challenge. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

When asked if there are any key things that he believes he needs to hold to and ensure that they continue in the way that has been working so well in the past, he elaborated again on the need to maintain the close connection between the school and the community:

One of the keys to the success of this school is that when the staff came here, the involvement of the staff in community and town events, and school events, was almost intermingled and intermeshed. So the students actually saw a real desire of staff, and a real like for this town, and therefore they take ownership of the staff. So the students of this school are very familiar with the staff. It's not as if they, and like in some city schools they only see them for that six or seven hours.

Many of the staff over the last 20 to 25 years, they see them all the time and around. So kids at this school speak easily to staff. They converse very casually with them but respectfully. But they, to them there's no aura about the staff at this school because they've had dealings with them at basketball, netball, swimming, football, you know, any activity and it's a pretty sport mad town, and the great thing is that the nature of the staff that have come into this school over the years has been one where they've got heavily involved in community activities.

What we have to do now, is we have to in some way engineer that continuation of staff involvement in the town which then reflects really well on the interrelationships that the staff have with the students, and their parents. So you get very few, let me say, agro parents at this school because many of them are familiar and many of those issues can be doused just through a simple phone conversation. They know who they're talking to, they've got respect for them and that sort of thing, and that's not to say that that occurs in all cases. There are always the instances where it doesn't of course – this school is no different to others in that respect. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Here, the Principal points to what might be seen as the development of a particular form of rural social space in Temora – where there is close interaction between the teachers and the rest of the community – so much so that the teachers have become the community in one sense, so that it is difficult to say where teachers and others might be differentiated apart from inside the classroom. As he elaborates on this point, he highlights a key means by which this occurred:

I think one of the things that also helped Temora High enormously, it was the fact that staff came here, had children, children went to the school. And it meant that the staff ... the easiest way to meet people is through your children. And so what's happened in Temora is their children have all gone through the school, and they've met – whether it be sport or whether it be cultural pursuits, whether their children would be interested in drama or dance, or whatever, you know, swimming or that, which was all available in Temora – it allowed the parents to be fully involved in those organisations outside school and that's what built the love and the interest in staying in the town.

They were able to meet [the community], because they had children here and the children went through school here, they were able to meet other similar people through their children. And that connected them, and then the bond, the glue was to stay here. They felt very comfortable and that's, if you come here and you don't have children or you don't develop any of those interests, then what's holding you? What's making you stay?

So I think that's been the glue. Staff coming here, having the children go through the school, and being so involved in community things that they've then developed their own friendships.

(Principal, Site Visit Interview)
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It's funny, I took my family to the bush and at Othertown High I taught my sons. And in, well put it this way, they were in the school that I was in, but one son was in a class that I taught, well actually two classes that I taught, two different subjects. When I went to Yetanother High for a period of time they were both at Yetanother High and the other son was in a class that I was teaching. Yeah. So I actually had experienced that, and I really do think that when your own children are at that school, you really take ownership. At present I have a daughter at Temora High so that enforces the ownership that I have in the school. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

These comments resonate strongly with our studied observations of all ‘successful’ rural schools in retaining their staff, though this phenomenon has not been articulated so clearly in other interviews. Evidence of what the Principal has called ‘taking ownership’ is shown above in the account of the staff member who extended his family camping holiday to include other children in the school, and, I would argue, in the willingness of highly experienced and senior staff to devote their own free time to tutoring and supporting senior students in the Failsafe program.

But keeping your children, and your community ‘safe’ in a social sense as well as academically can have other effects. Temora was one of the final Site Visits that was made by the research team, so that analysis of a considerable amount of data from other ‘successful rural schools had already been concluded before my Interview with this Principal. It is clear that the great majority of schools that were nominated as successful rural schools and where this was confirmed by informed representatives of their jurisdictions and then visited for study purposes were indeed beautiful schools: places that the research team consider would be excellent sites for developing and modelling the potential of enhanced forms of pre-service teacher education for rural teaching. But there is an important caveat on this finding: there are very few Aboriginal people in any of these towns.

The Principal of Temora has worked in other towns where there are greater numbers of Indigenous students, and he was interested in the observation that very few of the rural schools nominated for this study were schools with significant populations of Indigenous students. It could be suggested that rural schools are not hard to staff if there are few Aboriginal children in the community, and this raises the associated question of what forms of social space might therefore be most suited for schooling in Australia today. The Principal’s comments are again worthy of inclusion here:

That says that people make choices. Teachers are people, and some difficult schools to teach in are schools with Indigenous populations. By the same token there are very challenging schools that have much smaller indigenous numbers. I believe some staff may make choices based upon a whole range of reasons and that MAY be one of them. But there are also plenty of schools where there are lots of Indigenous kids, where people don’t feel that way, and are quite prepared to teach at them. We don’t have a high Indigenous population, no but we do have a significant number of Indigenous students in the school. There are a number of factors that draw Indigenous to a district originally, and one might be the presence of a river which Temora does not have so they may have settled elsewhere as part of their traditional land. We do have many children of low socio economic background, but it’s the same in all schools. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

He continued:

I just think staff make decisions based on a number of factors and many teachers weigh up a whole host of factors and say ‘Look, if I’m going to get a hard time, or I’m going to get an
easier time, which one am I going to?’ …Yeah. And it’s not good writhing and reasoning about it, it just, it exists…

I would like to think that with a higher Indigenous population in this school we would still be doing exactly the same things as we are doing now, and we’d still be having the same degree of success. Yes. Of course until that happens and until you put it into effect, you don’t know… (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

As the population of Temora grows in response to the Council’s ambitious and well-organised strategy to keep the town growing, the ‘safeness’ of the community will inevitably become less able to be assured, as newcomers bring different values and different expectations of social life. As the existing staff inevitably turns over and new staff without the strong investment in the school and community are recruited, the current success of Temora as a place where teachers would choose to work over other locations may not be so immediately obvious. The immediate signs, however, a year after the Site Visit, when the School can boast of its recognition as a Centre for Excellence. According to the NSWDET (2009), Centres for Excellence are “school sites for demonstrating, developing and sharing high quality teaching, leading to improved outcomes for students”. With the goals for the school including the promotion and demonstration of:

- Quality teaching through classroom and school-wide practice in improving student learning outcomes;
- Quality supervision, mentoring and support to early career teachers;
- Ongoing professional development aligned to teaching standards;
- Strengthened linkages between initial education programs and transition to teaching and teacher induction (NSWDET, 2009).

Temora High School would appear very well-placed to use this recognition and associated support to rebuild a strong and committed staff for the new times it faces, alongside the community it serves.
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West Wyalong High School was selected as a case study of a school in a medium sized community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

5.1 THE COMMUNITY

“I know one of the first questions that students asked me was how long will you stay for? Even after the first year: ‘Are you coming back next year?’ Now they have started to know that I'm becoming part of the furniture. I think that certainly helps, I think that stable workforce is good because generally we don't have a lot of new teachers – not a lot of new teachers coming in but enough to keep the ball rolling.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

5.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of West Wyalong

West Wyalong is located in south-central NSW, in the fertile Riverina district, in the centre of the South West slopes bioregion. It is about 500 km from Sydney, 600 km from Melbourne, and is a routine stop-off point for drivers travelling on the Newell Highway between Melbourne and Brisbane, and on the Mid Western Highway for those driving between Sydney and Adelaide. It takes about five and a half hours to get to Sydney and nearly three to get to Canberra. The surrounding small towns of Barmedman (32 km away), Burcher (52 km), Tallimba (34km), Ungarie (42 Km), Weethalle (57km) and Wyalong (3.5km) are all within driving distance for children attending the high school and school bus routes service each of these places daily. In this way West Wyalong is a significant hub for the local region, and has three schools, St Mary’s War Memorial Catholic School (K-6), built in 1961, but begun in 1901 by the Sisters of Mercy, West Wyalong Public School (K-6), and West Wyalong High School (7-12), the focus of the present study.

Driving in – golden wheat, flat, wide spaces, the drive between Wyalong and West Wyalong, and wondering why West Wyalong has flourished so much more than the mother town …The motel strip between Midway and town – for my family it’s always been a stopover place, rest and go, on the long drive between Queensland and Melbourne. There’s one green Rotary Park on the highway indicating civic pride and successful business opportunities to passing truckies and travelers. (Journal notes, Site Visit)

The original occupants of the area were the Wiradjuri people, though their regular communal activities were mostly carried out closer to the three rivers that define their country: the Murrumbidgee, the Macquarie and the Lachlan. In dry seasons, the food from the rivers was supplemented with kangaroos and emus hunted for their meat, as well as fresh food gathered from the land between the rivers, including fruit, nuts, yam daisies, wattle seeds and orchid tubers (NSW Dept of Environment, Climate Change and Water, 2009).
In 1817, John Oxley passed through the area on one of the first inland explorations, but predicted that “these desolate areas would never again be visited by civilised man”. Squatters began to settle the district in 1833, taking up land, though no centralised settlement developed until 1893 when gold was discovered on a property in the area. By May 1894 there were 12 000 miners on the field. But as most of the gold was located within quartz reefs, which made it very difficult to access, and needed vertical shafts up to 100 metres in depth with horizontal branch tunnels, by December 1894 the population had stabilised at just over 4 200.

The town of Wyalong was laid out to service the new population in 1894. However, the miners had already created a de facto settlement to the west around what was known as the ‘Main Camp’, which also boasted the ‘White Tank’, which in the absence of a river was the only established water supply. They showed no inclination to move and the site continued to outstrip the official town, with Wyalong businesses relocating to the more popular locality. Hence in 1895, West Wyalong was laid out. The crooked course of the main street reflects the course of the original bullock track, which wound around large trees. By the end of the century the Wyalong fields were reported as the most productive in the state. 1,264 kg of gold were turned up in 1899 alone. However yields declined, particularly from 1910, and the goldmining ceased by 1921. As mining declined, West Wyalong became the main service centre for agriculture in the surrounding district, although for many years there was rivalry between the towns. Both towns wanted the Temora railway line, but settled on a compromise of a station midway between the two towns, called Wyalong Central, in 1903.

Despite the closures, the area did not become a ghost town. While the rush was on, large pastoral holdings were being broken up for smaller wheat holdings. Mixed farming developed and the Wyalong district became the largest cereal-growing centre in NSW. Eucalyptus oil production had commenced in 1907 and the Wyalong area became one of the major world
exporters of the product. The introduction of cyanide processing saw the old mine tailings reworked in the 1930s, which continued the prosperity of the town.

In 1949, Russell Drysdale came to West Wyalong, for three days, with a friend who was a judge on the District Court Circuit. Drysdale made a rapid sketch of the main street, and later produced this painting, which has become one of his best-known images of the rural inland. A review from the time states that:

“In his last work on exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries, ... raises it to a new level - nowhere more so than in 'West Wyalong', where the deep red houses, reaching up to the clear blue evening sky do not require the quaint element of lonely and elongated country types leaning against the posts. One knows the inhabitants before one meets them - this is hardly the place for a fat jolly peasantry.”

(Paul Haefliger, ‘Drysdale, Fox exhibitions’, Sydney Morning Herald, 23 March 1949, p. 7)

Another description of the painting notes that it “captures the moment when dusk is falling; the high-keyed colour, single light source and the complete absence of people, evoke a tremendous sense of melancholy and poignancy”. This is still an evocative image for a visitor to West Wyalong some sixty years later, and I am struck by the sense of similarity between Drysdale’s painting and the photographs I took late one afternoon in 2008, after arriving to spend three days investigating why this town’s school has such a good reputation for achieving success in student outcomes and teacher retention.

In this photograph, we can see the architectural changes that have taken place over this time, and the buildings that have survived into the twenty-first century. We can see the improvements to road surfaces that have taken place over time, and the resulting vehicular traffic that now lines the street. The feeling of late summer heat that so strongly characterises the image above is missing from my early November photograph, where the spring sun is weaker, as it sets. Surprisingly, though, my photograph shows the town equally devoid of people – although one knows that the cars here will be driven by the same lean ‘country types’ whose grandparents might have noticed Drysdale sketching from the post office corner in 1949.

Since the 1970s, Wyalong has expanded in the direction of West Wyalong and Central Wyalong has become a motel area, so that the settlements have a greater degree of unity than previously, and there is continued expansion of housing on the outskirts of the town. The council advises that housing prices are well below those of capital cities and major
regional centres and that a range of land is available both within town boundaries or small acreage on the fringes.

“I take a walk around the back of town, north of the highway – “Boundary Street” – the line between Wyalong and West Wyalong. I’m struck by the large dam up towards the edge of town, high embankment screening the water from view, and a high fence all around, and ‘no entry’ signs prominently placed. What is this for, I wonder. There are several dams around town – they’re all large – on a street block square, and there’s one behind the school, a little smaller. They are brown and full of water. The one at the west of town is leaking, or overflowing. I find out later, but this morning I cross a bike path with a stream flowing down its centre, east, towards Wyalong, or ‘Toppy’ as the locals call it – like a wide, flat, cement drain. I wonder whether this is particular country thrift: a bike-path-drain, though there is a cyclist, in the distance, but he is on the road. I choose to follow him rather than the bike-path-drain toward town, and keep walking the peripheral streets.” (Journal notes, Site Visit)

5.1.2 Economy: production, work and industry in West Wyalong

“The age of the buildings is striking, 1890s, big, brick Catholic Church and convent – the town looks prosperous. There’s a new-look bakery with big glass and cappuccino machine, and there are a lot of ‘city shops’; the ubiquitous Target and Harvey Norman signs looking strangely misaligned with the old buildings and shop front size of the store.” (Journal notes, Site Visit)

West Wyalong is now the major town of Bland Shire, one of NSW’s most productive agricultural shires, where wheat, wool, pigs, eucalyptus oil, sawmills, farm machinery, and a growing tourism sector are the staples of the local economy. It is the largest cereal-growing centre in NSW. In recent years, gold mining has again taken off at Lake Cowal, 42 km from the town, and West Wyalong again sees itself as becoming more prosperous, with positive benefits to the economy of the area, in spite of the long drought that has affected the agricultural industry.

The development of the mine in 1999 was met with opposition from environmental groups and organisations. After considerable consultation with these groups, the Lake Cowal Foundation (LCF), a not for profit Environmental Trust was established in June 2000 with the objective of protecting and enhancing the natural environment in the Lake Cowal region. It is primarily sponsored through a negotiated royalty from the Cowal Gold Project, for the operational life of the gold mine. The Bland Shire Council noted in 2009 that:

The Cowal Gold, Pace Farm [egg farmers] and AWB projects will potentially create in excess of 300 jobs in short term during construction phases and 210 jobs once all developments reach operational phases. It is also estimated that the flow on effects of the extra local economic activity, as a result of the increase in wages and salaries, could see the creation of an additional 62 indirect full time jobs. The total job creation amounts to 272 new jobs. The estimated combined increase in economic activity within the Bland Shire economy could be around $39.6 million in capital expenditure and $34 million per year from the additional salaries and wages.
This recent economic expansion has brought an influx of people to the town, as indicated in the population figures below. As one of the teachers said:

“Look, if you’re not born and bred here, there is a feeling that you’re not a local – and that’s fine. People laugh at it, people recognise that. It is changing a little bit. We’ve had the greatest social change in West Wyalong since the gold rushes in the last three or four years, because of the mines.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This is important for the attraction of teachers to the town, as these developments mean that most of the essential services needed to support and maintain their staff are available to the general population. The town website states that it “has a well-equipped district hospital with surgery, radiology, an emergency unit and regular visiting specialists, a Community Health Centre, aged care facilities a pre-school and long day care facilities. The Shire contains eight public schools, including two high schools and one private (Catholic) school. Adult education and vocational training programs are available through West Wyalong TAFE and Central West Community College. Universities are within a 2-hour drive.”

Larger inland cities of Wagga Wagga and Griffith serve as the hub for major specialist services. As a community member who was explaining her desire to stay in West Wyalong after her retirement said:

“We could have moved to the coast – and I thought ‘no, this is where my family and friends are’. I’d like to have lots of coastal holidays but I’d like to stay in a rural community. This is where we’ve got our networks. As long as we can continue to keep our medical services and things like that … There is a small hospital and we’ve got several doctors, as long as we can retain that service that would be my main concern, medical services as we age.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

The town currently provides for the basic needs of its population – and beyond that it is well placed to allow for access to larger centres. As the figures presented in the next section indicate, the population of the town is ageing overall, so that these issues will become increasingly
important. Although at present the services that accompany economic prosperity are strong, the town must continue to ensure that it retains them. Activities like the conservation action to guarantee the sustainability of the natural environment around Lake Cowal suggest that the interrelationship between economic activity, the natural environment and the sustainability of the social fabric of this place are well understood.

### 5.1.3 Demography: the people and community of West Wyalong

The 2006, ABS data on which this summary is drawn supports the sense of West Wyalong as a flourishing community that seems almost to be reminiscent of an earlier era – with ‘old style’ country values, and a community profile that is quite different from the multicultural norm of Australia today. Most of the people in the community were born in Australia, though there are very few Indigenous people in West Wyalong. Most of those who were born overseas came from the United Kingdom or New Zealand, and the vast majority (98%) speak only English, though 30 people in the community speak another language at home, with Cantonese and German noted as the main languages spoken other than English.

Furthermore, only 20 people in the community say they follow a religion other than Christianity, with over 85% of the community nominating themselves as Christian. There is a large, well-kept Catholic Church precinct on one side of the main street, with St Mary’s School beside it. Also close to the centre of town stands an equally imposing Masonic Lodge.

Many of the staff at the school talked about the nature of the students as reflecting the town demography. The following three quotes are typical:

“If you ask me to name one thing that keeps me at this school I would say the quality of the kids we teach and the support of the community, no question about it. Wherever you go, you’ve got the Departmental crap, there’s no place to hide from that, we’ve all got to wear that. But the decency of the kids, they’re just real, good country kids who, they’re compliant, their niceness, they’re innocent at times, although they think they’re very worldly but they’re not, but I think it’s the quality of the kids for me, and the relationship that I have with them.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

“I’ve found the kids here are more innocent. They haven’t reached that level where some of the kids in bigger areas start to get that arrogance. I think it comes from probably – a lot of them do come off farms. I also think probably they have – the majority of kids here have good parental support in the sense that they do have parents that still probably instil those morals which helps.” (Teacher, Site Interview)
“I love our kids, we just have a good school, we’ve got great kids. I’ve found it an incredibly supportive community, I’m very, very happy here in this community, and we work really hard with our staff and so we have a cohesive staff and that makes being here a joy, but we do, we have great kids.” (Teacher, Site Interview)

There is little unemployment, and the area which employs most people in the town is the retail industry, a by-product of the other areas like agriculture, mining, administrative services, accommodation and food services, education, health and construction, which make up the top forms of employment in the town.

Statistics about the nature of the population continue to confirm the traditional conventionality of the town. There were only 10 single parent households in the town in 2006, for instance, with most people living in separate dwellings, and with 60% of the population owning or in the process of buying their own homes. One third of the homes in West Wyalong were connected to the Internet in 2006, below the national average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 3331</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 70</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 1615</td>
<td>Female 1716</td>
<td>Male 33</td>
<td>Female 37</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 3191</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 102</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 1526</td>
<td>Female 1665</td>
<td>Male 49</td>
<td>Female 43</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

Typical of small communities, the people of the town are active in building their own community, with 25% of the people of the town volunteering to work for an organisation or community group. In this town, several of the long-serving teachers are prominent in local government and volunteer activity. A drive around town after school shows the Scout hut open and operating, and the swimming pool to be in use, though the main street is as deserted as in Drysdale’s painting above.

The town’s website indicates that:

West Wyalong has a multitude of leisure and lifestyle activities and hobbies for local residents to get involved in. Active groups meet regularly in a wide variety of interest areas such as the dramatic arts, sports, art and craft cooperatives, pony club, historical research and farming organisations. Enthusiastic community organisations include the local Aboriginal Land Council, CWA, Rotary, Quota, Lions, Apex, Probus and VIEW Clubs. There is a wide range of sporting facilities catering to a wide range of ages and interests, including four codes of football, swimming, tennis, bowls, cricket,
netball, basketball and many more. The West Wyalong golf course is a competition standard 18 hole grass green facility within a sports club and motel complex (http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au/).

As I walk around town in the early morning, I notice the houses. It is fresh, but dry, and after a decade of drought across the bioregion, the colours of drought are everywhere – until I turn off the main road into the streets where the people live. My journal notes document the efforts of the community to create the typical Australian front yard.

White roses everywhere, in every street – lush, top heavy with blooms, so like but so unlike the white roses of Adelaide, even though they are planted the same way - in rows beside pathways, in lines along house fronts, long elegant trunks with pruned bushy tops.

And suddenly there are lawns – one, then two together, and another, lush, further up the street. A woman bringing in her empty rubbish bin smiles good morning, and we say good-day. These lawns stand out, these houses are painted, the white rose bushes perfectly round on top.

Most of the yards, though are like the school paddock – red dirt with clumps of tufty grass. Hoses lie like snakes curled across the dirt – their nozzles pointing to wet patches, each of which houses a tree or a bush that has been lovingly, sparingly watered during the early morning, before the heat of the day can waste the moisture.

They are little domestic oases in the dirt.

No footpaths on these streets, like my childhood. But nearer to town, out of Broadland, and along past a tennis court, a large white house, lush lawns and roses again, two expensive cars in the carport – there are wealthy people with footpaths, people I would not have known in my own town. Does the banker live here, or the new Mine Manager?

I turn off, along Monash Street, and turn again into Park Street and here is the primary school again and back into town. Main Street, the White Tank hotel, run down, I remember this place last time I was here, with Tony, the pub with the poster ‘BEER: Helping ugly people have sex for over 100 years.’ Later that morning I drive past the high school keen to go inside, and meet the first interviewee of the day. (Journal notes, Site Visit)

The contrast between the external appearances of houses in the town is striking, and can be read as an indicator of wealth – those who want to make a statement about their place on the land and the community do it through their lawns, or lack of them. In drought there is no water to
spare, and as my notes indicate, only a small minority of people tend their lawns – so that the contrast is severe.

There are also contrasts between the education levels of people in the town, with 25% of the inhabitants in West Wyalong having completed Year 12, and over 50% having left school at Year 10 or earlier. 100 members of the community are attending TAFE, mostly part-time, and 20 are studying for a university degree, with the majority of these again being part-time students. In 2006 there were 132 people in town who had a university degree of some kind, and 33 with a postgraduate degree or diploma.

As a Head Teacher at the school said, highlighting the way in which a particular social space is being built in this town:

“We’ve got good employment for our kids in the community even though it’s – most probably the mine and other things have done, have balanced out in West Wyalong, that notion of the rural community has been declining so rural jobs have been declining but here we now have engineering firms in town growing and those engineering firms were making bits and pieces chaser bins and stuff like that for farmers, they’re now making gear for the mines or they’re putting trays on the back of utes for the mine or they’re powder coating something else for the mine, or for people who are making another dollar from the mine and need another truck or whatever it happens to be, they’re doing those activities. Then there are the very specific mining engineering type firms that are here. There are jobs there. We’ve lost three or four boys out of one furnishing class this year. Three of them went to the one employer rather than going on to year 12, yes. If you’re doing furnishings though you’re more likely to be looking at a trade type career because it’s a non-examinable HSC subject. It’s there specifically for those kids.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

While this town is certainly a nice place on the surface, like all places, there are aspects of community life that are not conducive to the best education success of students, and are closer to the norm for other socially disadvantaged communities. One Interviewee noted that: “Drugs are fairly big here. Drugs are pretty rife here. Easy to get, cheap, and it’s the thing. It’s the cycle of drugs and alcohol. I mean there’s parties nearly every night at someone’s house.” One of the Head Teachers said:

“Alcohol’s a huge social problem. It doesn’t ‘just start’ – you take that from home through to the kids, particularly the kids. We struggle – I struggle as a parent saying to my children ‘No you’re not going to go to that party when you’re 15 and take a carton of beer, just because some other silly dill’s parents are prepared to let them do that’. Or give them a bottle of scotch because it’s easy to carry in. We’ve had some terrible scenarios that revolved around that. It is the big one. It would be stupid and I’d be naïve not to think that there is also drugs around, there certainly are other drugs in the community. I think there are issues in every community – for our kids, when there’s pressure on them from everyone else. I heard a boy from year 10 yesterday – because they’ve just finished their school certificate – say ‘You going out for a drink tonight?’ You’d expect that in a conversation between me and someone in the staff room, perhaps, but not as a conversation between two year 10 boys. And where are they going to have this drink?” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There is also the same sort of family dysfunction that characterises many low SES communities. The area of town on which the school is built, for instance, is close to the less wealthy parts of town:

“Ninety percent down in this area is all housing commission and there’s a lot of Land Council houses here – Aboriginal housing in amongst it and you’ve got a heap of teachers
live around in the same area. [...] I still don’t think that they do understand the different way of life. I mean in an Aboriginal home you’ll have the same things as what goes on in a dysfunctional white child’s home. You know, there might be abuse, there might be physical violence, there might be drunkenness, there might be all these sorts of things happening in the two homes but there’s a difference in the Aboriginal family and the white family. [...] Often in the Aboriginal family, kids, because of alcoholism in a lot of places, there is no respect left. There’s no role models. With the white family you’ll find a lot of the problems is the teenage things where they go out, they drink, they experiment with drugs and this is what gets them into trouble but they still have even one of the parents to crack down on them; whereas the Aboriginal families usually don’t, because the parents are usually the ones that are doing it as well.” (Aboriginal Education Worker, Site Visit Interview)

This means that the school faces similar issues to those in most other schools. It is not ‘more fortunate’ than other schools, or ‘special’ in some way, apart from what the people in the school do to make it so. How the school operates to bring about the sense that it is a ‘good school’, one where teachers want to teach and parents want to send their children to learn is the focus of the next section.

5.2 THE SCHOOL

The school prepared the following statement for inclusion on the Australian Myschool website in 2009, and it highlights the comprehensive view of education that is taken by the school:

West Wyalong High aims to provide a high quality, comprehensive rural education so that all students obtain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become caring, responsible members of the wider community. The school’s values are summarised in its motto ‘Sincerity’ and its 6 C’s: care, courtesy, commitment, co-operation, consideration and common sense. Student welfare and achievement is the school’s priority. It has been acclaimed as Best Practice in Middle Schooling (1999), and has received Directors Generals Awards: for School Achievement in Curriculum and Student Welfare (1997), as an outstanding community comprehensive School (2003) and in Environmental Education (2008). It has also been recognised in academic publications for its middle school and vocational education programs.

WWHS has been targeted by researchers studying educational best practice and the development and retention of effective staff. Success at WWHS extends well beyond the classroom. Students compete at elite levels in various areas including sport, debating and public speaking. WWHS strives through staff commitment and community support to provide invaluable opportunities and experiences for all. (http://www.myschool.edu.au)

The school profile presented on the national Myschool website indicates that in 2010 the school had 62% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) (down from 87% in 2009), 5% Indigenous students and 3% of students came from a language background other than English. It had 32.3 full time equivalent teaching staff, 327 students, of whom 156 were male and 171 were female (http://www.myschool.edu.au).

In an early interview, the Principal of the school said: “I came here for three years in 1990.” His Associate Principal added: “I came here for three years twelve years ago.” What is missing from both these comments from the initial interview preceding the on-site data collection for this study is
the unspoken essence of why this school has built a reputation among its community, teachers and outsiders as a successful school in terms of staffing. What the leadership team did not say here, but what this selection of data from my visit to the school aims to demonstrate, is that our analysis indicates the ‘secret’ to the success of this particular school as a community where teachers find it attractive to stay is: ‘and I have worked hard for this school ever since’.

In many ways this is a case of situated leadership (Novak et al., 2009) as produced in a particular place and a particular set of human and institutional circumstances, useful as an example of how good practice looks, feels and is spoken about by the people at the site.

This case study is an example of the benefits of long staying leadership when the leader has a strong, personal commitment to the value of education, and a charismatic leadership style. While it may not provide a template for other schools to emulate, it does provide an exemplar of a school where the leadership is committed to a place, a community and a school, and it suggests that it is highly likely that this triple commitment has played a key part in the success of the school.

Understanding how the school has been able to achieve this was built through review of documentary evidence available: in and around the school; in public places; on the website; and in other civic locations around the town. It has also come from interviews with teachers, parents and external community members, and student teachers.

5.2.1 Kids first - Education is what matters – everything else follows

At West Wyalong, the Principal has lived and taught in the town for two decades. He arrived there as a young Head Teacher with a small family and a belief that education is important in the lives of young people. He has brought his family up here, and he has brought other members of his family to live and work in the area. This sends a clear message to the people of West Wyalong that this person likes and values the place where they live. This has not always been the case with other Principals, and when the current Principal accepted the short term appointment in the position of Acting Principal, fifteen years ago, the school at that time was going through a period of change. He saw this as a positive factor, as it meant he was able to make changes and try out educational ideas without fear of losing the position:

“I was pretty fortunate because I really had nothing to lose, because it was in turmoil… or rather, that people weren’t happy, and the place wasn’t going as it should. If things hadn’t turned around, well and good, but if they didn’t well they would say well you have had a pretty rough hand there mate and it was rough here to start with. Within bounds, sensible bounds I have a free hand. It was never ever said by anybody at the time, but the brief that I had at the time was ‘get this place settled’” (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

His view was borne out by other staff who have ended up staying at West Wyalong since that time:
“Until change happened at West Wyalong High School, it was a ‘good solid school’. People would say it competed on a reasonably even foot with the private schools around the place. They’d say, ‘Oh, yes, it’s a solid school but it’s just a state high school. It’s nothing special’. When change happened it was (pause) … When we started going from the 40 minute/8 period days to 6 period days with the teaching cycle, when we examined vertical integration curriculum and the middle school got set up, the community started looking at the place as being more than just a place where their kids went, to a place where things were happening.”

(Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Two of the significant changes that were introduced to West Wyalong High School that have made a difference in staff involvement and commitment are the Middle School and the Vocational Education programs.

5.2.1.1 Middle School

I was aware of the West Wyalong Middle School program long before the school was nominated for this study. As noted above, it has won awards for best practice and is one of the few sustainable middle schooling programs in the state of New South Wales. The fact that it has operated so successfully and for almost a decade reflects the amount of hard work that the staff have put into its organisation and management – working together with staff from the participating primary schools to review and refine the program each year. Staff speak of this in terms of problem solving – and test the effects of decisions in practice each year:

“We used to have middle school on Tuesday afternoons and Wednesday mornings and Thursday afternoons, split all over the place. We’ve done everything we could do to try and fit in with the two-hour release from face to face that our primary school college we were dragging off them. While they were having their two hours release from face to face, we looked after their kids for them. That’s how the ‘pay back’ happened and we got pay for the casuals to do that. We tried to fit in there as best we could with the primary schools – the timetabling nightmare that created I can tell you.”

(Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The image below is of a large white board that dominates the staff room, and illustrates the nature of the complexity involved here. All staff members are able to comment and offer suggestions, and all staff members see the effects of a particular timetable configuration on their own classes and work practices. This sort of learning is invaluable for those who will move on to take up Head Teacher positions in other schools.
The latest iteration of the Middle School program has it all happening on Thursdays, when the VET program also takes place. As one teacher explained the planning on the white board:

“So the older kids go out of school and the younger ones come in..., so we have no year 11 and 12’s here, and then Thursday afternoon Year 9 and 10 are off with sport as well, so you have that extra access to specialist rooms ... So it really has been a whole-school investment ... and it continues to be, because when we look at things like our timetable, we have to put on Thursdays our middle school ... Thursdays are very complex days ... and in fact on there at the moment, middle school isn’t on there yet, the 5-6 part of middle school isn’t on there yet. That’s just the VET and TAFE, normal 9-10 and sport ... and the other part of middle school is the year 7’s having home-rooms with a home teacher. So they have their home teacher who does English, Maths, Science, HSIE, those four areas.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another teacher spoke of the curriculum issues that the Middle School arrangement has brought to the fore in the school:

“I think that we always planned something, we always wanted to move another step, we’re always looking to do something else, we never stay as we are, so last year, at the end of the year before, when we were doing our planning, we thought let’s look at literacy and then thought why not do numeracy as well, and it turned out that the Head Teacher of English took the literacy this year and we had our STL in there as well, doing the literacy with them.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The way a first year out teacher talks about the Middle School Program suggests that she is learning as much as the students though this work, and the satisfaction, ownership and
professionalism evident in her words here indicate the value of the extra effort to her as a teacher:

“Yeah, so basically we deliver the curriculum to them and we do all the reporting and the assessing and the reporting and the programming. So obviously there’s high school staff teaching them, obviously no one’s ever forced to do it or anything like that, but we’ve never had anyone not want to do it and it certainly ... I think in terms of pedagogy, as a high school trained teacher, the best thing to do is to teach years 5 and 6 because it really does make you stop and think about how you’re teaching, and that ... I love thinking about [the relationship between] busy work versus teaching and so in terms of professional development it really is the best thing. I’ve taught year 5 and 6 this year, and I’ve found it great, and I think that even after 15 years or so of teaching to have 5 and 6 ... I’d have to rethink what ... I think it is a bit inspiring too, because I think ‘I’ve got middle school, what am I going to do this week, or what are we going to do here, or what are we going to do with that’.” (First Year Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Words like ‘the best thing’, ‘inspiring’, ’great’ and ‘love thinking about’ in this excerpt indicate the excitement and pleasure this young teacher is gaining from her work. This is the sort of talk that characterises teachers who are fully engaged in and committed to their profession – and the pay off to the students they teach is obvious.

5.2.1.2 Vocational Education

The school’s vocational education program began in 1999, and like the strong agricultural education curriculum, ensures that students are provided with opportunities that are particularly meaningful in the social and economic space in which they live. It begins early, and aims to ensure that students who do not display academic interest are catered for, and find value in their schooling:

“We target students at the end of year 8 who have shown that they are not engaging in their learning and are at some risk and we go through a pretty elongated process of working out who is particularly eligible to go through this alternate program.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The teacher who coordinates the Vocational Education program had a long career working with disadvantaged youth and in local government services before being convinced to join the staff of the school by the Principal, his brother. He has since settled in West Wyalong permanently, and is active in community affairs. His history and community activity means that the program is tailored toward practical vocational ends, and this has meant that there is significant status afforded to these students’ achievements in the school, with resultant ‘pay off’ in high student attendance, engagement and high behavioural standards.
His discussion of this work, again, though, indicates that this has been carefully thought through and sustained over time – and there is more involved that just providing the workshop and instruction:

“At the beginning when I take a group into Voc. Ed - I was up front – I said I need to reprogram you guys – they were mostly boys – my first job is to reprogram you to accept that you can be successful and that you have skills and that you have value. I said ‘if ever you say anything within the context of our group that you’re dumb or you’re this or that’ – and I would use – I know the boys – and I would say ‘Darby you could pull down the motor in my car, fix it and put it back together again. I’m lucky to know where to check the oil and put the water, and you guys think I’m the smart one’. And I went through them and just identified those things that I knew those boys could do and that was the platform.”  (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The school is proud of this work, and has produced large poster-sized photographs of students in the workshops – demonstrating the trade and mechanical skills they are learning in the classroom.

“There are quite a few around the town, and talking with the local businesses, when you know them, is quite easy. So you say to them, ‘Can we hang this photo on your wall?’ And they are happy to. I think the city is more impersonal, you don’t have the same relationship. And if you don’t have that relationship then you don’t have the comfort to ask. How do you get to know the industry? The fact that I am on the community representative committee of the mines, probably doesn’t hurt (laughs), but you take the time to go and meet them that’s what you have to do. We have them in here often, say if the science department might like to talk about something geological it is only a matter of getting one of their geologists to come in and have a chat or the environmental people.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In this excerpt, the Principal is clear that the location and small size of the town is an advantage in achieving the best real life outcomes for students, and involving the community in the daily life of the school.

The opportunity for authentic curriculum activity is clear in this situation as, besides the vocational education work that takes students directly to employment opportunities in the community and beyond, other students breed and raise angora goats as part of their agricultural studies. They have achieved considerable success with this work over the years, and have been successful exhibitors of their livestock at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, success that is again reported fully in the local newspaper.

5.2.1.3 Success breeds success

This constant communication with the community is a key factor in the success of the school. At the time of this study, the West Wyalong High School Website (accessed 26 June, 2009) contained the latest edition of the weekly newsletter, a range of candid snaps of students engaged in learning and social activities,
and an 8-minute video presentation of information at the school featuring staff, students and community members. The school logo, with its motto “Sincerity” was clearly displayed on the website, along with the Principal’s message which captures the ethos of the school in the following words:

West Wyalong High School has an outstanding reputation within, and beyond, its community. It places very high emphasis on student welfare, values greatly its sporting, cultural and academic achievements and is deeply committed to maintaining best possible outcomes for its students (emphasis added).

The highlighted words above show the priorities that the Principal sees as guiding his practice in leading the school. However, the school makes sure that the local community knows and shares in the achievement of its children. The front page of the local newspaper regularly contains news about the school and students. One of the Head Teachers noted that this is again, not by chance, and takes constant work on the part of the Principal, and staff:

“You’d have to say that the boss has been a significant factor in all that because he is very much about putting the school out there for people to have a look at. There are guys at the school like [staff member], and there’s ‘advertising [staff member]’ over here with his letters off to the local paper, to the Wagga press and stuff like that. There are people who are wanting to let other people know what we do. I still think we’re very poor at blowing our own trumpet about some of the things but we just let people know what’s happening – there’s no trumpet blowing in that, you know what I mean.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

These news items do not just happen: the school shows that it is proud of its students, and it works to make the community proud as well – a feeling that feeds back to the school itself. It also makes the activities of the school visible to all. One of the teachers discussed the importance of the ‘Challenge Week’ reported in the image above, an activity that the school had instituted the previous year:

“Well, I’d just say the opportunities that the students at this school get are just unbelievable. I don’t know if [the Principal] talked to you about – this year in particular, they did a challenge week where the students were given a variety of opportunities. … They got to go on a plane and … students from Campbelltown Performing Arts High School came to West Wyalong and they put on a concert and students who would never usually sing in public were singing. So that’s probably the biggest selling point. For a small country school, the opportunities they get …” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

But not content with this, the school actively markets its students in other ways as well – particularly in terms of their future employment. It is interesting in this regard that staff members at the school speak of themselves as powerful agents – they are effective in their work
and their work matters. The following excerpt from one interview highlights the fact that these teachers see the school as an active participant in the construction of a positive rural social, economic and environmental space – thus impacting on the sustainability of West Wyalong as a whole.

“We are not a backwash of education and in fact we are doing many, many things and leading the way – as in the middle school program, as in the Voc. Ed. program - and I think we are recognised within the districts for the way we accommodate our special needs kids.

With our environmental programs, again I don’t know if the old ‘Triple C’s’ been mentioned to you – the Lake Cowal Conservation Centre – that again was a [Principal] thing. We had the mine out there and [Principal] said, ‘This is crazy that we’ve got this huge enterprise happening out there and there must be some links that we can make’. So not only do we have links with careers and they’re offering to come in and assist us or talk to our kids, what eventuated was we are looking at our environment and all these climate warming issues, all these sorts of stuff is increasing in scope.

So what we established out there was the Lake Cowal Conservation Centre and it’s a partnership between a multi-national company, the Lake Cowal Foundation which is a not-for-profit community organisation, solely aimed at doing environmental works out there, the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority and the DET through our school.”

“And who wrote the application for that?”

“I wrote the original one, so we went to the various partners, got their support – it did take two and a half years for DET and [the mining company] with their various legal people to get a license agreement that they would both agree on – two and a half years – but anyway, it’s out there, it’s operating and it’s one of those things …

And again there isn’t an equal to it within our system, and as I say, I think in some ways you’re trying to fight the perception…. Sometimes I feel the need to make the point that we are not a backwater in education: we’re the opposite. We have some of the greatest initiatives in education programs available anywhere.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

5.2.1.4 Care for students

All community members interviewed noted the success of the school in terms of its attention to student welfare. Two interviews in particular demonstrate the ways in which this operates in the school – one of these, with the Aboriginal Education Worker, illustrates the way in which the school has been able to deal with a potential ‘problem’ by investing time and effort up front, rather than waiting for the potential to be realised.

As the demographic information presented above indicates, there are few Aboriginal children in the school, and this means that there is no systemic provision of an Aboriginal Education Worker to support these students. Yet the school has employed one, making the decision to foreground this need above others in order to provide what it sees as the most benefit to the individual children, and, through them, to the community. This is because, as the Principal noted, although “Some of the Aboriginal families have been coming here for years because if they’ve come into the system, from kindergarten, they’re comfortable”, others are not.
“[T]he ones I've got no hope with, and [the AEW] struggles with, are probably the new folk to town who don’t have a relationship of any great length with the school. [For them] it’s been negative probably - all their kids’ schooling they’ve got letters home ‘He’s truanting’ or ‘he’s jumping off the roof’ or whatever it might be. So it’s very negative, and they expect negative from it but we’ve got a core of Aboriginal parents who are very comfortable here, come on up, their kids have been with every other child in the school since kindergarten, it’s all good.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The close eye of the Executive team on these new students in the school has led to them having the opportunity to undertake a cultural and social development program for Aboriginal boys. At the Tirkandinaburra Cultural and Development Centre, located between Coleambally and Darlington Point, NSW. This is an Aboriginal community-run centre offering Aboriginal boys, aged 12-15, a culturally-based residential program which aims to reduce their future contact with the criminal justice system. Tirkandinaburra means ‘to learn to dream’ in the Wiradjuri language, and the centre aims to help Aboriginal boys “learn to dream” and to develop the tools and self-confidence to enable them to take control of their futures. The program is designed to strengthen the boys’ cultural identity, self-esteem and resilience (http://www.rhef.com.au/programs/case-studies).

“They focus on getting boys that have the potential to get into trouble. Get them early. Now, I’ve actually sent four of mine from here. I’ve got four down there at the moment. I've got a year 7, a year 8, a year 9 and actually I really had to push hard for the year 10 because he was over age but he was the one in the most need. He was really running off the rails and I could see Juvenile Detention blaring at me and he was into drugs and he was into anything – you name it and he was into it – and I had worked so hard with him and not really getting anywhere. And I had a good talk to his mum, because his mum – she’s a sole parent family – and his mum’s a lovely lady and she gets out there and she works and she’s easy to get along with and she’s actually educated which is a bonus. She had no idea what he was up to and she agreed that this might do him good, might get him in the right direction. And they work solid with them down there.

The thing is, I don’t know if there’s funding or anything for me to be here next year but the thing that worries me is that when they come out of there they’ve got six weeks of holidays in which they can run off the rails but they need – had it been only two weeks like normal in between term – that follow up. They need that follow up and I ring every week and get an update on how they’re going. So far the four are going fantastic and one of them is doing his school certificate down there and he’s done a complete turnaround. He’s going amazing. The youngest one is homesick so we’re trying to get his parents down there if that’s possible just for a few days.” (Aboriginal Education Worker, Site Visit Interview)

This example of targeted, proactive attention to the needs of students appeared to be a heightened, though typical instance of the school attending to and caring for its students in a way that promotes a culture of acceptance and success with rural social space. Well documented effects of prolonged drought on the mental health of farmers and other rural males have not gone unheeded within the school and its community, and it is noteworthy that a similar, though less intensive cultural program is run by non-Indigenous community elders for the non-Indigenous boys of the town as well, providing connection with the larger traditions outside of the local space of West Wyalong.

“We’ve got a boys’ programme running ... (Community member) runs it and this year we took them out home and set up an orienteering course for them and sent them off in pairs doing that and had a BBQ lunch and sat out there and talked to them and that sort of
thing ..., all boys. And the year before we did something ... I got them to build a bridge across a gutter so they had to work as a team, and the same sort of thing, sitting around and having a yarn to them and talk about things that had happened at school ... was that the right reaction and that sort of thing ... and again, as I said, the cultural stuff. But we've got the bus and the kids go to Wagga occasionally to the theatre, I think they go to Canberra.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

Other parents noted that the Principal knows every student in the school by name, and that he has visited many of their homes over the years.

“The school is very approachable. I think parents do, and they are encouraged to, get in touch with the executive if there is a problem or an issue. Once or twice if I've thought I've had a need in all those years, I've got in touch and it's been resolved very quickly. Always, they're happy to be informed, they'd rather know about the little niggling issues with a teacher or a subject.” (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

This care for students is visible from the top of the school down to the students themselves – with the support unit for disabled students assisting them to be integrated across most aspects of school life. In terms of academic skills, vocational skills and sporting achievements, students are given every opportunity to participate and excel. One parent noted:

“Our middle son was able to play state volleyball with the grounding he got at West Wyalong high school. He's playing for Uni of NSW and he plays for New South Wales state with volleyball, again from the opportunities he got at the high school. Academically and sporting wise and socially we can't ask for any more.” (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

Another parent expressed her satisfaction with the school:

“I like West Wyalong because it offers myself and my family good employment and a good school. At the moment there's a drought on and things are pretty hard, but we've got the mines for employment. And probably a very, very good school and that is one of the reasons why we will stop here, at least until our kids leave school. I've been here most of my life. I did a couple of years in Sydney where I was nursing in Sydney and I came back to West Wyalong for experience, but I got married and stayed here, but I can get work anywhere. At the moment we've got our farm on the market because of the drought, and my husband will try to get employment in the mines. He actually said 'Do you want to move away?' and I said 'I will never do that with the kids here'; I will never move them from this school because I think this school is so great.” (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal noted that “making sure these kids do not miss out because they're in the country,” is his Executive team’s core goal. From the point of view of parents, this is a goal that is well met.

“Our kids leave here happy, they leave here educated, they leave here and they get, from the careers point of view, 90% of those who have applied to go to university and know what they want to get, end up getting into that in some way, shape or form.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

5.2.1.5 Care for staff

As well as care for students, though, the degree of attention to the pastoral care of staff that was evident at West Wyalong at the time of the study was extraordinary. Given the NSWDET’s folk
wisdom that staffing rural schools is never a problem – the problem is keeping staff in rural schools, the example provided by the case of West Wyalong may well be instructive for other schools and leaders aspiring to achieve the sort of culture and atmosphere that pervades the school. While this atmosphere may be interpreted as ‘folksy’ and ‘old fashioned’ in ways that I have depicted and described the conservative and conventional aspects of the social space that characterises the town, above – it is an atmosphere that is explicitly built on old-fashioned values that are lived and worked through in the everyday practice of the school. And as also noted above, this requires effort and persistence, as well as creativity and reflexivity from its leaders.

Several things are clear from the interview evidence collected in the site study, as well as from the documentary evidence considered in constructing this case. First, the traditional family values espoused in the school website, documentation and marketing: care, courtesy, commitment, co-operation, consideration and common sense, are lived values – played out in the interactions between staff, staff and students, staff, parents and community, students and community. People are keen to come to work and school, people are happy to work together, people are proud of what they achieve, and people work to continue to improve and enhance the education on offer at the school. It was clear from the first interview with the Principal, for instance, that family has always been a consideration in his working life:

“We found we were happy with the school, I had come to the school for three years in early 1990 that was the deal and here we are [2009] and there’s still no of getting rid of me yet. (Laughter) But the children really liked the school and in my opinion it was getting better and better as the years ticked along, so educationally I was very happy for them to stay here and they were keen to stay here. If I ever mentioned transfer, they were: ‘Well you are going without me!’ Which did have merit at the time. So anyway that was that, and what with the staff, and what the school has achieved every year, I have always looked forward to the next year, because we would do some good stuff one year and I would sit with the executive, and we’d say: ‘Well right oh, What needs doing next year?’ and, ‘What can we improve upon?’” There was sort of an incentive to stay to see how this all pans out or how this works out.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal’s enthusiasm for his work, and for continuous improvement and learning is clear in this statement. This appears to be carried through to the organisation and management of the school in three main ways:

- The institutionalisation of family values instilled through charismatic leadership;
- Close and regular communication with the school Executive staff;
- An ethos of continuous educational improvement and professional development for all staff.

5.2.1.6 Family values and transformational leadership

The ‘old-fashioned’ family values of the Principal have been translated to the school as a whole, with the paternal figure of the Principal as a ‘charismatic’ leader spoken of by almost all participants in the site interviews as central to the success of the school. Yet the values and vision of the leader have been taken up by others in the school, in a manner that suggests the school constantly produces more leaders, and sees itself as empowered to do this. The literature on transformational leadership (e.g. Burns, 1978) suggests that such leaders are often idealised in the sense that they provide a role model of working for the benefit of the whole organization, so that the leader focuses on ‘transforming’ others to help each other, to look out for each other, to
be encouraging and harmonious, and to look out for the organisation as a whole. As one parent indicated:

“I just find that whenever I ring up nothing’s ever a problem. The teachers will talk to you anytime, [the Principal’s] always there; the office staff are just so cooperative … the school is so cooperative, it’s just whatever suits me, because I’m very busy with my job too, and trying to fit everything in is very hard, but they’re always very cooperative: whatever I want, they’ll do.” (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

Individual leadership and its relation to school culture can be a difficult issue to highlight and discuss effectively in a study of this nature, as although the pleasure in working for a leader you consider to be a ‘good boss’ is something that sustains many workers in schools and other workplaces, there are clear downsides to the charismatic power of an individual being cited as key to the success of the school. When discussing the manner, noted above, in which this Principal was first appointed from an ‘Acting’ position, for instance, one interviewee mentioned that:

“[Principal’s] an interesting one, he was head of mathematics and we took him straight from there to Principal, he was never a Deputy…. We had a few people within the Department in the Western Region make comments about promoting a Head Teacher straight to Principal.” (Community member, Site Visit Interview)

Two things are interesting here. First is the implication that the community itself had a key role in the appointment of this Principal (“we took him”). This comment positions the community as a powerful player in the staffing of their school, in a way that is unusual within the NSWDET, and which authorised the Principal in ways that for an unknown candidate, an ‘outsider’ coming to the town would have been impossible. When Novak et al. (2009) talk about the ‘frontier effect’ that distance and remoteness can produce, they name the sense of this appointment – a ‘young gun’ hired to ‘clean up’ the school for the locals. Second is the suggestion here of ‘queue jumping’, rather than waiting one’s turn to be promoted from a ‘list’ after ‘serving one’s time’ in the rank-and-file of the teaching profession. This has a clear resonance with the negative effect of the tall-poppy syndrome in relation to promotion on merit within the NSW Department of Education. While not something that is often officially recognised, it has long been noted as a characteristic of this large institutional employer (James, 1950). The Principal’s statement above, about the implicit ‘free hand’ he felt empowered to take with the school after this unorthodox appointment, suggests that this freedom brought with it power and authorisation for change, a considerable responsibility not to fail, and not to be mediocre, so that the faith placed in him by the community and his superiors would not be seen to be misplaced. For all the envy of one’s contemporaries, there is a fair touch of professional pride involved in being promoted early, and this can be seen to have served to motivate and support the Principal over a considerable time in the job. West Wyalong is his school – his career has been made here as the school has been transformed over time, and it is an achievement of which he can be justly proud.

“You’d have to say that the boss has been a significant factor in all that’s changed because he is very much about putting the school out there for people to have a look at.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another problem associated with charismatic leadership arises when, with so being invested in one person, there is potential for collapse when s/he moves on. It is clear from the following excerpt, for instance, from teachers and community members, that this may be a real risk at West Wyalong at the present time:
“He’s just so good, he’s just so good. It makes all the difference. [Principal] could walk around here and know every kid in this school. I’d say he’s spoken to at least one parent or guardian of every kid in this school, and in a lot of cases, both of them. I’ve known him to go off at 8 o’clock at night to go and talk to some kid’s parents about that kid and how they’re going at school. He’s very good with the staff and you know where you stand with him. Actually I think the greatest thing about [Principal] is that he really believes in giving the kids the best go that you can give them. We’ve got staff here ... and the only reason they’re here is because he’s here, and if he had have left, they would have gone.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

“I know it sounds a little trite but, in a sense, we are a family. Every day – and I’ve said lots of times to anybody who cares to listen, and there are very few – one of the benefits that we have of a day is coming and working and relating with people whose company you enjoy and I love that. I could think of nothing worse than working in a shoe shop or something where you’re sitting there by yourself all day, hoping that somebody is going to come in. I mean I would hate that. If you’re in a workplace where you do enjoy the company of your colleagues then that’s got to be a big plus in anybody’s day.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

With this leadership, the motivation, morale and performance of staff in the school are enhanced through a variety of mechanisms. Mainstream leadership discourses (Burns, 1978) speak of strategies such as connecting the sense of identity of staff members to the mission and the collective identity of the school; being an inspirational role model; and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of staff members, so that they can be supported to achieve the best for the school as a whole. More recent notions of situated leadership (Novak et al., 2009) suggest the pedagogical role of the leader in rural places is crucial, and note that “rural communities often have higher expectations of school leaders than those of their urban counterparts” (p. 359), particularly around ensuring that staff uphold and make explicit the values of the community itself. As they go on to say, “The ability of the school leader to read place and situate their leadership or themselves in that place, put student outcomes first, and to link with the community is arguably ideal” (p. 359) and appears to be realised to a considerable extent in the practices observed at West Wyalong. There was clear evidence of this in the management structures of the school, which placed close and regular communication with the senior staff of the School Executive as a key feature in enabling them to learn, practice and benefit from forms of high level, values-driven interaction with staff and students, consistent with the vision and community expectations of the school.

5.2.1.7 Close and regular communication with the school Executive staff

In a site interview with a group of Executive staff at the school, the following conversation occurred:

HT 1: My experience of executive meetings at other schools is you go in there and sit down and the boss comes in and says this is what we’re doing and you get up and walk out.

HT 2: It’s very different here.

JR: What strikes me is the discussion at the beginning where you all went around and talked about staff there. Do they know that? Do they know that you care about them?

HT 2: My staff does. They know that we discuss their welfare and how they’re going. I think it adds to that feeling. I don’t know how else to put it. I feel good sharing. It’s a cathartic moment at times you know. I’ve had a shocking week with so and so.
It’s that sharing, being able to voice or concerns or being able to celebrate with someone else – your executive colleagues – what’s happening in your facility. It’s both – I’ve had a shocking week so it’s a good moment like that. It’s more of a welfare thing for ourselves as well as the staff.

HT 3: It’s very supportive as well because you hear other people saying things and you think that’s exactly the same.

HT 4: Can I just put a caveat on that? When we talk about staff members – yes your welfare is discussed – I think we take pains to assure them that their personal lives aren’t discussed but it’s in terms of – which we’ve done many, many times – what can we do to help you? How you’re going? What things have you done? We often write in the minutes – commendation to teacher x who did x, y, z. The staff would be uncomfortable if they thought - we don’t talk about a marriage break up or the dog died or the kids’ crook or something. It’s more above the personal level but … .

The weekly Executive meetings at West Wyalong appear to perform an important function in relation to the way that leadership is realised within the school. This leadership team takes its responsibility of care for the welfare and the education of staff very seriously. They work together to plan strategies to support staff, whether this is in relation to demonstrating techniques of classroom organisation and management, or simply making sure they are invited out for a coffee or meal on the weekend. The point is that this is not a routine process, it is worked out from year to year, from week to week, depending on the situation. What is done for new teachers when they are appointed in a group (as has occurred in the year of this site visit) or when a single new person joins the school (as had occurred in the recent past) is different. As one Head teacher noted, “Being young and having other young people … I think if you were to go somewhere where there was no one else who had started new, that would be really hard.” It would certainly require a different response from the school leadership. The importance of this leadership group as a team is expressed in the words of one Head Teacher, who said:

“I mentioned earlier on [Principal] talks to us as an executive all the time, but I think it’s still that strength of being able to work together really, really well and then look after people when they come, that helps us be able to make people feel comfortable here. It doesn’t hurt that there’s a whole bunch of nice people. For whatever reason, have we had successes all the time when the head teachers have come? No! And whether we’re nasty or not nice, they go, and they ultimately seem to be replaced with someone who stays and continues that notion of being a nice place.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There is a realistic sense here that things don’t work perfectly all the time, but that there is a larger purpose, and a larger timeframe to the work of the school, to which everything is ultimately geared. Some of the strategies the Executive team has initiated with the recent group of beginning teachers include modelling their own classroom practice, something that was extended to experienced staff members as a worthwhile learning activity for professional discussion and reflection. One beginning teacher interviewed during the site visit was highly complementary about the nature of his pre-service teacher education, where practice teaching episodes were discussed in class, and principles for practice extrapolated from this. However useful this was, he claimed:

“I think I’ve learnt so much more – I think I learnt much more in the first five weeks of teaching here than I did in my entire year of prac just because you’re seeing the kids all the time – and you’re surrounded by experienced teachers. That’s what’s nice about the close-knit community. You can talk to other teachers and say, I’ve got such and such in my class,
Another teacher in her first year commented on the willingness of her Head Teacher to experiment with class membership and organisation in order to provide the sort of ‘new group’ teaching experience that is often missing from smaller country schools where teachers teach the same students from year to year. The willingness to actively intervene to allow the beginning teachers to improve their skills by trying them out with a new group of students becomes a shared experiment, and a powerful demonstration of reflective practice.

“I tend to think back at the end of the day. You get to the end of some days and it’s like ‘why’. Some days you just go home and collapse and just cry and want to go to sleep but then other days you come out and it’s ‘Wow that worked really well. That was good and that was good’. It’s what people keep telling me and I’m learning it like - a good teacher is one that critically analyses their own practice. They’re always trying to learn and improve. You don’t become a good teacher and then you’re a good teacher forever. Actually what we’re doing this year – my head teacher, we were talking because there’s him, me and the other new teacher – we’ve said we’re actually going to change all the classes next year, so we’re not going to have any of the kids that we’ve had previously so that will be nice because it’s a fresh start for all of us. We’ve thought about how do I want to run this class from now on and so I’m looking forward to doing that.” (First Year Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As noted above, it is the pedagogical function of situated leadership that is perhaps most productive in terms of producing West Wyalong as a school where teachers are happy to stay for a sustained period of time, and contribute what they can to support the learning and enrich the experiences of the students. This is realised through what I am calling here a pedagogy of professionalism that appears to characterise the activities of support and encouragement by members of the Executive team.

5.2.1.8 An ethos of continuous educational improvement and professional development for all staff

One of the first-year-out teachers described the way in which his Head Teacher had allocated classes, in the interests of his two beginning teachers as professionals:

“Actually it was really good coming – a bit of a side note but it was good coming to a small school because small facility – there’s only three of us and two of us were new teachers in the maths facility – and it’s meant that I didn’t get bottom year 8, bottom year 9, bottom year 10. I got a mix of them. Which I would not have in a city school. I don’t know how I would have coped if I’d had all bottom classes first year out so I’m really thankful for that. I’m glad that I’ve been able to do that. My head teacher has been really supportive and right throughout the year he’s said, ‘is there anything I can do to help you out with’. There was a year 12 assessment task half way through the year for general maths - because I’ve got the year 12 general class – and I was feeling a bit bogged down with work at the time and he said ‘Look I’ll write the assessment task for you’. I was pretty nervous. I was pacing waiting
While allocating a beginning teacher a range of classes like this is always a risk for a Head Teacher, the risks are minimised, as the teacher himself has said here, “because of the close knit nature of the staff”. Teaching is not privatised, the school is too small to allow problems and issues to go unmarked. One of the features of the weekly Executive meeting discussed in the previous section, is a ‘whip around’ each staff member in the school, where all members of the Executive comment on anything they have heard or seen that might indicate a staff member is having difficulties, needing support, or achieving success in some area. This means that the Executive works collaboratively, providing different perspectives on individuals, and sharing the work of educating their colleagues as professionals. The following two excerpts provide the perspectives of a Head Teacher and a teacher (Nerida*) who has been at West Wyalong for three years on the recent decision by the school to allocate her a prac teacher for the first time:

“I decided for Nerida that it was time for her to have a go because she really is ready to move up to that next level, even though she might not necessarily have the confidence ... She is confident, but sometimes you don’t think that you, yourself ... It was time for her, if she wanted to, to have a go. And she said she would And she said it’s been fantastic, that she’s really enjoyed it I know, it was great. To see her sit and talk, and the professional dialogue that was happening and the suggestions ... just to really understand how she thinks about what happens in the classroom, it was really good to see the two of them together. And Nerida is such a happy person, and Chris*, the person she had was exactly the same, and so just to see them walking and laughing and having a great time, is just really encouraging and it’s good to see that and you think of all these great teachers coming through.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

From Nerida’s point of view, as a young woman who had recently experienced the challenges of managing adolescents in the classroom, this decision made good sense:

“Certainly when I was offered a prac student, I think ... You always wonder if you have the skills: am I capable of showing somebody? I actually thought, having a young girl come out, I think in some ways it’s better to have another young girl that’s going to have similar behaviour management strategies and problems and to show what I do rather than her going to someone who has been at the school for twenty years and male, and sometimes a dominant male, isn’t always the best example.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There was a clear professional development benefit for all concerned in this arrangement. The Head Teacher’s confidence in Nerida’s capacity to support a novice teacher was vindicated – as a leader she had taken a risk that paid off.

Other teachers spoke about the value of the middle school program in expanding their repertoires of practice as professionals.

“... I think in terms of pedagogy, as a high school trained teacher, the best thing to do is to teach years 5 and 6 because it really does make you stop and think about how you’re teaching, and that ... I love ‘busy work versus teaching’ and so in terms of professional development it really is the best thing. I’ve taught year 5 and 6 this year, and I’ve found it great, and even after 15 years or so of teaching to have 5 and 6 ? ... I have to rethink that ... I think it is a bit inspiring too, because I think I’ve got middle school, what am I going to

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1 Transcript altered to protect identity of this teacher.
do this week?, or What are we going to do here?, or What are we going to do with that?””
(Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The sense of teaching as professionally interesting work is clear in this comment, as this teacher continually challenges herself to make her practice educative rather than just entertaining. Similarly, as a visitor to the school I was struck by the enthusiasm for their work that characterised many of the teachers’ comments. The following selection indicates the range of experiences that teachers reported:

“Well, and this is what I say quite regularly, is the fact that you do get so many opportunities. If there’s anything that you want to do in the school, you only have to ask and you’re given the opportunity. It’s not one of those situations where someone’s been doing it for twenty years and they don’t want to give it up. There’s always an opportunity if you want to do something you can do it.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

“I love when you plan out. You’ve got where you’re going – my lecturer at uni had this thing: you go out and bury this treasure and then you bring the kids along and they discover it, this treasure. It’s nice when you’ve put this work in – how are we going to approach this and this concept and were going to come out from here and we’ve going to do that - and see a kid go ‘I get it now sir’. That light bulb moment. It gives you a kick. It’s great.” (First Year Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

“HSC marking certainly. I’ve been to geography days, HSC study days. There was another day – a quality teaching day. I’ve gone away for things like that. The school certainly tries to get any speakers that they think are worth getting into the school.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

From the opportunity for a younger teacher to take on a new topic or year level to gain experience, to the excitement and pleasure of shared planning that results in observable learning in the classroom, to the chance to move out of the school for external professional development activities that extend knowledge about subject content, curriculum and pedagogy, the school ensures that its teachers are engaged practitioners. These opportunities for individuals, each of which reflects the professionalism of the school staff as a community, are considered and discussed by Senior staff at their regular meetings, with regards to the needs of staff and the school. Those who are supported to go away for professional development are expected to bring back their learning, to share ideas and information with their colleagues as well as their students.

5.2.1.9 The school as community

The efforts of the school to provide regular news reports and public celebration of the achievements of students, as illustrated earlier, ensure continued community interest and support for the school. This highlights the general commitment to ‘kids’ that characterises the success of this school and means that the students are seen as a valuable and important part of the school and the community. There is a distinct sense in the interview transcripts that the school is proud of its students, that the students and their families are proud of their school, and that the teachers are valued members of the community of West Wyalong. The school regularly sends items about student success to the local paper for wider publication, as we have seen above, and it does this in all areas of student achievement. The goat stud, managed by the school and competing successfully at championship level with regard to breeding the livestock, involves students in all aspects of the work, from genetics, to diet, feeding and watering. The immediate relevance and practical application of such a curriculum is obvious.
A well-advertised feature of rural communities generally, is the personal relationships teachers develop with their students outside of school:

“I enjoy being able to have a relationship with the kids outside school as well. So you know, you’ll see them down the street and say 'hi' or you’ll see them at the supermarket and have a chat. I like being able to be a bit more involved in their lives outside of school as well as in school. It has its challenges too because when you’re outside of school you’re not a teacher necessarily — you’re always their teacher but it’s a different dynamic, but at the same time the kids — I think the fact that they’re used to that, seeing teachers outside and inside school — they get that when they’re at school, you’re sir. One of the kids is in the squash comp. At squash I’m ‘Davo’ but at school, I’m 'Mr Pseudonym'.” (First Year Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The benefits of closeness to the community were noted by one beginning teacher in relation to the ongoing work of classroom management in any teaching situation:

“And that helps seeing kids down the street as well. It can be difficult because you can’t get that space if you really want away from kids but it’s good being able to go down the street and know that maybe the kid that I roused on at school would be there at the checkout and I can say ‘hi’ to them and have a normal conversation and they can see that the reason you were angry at their behaviour, but them as a person. That’s helps a lot.” (First Year Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Similarly, with regard to teachers at different stages of professional experience, one parent noted the value of the repository of knowledge that staff in the school have built up over time about the community, and another spoke about the reputation the school has developed for care and concern for students. A third, a member of the P&C, noted the effects of this in her satisfaction with the school:

“I think that continuity of staff is a good thing especially in a high school. The staff does know the students well. They have a wonderful welfare policy. Experienced staff and staff

2 * Transcript altered to protect identity of this teacher.
that are willing to seek professional development and give the students every opportunity.”
(Parent, Site Visit Interview)

“As far as I know, they have a five or ten minute meeting every morning to talk about the welfare of the kids.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

“Just by the happiness of my children, the success of my children, listening to other parents. The school is very approachable. I think parents do and they are encouraged to get in touch with the executive if there is a problem or an issue. Once or twice if I’ve thought I’ve had a need in all those years, I’ve got in touch and it’s been resolved very quickly. Always, they’re happy to be informed. They’d rather know if there’s a little niggling issue with a child or with a subject or whatever it may be. I just always found them very approachable – Meetings usually only go for an hour, hour and a half, a little social cuppa afterwards. [Principal] gives his report, catches us up with everything that’s been happening.”
(Community Member, Site Visit Interview).

This strong relationship with the community is not achieved without considerable conscious and continuous effort on the part of the Principal and Executive. As the Principal noted:

“There are a lot of challenges, there’s a lot of work that goes into it. But there’s nothing that I would say that because we’re here it makes my life any more difficult than it would be if I was in a big centre. I think my challenge with the kids is what I want for them. One of the challenges that [Assistant Principal] and I constantly make is that our kids will not miss out.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

There is a strong emphasis on academic achievement within the school, and students are able to trace generations of family and community members through the school. However, as has been indicated above, there is an equal emphasis on developing, recognising and celebrating student achievement in a range of other aspects of school, social and community life that are important in constituting a rural social space as healthy and sustainable. It is this focus on ‘the kids’ that defines the success of the school as a place of learning and of teaching. The students here are
referred to as ours, as the responsibility of the school, and as people who matter to and for their teachers.

This is reflected in the number of comments from across the range of interviewees that refer to the fact that the students are both responsive and happy in the school setting, that there are few behaviour problems, and that there is respect for the school and teachers in the community itself.

“It’s just common sense isn’t it? Here is a school say in Sydney… you can have any number of restaurants, you can have art galleries and museums, you can have any number of churches and sports groups, whatever group you want to be in. But if your day every day is a crappy day at school because some bloody kid’s giving you a tough time, or a group of them, then you’re not going to survive there either.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

5.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

Our analysis of the information collected during the site visit strongly suggests that the leadership in this school has worked very hard over a considerable time to develop an ethos of care and a feeling of familial connectivity within and across the school and its community. Communication is a key factor in this achievement – with a consistent message of care for kids being sent from the school and received by community members. The town is proud of its high school. It has remained constantly innovative and open to new ideas in education. The values by which the school operates are worn on its sleeve (or in this case its website) – situated in pride of place on the school website and informing students, parents and the public that the School is committed to the 6 C's: Care, Co-operation, Courtesy, Common Sense, Commitment and Consideration.

There are other factors, too, and as one teacher noted:

“I think the number in our high school is wonderful. It’s not too small to restrict the curriculum diversity but it’s not too large that you don’t know most of the kids here and I think that 350-400 mark is a wonderful size for a school – and, I think as well, for young teachers. What has been offered to me whilst I’ve been here – OK I’ve been out for a long while now, but I say to the beginning teachers that arrived here, this is the best working environment for them to learn their trade.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The issue of student numbers and school size is important for most rural schools, as the effects of drought in recent decades have reduced the number of Australians living in rural areas, and the effects of population relocation have resulted in the reduction of curriculum offerings, and even school closures in some areas. As noted above, the affordances of its geographic location have enabled West Wyalong to remain healthy in both economic and social terms, so that this school has not decreased in size over recent years. However, again, there has been careful attention to developing foci around areas such as the Middle Years program, vocational education and agricultural/industrial programs in order to ensure student numbers remain strong – and thus enable good levels of staffing to be maintained. In addition, the leadership team ensures that the focus on the students is carried through at all levels of practice. As a community member explained:

“I love doing casual teaching there now. It’s probably my preferred casual work because they do look after you so well. You arrive, your days given to you, work’s handed to you. If the
teacher was away sick, the head teacher would organise it, so that shows the whole momentum of the school. Everyone works together and looks after casual staff, looks after children, looks after parents.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

This excerpt again highlights the fact that building a successful school community takes time and effort. This is the situation in the school now. It hasn’t always been like this, and the effects of change in the leadership of the school are marked. This same participant highlighted the fact that this is both unusual in her experience, and realised in the daily, lived experience of staff, students and community:

“I think there’s such a lovely atmosphere there. They don’t have any major behaviour issues, which is wonderful. Things are handled, they’ve sort of been able to put out the grass fires before there are any major dramas. They do seem to support each other. I mean I’ve been in the staff room – at some schools, where I’ve been, in the staff room you can feel hostility – I’ve never sensed that there. I mean they have little pockets of issues at times but I haven’t noticed it. As a casual teacher I’ve walked in and it’s a big open staff room. Some schools tend to departmentalize a bit more when they have their working department sections but they all meet together as a whole staff. I think that’s important too.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

In his reflection on the question of how the school has been able to attract and retain teachers over time in order to build a successful working and learning community, an experienced teacher explicitly noted the work of the Principal as an important factor in this regard:

“I think the town itself is a part of it, and I think the kids, and that’s an interesting one saying ‘the kids’ because the kids are because the teachers are – and it’s very hard to break the combination there. I think it’s just the atmosphere because of that ... as I said, we had problems here with principals, one was here who at half past three he was out the gate, on a Friday he was in his car and down the coast ... and the staff got so down because this was going to happen or that was going to happen and it never ever did ... and that doesn’t encourage them to stay.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

But teachers have stayed in West Wyalong – in sufficient numbers to have produced the successes reported on here, and many in spite of, rather than because of the particular rural social space that has been produced here. One experienced teacher noted that:

“I probably would prefer a regional area but it’s one of those situations you either have a bigger regional area or you have a good school. And the reason that I like staying here is for the actual school, so if I could put the school in a bigger place it would be good but then again it’s one of those things. You can’t have it all!” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

For other teachers, however, the quality of school life has not been enough to overcome other features of this social space that have proven problematic and unsustainable in their work or in their out-of-school lives. Thinking of those teachers over the years who have not stayed, the Principal was able to recount experiences where teachers had failed to ‘connect’ with the community or their colleagues, and where they had not wanted to work hard enough ‘for the kids’ to be welcomed and supported by their colleagues in return. As has been noted above, these people move on, and others take their place. The issue of teachers who find that the social space of this rural location does not afford them or their family sustenance outside of school though, is a concern raised by some participants. One Head Teacher lamented the fact that there is little racial difference among the staff, for instance, and that he believed students would benefit
greatly from a more culturally diverse staff. Similarly, one participant voiced concern that new appointments who arrive without family support may find out of school life less rewarding:

“It is an issue, though, if single people come here, that we are quite aware that they could be very lonely because where we have partners and all that sort of stuff there, when we are going home.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

5.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

“Places like West Wyalong, every time a new teacher comes into the town, every organisation in the town is interested in seeing if they can patch them in.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

“It’s a two-way thing and it will depend on the person themselves and their own personality as to whether they fit in. I mean, you can’t make a community accept somebody; that community has to get to know the person ….” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

These two excerpts characterise the range of views about community contribution to the attraction and retention of teachers in the town. Perhaps as a result of its cross-roads location that means its economy is partly reliant on travellers passing though, and its history as a staging post in the expansion of western NSW, West Wyalong has a reputation for friendliness and community spirit that the locals are proud of:

“I think West Wyalong is pretty accepting. It’s interesting, the Pace Farm set-up out here, when Frank Pace … he actually had a look at half a dozen places across NSW and I said to him one day, ‘Why did you finish up picking Wyalong?’ and he said, ‘We had lunch sitting down the street in a café’ and he said, ‘about 10 people said g’day or how’re going while we were sitting there having lunch at that’s why we set up here’. Simple as that…” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

Certainly the school leadership sees it as its role to alert the community to the presence of new teachers, and makes sure that the arrival of the new ‘crop’ each season is celebrated. From year to year teachers, of course, do leave the town, but rather than the staffing ‘churn’ (Roberts, 2005) that characterises many small rural communities, the turnover in West Wyalong appears to be smooth and managed well. In noting a comment from a participant, earlier, about the issue of single teachers who arrive in town alone, the photograph below indicates that the school and its leadership have learned from experience, and where possible attempts to employ single teachers in a group. The Assistant Principal noted the importance of support for new teachers within the school:

“I think the other challenge was that apart from our kids, is that we’re really aware that for all our staff, we’re really setting them up for their teaching career, and what they believe to be important from what they do here will very often carry them right through their career. So, to me, from our professional responsibility towards our teachers, it’s very much about setting them up so they become the teachers I’d like to see, if I had kids, my kids being taught by, and so there is that responsibility to these young staff about what they believe about teaching and what’s important about teaching … it is about what is the core of our core business ….” (Assistant Principal, Site Visit Interview)
As noted above, the school is quite aware that they could be very lonely because where we have partners and all that sort of stuff there, when we are going home. And this participant continued:

“The same can happen with people who come here whose partner is not necessarily in teaching. That’s also an issue that needs to be managed which has been the case for the mine, for the council and for us equally because it’s no good having that person come here and communicating and being a part of something and their partner is sitting at home. We talked about the maths teacher we had here whose wife was very unhappy, wouldn’t set foot out of the flat over there. He loved it here and I think it was a choice of well she was going to go without him or be tagged along.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

It was noticeable that experienced teachers who indicated they were planning to move on were moving for promotion or to be closer to family members:

“We’re a five-year incentive school, so some come here and hope to get back to the coast where their families come from, and others stay on … Generally when they get married and start to have kids, then they put their hands up and say we need to get back closer to our parents …” (Assistant Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Several of those who were planning to leave were also planning to replicate many of the practices operating at West Wyalong in their new appointments. Student teachers who complete practicum placements or internships in the school often seek appointment there, and the Principal’s length of tenure in the school means that relationships built up with staff in central staffing and District offices allow him to make requests to target particular new staff, and for this to sometimes be accommodated. As noted above, the Principal’s discretionary appointment of an Aboriginal Education Worker as he saw a potential need emerging in the student body as a result of community change, predicted and circumscribed both school and community concerns related to a new more transitory population relocating from the city for work or social security.

This is a white community: there is no river alongside which Wiradjuri people might have been tempted to make camp. For this reason there are few Aboriginal families in the town, few Aboriginal children in the school and there are similarly few racial tensions reported by participants in this study. Local Indigenous people believe that they are treated with respect. They have ‘earned it’, as a community member noted:
“We wouldn’t have half a dozen Aboriginal kids in the school I don’t think ... and I think they’re all working ... off the top of my head I can only think of the Pseudonym’s ... there’s probably another family, but the Pseudonym’s have always been part of the community. They work.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

This is a telling comment in that it implies the local Aboriginal families are different from those elsewhere, who presumably don’t ‘work’. Immigrant values of hard work and earned success characterise this community, and I have noted above the way that the school has responded quickly to evidence that some of the young Aboriginal boys were not working in class. However, the historic closeness of the community, which enables the school to notice when a child or a family is experiencing difficulties of any sort, is changing with the influx of people associated with the expansion of the mine:

“One of the main differences is that I used to be able to walk down the street and everyone knew me and I knew everyone, which is a good thing and sometimes not such a good thing, especially if you were in a hurry to get down the main street or get round the supermarket. It’s a nice thing, when you’re get the time, to have a chat, sometimes you just think it would be nice to be a little bit anonymous especially after a day at work and you meet half your class but that’s fine. Nowadays there’s lots of — I just smile and say hello even if I don’t know who they are but I hope in my retirement I’ll get to know some of the new faces.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

It is clear that the community is changing over time, as the demographic, environmental and economic dimensions of the social space that is produced there changes, although this study strongly suggests that under the current leadership, the school is well prepared to cope proactively with community change.

5.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

The approach to pre-service teacher education espoused by the Principal of the school indicates the benefits of longevity in the place, and a willingness to see the school’s role in pre-service teacher education as significant:

“We have a very good relationship with our partner universities. [They] ring up and say, “[Principal] I need to place ten maths persons and an English person” or what ever it may be. I have always been adamant that if they’re going to promote teaching as a career (and it is a wonderful, wonderful career as you know), then we can’t turn around and moan because there is a teacher shortage and so on. So I am very keen to have the teachers here and to help them out. Although I am not the one who has to do the minding, the system pretty much works…. But here it is a matter of saying we treat the prac teachers like we treat the kids. Essentially we have one shot at making these kids into the people we want them to be. It is very difficult to go back if you do get it wrong.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Although this comment of course does not recall a verbatim exchange with the University Professional Experience Office, it is significant that this school responds positively to fairly heavy demands from the local university – it makes places available to student teachers. Two other things are important in this excerpt though. First is that there is clear evidence here of a sense of partnership and professional responsibility on the part of the profession for the quality of the teachers who graduate from universities: “if they’re going to promote teaching as a career … then we can’t turn around and moan because there is a teacher shortage.” Second is the gravity with which the pre-service teacher’s experience in the school is viewed: “Essentially we have one shot at making these kids into the people we want them to be. It is very difficult to go back if you do get it wrong.”
I have spoken above about the decision by a Head Teacher to allocate a pre-service teacher to one of the younger teachers on her staff (Nerida), in order to extend that teacher’s range of professional experience, and enable her to develop her own sense of leadership and support for colleagues. The Head Teacher’s confidence in this teacher’s capacity to support a novice teacher was vindicated – as a leader she had taken a risk that paid off, and her reflection on the arrangement highlights the responsibility she felt for a successful initiation experience for the student teacher (p. 106). It is significant that Nerida also reflected positively on the experience, saying:

“I think [the student teacher] felt the benefit also, to have someone who did have strategies that worked. For me, I work more from learning strategies rather than the dominant behaviour management strategies and so I think she enjoyed that too because she was then getting good ideas and thought, ‘Yes, I could go and do this as well’. … It’s both – it’s knowing that, as a young female teacher, I’m not one of those people who can be continually cranky and I want to be in a classroom where I enjoy it as well, as much as the kids because it’s developing resources where everyone’s enjoying being there.” (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Her words here indicate that the experience her Head Teacher provided has enabled Nerida to reflect on her own teaching and approaches to classroom management and to communicate her understanding of the importance of healthy classroom relationships for student learning. While the student teacher, in this instance, was no longer at the school at the time of my site-visit, Nerida’s comments suggest that the experience she had at West Wyalong would have been of considerable benefit.

An experienced teacher, in discussing the issue of pre-service teachers having a ‘country prac’ noted that there are important affordances that the school provides for novice teachers. Her own pre-service experience had not fully prepared her for the realities of teaching in a rural school, and she considered that West Wyalong provides an ideal opportunity for gaining experiences that bring to life the ‘theory’ of campus courses on pedagogy, such as differentiation and the need to respond to individual differences.

“I think it is beneficial to come to a rural school to do a prac, because I just think the experience is so different. Because you can get classes that are multi-age, you can get that sort of thing. Because our electives in years 9 and 10, we have vertical integration and there are years 9 and 10 in the same class and that’s something that lots of people haven’t experienced, to come in and you’ve got a range in there … that was one of the things when I first came ‘I’ve never taught two year groups in the one classroom, how am I going to do that?’ It was foreign to me.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

From the point of view of teacher education, this sort of opportunity is highly desirable, so that pre-service teaches can study and come to understand the need for, and the type of, preparation and programming for teaching that is able to differentiate curriculum to account for student needs. Similarly, an experienced teacher in the school considered that there is need for all pre-service teachers to do school experience, either primary or secondary, in a rural location.

“I think it’s a very good idea. I’ve worked with Beyond the Line students and they really enjoy it and I think it was a bit of an eye opener. Some haven’t been west of the mountains and I think it is important. Some will fall in love (just on their prac), with country schools and it’s going to be harder and harder to staff with the proposed changes to staffing. I think they’ll be a little bit more wary where they do start their careers.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview).
As noted in the first section of this Case Study, there are considerable challenges with ensuring that pre-service teachers do have the experience of a rural practicum before they begin teaching. The Principal of this school commented on this, saying:

“I’d like to see some study done on that. Some years ago the Country Areas Program funded Charles Sturt, and it wasn’t a lot of money, I think it was about 6 or 8 thousand a year, to cover the travel and accommodation costs for prac in some of the western schools ... I think probably six students, and we did that for about three or four years, and whilst a lot of the feedback we got from the students was great, we didn’t see many of them end up in country schools, so I would be interested to see a wider thing done on that.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

This comment points to issues of centralised staffing, where people who are and have been prepared to teach in rural schools are often placed in metropolitan schools, while teachers from the city with no experience of small-school teaching or communities are similarly appointed regularly to rural schools. While this policy continues to counter and minimise the effect of the work of the school in pre-service teacher education, both the Principal and teachers commented on the value of city students having the opportunity to undertake a placement at the school before they are appointed:

“I think one of the things here is that we get city students out here teaching and I don’t think they have a clue what the bush is like, but they find that it’s not that damn bad after all. They need to know how rural communities function, and I think it’s important to understand the culture of rural communities; particularly places this size where everyone knows everyone and their business. I haven’t lived in a city, I’ve worked there for a while and you can live there and don’t even know your next-door neighbour. ... We haven’t got the cultural stuff, that’s probably one of the hard parts and when you look at the isolation. I remember when they extended the country areas programme and Wyalong actually came onto it because originally it was further out west and I thought Wyalong wasn’t isolated, but when I thought about it more, if you want to go to the theatre or that sort of thing, where do you go? It’s not here. I guess there are degrees of isolation.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

“Things like, too – I think that some teachers get a little bit of a surprise when they have to teach out of their own faculty area. Reality is, for a good number of them that will happen with bits and pieces. Things like they have to take a sport, learn a sport and learn how to do sport because big chances are you’re going to get it.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

With this sort of emphasis on the totality of the work of teaching, it was clear that the school takes the job of educating pre-service teachers very seriously. The importance of the opportunity that the ‘prac’ provides for novices to practise and develop the sorts of skills and attitudes necessary for teaching – and to demonstrate both capacity and awareness of the importance of the work of teaching is marked. As the Principal noted, for instance:

“The prevailing view of our prac teachers is that we have got to get it right. If they are not right they need to be told very quickly. I’m not a believer of ‘let’s drag people over the line because...’ but ‘if you’re not up to scratch then go and find another job’. But that is the same for you or me or anybody else. It is all too valuable to get wrong.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In response to our final question about the sorts of things that the school and community do, or would like to do, to make it attractive to student teachers, both school and community
participants noted the importance of connecting them as newcomers to town, with someone they can relate to in a social as well as professional sense. However, as the following comments illustrate, at the more transitory level of a short term practicum or internship, the school sees itself as taking the major responsibility for involving the pre-service teacher in out of school activities.

“Probably helping them network, maybe some more social functions. There’s a great sporting opportunity – if they’re ‘sporty’ they slot in very quickly. I think that’s a good way to meet people. Because I’m the next generation, I’m not really sure about the social life – there’s probably a bit with the pubs and clubs, if they’re that way inclined. I’m not really quite sure.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

“When they’re coming on their prac? Certainly informally we do, we don’t formally ... but we set Connie up with someone to stay with ... she stayed with Davo, and so she did some things with him and went to his church with him and that sort of thing. And I hooked her up with another young teacher and they went out to some gymkhana on the weekend, so things like that, so it’s all very informal.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

5.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

5.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

Having studied the school community of West Wyalong High School, I have attempted in this case study to highlight the vision and commitment of this school in placing student success at the centre of all considerations of community engagement, curriculum, pedagogy, staffing and staff development, along with the raft of successful strategies to achieve this vision. However, the indicators of success here appear to be contingent on factors that may be beyond the power of the school to sustain. It can be concluded that there are three potential areas of challenge that face the school: the challenge produced by charismatic leadership; the challenge of social change brought about by changes in the environmental and economic fabric of this particular rural community as social space; and the potential challenge of the reverse – of lack of change and complacency as a ‘good school’ in a ‘good community’ fails to contribute to its social space by addressing areas of diversity and difference.

It is clear that the biggest challenge facing the school in the short term is the potential retirement of the Principal. As one community member, an ex-pupil of the school who has gone on to be active in local government and state parent associations noted, only half joking:

“When he retires, I’m going to be like some of the teachers and I’m going to retire too!”

(Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

The personal charisma of individual leaders and staff members cannot be cloned. Long serving staff, who have been in the school under other principals are of an age to seriously consider retirement or relocation should a replacement principal fail to live up to their expectation, or to deliver the same social climate and forms of support that the incumbent has worked hard to produce in the school. This suggests that the pedagogical role of the leader in this as in other rural places is crucial. Certainly the school is producing leaders as younger Head Teachers leave for Assistant Principal positions, and younger teachers relocate to take up jobs as Heads of Department in other schools. The positive outcome of this is that many of these people choose to stay in the bush, and that there is, as noted above, an apparently smooth and regular through-

3 Transcript altered to protect identity of this teacher.
4 Transcript altered to protect identity of this teacher.
flow of new staff of varying levels and with varying experience, from first-year-out to experienced Head Teachers.

This is, of course, what keeps the leadership work of the Principal engaging and fulfilling – the staffing profile remains dynamic enough for constant vigilance and attention to the little things that matter in producing a successfully functioning school. The school as a whole, under the direction of the leadership team, must also work consistently to deal with the challenges that social, environmental and economic change inexorably bring to the community it serves. One experienced teacher noted that these changes are small overall:

“The mine hasn’t made a big difference to West Wyalong High School, there were 340 students when we came and now it’s 320 so it obviously hasn’t changed much over the years. But it’s changed the community. There was a time you walked down the main street, I knew every single person down that main street but now that’s changed. It’s a different community. There are people you just don’t know. That to me is the big change. There is an itinerant group of them who will come – we’ve had some lovely students haven’t we, Rob, who come – Lucy Macandrew⁵. What a delight she was, she was beautiful in graphic designs – Lucy comes up to me and says ‘I’m going sir, see you later. Going to Brisbane’. [After] only the year, three quarters of the year. So there’s a bit of that. That’s new for our school because we’re very used to a very stable environment. You’ll get the odd Sydney – whether they be Mount Druitt or whatever – they’ll come out here and try and live in one of our smaller communities for a little while because some one’s told them about the cheap lifestyle and all the rest of it and you get a few of those, they’ll come and go. Or the other itinerant change – children from marriage break up or something along those lines. They’ll come home to be with grandma. Otherwise they’re pretty much the same – at the moment, 98% of them will come through the primary system here. I’ve run them through little athletics, I’ve run them through the football club, I’ve run them through golf or whatever. Well before the middle school happened I was seeing a lot of these kids before they got here and so you know them, you know their families to a degree. But that’s changing.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This form of social change highlights another side to this comfortable state of teachers knowing their students, their backgrounds, and experiencing the comfort of teaching in a situation where the kids are ‘just great’, and there are few problems. As noted above, recent notions of situated leadership (Novak et al., 2009, p. 359) argue that “[r]ural communities often have higher expectations of school leaders than those of their urban counterparts”, particularly around ensuring that staff uphold and make explicit the values of the community itself. As they go on to say, “The ability of the school leader to read place and situate their leadership or themselves in that place, put student outcomes first, and to link with the community is arguably ideal”, yet it appears to be realised to a considerable extent in the practices observed at West Wyalong. This is the issue that troubles some of the staff in relation to whether this pleasant state, where people are very much the same, and share similar values and lifestyles would actually be what they want for their school and their students, and what their community needs.

They feel that there are benefits in the regular turn-over of teachers in the town, and they feel there is potential danger in this area if a new Principal were to be influenced by some of the cultural norms that have characterised many of the dominant constructs in rural social space related to gender, race, forms of work, and the post colonial experience. As one Head Teacher said, reflecting on the challenges and risks that potentially face the school:

⁵ Transcript altered to protect identity of this teacher and student.
“I think the biggest threat to the success of West Wyalong school is almost political. I think that any system that doesn’t allow for diversity, in terms of the staff, in any school or any community is dangerous. If we were to have a situation where you have a principal who is prepared to exercise what I understand to be their right to be able to basically say ‘I’ll pick every person who comes into my school and have control’, even to the point of picking who’s president of the P & C – if there was a control situation like that I would see that as being a disaster. That’s not West Wyalong High School. That’s nowhere near West Wyalong High School but I think that’s a threat.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This points clearly to the recognition of the complex and darker sides of charismatic power and leadership: first that it may not always be used for the good of the whole community, and second that where it is, it may always be replaced by purely positional authority. The threat suggested here is the threat of a leader being appointed who does not possess the passion and vision that might produce West Wyalong High School as constantly evolving, responsive and open to change. When communities (and employers) choose potential leaders who practice orthodox ways of educating and leadership, or mimicry of practices that have worked in the past but are not responsive to the present, there is a potential for conformity and discrimination against difference that does not shape a future rural citizenry in the most democratic ways.

“[It’s a problem] where you’ve got no guy walking into the town like Pseudonym who was principal of Rural Town Secondary School who walked into this town in a kaftan and people saw a man in a dress - this is going back 30 years. They see the diversity [in the new teachers] like guys who were all surfies – a couple of guys who would rather be surfing – who have that different cultural thing to share with the kids at West Wyalong High School. One thing we don’t get, we don’t have very many people from Central Asian backgrounds come into the school. I’d like to see that, for our kids to have that exposure. It’s just the knowledge they bring from a different situation, so if I say my little bit of knowledge and someone else brings their little bit of knowledge into the class, they get exposed to so much more. And the way in which they teach and the way in which they deliver - that is different. If someone gets in the position and wears the same clothes, one after another – for me, that would spell disaster, and it would become a very dull place.” (Head Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This sort of challenge and articulation of risk may be more keenly felt by teachers who, like this very experienced Head Teacher, have lived and worked in this community for decades, who have raised families in the town and therefore mixed with the locals as well as with the more mobile communities of doctors, bank manager, mine engineers and teachers. These, while perhaps locally born, have entered or returned to the town after experiencing the cultural, philosophical and political differences that travel, city life and culture have provided and see the capacity to interrelate and communicate across difference as a life skill they want for their children.

Certainly this community wants to remain free of social tensions as changes in the social space that its members experience with the shifts in demographic and economic factors that are impacting most rural places in the aftermath of drought and climate changes. These shifts bring about related changes in industry, work and social patterns, the school will need to remain at its heart, and working as hard as it does in the time of this study, to produce well educated, happy, socially aware and competent students.
6 YASS HIGH SCHOOL

Yass High School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

6.1 YASS: THE COMMUNITY

6.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Yass

The town of Yass is located just off the Hume Highway in the Yass River Valley, about 60 km north-west of Canberra, 280 km south-west of Sydney, 220 km south-west of Wollongong and 180 km east of Wagga Wagga.

The Yass River which flows through the town is an upper tributary of the Murrumbidgee and the area consists of fertile, undulating country. As the Yass and District Historical Society notes:

Since the late 1830s the main route from Sydney south to Melbourne passed through the town ensuring its importance as a place of commerce and as the centre of the extensive Catholic and Anglican parishes. […] Passing travelers
and overlanders stopped seeking food, shelter and water before continuing their journeys … Settlers […] came to Yass once or twice a year for their supplies [and] added to the coffers of the makeshift stores and the inns, whose owners in time prospered and built permanent premises - some of these are still part of the Yass streetscape. For many years the economic wellbeing of the district rested squarely on the back of the fine wool industry but in recent years diverse agricultural and farming endeavours as well as light industries have gained in importance. Its proximity to Canberra has contributed to the expansion of the town and the villages as commuters seek an alternative lifestyle. Yass, once heavily promoted as the most desirable site for the national capital, can be said to have the best of both worlds - a rural town with all the benefits of the National Capital! (http://www.yasshistory.org.au/history.htm)

From the highway you cannot see the town at all, it is marked only by a sequence of exit signs and the large highway fast food roadhouse and travel stop, out of town, on one of the hills above the valley. Most travellers now pass by this small town with a population of just over 5 000. The Yass Valley Local Government Area (LGA) is home to over 13 000, and with the amenities of Canberra so close to hand, the towns in the Yass Valley have become attractive as lifestyle choices for many who work in Canberra but who do not want to live in the city itself.

It has been noted as a good place to live since very early in colonial times. Prior to European settlement, when Hamilton Hume, George Barber and William Broughton ‘discovered’ the area, the Yass district was Ngunnawal Territory and the relationship between the local Indigenous people and the town’s development is reflected in its name: Yass is believed to be derived from an Aboriginal word ‘Yhar’ meaning the running water of the river crossed at this spot by the road between Sydney and Melbourne (http://www.yass.nsw.gov.au/about/1573/1582.html) when it was settled in 1837.
The Yass River is an upper tributary of the Murrumbidgee and features fertile, undulating country [http://www.argylecounty.com.au/towns/yass.html]. Although Yass lies on the border of the country occupied by the Wiradjuri and Ngunawal people, there is little evidence of even semi-permanent settlement by them in the area. However, Hume encouraged them to camp by the river running through the property he bought at Yass, but the main Wiradjuri camping grounds remained south on the Murrumbidgee and north on the Lachlan and Boorowa Rivers [http://www.argylecounty.com.au/towns/yass.html]. The last of the Lachlan people were rounded up and herded on to a government reservation near Yass in the late 19th century and just 117 were living there in the 1930s. A Catholic Mission worked on the site, known as ‘Hollywood’ from the 1930s to the 1950s, and those people, still there in the 1950s, were removed to Brungle.

6.1.2 Economy: production, work and industry in Yass

The Yass Shire Council also services the surrounding communities of Binalong, Murrumbateman, Bowning, Wee Jasper, Bookham, Sutton, Gundaroo and Wallaroo, serving as the administrative and educational centre for these townships. The Council has as its Vision Statement: “A diverse rural region that provides lifestyle, business and recreation choices, while sustaining our environment, history and community” [www.yass.nsw.gov.au/council.html].

One of the most prominent industries in Yass is sheep farming, and due to the excellent soil and climatic conditions of the area, Yass is renowned for its very fine merino wool. In addition to wool, beef farming and cereal crops are also significant industries of the area.
According to 2006 statistics from the ABS, the workforce in Yass is divided thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians and Trade Workers</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Personal Services Workers</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and Administrative Workers</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Workers</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery Operators and Drivers</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With just over half of the working population of the Valley classified as working in managerial, professional and technical and trade occupations, a large proportion of Yass residents do not have an educational qualification past high school level. Unemployment is fairly low, and as the Principal noted:

“Often the school certificate from here is the highest qualification in the family. So there is some value for education, there is some respect for education, there is employment after education, so kids can go from school to work. It’s a package that hasn’t evolved a lot, but wasn’t broken in the first place, so it’s a strange culture.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

One teacher noted:

“Yes. It’s nice. I mean I’ve been to a lot of schools around, and here’s just a nice, you know, cause you think it’s not too isolated here, but our clientele is actually from pretty rural isolated areas, and... And Yass is just here, but the motorway’s there. And you go north on the motorway to Settler, to Littleton and these are little outlying villages that are out there on dirt roads. Longview is 50 kilometres away, in the mountains, and we get a lot from there. So all the students come from little sort of rural communities, which are, I just like dealing with that type of person.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As the small rural communities of the Yass Valley increase in attractiveness to ‘tree-change’ members of the Canberra and Sydney metropolitan areas, there is significant growth projected for the area into the future, and in many ways, because of its location, the community has managed to survive and prosper through the long-term drought of recent years. The Principal compared the situation in Yass with that in other towns much further west, where the economic downturn has had disastrous effects:

“So, it’s a bush town in line with what would be probably Darlot 1978 when I was there. But Darlot now is barred up, it’s become another Bourke or Bree... that doesn’t exist anymore. Whereas Yass does, Yass is still [functional] and working.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

As the Yass Valley Council 2006-2007 Supplementary State of the Environment Report notes, this means that there is continuing and projected further work in the construction industry available in the area:

The demand for additional housing has placed significant development pressure on agricultural lands and new lots created in rural lands do not
necessarily continue to undertake agricultural production. This trend is expected to continue as people are attracted to LGA for rural living opportunities. Furthermore, there is significant development pressure for residential development in the area between Yass and Canberra (Yass Valley Council, 2007, p.2).


As another teacher commented, too:

“Yass’s going through a small – or fairly large – demographic change I think. A lot of young families are moving here ‘cause it’s cheaper to live here and then commuting to Canberra and/or they’re setting up their own businesses here in Yass and working with customers from Canberra. So having that big population base next door to a little place like this, I think that’s the saving grace of Yass. And you’re getting ‘changers’ from Sydney move here because it’s a very nice place, it’s close to Canberra, it’s on the Hume Highway, it’s reasonably close to the coast, it’s got hospitals, shops support from Canberra.” (New Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

6.1.3 Demography: the people and community of Yass

As noted above in relation to the economic context, the Yass area, unlike many small rural communities at the present time, appears to be growing in population. The ABS population figures over the past ten years indicate an overall increase, of 15.7%, with increasing numbers in each age group, although the largest proportional increase is in older residents, 65 years and over.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male   Female   Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2401   2508   70    75</td>
<td>1110   2986   699</td>
<td>104   515   364</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 5331</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 162</th>
<th>Under 15: 1162</th>
<th>15 Years and Over 3248</th>
<th>65 Years and Over 921</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool 130</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School 503</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School 372</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male   Female   Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
<td>Male   Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2544   2787   88    74</td>
<td>1162   3248   921</td>
<td>130   503   372</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

According to the Yass Valley Council website, the area is described as: “A diverse rural region that provides lifestyle, business and recreation choices, while sustaining our environment, history and community”. Additionally, the Council has listed the economic and community development of the town, the protection and enhancement of local environmental systems, and the provision of convenient and equitable access to services, facilities and places among its Community Strategic Goals (http://www.yass.nsw.gov.au/council.html). There is an active Indigenous network in the larger Canberra region keen to reclaim the heritage of the local people, dislocated after the closing of the Yass Catholic mission in the 1950s, and though there is only 5% of the High School population identifying as Aboriginal, there are even fewer children in the school...
whose home language is not English (3%). There seems to be little racial or cultural disharmony in the town from the point of view of the School:

“I mean the school's accommodating. The community's not divided, no. In my experience here it's a very harmonious environment. 'Cause they've got along together, they know each other from before pre-school, so it's not if you're black or white that's the problem, it's if you're a good person or not a good person.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Students come from the two primary schools in town, Berinda and Yass Public, with students also bussing in from Bowning, Gunning, Dalton, Ryan Park, and Wee Jasper.

The Australian Government’s Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) places the school below the national average (MySchool, 2010):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of students</th>
<th>Bottom quarter</th>
<th>Middle Quarters</th>
<th>Top quarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School distribution</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian distribution</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the staff I spoke with referred to the fact that the students they teach here in Yass are nice people, and that the community, while not conventionally ‘wealthy’ has considerable wealth of feeling and a sense of community strength, so that many of the stereotypes of disadvantage are not played out in this community.

“You saw the sort of kids out there; you don’t see kids like those around too often. The only kid outside the Deputy’s office is probably the only troublemaker and even they’re as nice as can be. They’re not your urban psychopathic terrorist, no. So the families are pretty well together, even single families cope pretty well, the parents’ probably highest qualification would be a school certificate. Often the school certificate from here is the highest qualification in the family. So there is some value for education, there is some respect for education, there is employment after education, so kids can go from school to work.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

When asked whether the geography of Yass, with its closeness to Canberra works as a benefit or a detriment to keeping students in the school, the Principal reiterated his view that Yass has retained the ‘country town’ mentality that sees locals wishing to stay here for everything they can, including their education. One of the teachers commented on this as a reason why she had decided to stay in Yass, and indeed had convinced family members to move here too:

“Yes, I [live here] now. I’ve moved here. And in fact my mother has just moved out here as well, so for the same reasons, sense of community. It’s not that, you know, you know what everybody’s doing or what’s going on in anybody’s life, but there’s a sense of moral responsibility. And it’s the same with our kids in the playgrounds. There are students who, in all schools I believe, I believe kids are good. Kids are good kids. Sometimes they just forget to show it, that’s all it is. Or they don’t realise how to do it. So, but yeah, there seems to be a, is it an innocence? No it’s not innocence, but it’s, they genuinely want to help I think, and that’s what this community is.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

But Yass itself is also a centre for the even smaller towns and villages around. Both the Principal and a community member noted that the history of the town is played out in its social structures today. The staff member noted that the school:
“Yeah. It’s nice. I mean I’ve been to a lot of schools around, and here’s just a nice, you know, cause you think it’s not too isolated here, but our clientele is actually from pretty rural isolated areas, and… And Yass is just here, but the motorway’s there. And you go north on the motorway to Settler, to Littleton and these are little outlying villages that are out there on dirt roads. Longview is 50 kilometres away, in the mountains, and we get a lot from there. So all the students come from little sort of rural communities, which are, I just like dealing with that type of person.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The community member noted that there are strong social divisions within the town:

“Here it’s a very established community, they have very established family ties. The farming community is quite different from the Exemplar community, it’s much more structured in terms of social structures. Very. The landed gentry still exists in some areas, they don’t particularly associate that much with newer farming people. Particularly if they’re only on small holdings. A quite close community. But it also depends on if you have children and then you get into those circles of sport and all that sort of stuff. Or whether you have, you marry into one of the farming families, then you’ve got those ties as well. And you know, lots of those sorts of things.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

Taking a similar thread, the Principal noted that this history means that some local families seek their education elsewhere, outside of the public system, which tends to serve the working classes of the town.

“Well if you’re looking at bush schools, and we’re a rural school, so what we have I suppose in Yass in some ways of values and attitudes and a culture that’s around 1965. It’s a very conservative town, and it’s the old fashioned values, it’s not a well-educated town, it’s a working class town, it has strong middle class with a lot of money at the top which is probably funnelled to boarding schools in Sydney or to private schools in Canberra. So we become the working class school and we are. We’ve had good people who have gone through. Oh yeah. The students are not disadvantaged coming to this school. But we don’t know what students we don’t get because they go to Canberra and that’ll be more and more so.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Again, the location of Yass makes it possible for local families to bypass the local schools. At the same time, though, it means that not all teachers have chosen to live in the town. Among the staff who live in Canberra and commuted to Yass each day is the Principal himself, who has done this for nearly seven years, and continually notices the differences between the metropolis and the township:

“Well I travel it every day and it’s about 50ks and I reckon, it’s probably an exaggeration, but it’s about 50 years as well. So you can have, yeah it is, it’s a bizarre, I don’t understand it, but we have a sophisticated international city 53km away and we’re a country town. But we have the services, the medical services, public service, employment, big employment in Canberra which keeps this town prosperous.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In terms of the model of rural social space, then, it seems that there is a predominance of geographical assets that have served, over time, to construct Yass as a continuously successful community. Once a contender during the discussions about the location of the national capital because of its location, losing that honour has in fact benefited the community considerably as Canberra has subsequently grown and become more urbanised. The closeness of cultural, medical services and higher education amenities less than an hour away by road is a clear asset
YASS HIGH SCHOOL

for the attraction and retention of teachers, although as I go on to demonstrate, the social space that has developed in this small town community also has a great deal to do with the retention of teachers at Yass High School.

6.2 THE SCHOOL

Yass High School was established in 1958 and currently provides secondary education from Years 7 to 12 for over 450 students who live in the town, its surrounding farming areas and small communities.

The villages of Binalong, Bowning, Gundaroo, Sutton and Wee Jasper have their own Primary Schools, although rural students have the option of travelling in to Yass by bus for both Primary and High School. The long driveway into the school grounds sees a large number of buses, large and small, which deposit students each morning, and pick them up again each afternoon.

The High School provides a full curriculum, and with its own farm, addresses the concerns of its location by including the study of agriculture for interested students. The farm is located on the river flats at the bottom of the hill on which the school stands, looking over the town.
There is a successful Special Education class that is included in all school activities, and a very successful music program with a performing School Band that has achieved considerable success in the local area and beyond. Two thirds of the students leaving Year 12 in 2010 left with VET certificates as part of their HSC study, and over a quarter of the students had undertaken approved part-time apprenticeship training while still at school.

The entry to the school is imposing - producing a representation of public education that highlights the traditions and values of education and a rounded curriculum. A young boy waiting with his mother with me in the foyer on his first day at his new school is awed, looking carefully at the trophies, the display and explicit valuing of the school uniform, academic and sporting success. “Lucky I’ve got the right shorts,” he tells his mother, who nods, as they sit quiet and respectfully in the wooden waiting chairs.

The achievements of students are celebrated in extensive honour boards and photographic plaques that decorate the front office and the official corridor spaces of the school. It is noticeable that photographs of many former students adorn these spaces – modelling academic, career, sporting and public success in a way that advocates for the benefits of education, and helping to produce an immediate atmosphere of respect and aspiration.
The best and brightest of the Yass community are honoured here, and as new generations of students enter the High School, they are immediately aware that there is a tradition of achievement and success that they are entering.

Another marked aspect of the emphasis on tradition within the school is the collection of historical staff photographs that line the main corridor leading to the Administrative offices from the school area. On both sides of this long corridor are mounted large colour photographs of the teaching staff of the school over two decades. A considerable number of current teachers smile down on passing students from younger and much younger faces, making connections with students and their families over time.

As one of the newer teachers to the school said, this does have an impact on the students:

“If you, even if you have a look at down the corridor here, there’s a list of the teacher photo for every year for the last like 20/30 years, things like that make a difference. And they see 15 years ago, they’ll see still six/seven teachers, even more that are still here, and they’re always looking at it. “Oh there’s Miss Ekks look, you know, this is 20 years ago and that’s what she looked like and she’s still here” you know. So there’s overall there’s lots of little things that just keep it a community based school and most of them are happy to be here. You know, when it comes to towards the end of term, a lot of the time, I mean we, it does go down but you’ll still get them coming because it’s more enjoyable to be here than being bored at home.” (New Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As well as this historical display, establishing the school as a place with clear traditions and culture, attention is given to recording topical news and successes of the students on a large
notice board and also on a rolling videoscreen in the front foyer. The notice board records the 21st anniversary of the school farm, for instance, along with mementoes of significant events such as the annual school musical, attendance at an Indigenous educational event, and the ongoing successes of the school band and its award-winning Breakfast Club.

As the Principal noted:

“The band program here in 1997 won a Director General’s Achievement Award. Two days ago (2009) I found out that we've just been given another Director General's Achievement Award. Which is terrific and that's for the Breakfast Program. That's a program established by [Teacher] which has grown like topsy over the past five years, supported by Red Cross and the local community. To an extent we run it three times a week, we serve more meals than we have children. It's a breakfast stop. It's terrific. And it's supported by the community through fund raising. We can have a walk-a-thon here and we're 400 and say 450 kids and in an afternoon raise $6,000.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In a different way from the Yass High School Band, which highlights the value that attendance at the High School can add to students' cultural experience and expertise, the Yass High School Breakfast Club is emblematic of the relationship between the community and the school in this place. In response to my inquiry about what made the teacher who had begun the program think about the need for it, she responded with a story that stands out as an indication of how good teachers in schools can really make a difference. As she explained:

“I think [the need is there] in a lot of communities, Yass isn't necessarily different in terms of logistics or need, but we've got this sense of, I don't know. There's this unbelievable sense of community, of belonging here, and people will say once they get here they don't leave. The reason why we started? Well, breakfast clubs aren't new. They've been around for a while now. But I did become, back in 2004, involved with the welfare committee here at the school,
and it came to my attention that there were some students who were in difficult circumstances, for lots of different reasons. So we started with a couple of kids, inviting a couple of kids just to have a nice quiet breakfast once a week with me, just as a calming point before starting school. [There were] different circumstances for each of them. And it was ‘invitation only.’ But from there we learnt that, it [shouldn’t be] invitation only, but we thought how do we get this started? So we invited other students…. and from there I quickly learnt that that attaches a stigma to these students as being needy and that became the first failure.

It didn’t stop the breakfast club, but I realised that I needed to remove that. So in time, we opened, thinking that it would, you know, calm down to a majority, you know, to a solid group of 20 or 30 kids. We opened it up to the entire school, you know, with our foam cups and our paper plates, thinking that, no it’s just an influx, it’ll calm down. We now serve 150 students three mornings a week.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The initiative is described in the 2010 Annual School Report – seven years on from this start, it has grown far beyond its modest beginnings to play a central role in the extra-curricular life of the school – supplementing academic and cultural opportunities such as provided by the School Band with opportunities for community service and life skills.

Breakfast Club

The inclusiveness which the Breakfast Club promotes stretches far beyond the 160 students it welcomes each morning. It is a place for all students to visit.... it’s not just for breakfast.

- Our Club is somewhere to sit, somewhere to meet friends, a place to talk and socialize, a place to meet new friends, somewhere warm on chilly mornings, a place where people always care, somewhere to enjoy after a long bus trip, and of course a place where everyone is welcome to enjoy a small breakfast and grab some healthy snacks for the day.

- Our Club is almost solely student operated, from the preparation to the serving, from the cleaning to the washing up. It has truly become part of the infrastructure of Yass High School and displays the unique spirit of our students and their willingness to help each other.

- The involvement of the whole school community is the real success of the Breakfast Club. Incorporating a skills for living program, success for boys program and a student volunteer program; the Breakfast Club supports a transition program visiting local Public Schools; it encourages partnerships in the broader community through sponsorship; it gives ownership to each and every school community member by participation in the Brekky Club Walkathon.

- Through the Breakfast Club, students have had the opportunity to become involved in State and National initiatives such as the Young Peoples Reference Group and the National Cyber Bullying Forum. In addition we have had one student recognized as Youth Volunteer of the Year.

- The initiative and innovation that this particular Breakfast Club displays has been recognized previously at State level through the awards of ‘most innovative program’, ‘valuable regional/rural program’, and further contributed to this school receiving the Energy Australia Youth Challenge Shield.

- It really is a program which is not about ‘need’, but rather all about ‘support’. Our amazing groups of volunteers continue to re-invent themselves, dedicating an enormous amount of energy to ensuring Our Club continues to be a positive environment for all (Yass High School Annual School Report 2010). http://www.yassh.schools.nsw.edu.au/sites/swsRepo/8334/asset/2011/4/19eb9ebe2cda264e012f281159384fcc.pdf

One part of the reason the Breakfast Club has been so successful is the commitment of staff, particularly its originator, to the program. In this instance, commitment to this initiative is also commitment to the school and to the community, and this has been sustained over a considerable period of time now. Importantly for our analysis, it recognises the exigencies of the rural social space that produces life in Yass:
“Yeah. And it’s for lots of different reasons. We’re a rural community and we need to realise that some of our kids, even though as the crow flies it’s only a 15 minute or 20 minute journey to school, but when they’ve got to catch a bus that zig-zags all over the place, sometimes in the middle of winter when you’re leaving home at 7:30 in the morning and spending an hour on a bus that’s not heated, a hot chocolate when you get to school goes a long way. It doesn’t mean that the child is needy or that they come from a needy home, but it’s about looking at the welfare of our kids from all angles and saying let’s provide a really safe happy community. And research tells us, as we’re told on the TV every night, with the Weetbix ads.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another aspect of the success of the project has been the way that the community, both informally and through formal community service organisations, has worked with the school to provide support. The costs of supplying hundreds of breakfasts each week are considerable:

“Yes. Because of our huge influx of kids, quickly it was like, well, wait a minute we can’t cover these costs. [We were covering it out of school budget before] - a little bit out of welfare and a little bit, well initially a little bit out of my pocket, a little bit out of welfare pocket. It was, yeah, it was, you know, we were pasting it together. Then, when we realised how big it was, or I realised how big it was, I then had to go, hey I need help! And Red Cross were the first people because they do have a breakfast club program, but it predominantly runs in primary schools in identified areas. It’s called the Good Start Breakfast Club program and it’s run by Red Cross in partnership with Sanitarium.

So through Red Cross they were able to, firstly we needed people to be here to help. To get it going. Adults. So the local Red Cross ladies were fantastic, and dedicated time to come in, and they were able to donate small fundraising, you know, amounts, and the little bit of cereal and things like that. So that was number one. Then number two, Yass Soldiers Club, being New South Wales Clubs, or Clubs New South Wales, they have what’s called the Community Development Support Expenditure. All clubs in New South Wales are then by law, I’m not too sure the exact amount but I think it’s around 10% of their profits have to be put back into the local community. …

So it comes out of their pokies. So I made an application to Yass Soldiers Club, they kindly supplied us with enough money to be able to afford crockery, cutlery, you know, all of those kind of little ongoing things so we didn’t, you know – thinking about the environment [if we had to use] paper plates and foam cups, it wasn’t great. So that was there, and then slowly, Dairy Farmers, because we go through 40 litres of milk, so it was …

So luckily, again, being in a small community you’re able to approach the person there and, you know, the person who is directly involved. First it was this, and then it was the baker, he was able to give bread at a reduced price, but now one of the local general stores in partnership with the actual bread distributor, not the company, but the actual person who delivers the bread and has got that franchise, they now donate the bread.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
As a newcomer to the community at the time, this teacher found the close connections between the school and the people of Yass an asset in bringing her idea to fruition. As she said:

“You can just ask anybody. Yes. That’s what it came down to. It came down, you know, you just have to, the Red Cross were a really powerful force. Those local ladies. Because they were able to put me in the right direction. And even the Red Cross, the organisation, the regional office for this area for Red Cross is down in Albury, and they were able to say “Hey listen, have you tried this, have you tried that, have you tried this?” and then kids, uncles or aunts or cousins, were all “I work for”, and so it became a real, it was social networking with the students here at the school. That it really pushed it along.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Over the years most teachers have been involved “in one way or another”, but staff and students also participate in a Walkathon each year. In the year of my site visit, the Walkathon had actually not been held “because we raised enough money last year to keep us going for two years, which is unheard of in a small school” (Experienced Teacher, Site Interview). It is the students who actually walk to raise the money, as their contribution to the idea of the Breakfast Club:

“The kids do that. But teachers get together, they go out, they monitor the track, they watch the kids, they help with the sponsorship, they encourage the kids to go out and get sponsorship. The kids go and get the sponsorship. The parents support them. And then you’ve got community businesses supplying prizes.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Their contribution to the reality of the Breakfast Club is much more sustained than an annual fundraising event. Students who live in the township of Yass arrive at school early, set up and serve the breakfast each day, and all Year groups are involved over the week. The 2009 Annual School Report noted that student involvement has been inclusive, with students in the Support Class also contributing to the initiative:
Support Class

The Support class has been involved in a range of new initiatives in 2009. The class now completes the Breakfast Club washing up program, within the Support Class, thanks to the purchase of a new dishwasher by the Yass Soldiers Club. This enables all students to help support the school’s Breakfast Club program and to gain valuable in school work experience. (Yass High School Annual School Report, 2009, p.6.)

This Breakfast Club – something of which I was unaware of when I entered the school as a research site – is a striking illustration of the way that the community of Yass supports this school, and the way that the school in turn supports the common good of the community. There is something unusual, ‘old fashioned’, in the way the school explicitly values its traditions and its commitment to more than just the academic education of the young people of the community, and this is seen as valuable by staff as well as by the community itself. One experienced teacher remarked on this as feature of why he has chosen to remain at the school for a significant period of time:

“...And all of my teaching career has been served in country schools: Moree, Moruya, Yass High School. The main difference is, we really like the town. I really like the school. This is just a typical country school, good old-fashioned country school. The students are, and parents are typical country people and it is something that is almost unique in my experience. So it’s a school that the staff, work at to try and keep a good school.” (Executive Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

6.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

6.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

There seems to be little difficulty in staffing this school. Several teachers with whom I spoke indicated that they had stayed in Yass because of its location.

“...And so you know, why people have stayed here? I think closeness to Canberra, the fact that their children can go to uni and it’s close, it doesn’t matter. The fact that they can go to doctors, hospitals, dentists, all in Canberra. They can go out to dinner or a restaurant, theatre, it’s not too far from Sydney, three hours to Sydney. They can go to the snow or the coast.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

An experienced teacher who had grown up within the region said that this has influenced his decision to apply for Yass:

“Mine’s a reasonably easy story and I can tell you exactly why I’ve landed here. It’s because I grew up in Settler. And Settler’s a small town, 45 kilometres away, population 2,000/3,000. I did my schooling [there and] I ended up getting into uni, and I wanted to definitely get away from Settler for a period of time. So I ended up just studying at Sydney Uni. [...] But I was definitely wanting to stay in the area, within an hour or two drive of my parents basically. And here, [it was] purely the location. Cause Wagga’s a fair way, and Albury and Sydney, they’re a fair way, but here, Canberra, I’m right in the middle of Canberra and Mum and Dad. And I’m on the motorway to get to Sydney quicker. So to

6 Pseudonyms have been used for the names of all small towns in the NSW Case Studies.
me, it was an ideal location. […] We bought a house here now, yeah, so we’re staying in Yass.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal noted that within the school, there is little expressly done to introduce and settle people into the community.

“There is an induction process, which is more a familiarisation process. Is there a formal program? No. We’re working on one now, but no there’s not. When I arrived here it was dealt with traditionally by the Deputy Principal who’d been here for 15 years and that’s what he did. So he had his unique idiosyncratic process and that’s what I inherited. [The last person who left the school here] was the School Counsellor, retired last year or the year before, who’d been here forever. Another retirement last year [was a] medical retirement. So they’re clearly not moving on. No it doesn’t happen.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal discussed the fact that he did have quite significant staffing problems when he arrived in the town, and that there had been “probably 20% new ones when I think of it” over the past seven years and that these had mainly stayed on. In this discussion he raised the matter that these issues had arisen because some people may have stayed in the town ‘too long’, which he believed had a detrimental effect on the school as a whole.

“[When I arrived] I believe there were a lot of personal issues. Part of the problem was people had been here too long, people had been protected in many ways, change had been avoided, responsibility had been avoided and people’s personal lives became complicated as well. There was some health issues, mental health issues, relationship issues and they’d become dysfunctional, the school. And they were very dysfunctional for the school.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

A key issue for the maintenance of healthy staff relationships and high quality teaching in small communities was that people can sometimes become ‘too’ close – overly familiar, emotionally entangled, prejudicial and set into particular styles of teaching and forms of relation that are not conducive to professional renewal, collegiality and growth – which require constant leavening of settled practices with new and innovative ideas.

One of the teachers, when asked how he ensures his own professional development as a teacher, having made a decision to stay put in the comfortable location of Yass, noted that he has made use of Departmental resources and opportunities to learn by distance education to keep up to date in his disciplinary knowledge as he seeks to gain more experience and responsibility for teaching in higher year levels.

“We’ve got the, inter, the connected classroom stuff now. So, like I did an extension one course, by just sitting up there, in the afternoon, and just logged on with a few other schools to do some. Me and Debbie did it - the other, one of the other maths teachers. So that facility is there. I mean, okay, it comes down to ambition and what you judge your ambition is. I personally, because I was overseas, and I was quite nomadic, I never really had, I had a gap of you know, six/seven years of not really being a full time teacher. [There was] no sort of real accountability for anything, so I had a big gap in the middle, and when I got here, most of my high level maths I’d forgotten, cause I hadn’t done it for ten, well, that was four years ago, so yeah, nine/ten years. So since being here, and I was speaking to [Head Teacher], you know, I’ve just bad year ten and a few junior classes. Now this next year will be my third time through a two-unit class, and then I’ll be looking for extension one class and an extension two class. So for me personally, it’s to do the higher-level maths over a couple of years.” (Mid-Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
These opportunities are available widely within the Department, but the strategic planning to prepare for future career opportunities that will enable him to be competitive for promotion within the school as older and senior teachers move toward retirement does indicate a strong motivation to stay in the community. Another teacher attempted to articulate just what it is that has led to the ability of this school to retain its teachers. In a discussion about how rural schools are often seen as ‘easier’ and more attractive to work in than urban schools, he highlighted the problem with this sort of generalisation across the diversity that is covered by the ‘rural’ descriptor:

“But it’s not always the case because I’ve been to rural schools that are really tough still. There are still some local that I wouldn’t like to work in. And the difference between them and here, I guess, comes down to the clientele and the leadership, really. One or the other has got to be really strong. It’s either got to be kids that are, you know, reasonable kids and don’t come from like the, a lot of the population can’t be from too many disadvantaged backgrounds otherwise you get sort of …” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

His words here highlight the work that needs to go on in a school, even one where the clientele is not overly ‘disadvantaged’, to make the atmosphere right for teachers to want to stay. But from the point of view of a beginning teacher, born and raised in the community

I guess it’s – like to me this is not a country school. Like I don’t find this ‘country’. So I guess if I went somewhere that was even smaller and things like that it would probably be different. But I don’t find this country. So…and the way that they talk about going to country schools it’s – it’s so hard. It’s this and that. And yeah, it would be like – I mean if I went to Broken Hill or somewhere like I’m sure I’d find that hard. But knowing that this – they say that this is rural and small and stuff, like I’m – is it?” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

6.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

As noted above, Yass benefits from its geographic location as a desirable place to live and work. It doesn’t feel ‘country’, rural or isolated to the people who live there. One teacher summed up the attractions of the place in the way – echoing here all the aspects of social need and amenity that operate to make a location desirable:

“And so you know, why people have stayed here? I think closeness to Canberra; the fact that their children can go to uni and it’s close – it doesn’t matter; the fact that they can go to doctors, hospitals, dentists, all in Canberra. They can go out to dinner or a restaurant, theatre, it’s not too far from Sydney, three hours to Sydney. They can go to the snow or the coast.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

It may be for this reason that the community does not need to actively seek out new teachers and work to draw them in and welcome them as community members. In the Principal’s view, this is not unusual:

“I can’t say in my experience that I’ve worked in any community that has purposely embraced teachers. I don’t think so. Another public servant who comes in, do your job and you move on. And Yass isn’t any different from that. I don’t think so. Other than there would be a lot of teachers here, who’ve been here a long time and who are local people. We’re
talking 20, 25, 30 years. Quite a significant number.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

Further, many of the newer teachers in the school have grown up in the local area and sought to return to a community that they know they will enjoy. As one of them noted:

“I always knew about it, like growing up we used to come to the Yass pool here and compete against the Yass High School and the Yass swimming club. So I’m in a rural community cause I grew up in a rural community. I like a rural community. I’ve lived in cities, like I said it was London for five years, and Brisbane and what not, and Sydney for four years, so I personally like the rural community. I like it, for the smallness of the school. I like it for the smallness of the town. I like the fact that, I mean it’s not everybody’s cup of tea because in your day to day life you’re in and around the students, but for me I’m a sporty person, I get on with the kids, I’m reasonably young, I’m, you know, just a sporty young male, okay. So I fit a pretty good mould to exist pretty comfortably in a community. And I like to see the students outside, and I like them for the fact that they see me as a normal person and someone who’s of the rural area, and then it’s just a good feeling in the school, you know.” (Early Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another teacher, more recently appointed to the school, had moved from the coast after taking up a teacher retraining opportunity:

“I got a DT scholarship for the Accelerated Teacher Training Program. Applied for that and I was successful which involved a contract to teach for three years in rural New South Wales and so Yass High School, well even though it is in the Illawarra group of schools, it still seemed to satisfy their definition of rural.” (Newly Appointed Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

When asked how he and his wife had fitted into the community, and whether the community had done anything to welcome them, he described the situation where he had made moves himself to become connected into the community in this new place:

“Yes, I had to [make the effort] and then we’ve got a little coffee shop group of like-minded people, greens, environment, sustainability type people ... My wife found it yeah. It just opens on Saturday mornings, Chris McHarg, he’s a councillor with you know a bit of a sustainability slant, a young fella and he’s got elected to Council, so he’s sort of representing that way of thinking. … But yeah, I think it can be difficult fitting in. My wife has some experience of that here with just kind of fitting in a bit, or, you know, just finding like-minded people seems to be … I don’t know whether it’s cities versus country thinking or what, or education or levels of education or experience in communities of life in general. Like we’ve moved around a lot, lived in Sydney, lived in rural areas, lived on the coast, so you know she grew up in a city and so she’s kind of a bit more – used to a bit more tolerance about the way you think. And she’s very environmentally strong, environmental strongly green, strong, a bit of a food Nazi, a healthy eater.” (Early Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Although the couple had managed to find a section of the community with whom they could connect, there was still very little outside of the school for this teacher until he himself moved to interact with others:

“That was probably something my wife identified in me, is that I didn’t have anyone outside the school that I could go to and talk to and just be – like a men’s group if you like.
Whereas I played in bands and that on the South Coast and I had other connections with people I did things with, but you know 10, 15 year old friends, so … So I joined RFS and I started a TAFE course in Welding, which I've always wanted to do. I'm a Fitter Machinist.” (Early Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

He went on to show how this initiative, on his part, had also been a way to improve his own professional skills:

“I did it 'cause it's related to VET. I teach VET in Metal Fabrication and I'm not a welder by trade, but I can weld, I'm self-taught, or industry taught if you like, but never formally taught, so I thought if I'm gonna teach TAFE based qual, I've gotta see what they're doing at TAFE. So just conveniently, they run a little night time welding course down here at Yass TAFE so I signed up for that and it's been really good for my course. I just go there and I'm delivering the same competencies … (And you're also seeing another teacher deliver it ...) And he's got 30 years' experience, he's fantastic. And I can just ask him questions and I just take what he gives me and I give it to them and then I know I've got continuity. I know my course here in this school, to the best of my ability, is on par with what TAFE does. And that was really important to me, to deliver VET, 'cause I basically retrained to teach VET …" (Early Career Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another beginning teacher, this time one who had grown up in the area and returned here to start her career, commented on the differences that being a local meant for her transition to teach in a rural school - that it made her more critical of the teacher education she had received. When asked to comment on whether she thought her teacher education course had covered enough about teaching in rural communities, she initially reported that there had been ‘nothing’ about this in her course, and then used the example of Indigenous education, where:

“We did a little bit on, like, teaching kids – like Aboriginal students. But that was kind of put in perspective as if, that it is so different. Whereas – where I was relating to it was completely different because here I – I went to school here with kids that were Aboriginal, and to me it wasn’t like how they were teaching it [at University]. It was like – it's just this whole school— it's like they kind of … separated things. I was like, well it's not so much like that here. Because I could relate to being with them, yeah. They were just separated like that [in teacher education] but that’s where I find … Like here, like the Aboriginal kids, like all the others, they're fine if – if they can do what – like you know if you find an interest. Like in sport because a lot of them like sport … So it's – it's a whole lot easier. Where if you take them to English, like they play up, they muck up and things like that. But yeah, they’re – yeah, I just found it different the way that [the university] put it across that it's [a separate sort of teaching].” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In summary, the town itself does not do a great deal to welcome and include new teachers – and there has not been a need to do this as a strategy for retaining teachers within the community. Many teachers are locally born, or have stayed in town because of its location and cost benefits, and the satisfaction that they have found working with the students. As one new teacher who returned to Yass, after travelling away to study, explained:

“… in a country school like this, we are just so lucky at Yass. I don’t know why you wouldn’t want to work in a country school. The kids are just a totally different kettle of fish, they really are. You can totally tell the difference between country kids and city kids, there is just … I don’t know, I think it’s just general respect for life itself, you know. They are just more adjusted, more settled in themselves, they have got more life experience you know. They have seen death and that sort of thing out in the paddock and they understand
that circle of life and you know, they are just a bit more mature.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

A negative effect of the desirability of the town for teachers is that it has become difficult for some teachers to find full time work in the school. A local community member who retrained after the drought noted that although her connection with the school has been long term and regular, it is not satisfying for her professionally:

“I do play a big part in the community. So school community and outside too. Yeah, which I don’t mind, but I – I – but I would dearly love a teaching position where I can use my skills. Yeah, and what I find frustrating is, I’m on this big list and I don’t know where I sit on that list and I can’t find out. I mean – all the – all – a lot of people think I’m actually a permanent teacher here and I’m not. And the kids in year 7 say to me, we just had you for Geography. Now we have you for English and now we have you for this – what do you teach miss? You know and I must look fairly competent in whatever I turn up to teach. But I don’t know.” (Community Member/Casual teacher, Site Visit Interview)

6.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

The school’s location means that it is an attractive site for placing pre-service teachers for their professional practical experience, and Yass regularly takes students from a number of local and regional universities. Their experience at the school is monitored by the Deputy Principal, and they have the benefit of the considerable experience of the staff and the nature of the ‘country kids’ in the school. As one local noted:

“What amazes me is the number of teachers we get doing prac work here who went to school here. That is very common. We get, every year, we’d have at least one.” (Community Member/Casual Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As one teacher who had grown up in the area noted, however, not all pre-service teachers get to experience what it is like to teach in a small country school. She believes that they should – although she does not believe that an experience in Yass would really provide a sense of what it was like elsewhere.

“Maybe so – I think – I think what they need to do in uni’s is make everyone [experience teaching in a country school] – even do a week. Like just going somewhere - where like because my sister she’s – off the subject, but she’s doing pharmacy. And they make them do a week placement in a complete rural – like she can’t do it in Yass because she lives in Yass.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There was a general sense of the importance of this sort of experience for pre-service teachers: because of the increased potential for developing recognition of teaching as involving the whole child.

“But you, generally speaking, in the rural community you have more contact with the parents of the kids that you teach because you’ll meet them down the street and you might play tennis with them or golf or squash or whatever happens to be going. So I suppose to give them the skills, only I think if you’ve put them into a two or three week prac in a country school, will they then sort of see that. So I think it’s, city schools in particular, the big ones, it would be much more clinical. You teach a subject –And you go home. And that’s it.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview).
This recognition of providing pre-service teachers with a sense of teaching as more than just a job is the key way in which the teachers at Yass see their role in teacher education. Few interviewees brought this up outside of the interview schedule, and there was no sense that student teachers on prac in Yass would be strategically inducted and supported to enter into the community. Again, it seems as though its location means that locals and short term visitors can find enough social support in the nearby capital city to preclude any problems of loneliness or isolation in the community.

6.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

6.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

The key challenge that faces Yass in terms of effective recruitment and retention of teachers is paradoxically an effect of its success in this area. People who come to the school generally tend to stay for a long time. It seems that there is a fairly regular, though small, intake of new teachers, and that although most of them are happy to remain in the school, there are also some that do move on for career and family reasons:

"Even though people have been here a long time, we've also had a lot of people go through. Like people who have come and gone, and some have only stayed a couple of years and moved on. And others waited for years doing casual work here, waiting for years to get a permanency, get their permanency and then a couple of years later leave. But there are also teachers here who went to school here." (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In the main, though, it seems that new positions become available because of retirement rather than resignation or transfer. This is an issue noted above, raised by one local community member who had decided to retrain as a teacher after a successful career in another profession, because she and her family wanted to stay in the district even though the general drought conditions had brought about a reduction in income for her and her farming husband. The lack of resignations and transfers from the school has meant that there is no position for her in her specialist area, and that while she has been consistently offered work by the school this is only as a casual teacher, she has come to feel ‘stuck’ in her career because of her inability to move away from the town. For her career to develop, she would need opportunities to teach regularly and often in her own discipline, but this cannot happen, and her comment here about ‘friction’ sound a suggestive echo of the Principal’s reflection about the ‘dysfunction’ he found on his arrival:

"You need vitality, but you also need to value what exists in the school. And I think that, sometimes, new people coming in, particularly executive, can create barriers without valuing what's already there, and therefore creating friction and people then don't work as a team.” (Community Member/Casual Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another teacher echoes this feeling:

"I think that a lot of teachers have stayed here because of the closeness to Canberra, because their spouses might have jobs in Canberra. We have a lot of teachers who travel every day. There are also the country ones, the teachers who are married to farmers and therefore they are locked here. And there are people who sort of come here and a lot of it is the spouses that keep you, I think. I don't know that it's necessarily anything particularly great about this school that keeps people here, to be honest. And I feel that I've been here for 20 years and I think that's too long, and if my situation were any different I would have moved on."
Because when I first arrived, I heard of people who’d been here for 10 years and that was their first school and I thought “what, are you mad? Why haven’t you moved?” And now I’m one of them.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In conclusion, this issue is probably difficult to avoid in a ‘choice location’ such as Yass, and is likely to arise as a cyclic problem from time to time, whenever the process of renewal and retention more strongly favours a situation of stasis over dynamism at a particular time.

It is clear from the interview data above that the town and community of Yass continues to grow, and change, and it will be important that the school staff reflects the sorts of social changes that are going on externally. While the Principal interviewed for this study was nearing the end of his career and looking to retire, his administration and executive team included newer and younger staff who could support an incoming Principal to make the sorts of review and renewal that he reported initiating when he had arrived, about seven years earlier. This sort of renewal will be important for the continued benefit and sustainability of the school as a public good for its community.
The Queensland Schools
7 MT GARNET STATE SCHOOL

Mount Garnet State School was selected as a case study of a school in a small remote community with a low to medium economic and social base.

7.1 THE COMMUNITY

7.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Mount Garnet

Mount Garnet is a small mining town located on the Kennedy Highway about 170 km south west from Cairns. It is located on the south-western edge of the Atherton Tablelands in far north Queensland. The Tablelands region is an area covering 64,768 square kilometres with a varied landscape including world heritage rainforests, crater lakes, expansive savannahs and wetlands. Mount Garnet is part of the newly (2008) established local government area of the Tablelands Regional Council in the far north of Queensland, Australia.
Map 1 shows the town of Cairns. Mount Garnet is situated 170 kilometres inland and south-west of Cairns on the Kennedy Highway. The Kennedy Highway becomes the Gulf Development Road that leads west to Normanton.

Map 2 shows the roads that link Cairns with Mount Garnet.

When I visited Mount Garnet, I travelled by car from Cairns through Gordonvale. The highway climbs up into the Atherton Tablelands before heading in a general south-westerly direction through Atherton and Ravenshoe to Mount Garnet.
Trees at sunset, on the Atherton Tableland, on the road towards Mount Garnet. (Above)

The mountains and grasses on the way over the Atherton Tablelands. (Above)
7.1.2 The soil and vegetation in the area

There is a diverse range of vegetation and soils in the area around Mount Garnet, which is a result of a long period of geological, weathering and natural erosion processes. There are fertile volcanic soils throughout the Tablelands. The considerable range in elevation, rainfall and soil types has produced incredibly diverse vegetation in the region, ranging from highland rainforests and wetlands to dry tropical savannah teeming with bird life. There is an abundance of water and natural beauty in the vegetation of the area.

7.1.3 Industries in the area

The soils, water and diverse growing conditions have supported development of a wide range of agricultural and horticultural cropping operations. In the 1930s, several cattle stations were established within the community and beef cattle production developed as a major industry. Agriculture was also strong in the area with farms that grew many crops, including potatoes, corn, peanuts, sorghum, milk, tobacco and maize.

Various mining operations, including Kagara Zinc, Mount Garnet Lime and tin mines are currently functioning at Mount Garnet. A large fodder, lick & molasses depot has opened at Battle Creek recently.

7.1.4 The town of Mount Garnet

The earliest reference to the name Mount Garnet relates to the Swiss, Albert Vollenweider’s discovery of copper on a slope of what was known as Garnet Hill in 1882, and there has been a continuous title for that area, under various ownerships, since 1885. Garnet is a hard stone that can be found in different colours. The local ones found in abundance in the region are dark green (http://www.australiaforeveryone.com.au/places_mtgarnet.htm).

Mount Garnet itself was established as a mining community from around 1882/3. Albert Vollenweider found copper while searching for horses and he acquired the freehold title to the area around the outcrop. The Mount Garnet Hill/Mountain is situated a few hundred metres from the state school and this was where a main vein of tin and garnet was discovered in the late 19th century. Silver, copper and zinc were all found at Mount Garnet.

By 1900, Mount Garnet was a thriving township, aided by the construction of railways lines. However, the mining boom proved short lived when the price of copper dropped suddenly and the company, eager to cut its losses, closed the mine in 1901. The town continued as a service centre and after 1904, the mining industry and miners turned their attention to the excavation of tin.

In the present day, the Consolidated Tin Mines Limited is an exploration company with projects in the lower Herberton Tin Field in northern Queensland, which is one of Australia’s premier tin producing fields. The company is focused on discovering and developing major tin deposits at its Mount Garnet project area. As the CTM website states:

The Mount Garnet area is in the southern half of the Herberton Tinfield. Up to 2010, approximately 150,000 tonne of cassiterite (tin oxide) with approximately 90,000 tonne of contained tin metal has been produced from within the Tinfield. Most production has been from hardrock production, with over 2000 individual mines developed. However, most of the production
mines have been high grade mines, the largest historic mine being the Vulcan mine with production (through years 1891-1933) of approximately 9,000 tonne of contained tin metal in concentrate, the mine head grade being 5% Sn.

The only other economically significant base-metal deposit of any size is that of the historic Mount Garnet Copper Mine, which is ‘interpreted to be a distal zinc-copper rich skarn mineralisation hosted by sediments’ http://www.consolidatedtinmines.com.au/csd/herberton-tinfield This is currently operated by Kagara Zinc Limited which is a highly successful exploration and mining company with low-cost production of zinc and copper.

Apart from copper, tin and zinc, other minerals mined in the area include garnet and lime production.

Map 3 showing mining activities in relation to the town of Mount Garnet and the Kennedy highway. Mount Garnet is situated in the mineral area known as the Herberton tin field, although as explained earlier, copper mining was the industry with which it began (http://www.consolidatedtinmines.com.au/).
Tabo Dam in the Mount Garnet area. Tabo is short for Tableland Tin (Tableland Tin Dredging N.L.), the name of a company set up by James Malcolm Newman, a mining engineer. This company built the first tin-dredge in Queensland, or possibly in Australia, for Tableland Tin, which was launched on Saturday 25th February, 1928.

### Demography: the people and community of Mount Garnet

![Image of Tabo Dam](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 417</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 144</th>
<th>Under 15: 15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 457</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 152</th>
<th>Under 15: 15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)**

In the 2006 Australian Census, the population of Mount Garnet (Urban Centre/Locality) was 457 people. Of these 238 (52%) were identified as males and 219 (47.9%) were identified as females. This compares to the Australian population of 49.9% males and 50.6% females. Therefore, there are proportionately more males than females living in Mount Garnet than in
other population centres in most of Australia. The Indigenous population was 33.2% (152 of the total population of 457) compared with the 2.3% Australia-wide percentage Indigenous population.

Mount Garnet is surrounded by various smaller communities. These include Tableland Tin, Innot Hot Springs, Silver Valley and Battle Creek. The economy around Mount Garnet is based on the mining industry.

In Mount Garnet, the age profile shows that there is a lower proportion of children aged 0-4 years (5.7%) than in Australia (6.3%) as a whole. On the other hand, there is a much higher proportion of children aged 5-14 years (19.4%) than in Australia (13.5%) as a whole. The other age group that varies from the Australia-wide pattern is the lower proportion of people in the 25-54 years (35.8%) compared to 42.4% Australia-wide (http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/Mt%20Garnet%20demographic%20profile.pdf).

The ABS 2006 census figures indicate that in Mount Garnet, 45.0% of the population are in full-time employment, 29.8% are employed part-time and 14.6% of the people are unemployed. The occupation of employed people indicates that there are 22.5% who are working as labourers, 17.8% as machine operators and drivers, with 14% working as technicians and trade workers. Community and personal service workers represent 13.2% of the population, which is also the same as managers, at 13.2%. Mining is the main industry of employment.

The history of the town and its strong relationship with the economy of the mining industry means that the demography of the area is predominantly made up of miners who work under difficult and dirty conditions.

Mount Garnet is situated on the traditional lands of the Mbarbaram peoples. However, with European settlement there has been a history of dispossession of people from their lands and tribal groups. Amongst the books in the school library, the story books with Indigenous themes and backgrounds include the *Jirrbal: Forest Dreamtime Stories*. One of the Indigenous staff showed me the book to indicate the ways that the children can learn about the Jirrbal people of Ravenshoe, Far North Queensland. In the preface to the book, Sandra Gray writes about the author Maisie (Yarrcali) Barlow who is “resuming the story telling tradition which was broken with white settlement and the dispossession of people from their lands and families” (Barlow, 2002, preface).

There was also an excellent collection of artefacts and stories of the Jirrbal peoples in the Ravenshoe museum. It is also important to note that on the 8th October, 2010, the Federal Court of Australia made three consent determinations recognising the Jirrbal People’s native title rights over country, 133 km south west of Cairns in Far North Queensland. Aspects of this claim have been on-going since 2003. (For further information see http://www.nntt.gov.au/publications-and-research/publications/pages/native_title_determinations.aspx).

Recently, the Mount Garnet community has completed the first stage of a community planning process including two workshops - an Indigenous planning workshop and a Community planning workshop (which are currently being developed into a poster). Further information on the Indigenous Community Vision for 2011 – 2021 is available at http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/tablelands-community-plan/mt-garnet.

In terms of the mining industry, Mount Garnet Tin is the company now leading the resurgence of tin mining around Mount Garnet, including the refurbishment of the Mount Veteran Plant.
MGT Mining is currently in the process of implementing a new plant design by upgrading the Mount Veteran Plant to process hard rock tin ore at a rate of 10t per hour, or around 50kt per year (http://www.mgt.net.au/project-mountGarnet.htm).

Additionally, the case study school interview material gave some background to the demography and the relationships in the community. As one teacher aide said:

“I like the bush, and I like the community, and I like the people that I work with at the school. … [It’s] a pretty good community. … It’s a good community. It mightn’t have all the big shops that you see in bigger towns, but … I love the camping and the fishing and the family orientated community, you know, everyone knows everyone and the kids are really good.” (Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)

A teacher also spoke about why he enjoyed living and working there, “Yeah love the small community. Love the quietness. Love the stars.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Also, the sense of the community as a mining town was also important. As a community member said:

“When the mine started, it was good in the fact that they employed quite a lot of local people to get the mine up and running as far as the building side of it, as in building the dams and all that sort of stuff. But then they’ve employed contractors from everywhere else around the place to work and then now, as far as parents or community members working, in our school there is probably four families, five families that actually work at the mine. So they have a bus run that goes from Mount Garnet to Atherton every day, twice a day that brings people to and from work … when the dredge days were here many years ago, like it was, we had five pubs here in Mount Garnet, cinemas, like there was, it was a lively town. Now there’s not that family mining community aspect of how it used to be.” (Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

Obviously, then, the demography and the community have changed a lot over the past 120 years. The social and economic conditions have fluctuated and modes of transport have been developed but there is still a feeling of being in a small town. As the Principal says to new teachers before they agree to come to Mount Garnet:

“Some people that I talk to on the phone will say that I’d really like to experience a country school, and I question those people very thoroughly. Because that’s when I’ll say to them, do you realize how small the community is? Do you realize that it does not have this, this, this and this? There is not a hairdresser that you can go to. There’s one supermarket, and it’s a small supermarket. You know things like that. They need to understand all that before they decide that, yes; they are going to do it.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
The Mount Garnet State School was originally established in 1901. The school has a focus on quality teaching and learning. It caters for students from Mount Garnet and the outlying settlements of Tabo, Innot Hot Springs, Battle Creek and Silver Valley.

The history of education in the district tells how James Potter, the mine manager as well as Secretary of the Mount Garnet Progress Association, introduced education in the Mount Garnet area. Initially, he set up a private school operated by his daughters which was established in 1899. In August that year he wrote a letter to the Education Department suggesting that a Provisional School be set up for the community. By September 1899, the department was presented with building plans and a list of about 30 prospective pupils, formally applying for the construction of the school. As the website of the Mount Garnet Progress Association says:

Once some problems associated with the raising of funds were solved, the school was built in four months at a cost of £1.034 and opened on 22nd January 1901. Forty two children were enrolled the following month and 129 were enrolled by the end of that year. It became a state school at the beginning of 1902. (http://mountgarnet.org.au/school.htm)
Therefore, the manager, associated with the mining industry, was crucial to the establishment of the school for the Mount Garnet area. A theme that is clear on the Progress Association website has the school connected with the inspiration of ‘Children at the heart of our community’. The actual website of the school gives the theme as ‘Deeds Not Words’.

The official school website extends a warm welcome to new families in the community and invites parents to become actively involved with the school to ‘support your child’s learning’ and it goes on to say ‘We always welcome opportunities to discuss your child’s learning journey’ (http://mtgarnetss.eq.edu.au/wcms/).

Another website that has useful data about the school is the My School website. This website is set up by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) information service. ACARA is an independent authority which has the task of publishing nationally comparable data on all Australian schools. Information on this site has been provided to ACARA by individual schools and education authorities. The My School website describes the Mount Garnet School, in 2010, as having a vision and purpose which is to:

Provide quality educational opportunities for all students so they become active, informed citizens. To support this vision we provide holistic and diverse programs that cater to the needs of every student. Classes are currently composite, two year levels in the one class. Our commitment is to provide individuals with the skills and knowledge to equip them with a broad range of choices at the end of their formal schooling. Our curriculum has a central focus on literacy and numeracy (http://www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SchoolProfileRep.aspx?SDRSchoolId=3100000000944&DEEWRId=13145&CalendarYear=2010&RefId=CLlv2orMGeUQmv%2bO6B9vHcOLY49Ro0iB).
As the website states, and was also clear from my visit to the school, the staff are enthusiastic, skilled and make a committed team who strive to provide a quality education for all of the school children. The website also states, that in 2010, 84% of the students were in the lowest quartile of the population compared with 24% of children in the general Australian population (according to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)). Indigenous students comprise 60% of the student population of the school. The school has 6 full time equivalent teaching staff, with 4.4 full-time equivalent non-teaching staff, and 83 students, of whom 50 were male and 33 female (www.myschool.edu.au).

The school website, in 2009, made clear the progress the school was making towards its goals.

Our 2009 School Operational Plan identified four priorities in delivering our required service agreement and meeting the needs of our local school community. Our first goal outlined our desire for all students to be literate and able to operate in our literate society. We have achieved this through focusing our Professional Development on literacy, continuing our 2 hour literacy and English blocks and beginning the long process of reviewing our current Literacy Plan and Spelling Program. Our second goal expressed our desire for all students to be numerate and able to operate in our numerate society. This has been achieved by reviewing and beginning to write up our new Numeracy Plan, focusing on a real-life approach to numeracy which resulted in a change to the ‘I-Maths’ Program and the purchasing of engaging concrete materials including interactive whiteboard materials. Our third goal of increased Community Engagement has been achieved through the employment of a Home Liaison Officer, the
establishment of regular monthly Community Meetings, the successful review of our Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students and increasing our public relations in the local area. Lastly the goal to acknowledge & embed our local indigenous culture in to our learning program is continually improving with increased awareness through Professional Development, the strengthening of our Indigenous Parents Group with the help of our Home Liaison Officer and the re-establishment of the celebration of indigenous culture through NAIDOC Day. Many new library resources have been purchased that depict indigenous culture. (http://mtgarnetss.eq.edu.au)

Data from the 2009 Annual School Report indicates that the School Opinion Survey (S.O.S) data shows that both parents and students are well satisfied with Mount Garnet School and the education they are receiving there. For example, 95.7% of parents and 100% of students indicated that they either felt their child was safe, or felt safe themselves; 76.9% of parents and 65% of students felt that the children were treated fairly at this school; 76.9% of parents were satisfied or very satisfied with the behaviour and discipline at the school, 84.6% of parents were happy to send their child to this school and 93% of students were happy to go to this school (http://mtgarnetss.eq.edu.au/school-reports/annual.pdf).

Likewise, the Performance Measure Result in 2009 indicates that 88.5% of the parents/caregivers are satisfied that their child is getting a good education at school, 80% of students were satisfied that they are getting a good education at school, 97% of parents/caregivers are satisfied with their child’s school, 86% of the school’s workforce was satisfied with their access to professional development opportunities that relate to school and systemic initiatives and 86% of staff members were satisfied with morale in the school (http://mtgarnetss.eq.edu.au/school-reports/annual.pdf).

From the interviews conducted with school staff and community members, these themes and ideas about satisfaction with the school were clear.
CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

7.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

As one of the beginning teachers at the school mentioned, being able to get a permanent position was an important incentive. He said:

“How once I had applied I got a call basically the next day saying you can come up here for three years and it had to be on a three year ... Yep, had to be on a three year understanding that I would stay because if you don’t you have to pay back money to Toll for the transfer and all that stuff.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

He then spoke about the support he received in the school:

“We started doing dinners, every week it would be at someone’s house basically and we generally have not parties but you’d have an Australia Day barbecue and just invite whoever in the community to come to the teachers’ residence because there’s a big area underneath the duplex that is open and you have a barbecue and just tell people to bring a plate.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

He also spoke about the mentoring and support he received from the Principal and other school staff:

“...just the staff like Janice supporting us in finding out information about stuff in the school and so forth and really community is more just the older staff being here introducing you to the community. I know when I moved up there was a teacher by the name of Sue, she took us down to the pub and introduced us to the people who worked down there, introduced us to the police, the ambulance, took us around and showed us so yeah that’s the only real support.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

(Above) Children swimming in the local pool.

The Principal also spoke about mentoring and induction programs and the two top reasons for teachers to do country service:

“But I mean they would be the two top reasons that people would go to country schools, and whether they stay longer or not would depend on their first couple of months in the school and what that’s like for them. So that’s why that induction and that mentoring is so important.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
But still there was the idea that you are putting off other important things like being with your extended family and being so far away from your friends back home.

“So yeah it’s not that we don’t enjoy the place because we do we enjoy the teaching but it’s the family. I think as well you put your life on hold a bit.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another young teacher on a short term contract also spoke about liking the community and the sense of place:

“I think it’s just peaceful. I love the waterfalls around here. … And I’ve seen the waterfalls. I think the nature here is wonderful. Like in Brisbane, I would never really take the opportunity to go on a nature walk or to a rainforest or anything … There would be a colleague always knocking on my door, and always asking me to go somewhere.”

(Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

One teacher’s aide talks about the importance of feeling part of the family of the school. She uses the metaphor of being like a family and treating everyone like family:

“…that’s one thing about this school, everyone is treated like family. They are welcomed into here quite happily, they are invited to functions or whatever. Quite often parents of the kids in the classes that they are teaching yeah will have a yarn… I have been on a few school camps like to Brisbane and that with teachers that came here as pre-service and then come back when they’d finished. Most of them go away saying they had the most fantastic time here.”

(Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)

Another teacher’s aide had a similar sentiment and also talked about the benefits of getting to know everyone in a small community:

“… we’re very welcoming [laugh]. Yeah we try and fill them in on everything that they can expect and the accommodation that they have is either at the BP or the pub, so they get to know the locals quite easily [laugh] … It’s a complete different situation to a city school. Kids, you know everything about their families and their backgrounds and who knows who and you know like it’s a very small community, and I would say that’s a bonus of being in a small school that you get to know those sorts of things about them … We have a fantastic school, our school is great. It is really, all staff get along really well, the kids are gorgeous, there’s you know so many different cultures that we have at this school which is great to experience, being a small school you get more of that one on one relationship with them, so and I think being a small school kids get like a lot more individual time with the teacher or a smaller group working with the teacher which is a big bonus … from what we’ve heard we get a good report back from any kids that, you know any prac students that come, they think it’s a fantastic school. The kids are really welcoming and also the staff as well.”

(Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)
For a few of the experienced teachers at Mount Garnet School, it was a matter of doing the expected country service to allow them to gain a permanent teaching position rather than be employed in a contract position with uncertainty of continuing employment. For all teachers employed in the Department of Education and Training in Queensland, it is stated that:

It is a condition of permanent employment with the department that teachers may be required to work anywhere in Queensland to meet state-wide staffing requirements. Permanent teachers should expect that they will be required to teach in locations across Queensland, as all teachers are likely to be required to transfer at some stage. This condition applies to all teachers appointed on a permanent basis regardless of location preferences at the time of application for teacher employment. (http://education.qld.gov.au/hr/recruitment/teaching/employment-conditions.html)

Along with this, there is also The Remote Area Incentives Scheme (RAIS) which “aims to encourage quality teachers to teach in rural and remote schools and to remain in those schools beyond the minimum required service period” (http://education.qld.gov.au/hr/recruitment/teaching/remote-area-incentive.html). This RAIS provides generous incentives and cash and leave benefits to teachers in schools and other
For most of the young teachers in Mount Garnet, their only previous employment was on short term contracts. One had already been on 6 short term contracts and another was on her first 6 week contract. Therefore, the incentive to undertake their rural experience in order to get permanency was clearly an important incentive to work in this community.

7.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

A number of community members have been associated with the school for a number of years and see the school as a central and important part of town life. They also see the school as central to their children’s life chances. Previous examples have been given of how new teachers are welcomed into the town and encouraged to become involved in town activities. As one very experienced teacher, who has lived in the community for 30 years, said in relation to how the community contributes to the recruitment and retention of teachers:

“I think it’s the community and you feel part of the community and I think it’s the friendliness of small places where you get involved, as long as you get involved with the life and the activities of people that live here.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

A community member also stressed the ways that new teachers are introduced into the community:

“Um, they are invited to come to the P&C meetings to sort of, Janice gets a lot of them to come to the meetings sort of first time or whatever to say who they are, what they’ve done, sort of do a general introduction of what they were, what they want to get out of the place. We quite often have functions like dances or barbeques or fetes or the teachers are encouraged to help to get each of their classes to do stalls but also to encourage the parents to come in because it is a P&C function, not a school function.” (Teacher’s Aide/Community Member, Site Visit Interview)

In addition, a teacher’s aide highlighted the way that funds are raised for the school and for the community, where parents work together with teachers to benefit the school and the community:

“Well at the school there’s certain fundraising things that you do need to fundraise for within the classes, so that’s actually bringing them out into the community as well, where they have to, you know, the kids are involved but the parents are also coming. So they get to meet the parents and things like that. And, even through P & C, a lot of them have come to P & C meetings just to help with fundraising and organising of stuff there as well.” (Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)

The other way that the community contributes to the retention of teachers is by encouraging them to apply for promotion when positions are available at the school. As the Principal said, when asked why she had applied for the position as Principal at the school:

“Why did I apply? Because I was encouraged by the P and C and the school community, I guess. It was not out of any ambition or plan of my own to end up in this role.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
Clearly, community members were keen to encourage one of the local experienced teachers to apply for the position when it became vacant and obviously thought she would do a great job for the school and the community. The community members associated with the school see the school as a central and important part of the town and their children’s lives. Therefore, new teachers are welcomed into the town and encouraged to become involved in the activities of the town.

7.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

Where possible, this school, the teachers and community members all seem to be aware of and to support the need for pre-service teachers to have the chance to undertake some professional experience in a rural or remote setting. As one teacher aide said:

“… we welcome all those young ones [pre-service teachers] that come through you know, we make sure that they are welcome and try to I suppose make sure that they are comfortable, happy, when they are here … I haven’t seen any of them, you know disappointed or anything like that.” (Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)

One recent graduate teacher, who has been the supervising teacher for some pre-service teachers undertaking professional experience at the school, made some comments on the financial difficulties faced by teacher education students. He comments on the fact that they have had to come so far away from their family base and their part-time employment. He suggests some strategies to assist these pre-service teachers to undertake rural and remote teaching experiences:

“I think, maybe that incentive like we’ll pay for your accommodation, give you a meal allowance, or something along those lines because it does make it hard and a lot of the ones I’ve had are usually just first years and after the holidays I got a second year one. But yeah the first year it’s one block and I asked the girl why do you do it now and not later and she said because I can afford to stay up here for one week, I couldn’t afford to stay up here longer than that it’s too expensive and I thought that’s fair enough I can understand. She has a part time job on the weekend and she said I wouldn’t like to go back to Cairns, work for the weekend and then come back out to a remote area.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Also the fact that small schools like this do not have a lot of teachers considered sufficiently experienced who can supervise student teachers, “Sometimes it’s hard because we’ve got such a big turnover of staff, often we don’t have a lot of experienced teachers here. They might be, well, Greg’s got a student, he’s only third year out” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview).

There is also the idea that some teachers think that the universities do not support the pre-service teachers and their supervising teachers sufficiently. As the Principal states:

“I won’t hear from them [the university staff]. I mean … the booklet comes through the mail. The year that we had two fourth year students I had one of them, that’s when I was in the classroom, I had one of them and another teacher had one of them, and they actually had one visit during their four week practicum. But normally it’s nil … I don’t think it’s enough. I think there should be more contact. They rely on us ringing them to say if there is a problem. I mean, not even a phone call from them to say, how’s it going.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

One of the Indigenous people employed in the school also commented on the student teachers’ lack of knowledge about small rural communities.
“If they don’t know anything about a small community, well, being in a small community before, I think it’s very, it’s all new, and I suppose they just don’t know how to, what to do or how to go about it. They’ve got some brought here to, answering their questions and making them feel as comfortable as possible, and making their teaching time here successful, I suppose. And help them in every way possible to make them comfortable to do what they can do.” (Teacher Aide, Site Visit Interview)

Some innovative suggestions were put forward by a beginning teacher:

“Maybe let them do it in pairs rather than one person by themselves … Cause obviously you’re learning your competence to start with but if you’ve got a mate or someone else who can experience the trauma with you … Pairs would be good. Even small groups you know. You could have 4 or 5 kids.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another experienced teacher talks about the pleasure she gets from working with pre-service and beginning teachers, “You mentor younger teachers which is great and you form lots of friendships with the teachers and other people in the community” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview).

The school is generally supportive of teacher education students and of pre-service programs but would like more support from university staff when students are at the school. If the distance is the reason why student teachers do not get face-to-face meetings with university staff, while they undertake their professional practice, then alternative ways of communicating and supporting students needs to be worked out. Travel time and costs for university staff are factors for consideration here. If, however, the student teachers are having difficulty in their placement, then this would be taken into account by the university staff involved and particular arrangements made so that both the student teacher and the classroom teacher could be adequately supported.

7.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

7.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

There are many challenges involved in sustaining effective recruitment and retention of teachers in a town the size of Mount Garnet, with the mining industry not employing local workers or providing housing for local miners in the community. Bussing miners in from larger towns some distance away does not help to sustain the local school and community life. As one beginning teacher explained:

“I think the school does a lot; the school does a lot of community things. I was speaking to one of the teachers the other day about it and basically any community event that is held in this town is run by the school… The school does everything, the school does Anzac Day, and the school has the stall out at the rodeo, Labour Day weekend which is massive for the town like we get thousands of dollars in funds through the P&C. We do the movie nights, we do discos, we do trivia nights, the theatre restaurant I know it’s a community base but it’s still basically the school does it.” (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another challenge is making sure that the children attend school on a regular basis. As one of the Indigenous teacher aides explained:

“I am also the school liaison officer for the Indigenous children, yeah. … and my role is to go around to the early class, check the roll, who is not, who has been away for so many days and I make contact with the parents and find out what is going on … three days then I just got
to ring the parents and ask them what’s wrong because most of them don’t ring in when they should and you know I have to get on the phone and ring them up, and it makes the job easier for the teachers. They know that someone who knows the parents and they come through to me … I am there for the teachers and for the parents, like you know, that there is something that the teachers need well you know I can go and talk to the parents or even bring the parents in to meet with the teachers … Okay so meet face to face to talk about the issues when they arise.” (Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)

I also asked this teacher’s aide how long is a good time for teachers to stay in the community. She replied; “Well if they could stay about 3 years that would be good, you know I mean the longer they stay the more experience they get by living in a smaller place” (Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview).

There is also the idea that it is difficult to work in small towns because “you know, you can’t speak of what’s happening at the school, and sometimes it does get hard, because you’re in a small community and people talk … So I’m not one that will go into anything with anyone, even here [laughs] I just keep my mouth shut [laughs]” (Teacher’s Aide and Parent and Citizens Committee Member, Site Visit Interview).

The other point that was well made, was the challenge of being the Principal in a small school where the time allowance is only 0.2 for administration and the Principal is expected to teach for 0.8 of the time.

“The biggest challenge is, I guess, the fact that it’s a small school. It means that you have to be a principal and a teacher. And even in a school with 80-odd kids, the administration side of things doesn’t change from a large school; you still have to put in your annual report, all your surveys, all your on-line data, you still have to do all of that. But you only get a day a week allocated to do it, and it’s impossible, it’s absolutely impossible. So I guess the biggest challenge for me is really focusing on what we do achieve together as a school community, because it’s very easy to feel absolutely bulked down and unsupported because you are a long distance away from central office, district office, regional office, and you don’t see people who are supposedly your support network very much.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The challenges that Mount Garnet State School faces in order to sustain the quality of recruitment and retention of teachers are best understood in the context of the framework of rural social space used in this study. It is important to understand the actual events and social
and cultural practices in this particular place that so strongly influence the community. By continuing to examine the ways the economy, geography and demography of the local area work together to produce the relationships between, and amongst the people and the place, we can get an idea of the challenges faced by this community and the ways to recruit and retain quality teachers. Society and space, in Atkins’ formulation, interact, so that location and landmarks along with the people in the community interact together in the environment. The focus on mining, in the community, changed over the years and the fact that the locals are not employed in the mines and the mines bus in the workers for their long and arduous shifts does not do anything to sustain the school and the community. Nevertheless, the school is obviously a caring, supportive and friendly place to work and the children and parents are very satisfied with the school.

There were many expressions of enjoyment of living and working in this community that were mentioned by the teachers and the teacher aides.

“I really love working here, especially with the kids and the teachers as well. I like to work with kids because children never cease to amaze me. They all, and I always feel comfortable working with children because you can see if my input into their learning has meant something to them, and it’s good because at the end of the term, or during the term, you can see that some of the kids’ have really improved.” (Teacher’s Aide, Site Visit Interview)

Another issue is the mobility of the local population as well as the mobility of the teacher population.

“This community has such a transient population, that I think they would sit back and say, okay, we’ll wait and see how long this lasts….and there was a time when we had some rather large families come to the area, and then, of course, as soon as they shift, you’re back down to where you were [in terms of student numbers and therefore staff numbers also].” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

So the Mount Garnet teachers and other staff and associated community members work well in the school and in the community life of this town. Overall, it is clear that the school and the local community members work together in numerous ways, but there are also challenges and tensions that need to be explored. Partnerships and collaborations need to be forged, but it is clear, issues of mining, employment and housing for miners is a crucial issue. To maintain places and spaces where people live in sustainable communities that meet the needs of the local population and build the infrastructures necessary for the common good, is essential to maintain a vibrant school and community learning site. This community is a result of major social and demographic changes and is and will be affected by mining industry changes, work practice changes and technological advances which will impact the demography, economy and the geography of the region. This will have a vital impact on the life of the community and is therefore an opportunity and a challenge for all participants involved in the region.
Big Lunch - 1:15
At Big Lunch we play and have fun.
8 QUILPIE STATE COLLEGE

Quilpie State College was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a low to medium economic and social base.

8.1 THE COMMUNITY OF QUILPIE

8.1.1 Geography: The Place, Space and Environment of Quilpie
Queensland

This map was generated using data compiled by the Australian Heritage Commission with the cooperation and technical input of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, and the Queensland Government, and the Environment and Heritage, of the Queensland Government. The data forms part of the Australian Wild Rivers Condition Database (ARCID - formerly the Wild Rivers database) which was developed by the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies under contract to the Australian Heritage Commission. Whilst the analysis was based on the best available data, it is known to have limitations in resolution and accuracy.

The Queensland Government accepts the mapped areas as possible Undisturbed Rivers with varying degrees of confidence based on the degree of field checking, the reliability and resolution of the underlying toposheets or maps (note Class 0: Low Confidence), and by knowledge of the region. Linear boundaries on maps may thus show boundaries between maps of different resolution, or in some cases may represent real boundaries in land tenure, land use or land disturbance.

Whilst an RDI of 0.00 or less is considered a useful indicator by the QLD government, any determination of Undisturbed River status will require further field checking and reference to local information. It was not possible to individually identify all of the unnamed river segments mapped in the study. However, unmarked segments were agreed to be possible Undisturbed Rivers, where they are contiguous with a named Undisturbed River.

Note that the topographic model on which the ARCID is based shows drainage lines which may contain water only rarely, particularly in arid and semi-arid areas. Further information is available from: http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/anlr/maps-id/jpgfull/qld_id.jpg
The town of Quilpie is located 980 kilometres west of the Queensland state capital of Brisbane and 208 kilometres west of the larger town of Charleville. Quilpie is the administrative centre of the Quilpie Shire, which has a population of 668 persons (2006 ABS data for Quilpie Shire) and covers 13,250 square kilometres.

The township of Quilpie sits on a mulga ridge on the western bank of the Bulloo River and is out of the reach of floods. The rich river systems around and the potential for floods and drought are a part of the life in the town and surrounding areas.

The township of Quilpie was founded on April 29, 1917. The railway line from Charleville to Quilpie was completed in the same year and this was an important transport link for the area’s population and industries.

The town of Quilpie was named after the Aboriginal word for ‘Bush Stone Curlew’: quilpeta or quilpeter (Burhinus grallarius, obsolete name Burhinus magnirostris) (http://www.australianzoo.com.au/our-animals/amazing-animals/birds/?bird=stone-curlews&animal=bush_stone-curlew).

The Bush Stone Curlew is a large, ground-dwelling bird prevalent throughout Australia. The environment surrounding Quilpie has many species of birds, such as brolgas, that enjoy the shire’s vast outback spaces, rivers and waterholes. Most of Quilpie’s streets are named after these birds.

The account of one family of early settlers in the area, entitled Kings in Grass Castles, has a chapter entitled ‘A land loved by birds’ that mentions Quilpie and the surrounding areas of the ‘mighty Cooper Plains’ that were:

… pastures of a graziers dreams, Flinders, Mitchell, button, kangaroo and blue grasses, while gidgee boree and coolobah trees made scattered shade and lignum sprouted succulent shoots along the courses of winding creeks and gullies … . The trees swaying under the weight of perching birds. (Durack, M. 1979, p. 92)

The diversity of habitats in the Quilpie shire encourages a vast range of wildlife, animals, breeds of cattle and sheep, in addition to the birdlife. To the west, towards Eromanga, there are wedge-tailed eagles that soar on a thermal current in search of prey, and wallabies and kangaroos live amongst the scrubby undergrowth.

Other notable townships in the shire include Adavale and Eromanga. Eromanga is home to the largest dinosaur fossil found in Australia.

In a simple tin shed outside Eromanga in south west Queensland, a small and dedicated group of workers continue the painstaking and intricate job of preparing the most recent and exciting find of fossilised dinosaur bones, belonging to Australia's largest titanosaur, Cooper … . The bones currently being prepared for scientific interpretation and display were recently dug up from their resting site, and after 95 million years, the beauty of nature has
produced magnificent specimens, making this find one of the most significant in Australia's history. (Lilburne, 2007)

Additionally, the Quilpie Shire is steeped in the history of grazing which began with the pioneering efforts of families such as the Durack’s. Primary industries play a huge role in the shire’s economy, with sheep and cattle farming prominent in the area.

Within the Quilpie Shire, oil and gas are other industries associated with the geology of the area. Eromanga is the largest oil-producing area in mainland Australia. The town of Eromanga has a mini refinery that refines crude oil and supplies automotive distillates, jet fuel and specialty chemicals. The refinery produces about 1.5 million barrels of oil a year (adapted from http://www.quilpie.qld.gov.au/page69.html).

The Quilpie Shire relies heavily on groundwater from the Great Artesian Basin. Bore water is reticulated to all premises in the town. The bore was sunk in 1933 to a depth of 899.8 metres. The water temperature is about 53.4°C at the Bore head. Cooling tanks are necessary at all premises to allow for the supply of both hot and cool water. While the sodium carbonate content of the water is reasonably high, it is satisfactory for most purposes. Generally, rain water is used for drinking purposes but some households use only bore water (adapted from http://www.quilpieshire.com.au/page34.html).

8.1.2 Demography: The People and Community of Quilpie

The people of Quilpie are, like the shire website suggests, and like the surrounding countryside, ‘simply unique’. There is a sense of adventure and challenge when one enters the area. It is also a little unpredictable, as when I visited, I had planned to drive in but the main road was cut by flood waters and, therefore, I had to fly in and rearrange my schedule at the last minute. Living there means that you need to be flexible and able to handle change and adventure, to live and work with modifying your plans to take account of surrounding conditions including floods, drought and the wonderful changing colours and light of the vast landscape where the township is situated.

In the 2006 Australian Census, the population of Quilpie (Urban Centre/Locality) was 559 people. Of these, 50.6% were identified as males (c.f. 49.4% of the national figures) and 49.4% were identified as females (c.f. 50.6% of the national figures). The Indigenous population was 14.1% compared with a national rate of 2.3%. The median age of persons in Quilpie was 35 years, compared with 37 years for persons nationally.

In the 2006 Census, 89.9% of persons, usually resident in Quilpie, stated they were born in Australia. Other common responses to place of birth were: United Kingdom 1.2%; New Zealand 0.9%; Papua New Guinea 0.9%; with Croatia and the US both at 0.5%. The population of Quilpie had 4.1% of persons who were born overseas compared with the national average of 22.2% who claimed they were Australian born.

Of the 421 people aged 15 years and over, who were usually resident in Quilpie, 66% were employed in the labour force, 27.3% were unemployed (and the others did not state their labour force status). Quilpie’s unemployment rate of 27.3% is significantly greater than the national unemployment figure of 5.2%.

The most common industries of employment for persons, aged 15 years and over and usually resident in Quilpie, indicated 36% were employed in Public Administration and Safety, 23% in Transport, Postal and Warehousing, with 15% in Construction and 15% in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing. In the larger statistical region, the ABS statistics for 2006 indicate Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing was the main industry of employment, with 33% of the people in this area employed in the sheep and cattle industries in particular.

In Quilpie, the median weekly individual income for persons, aged 15 years and over, who were usual residents, was $465, this is similar to the Australian national median of $466. The median weekly household income was $842, compared with $1,027 nationally. The median weekly family
Income was $1,058, compared with $1,171 nationally. So although the median weekly individual income was similar to Australia as a whole, the household and family incomes were lower.

In the 2006 Census, there were 130 families in Quilpie, of these, 55 families had children under 15 years of age, 50 were couple families without children, 15 were one parent families with children under 15, and there were 6 one parent families with dependent children.

The Shire’s website suggests that the lifestyle in Quilpie provides a unique opportunity for affordable living, including reasonable real estate prices and jobs and business opportunities. There is safety for children, peace and quiet for fishing and relaxing and fresh air, star-filled nights and early morning sunrises that allow you to enjoy comfortable living in outback Australia (http://www.quilpie.qld.gov.au).

8.1.3 Economy: The Production, Work and Industry of Quilpie

Local industries include large pastoral holdings that run beef cattle and sheep grazing. Pastoral occupation of the land around Quilpie began in the early 1860s as teamster’s camps evolved on the Bulloo River. Over time, Quilpie became a centre for the wool industry and the area continues to sustain large sheep and cattle grazing enterprises. The railway line to southwest Queensland begins and ends in Quilpie and up to 90,000 cattle and 20,000 bales of wool begin their journey here each year (http://www.quilpie.qld.gov.au/page54.html).

Within the Quilpie Shire, oil and gas are industries associated with the geology of the area. Eromanga is the largest oil-producing area in mainland Australia. The town of Eromanga has a mini refinery that refines crude oil and supplies automotive distillates, jet fuel and specialty chemicals. The refinery produces about 1.5 million barrels of oil a year (Adapted from http://www.quilpie.qld.gov.au/page69.html).

Opals are also an important industry in the Quilpie Shire, with some opal fields in the shire having been worked since the 1880s. The boulder opal of Quilpie Shire has a backing of ironstone which makes it very durable. Opals are valued for their unique combination of fiery deep colours and dazzling elements of light. Their value on the gem market depends on the cut, polish, body colour, as well as the play of light and depth of the pattern. Although red is the most precious colour, the oranges, yellows, greens and blues found in the opals are also vibrant and highly valued.
There is a thriving arts community in Quilpie with striking murals and sculptures in the main street.

The 45-metre streetscape mural in Quilpie - completed in 2003 by local artist Cheryl Pratt and supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland - depicts moments of the area’s rich history. Among the scenes you’ll find: the Adavale Post Office in 1907 with the Cobb & Co Mail; the sinking of the artesian bore in 1933; Amy Johnson’s famous plane landing in May, 1930; the Eromanga hotel in 1900; and the end of the line at Quilpie Railway Station. The mural in the Bob Young Memorial RSL Park depicts the various aspects of war and the involvement of locals in these campaigns.


Recreational activities in the area include fishing, swimming, river walks, bird-watching, searching for fossils and riding on the commons. One of the teachers mentioned her reasons for enjoying teaching in this community:

… we’ve got mud bikes, so we go mud bike riding to the common area. And so I have a bike, too, now, and we all ride out together, and ride along with other families, and we have barbies…It’s called the Common, the Quilpie Common, it’s surrounding the town, it has probably twenty or thirty acres in it, surrounding the town, where you can put cattle on it, … so it’s kind of a shared area. You ride your mud bikes and your pushbikes …

(Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview).

The region’s development has been enhanced through a proactive Shire Council that takes responsibility for and leads in social and economic matters and endeavours to make the town an attractive place to live for all residents, as well as to attract tourists to the area. The Shire of Quilpie website has a new logo which:

… represents the five main areas of interest in the shire: Community, Geology (Opal and Oil and Gas), History, Primary Industries and Palaeontology. The colours used to signify each of these areas were drawn from the five main
QUILPIE STATE COLLEGE

colours used to classify opal: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green and Blue. 

From the air, the landscape seems vastly different than from the ground. The earth seems redder, the homesteads lonelier and the vast horizons more distant. Quilpie Shire is ‘Simply Unique’. 

8.2 THE SCHOOL

Quilpie State College is an exciting place for learning. The school motto is ‘Work to Excel’. Students, teachers and community members seem pleased to be a part of the learning community and have commented on the ways that the school population works together to support each other in learning. The school itself was established in 1918.

http://www.quilpiesc.eq.edu.au/school_history.htm

Currently it caters for students from Prep to Year 10. Year 11 and 12 students are able to access the learning facilities and work through distance education studies. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that in 2009 the school had 64% (86% in 2008) of its students in the bottom quadrant of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 26% Indigenous students in 2009 (32% Indigenous students in 2008). It has 10 teaching staff and 9 non-teaching staff, 53 students, of whom 32 are male and 21 are female.

The school website indicates that ‘The teaching at Quilpie State College is based on the Essential Learnings issued by Education Queensland and Queensland Studies Authority’. The school community has developed positive school-wide expectations which include: Be Ready to Learn; Be part of a Safe, Happy and Caring environment; Be Respectful, which together make a productive learning environment. It is clear that the school community encourages individuals to excel in all aspects of their lives. The school is in a stage of renewal and as the My School website indicates:

Our renewed focus on student morale, curriculum and pedagogy resulted in improved outcomes in the 2009 NAPLAN assessment. We were awarded recognition of this by being among the top 60 most improved schools in Queensland. Our participation in the community and across the district is paramount as we highly value student engagement despite our remote location… We continue to have an affiliation with the ‘Dare to Lead’ project
which has resulted in our Indigenous students achieving at a level equivalent to their non-Indigenous peers. (http://www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SchoolProfileRep.aspx?SDRSchoolId=310000001594&DEEWRId=12251&CalendarYear=2010&RefId=6Wv7vZDenU33QViNOmDwbvt%2b4H3ng7mb)

Although Quilpie State College is situated in a community that is isolated geographically, it provides a challenging learning program for students from Prep to Year 10. A range of secondary curriculum offerings include Industrial Technologies, Home Economics, Science, HPE, Arts (including Music, Drama, Dance & Multi-media), Maths, LOTE- Japanese, English and Information & Communication Technology.

The school has an integrated school culture where there is a balanced mixture of experienced and new staff at the school, and the staff share ideas, experiences, skills, values, curriculum programs and teaching innovations in a positive approach to learning and innovation. The support and ancillary staff are drawn from the local population, and this factor adds to the stability of staffing and the school’s close links with the local community.

8.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

8.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

The school has been able to recruit and retain teachers with its networks of support by both teachers and community members. There has been thoughtful leadership within the school and the community which means that staff mentor and support each other with rich contacts through teaching and non-teaching, staff work closely together to support each other and the families in the community.

Some staff have been at the school for a long time and indicate that they do not want to live in big cities, saying; “I’m not a big town sort of person. I like to go down the street and say hello to people, I know people to say hello to, and get one back” (Experienced Teacher). As this teacher said; “I am from the country area originally. I don’t like cities. And I took the job that was offered. I said, well, I’ll come”.

This experienced teacher provides some positives aspects of living and working in Quilpie:

"You can get different exposures to different students and parents. You mostly have a common interest. There is some restriction, obviously, they like to live in this area as well. There’s lots of organizations you can be involved in. If you are inclined that way, there is plenty of things for you to get involved in. Plenty of groups that need support, and just numbers of opportunities to help community organizations and groups to benefit from your expertise. It’s a relaxed lifestyle with no traffic pressures to get to work…. There are lots of other little things. You can develop good relationships this way. And often when people do come here, and then they go back, but a lot of times those relationships, friendships, still occur. And also many families that do leave, keep in contact too. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

When asked to comment on what attracts you to stay in the community, the reply was:

"… what keeps me here is not just the work, it’s the lifestyle. As far as holidays go, I don’t go on a trip somewhere, I just go home to file my work. But that’s just as good a holiday for me, because it’s change. But, money, it doesn’t take much for someone to live in this place, I suppose. But … you can have the friendships and the networking available right here ….
Some people just don’t see it. But it’s all the happy times ... there’s lots of different sports and fitness activities that go across the year. ... But you can also help out in committees and stuff, you don’t necessarily have to be a sports person. There is a cultural society here that do the arts and crafts ... There’s lots of other groups that you can get involved in. If you don’t get attached to one of those, you sometimes might think, I’m just not into it yet. But there’s lots of things to do. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another teacher talked about the difficulty she had in getting a position in Quilpie. As she said:

So I applied to come out here, and it was actually quite hard to get here. A lot of the teachers wanted to keep their position here. I waited two years to get a vacancy. Which everyone in Brisbane thought was hilarious. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

She goes on to explain why she likes living in the community; “It’s good for the kids, we’ve got chooks, dogs, cats, mice”.

She talks about the good lifestyle and the safe environment for her children. As she explains, most people in the community know your children and if they were to get ‘lost or stuck’, someone would help them out.

Another experienced teacher talked about getting offered a job at Quilpie. At first when she said she expected to get a job on the coast, she was told by staff at the university that it was not possible:

They said, you’re dreaming if you think you’re going to get a job on the coast of Australia’… And then they [the employers] rang me up and they offered me here. And they said, this is the subject area you applied for. And then I said, where’s Quilpie, and they said, funny that you mention it, because I don’t know. And then they rang me back the next day to tell me and then I decided to come, because I was young, and I might as well. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This teacher decided to ‘give it a go’. After being here a few years she says; “I like the town. The classes are small. And the people are nice” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview).

Additionally, this teacher speaks very positively about the mentoring that is available at the school:

I started, [being mentored] when I first came, there were, the first principal that was here had a meeting every week, and everybody at the school, likes, had a fifteen minute meeting one-on-one. So all the teachers had one-on-one, like, if you had a problem with certain behaviour or something like that, you could go and ask them… And then you could ask them if you weren’t sure about how something was done. And then the new principal came and turned into a more of a mentor thing. So one of the other primary teachers is my mentor, and she’s been here for a long time. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

These three experienced teachers all had different motivations to take up a position at Quilpie, including loving country life rather than living in a city, relationships in the community, and because they were offered ongoing continuing work and the security of a permanent position. However, all have chosen to stay in the community for similar reasons, including a friendly and welcoming community, knowing the families in the community, small classes in the school, and supportive colleagues.
The situation of a new graduate at the school was different because she came from the community and had a long relationship with the school before becoming a qualified teacher. She is, therefore, a long-standing and involved community member even though it is her first year as a teacher in Quilpie:

So in a community like this, for me, it's not looking at one group, it's looking at everybody and I also felt that there was a split and one of my most recent projects is getting, because we never ever celebrated NAIDOC or any kind of Aboriginal, so the last couple of years that's been my focus. Focussing on bringing the community together and celebrating and understanding each other. (New Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Her motivation for going into teaching is well thought through and is related to her background as an activist in the community. As she talked about the involvement of Indigenous soldiers who were not officially allowed to volunteer for the Second World War she explained:

There's been no recognition, so as far as the records show, Aboriginals didn't contribute and that's comments that I hear in society, so I guess I'm not a confrontational person, but I love to let people know you know, and my way of letting them know is through educating children and let them explore it. At the moment the NAIDOC theme for this year is unsung heroes which fits perfectly, everything's falling into place, so I guess my reason for being a teacher is to try and educate, not just children, but society. (New teacher, Site Visit Interview)

She also talks about the difficulties she sees of living in the city:

I don't know that I could live in the city where you don't know your neighbours. (New Teacher, Site Visit Interview).

Further, she also explains more about her reasons for living in the country:

... out here, everyone makes everyone happy I guess. You do what you want to do ... I think because everybody deep down respects and understands people, because they know them so well. That's my excuse for living in the bush. (New Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

As can be seen from these interviews, there are a range of motivations and ways of attracting teachers into Quilpie. Some staff come and go, but others stay for varying lengths of time and for various reasons including personal and professional well-being and a quiet, safe and supportive lifestyle. There are of course some teachers who do not stay long: “I've been aware of where some beginning teachers start saying to people, oh, I don't like the place, there's nothing to do. As soon as you've got people thinking you don't like the place, they've just dropped you from their list ... kids pick up on it at a drop of a hat” (Experienced Teacher). Once the students and the families get a sense of teachers not being comfortable with the community, the place or the people, it is difficult for everybody concerned. As one teacher mentioned:

There are just some teachers that should have never come to an area like this. And for some of them, it's been very daunting. But when the time comes for them to say yes, two years is enough, but at the end they say they really enjoyed it. But then there are some who do their two years, and they can't wait to get out. But I think there are some new teachers who haven't experienced separation from the family before. I really think, at the end of the game, that's the first critical aspect to being a successful teacher, learning to separate yourself. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
The need to be able to be apart from close family and friends and to develop your own friendships and professional support networks is an important aspect for new teachers in remote rural areas. Clearly it will not suit all people. But for those it does suit and for those who can develop supportive and close relationships in the areas, it can be a very stimulating and sustaining environment with curriculum leadership and management possibilities to enhance one’s teaching life.

Additionally, there is an excellent formal and informal mentoring program to support new staff. As one experienced teacher explained:

… when I first came, [we] had a meeting every week, and everybody at the school, like, had a fifteen minute meeting … it was helpful. And then you could ask them if you weren’t sure about how something was done. And then the new principal came and it turned into more of a mentor thing. So one of the other primary teachers is my mentor, and she’s been here for a long time. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

It is clear that the staff work well together and that experienced staff work in collaboration and co-operate thoughtfully to suggest ways new teachers can acquire a sense of belonging to the school and to the wider community and feel welcomed.

8.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

There is a sense of a strong partnership of school and community leadership, with the school community working closely with the shire to plan and organise community-wide activities.

For example, Quilpie State College, in conjunction with CWAATSICH (Aboriginal Health and Centrelink Services), other health agencies and the Quilpie Shire Council, provide an early years’ program for the families of Quilpie. This is an early years’ program where families play and learn together. It is organised by a teacher and an Indigenous Education Worker and aims to assist learning through literacy and numeracy activities presented through play. It focuses on healthy lifestyles and increasing the literacy skills of children entering school (http://www.quilpiesc.eq.edu.au/Documents/Cryer/Cryer%20ED%20498%2002.02.11.pdf).

There was in the past, a couple of years, there was a meet and greet at the Town Hall. But generally, it’s just basically introduction through the school newsletter to the community announcing the teaching staff for the year. And maybe just at home of the parents of their students ... . (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The other point about how the community contributes to the recruitment and retention of teachers was the comment made about how when potential teachers visit, they are shown the community life. For example, a comment was made about a student teacher who had done a practicum experience in a nearby town and then visited Quilpie, she “came up here and had a ball”. The principal went on to say, “if she didn’t come out here and do that, I don’t think she would have applied for a country area” (Principal).

Another important point about Quilpie is the sense of the community as one that is encouraging to all people who are a part of the town. It was mentioned that this is a town where “there is not a lot of racial tension”. In fact, the narrative of the staff member who began as a cleaner at the school, then went on to become a teacher’s aide and then study to become an Indigenous teacher was inspiring and one that showed the ways that the community had worked together at a number of levels to encourage and support her. She clearly showed a great strength of commitment to the community and to actively working to change the school over time. For example, she had
lobbied the government in the past to develop the high school program “because we had up to 22 kids here at one stage sitting on a verandah, doing distance education, waiting for someone to come by just to help them out, you know, no support.” More recently she talked about working to change the ways that people viewed NAIDOC Week and other Indigenous events and suggested and organised other innovative ways of working together in the community and in the wider society. She has been “Focusing on bringing the community together and celebrating and understanding each other”. When commenting on her encouragement to become a teacher she admitted that she had “support, not just from within the school, but there was also, I suppose a bit of a push from community people as well.”

It is this sense of the broad community working together, celebrating together and teaching and learning together that makes this community a stimulating and challenging one for new teachers who want to work in rural and remote areas.

8.3.3 How has this school community supported pre-service teacher education?

For various reasons, including financial and distance from home and family, not many pre-service teacher education students apply to come to such remote settings as Quilpie for their professional practice. One of the teachers had a pre-service teacher work with her last year. However, the new teacher was herself a recent graduate and agreed to work with the pre-service student because she was teaching in the early years area that the student teacher wanted experience. As it worked out, the new teacher found it “was a lot of hard work” and had to ask the more experienced teachers a lot of questions, but overall, it reportedly worked out well and was a positive learning experience for all involved in the program.

Some of the teachers have not had much experience with teacher education students. As one experienced teacher said; “I haven’t had a lot to do with that sort of thing.” One suggestion was that it does “depend on what time of the year it is, because if it is assessment or reporting time, because there are some quite busy times, just that extra interaction with someone else can also hinder the regular progress of the school.”

Clearly, the priorities, interests and needs of the teachers and students, as well as the teacher education pre-service students and their institutions, need to be carefully and reasonably taken into account in setting up the various programs and taking account of the rhythms of the school and university years as well as the cycles of weather conditions and environmental concerns of all involved. All participants, in the process, need to keep in mind the multiple factors that enhance the learning of the children. Overall, the school staff generally indicates an eager and encouraging approach to accepting pre-service teacher education students who choose to undertake professional experience placements at the school. It is crucial to include potential new teachers in a wide variety of educational settings to make sure they get the best quality and most meaningful teacher education they can, including seeing the difficult and particularly challenging times and conditions that teachers work under.

As well as taking on pre-service teachers, another aspect to note is the professional development and higher degree studies, including post graduate certificates and Masters studies that are being undertaken by some of the teachers here. Some of this professional learning is done through online learning because, as some teachers said: “distance to travel for PD is difficult”. For example, “It takes a whole day to travel back from the one I am going to next week. So you use up a lot of our TRS in travel days … that’s the way it is. If we had a little plane!!! …”. So taking into account the wishful hope for an easier and quicker way to travel, it was the long travel time that made PD so expensive for the school. Nevertheless, the teachers found it important to undertake ongoing learning to enhance their work as teachers and realised that this would encourage pre-service teachers to learn as well,
if it was undertaken through E-lluminate and other forms of online learning, and in some cases, in collaborative groups.

8.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

8.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain the quality of the recruitment and retention of teachers?

The challenges that Quilpie State College faces to sustain the quality of recruitment and retention of teachers are best understood in the context of the framework of rural social space used in this study. It is necessary to understand the particular set of events, or practices, performed in this particular place. It is the way that the economy, the geography and the demography of the area work together to produce the relationships between, and amongst the people and the place. Society and space, in Atkins’ formulation, interact, so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people one meets and interacts with, and the things one does together in their environs. The school community has set up a productive partnership with the people in the wider community, and the individuals and groups in the school and the community overlap and interconnect in a variety of ways that make this a caring, pleasant and affordable place to live in, from the data provided here.

In terms of students’ success in school, the students’ results, when compared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, indicates that there is not a huge gap as is found in some remote communities. As the My School website indicates: “We continue to have an affiliation with the ‘Dare to Lead’ project which has resulted in our Indigenous students achieving at a level equivalent to their non-Indigenous peers.” Additionally, the website indicates that Quilpie State College was recognised “by being among the top 60 most improved schools in Queensland”, given the My School website’s reporting of changes in the NAPLAN results between 2008 and 2010. It is stated that this was because of the “renewed focus on student morale, curriculum and pedagogy” (http://www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SchoolProfileRep.aspx?SDRSchoolId=310000001594&DEEWRId=12251&CalendarYear=2010&RefId=ynb7Q1j5oz7bVtOml%2bE).

The relationships and professional networks established in the school community are sustaining for the teachers as well as for the community members. The relationships are based on respect, trust and caring for one another. The ethos and values of the school reinforces these. Collaborative relationships and professional learning communities are part of the ongoing relationships in the school. The people working in the school each bring various skills, abilities, knowledge and ethical considerations that make the school a productive and satisfying workplace that is attractive to the new graduate teachers that choose to work there. The work is complex and intense but that is part of the challenge and the joy of the work of a teacher. Respect for local knowledge and community engagement is obvious in the school.

There were a lot of joys of living and working in this community that were mentioned by the teachers. “This size is almost perfect … I think a certain size is good” (Experienced Teacher). Part of this size factor means, ‘smaller classes’ than in larger towns, the teachers gain more responsibilities and teachers ‘have more say in what is going on in the school’. As was stated previously, you are welcomed into the community and become known because of the size of the community. The ‘Remote Area Incentive Scheme’ (RAIS), whereby teachers are paid an extra allowance for working in remote communities, was also mentioned as an attractive feature of working in such a remote setting. Also, as the Principal noted; “I enjoy the fact that I can have the
opportunity to speak to every child every day...and work on school renewal and the zest for education” (Principal).

More difficult challenges include the aspect of privacy for one’s personal life. Nothing is really private or anonymous in such a small community and this is one of the main issues for teachers and schools in communities such as Quilpie. As a staff member you have to be able to feel comfortable knowing that your behaviour, your teaching, your attitudes and values are likely to be observed at all hours of the day and night and that any behaviour not seen as ‘acceptable and responsible’ to all groups in rural communities can lead to disapproving comments, controversy and tension among some individuals and groups in the community.

The other aspect, is realising that pedagogical misunderstandings within the school and between the parents, community members and the teaching staff are a part of life in all schools at various times. Poor communication or misunderstood communication is also something that happens and this can be intensified in small rural communities, and teachers need to be aware of the challenges that open communication and transparency can make for the people involved. Differentiated gender expectations amongst both adults and children in the community were mentioned as another challenge in developing even more positive community relationships.

Overall, good school leadership, supportive professional colleagues and excellent community school partnerships, both formal and informal, make a strong sense of place and community in Quilpie. It does seem to be a ‘simply unique’ place for new and graduate teachers to develop their sense of identity as a successful and engaging teacher. Situated in a town within such a vast open space, it is both challenging and stimulating to develop one’s identity here as a teacher and as a person in a vibrant and caring community. Part of this is because of the economy, geography and demography of the area, with the positive and sensitive social and cultural relationships, its unique people and its sense of place in Queensland and Australia.
9 RICHMOND STATE SCHOOL

Richmond State School was selected for study from the nominated schools because it is situated in a small community with a medium to low economic and social base.

9.1 THE COMMUNITY

9.1.1 Geography: The Place, Space and Environment of Richmond

The space is vast, the light is glary, the land is flat and the dry dust permeates the humid air.

In prehistoric times, Richmond’s location was submerged beneath an Ancient Inland Sea, therefore, the site is rich in the fossilised remains of animal and plant life. Water is plentiful because Richmond is situated over the Great Artesian Basin. There is sub-artesian and artesian water, and bores supply the town and surrounding areas with water for domestic and agricultural use.

There is an absence of tree growth in the immediate area around Richmond. The surrounding land is flat, dry and dusty with expanses of grassland. A thick body of Flinders and Mitchell grasses cover the ground and the landscape changes from brown and barren to green after rain. Heat and rain are part of the changing landscape of the surrounding areas. The vast flat landscape is glary and the harsh sunlight shines on the dry brown earth, and further away there are sparse gidgee trees that grow alongside the highway. There are paddocks, fields, bush, farms, and land rich with fossils on the vast expanses outside the town.

The township of Richmond is a settlement remote from large cities and large population areas. The town of Richmond is located approximately 520 kilometres west of Townsville and 400 kilometres east of Mount Isa on the North Western stretch of the Flinders Highway. The train line runs parallels to the road for most of the journey between Townsville and Richmond. The large, three sectioned trucks or road trains traverse the highway with their loads of valuable iron ore from the mines much further inland (see map below).
The area around where Richmond was established was initially:

*Explored by William Landsborough who came through the area in 1862 looking for Burke and Wills. Landsborough’s report on the area was such that within the next decade the area had been settled by pastoralists.*


Gold was also discovered in the area and Richmond became an important hub for the Cobb & Co coaches which moved miners throughout the area. Richmond was established as a European settlement in about 1860. Richmond was surveyed in 1882. The town of Richmond was named after the Richmond Downs Pastoral Run. By 1904, the railway was built and reached the town, thus making it the terminus and railhead for the Gulf country. There is a pioneer cemetery that is very small and was first used in the early 1900’s. It has about 30 graves and 15 of these are unmarked. Many of the headstones are badly worn and unreadable. The town centre has distinctive architecture that is reminiscent of Richmond’s rich pastoral heritage and European history.
Richmond is recognised as an attractive outback town in Queensland, and a town that takes particular pride in its appearance. Richmond's streets are lined with striking native and bougainvillea garden beds, parks and recreation areas, which are always neat and well kept.

Water is plentiful because Richmond is situated over the Great Artesian Basin. Bores supply the town and surrounding areas with water for domestic and agricultural use. The community of Richmond has made the most of its access to water. It has built a wonderful recreational lake and has also made a magnificent waterfall as the centre piece of its new Bush Tucker Garden. It is located on the west bank of the artificial Lake Fred Tritton. There are more than 900 plants representing 76 different species with plaques stating the traditional use. Designed to maintain the traditional Indigenous cultures and teachings, the garden is an open space for people to sit in solitude, to reflect and to meet with others and share in its harmony.

Recreational water activities in the area include fishing, boating, water-skiing, walking and swimming, see photos below:
Mushroom water feature at Lake Fred Tritton in Richmond.

Searching for fossils and exploring the historic dinosaurs trails is another local activity that attracts local and international tourists to the area. The local museum, see photo below, is filled with scenes of past treasures, including dinosaur remains and fossils of all types and sizes.
9.1.2 Demography: The People and Community of Richmond

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 1055</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 35</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 537</td>
<td>Female 518</td>
<td>Male 17</td>
<td>Female 18</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Statistical Local Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 902</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 50</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 496</td>
<td>Female 406</td>
<td>Male 23</td>
<td>Female 27</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Statistical Local Area)

In the 2006 Australian Census, the population of Richmond (Statistical Local Area) was 969 people. Of these 55.0% were identified as males (cf 49.4% of the national figures) and 45.0% were identified as females (cf 50.6% of the national figures). The Indigenous population was 5.5% compared with a national rate of 2.3%.

The median age of persons in Richmond was 34 years, compared with 37 years for persons in Australia. Richmond has a higher proportion of the population in the age group 0 to 14, 22.7%, compared with the national figures of 19.8%. From ages 15 to 54, the population figures are the same as the national average. In the older age group of 55 and over, Richmond has 22.2% compared with the national figures of 24.3%.

In the 2006 Census, 87.3% of persons usually resident in Richmond stated they were born in Australia. Other common responses to place of birth were: New Zealand 1.1%, Papua New Guinea 0.6%, Wales 0.6%, Scotland 0.4% and England 0.3%.
Of the 749 people aged 15 years and over who were usually resident in Richmond and were in the labour force, 72.7% were employed full-time, 19.3% were employed part-time, 2.5% were employed but away from work, 4.2% were employed but did not state their hours worked and 1.3% were unemployed. This compares with 5.2% of the national population that are unemployed.

The most common industries of employment, for persons aged 15 years and over, in Richmond were: sheep, beef cattle and grain farming, 35.6% (cf. 13.2% nationally); local government administration, 9.7% (cf. 1.4% nationally); school education, 4.9%, (cf. 4.5% nationally); road freight transport, 3.0% (cf. 1.8% nationally); and accommodation, 2.1% (cf. 1.3% nationally).

In Richmond, the median weekly individual income for persons aged 15 years and over, who were usual residents, was $484, this compares favourably with $466 Australia wide. The median weekly household income was $915, compared with $1,027 in Australia. The median weekly family income was $1,072, compared with $1,171 in Australia. So although the media weekly income was higher, the household and family incomes were slightly lower.

In the 2006 Census, there were 205 families in Richmond 50.2% were couple families with children, 39.5% were couple families without children and 10.2% (cf national average of 15.8%) were one parent families.

9.1.3 Economy: The Production, Work and Industry of Richmond

Local industries include large pastoral holdings that run beef cattle. In the past, sheep were also important but are no longer considered profitable, so beef is by far the main industry. Grain fields, goats, camels, fossils, dinosaur trails and tourism are also part of the industries in and around the town. The area is watered by sub-artesian and artesian water. The man made lake is the recreational heart of the community in the daylight and the pubs, one of the few public places open after dark.

Dinosaurs and fossils are features that attract tourists to the area. The fossilised remains of animal and plant life from the Ancient Inland Sea are being marketed globally through the World-Renowned Kronosaurus Korner and Australia's Dinosaur Trail. http://www.richmond.qld.gov.au/ . The local museum is filled with scenes of treasures from the past, including dinosaur remains and fossils of all types and sizes.
Recreational water activities associated with the lake include fishing, boating, water-skiing, walking and swimming. Searching for fossils is another local activity.

The Region’s development has been enhanced through a proactive Council that takes responsibility for and leads in social and economic matters, and endeavours to make the town an attractive place to live for all residents as well as to attract tourists to the area. The Shire of Richmond websites highlights the idea that Richmond shire is the ‘Heart of the Inland Sea’.

9.2 THE SCHOOL

The photo above is of the main school building which is built up high on stilts, Queensland style, to allow the cool air to flow under the classrooms.

Richmond State School is a stimulating and exciting place for learning. Students, teachers and community members comment on the ways that the school population work together to support each other in learning. Although Richmond State School is situated in a community that is isolated both culturally and geographically, it provides a challenging learning program for students from prep to Year 10, with 11 full-time and 3 part-time school teachers. The school has a current enrolment of approximately 130 students. The school incorporates a wide range of specialist teachers, diverse subjects and up to date resources and facilities. For example the school has an innovative LOTE program in Japanese and an excellent sports program.

The school has an integrated school culture where there is a balanced mixture of experienced and new staff who share ideas, experiences, skills, values, curriculum programs and teaching innovations. The support and ancillary staff are all drawn from the local population and this factor adds to the stability of staffing and the schools close links with the local community.
The Annual School Report for 2008 states that the primary pedagogical focus at Richmond is on the development of the core skills of literacy and numeracy. There has been a major emphasis placed on teacher professional development as the school further embraces the goals of Education Queensland’s Strategic Plan.

Also reported in the Annual School Report are the results of the school opinion survey, indicating that ‘students and staff are extremely satisfied with all aspects of the school climate. Parents are mostly satisfied but many are sitting under the neutral section and this matter is being explored by school staff’.

The classrooms and playgrounds are places where children are engaged in their learning.

9.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

9.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

Good leadership within the school and community means that staff mentor and support each other with rich contacts through teaching and non teaching staff working closely together to support each other and local families. There is an excellent mentoring program to support new staff, whereby, experienced staff work in collaboration and co-operate thoughtfully to make sure new staff feel a sense of belonging to the school and the community. Strong networks of staff, teaching and support staff, work extremely well together. There is a good sense of an integrated school culture involving:

‘sustained support and ongoing exchange across experience levels for all teachers. There were no separate camps of veterans and novices. Expert teachers understood the importance of mentoring their novice colleagues and often found that they themselves benefited from the exchange. All teachers, veterans and novices alike, were regularly engaged in deliberations about curriculum, instruction, and their shared responsibility for students’ (Kardos, 2001, p. 261).
Teachers at Richmond spoke about their sense of developing as professionals and their deep sense of community togetherness. In addition, one of the community aides, whose responsibility is community liaison and behaviour management at the school, said:

They [school staff] tend to ask my opinion, they treat kids at the same level, they’re [you’re] not just a teacher’s aide, they’re involved, you’re involved, in decision making in the school, you’re asked your opinion. Everyone has their opinion and you’re not excluded. (Site Visit Interview)

Julie has lived in Richmond for 24 years and is a teacher’s aide at the school. She is the parent of 3 children at the school (in primary, upper primary and high school). When asked what she likes about living in a rural area like Richmond, she replies,

The people, relaxed lifestyle, um...being a parent you know where your kids are and if you don’t, you can soon find out. It’s not rushed. Everybody knows you, like if you go to the shop and you have no money you book stuff down. I suppose the closeness of the community, people know you...yeah. (Parent & Teacher’s aide, Site Visit Interview)

Part of Julie’s work involves behaviour management in the school. She talks about how much she loves working with the children and how they treat her differently inside and outside the school context.

Yes, yes, the kids are brilliant, um… knowing the kids more on a personal level is good. Outside the school they treat you in a totally different way than inside the school. Inside the school you’re sort of, like not the enemy, but you have the authority and they see that, but outside the school they totally switch and they will sit and talk to you. They will come up to you, yeah, they’re just really friendly little things…you get to know them on a more personal level. You can help them more, because you tend to know their circumstances… like if their parents work or don’t work. (Parent & Teacher’s aide, Site Visit Interview)

Julie sees her relationship with the children, in the work space, as a teacher’s aide as one thing, whereas in the community, it’s another, but both of them are complimentary and perhaps have a different quality about them because of the smallness and closeness of the small knit community. It is clear from other interviews that Julie’s work is really appreciated by the new teachers, as her work on behaviour management with strong community links and understandings of family contexts and circumstances is helpful if the new teachers have particular problems and difficulties with certain children in their classrooms.

That they are accepted into the community. Most of our young teachers don’t stay, um most are young women and they tend to move to where their husbands or spouses go, but if there is work around for their husbands, it tends to keep them here. Heat, we have a battle with the heat, people don’t like the heat either... There’s not much you can do about that, but we air-conditioned the school so, all the accommodation is air-conditioned ... . Some people just come, they like the lifestyle, sea change kind of thing. The relationships they build with their students because they are... like I know one teacher is going to get the kids she taught the year before and I know she really wants to teach those kids again. The relationship building that teacher has with those students… So it’s a 100% she will get that class back again. (Parent & Teacher’s aide, Site Visit Interview)
In commenting on her experiences of working with new teachers:

Yes they’re good, my role is Behavior Management, they tend to ask my opinion, they treat kids at the same level, you’re not just a teacher’s aide, they’re involved, you’re involved, in decision making in the school, you’re asked your opinion. Everyone has their opinion and you’re not excluded… (Parent & Teacher’s aide, Site Visit Interview)

Also Barbra, the Indigenous community support teacher, spoke of the schools strong support system for new teachers:

‘the support system for the teachers is very high and they are very good, experienced teachers and have been here for a very long time. And... the staff turnover is very low, in my understanding.’ (Indigenous Community Support Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The average staff attendance for permanent and temporary staff and school leaders was as high as 97% in 2008, as was the proportion of staff retained from the previous school year. From the end of the 2007 school year, 84% of staff were retained by the school for the entire 2008 school year. The average student attendance rate, as a percentage in 2008, was 90%.

**Parent, student and teacher satisfaction with the school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of students satisfied that they are getting a good education from school.</th>
<th>81.5%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of staff members satisfied that there is good team spirit.</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of parents satisfied that this is a good school.</td>
<td>54.3% (25.7% Neutral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students satisfied that the teacher helps them to do their best.</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of staff members satisfied that this a good place to work.</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of parents satisfied that the school is developing their child’s computer skills.</td>
<td>70.6% (17% Neutral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students satisfied with the interest the teacher takes in their learning.</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of staff members satisfied that this school has good workplace health and safety practices.</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of parents satisfied that their child works well at this school.</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**9.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?**

There is a sense of a strong partnership of school and community leadership, with the school community working closely with the shire to plan and organise community wide activities such as: the fossil festival; and the idea that all new teachers are welcome to both the school and to the community, when they arrive. They are encouraged to join and become actively involved in community groups that have meaning to them and provide a sense of who they are as both people and teachers.
9.3.3 How has this school community supported pre-service teacher education?

The school is eager and encouraging of pre-service teacher education students who choose to undertake professional experience placements at the school. The principal keeps a close watch for capable graduating students and encourages them to apply for teaching positions in the Richmond area. As soon as the school is aware of teachers leaving for promotion or to work in other areas of Queensland, the school is proactive in getting replacement staff who choose to want to work in this area. One new graduate teacher remembers his university lecturer encouraging him to apply for rural areas. He said,

Well, I think back to when I was actually at Uni and one of the lecturers there, …what she did to inform us of opportunities that are there and as she said, it may not suit everybody, most of you in this room, she said, would not want to take it onboard and for those that do, it might be the best thing you ever do. (New graduate teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This was clearly a factor in this young teacher applying for a position at this school. Then the way he was supported by the staff at the school and invited to participate in activities by community members made him feel good. He states,

Well as far as the community goes, I seem to have gotten some pretty nice feedback, off other people that we have fitted in quite well. I took up Sal’s advice right from the start, which was if someone gives you an offer to go out and do something you take them up on it. (New graduate teacher, Site Visit Interview)

He reports that a community member said to him, ‘Like, oh you really just jumped in and fitted in straight away’.

9.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

9.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain the quality of the recruitment and retention of teachers?

The challenges that Richmond State School faces to sustain the quality of recruitment and retention of teachers are best understood in the context of the framework of rural social space used in this study. It is necessary to understand the particular set of events, or practices, performed in this particular place. Society and space, in Atkins’ formulation, interact, so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people one meets and interacts with, and the things one does together in their environs. The school community has set up a productive partnership with the people in the wider community and the individuals and groups in the school and the community overlap and interconnect in a variety of ways.

The relationships and professional networks established in the school community are sustaining for the teachers and school leaders. The relationships are based on respect, trust and caring for one another. The ethos and values of the school reinforces these. Collaborative relationships and professional learning communities are part of the fabric of the school. The people working in the school each bring various skills, abilities knowledge and ethical considerations that make the school a productive and satisfying workplace that is attractive to the new graduate teachers that choose to work there. The work is complex and intense, but that is part of the challenge and the joy of a teacher’s work. Respect for local knowledge and community engagement is obvious in the school. In fact the report in the Tweed Daily News, 31st May, 2010, stated,
DINOSAUR fossils have been discovered in a veggie patch at a Queensland school, 100 million years after the beasts roamed the inland sea.

Year 10 student Raymond Hodgson and groundsman Ben Smith unearthed six vertebrae from the ichthyosaur on May 20, while laying out a vegetable garden at the Richmond State School, in the state's northwest.


This event would certainly make for a wonderful curriculum and learning experience that can be shared by the students, teachers and all community members.

More difficult challenges include the aspect of privacy for one's private life. Nothing is private or anonymous in such a small community and this is one of the issues for teachers and schools in communities such as Richmond. As a staff member you have to be able to feel comfortable knowing that your behaviour, your teaching and your attitudes and values are being observed 24 hours a day and any behaviour not seen as ‘acceptable’ to all groups in rural communities can lead to negative comments and conflict and tensions among some groups in the community.

The other aspect is realising that pedagogical misunderstandings within the school and between the parents, community members and the teaching staff are a part of life in all schools at some time or other. This can be intensified in rural school communities, and teachers need to be aware of the challenges that open communication and transparency can make for the people involved in such a dynamic and diverse community.

Overall, good school leadership, supportive professional colleagues and excellent community school partnerships, both formal and informal, make a strong sense of place and community in Richmond. This makes Richmond State School a place of excellent opportunity for teachers and students to be part of a rich learning community. This is an exceptional place for graduate teachers to get their sense of identity as a successful and engaging teacher in a stimulating geographic place and space.
Tieri State School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium economic and social base.

10.1 THE COMMUNITY

10.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Tieri

Tieri is a small mining town in the Central Highlands Region of Queensland. It is located in the heart of Central Queensland, 917 kilometres north west of Brisbane. Tieri is situated inland, 328 kilometres west of the coastal city of Rockhampton and 36 kilometres east of Capella, where the local high school is situated. The town of Tieri is part of the Central Highlands Regional Council which was established on the 15th of March, 2008, following the amalgamation of the former shires of Bauhinia, Duaringa, Emerald and Peak Downs.

Map 1 shows the town of Emerald. Tieri is situated 85 kilometres north east of Emerald in the Bowen Basin Region.

Below is a map of the towns in the area around Tieri (taken from the circulation map of the Central Queensland newspaper site).
Map 2. Shows towns and main roads in the area, and shows the access roads to Tieri in relation to the smaller towns of Capella, the town of Middlemount which is another mining area service town, and the larger town of Emerald.


Map 3 shows the Bowen Basin Region with the operating coal mines and townships.

When I visited Tieri, I travelled by car from Mackay through Sarina and up into the highlands, staying at Middlemount on the way. It was a winding road that had many wonderful views of parts of the Great Dividing Range with mountains, plateaus, gullies and escarpments with an ancient and complex geological history. There were stunning views eastwards to the coast line which changed dramatically with the changing light around sunset. There was also evidence of car accidents and road deaths. At one site, a cross and a miners helmet were erected to mark the place where a miner had been killed whilst driving his car along the treacherous winding narrow road.

Photo of the grasses and country on the drive towards Tieri.

There is a diverse range of soil and vegetation in the area around Tieri which is a result of a long period of geological, weathering and natural erosion processes. Historically, the area was known for its undulating plains covered with various blue, mitchell and other grasses, along with woodlands of mountain coolabah, bloodwood and silver-leaved ironbark trees interspersed with stony ridges. The soils on the undulating plains are mostly heavy black, brown and grey clays of varying depth with smaller areas of undulating scrub plains formed from the deposition of weathered fine-grained sediments. Some areas are ‘fertile self-mulching cracking dark clay soils’ (Spackman, 2008) that are suitable for grain growing and pasture production. The open downs plains were the first areas developed for grain farming. Introduced pasture grasses are now used for cattle grazing.

The beef industry plays a significant part in the economy of the surrounding area, with records from 1869 showing that ‘some cattle were then in the area but the predominant livestock was sheep… . There was a gradual changeover from sheep to cattle in the late 1940s owing to the prevalence of speargrass and wild dogs. The majority of cattle are now Brahman crossed, which ensures hybrid vigour and higher weight gains’. http://www.capella.com.au/cattle-in-the-peak-downs-district. Most farming in the region is broadacre farming enterprises or mixed farming and beef cattle operations which reflects the range of land and soil types in the area. The main
crops grown in the district include grain, sorghum, wheat and chickpea, and smaller areas of mungbean and sunflower. Grazing crops of forage sorghum, oats, and grazing legumes (lab lab and butterfly pea) are also grown <http://www.capella.com.au/grain-farming-on-cracking-clay-soil-downs>.

The town of Tieri was built on scrubby bushland which was originally within the property called ‘Crinum’. It was named after the parish in which it was established. Tieri was developed during the 1980s by Mount Isa Mines (MIM) Holdings Pty Ltd to provide housing for the employees and the families of the Oaky Creek Mine. The mine is situated 14km to the east of Tieri. Exploration at Oaky Creek began in 1977. MIM acquired its majority stake in the Oaky Creek project lease in 1981, becoming project manager, and the mine was officially opened in 1983.

Tieri Town is a township area, including residential, industrial and commercial land use. Tieri Town is bounded by the Tieri Town Firewarden boundaries, which encompass the urban part of the Tieri locality. Rapid population growth took place during the 1980s and has fluctuated from the 1990s and 2000s because of variations in the economy of the mining operations. The Peak Downs Shire Council took over the administration of the town on behalf of MIM Holdings when it signed a formal letter of agreement and infrastructure package on 28 March, 1984.

As you drive into the town, the design of the sign announcing the town of Tieri gives a clear indication of the mine’s important role as the town’s core. The line drawings of the miners and the mining equipment announce the importance of mining to the economy and demography of the town.

The photo shows the sign at the entrance to the town of Tieri. Like the other nearby towns of Middlemount and Dysart, Tieri is a service centre for the local coal mines in the area <http://www.scratchpatch.com.au/Tieri_Queensland.htm>.
10.1.2 Demography: the people and community

The interview material gave some background to the demography of the community as well as to the relationships in the community.

Originally … the town was built by the mine to encourage families to come out, so [unlike] a lot of other mining towns, where the husband is flying in and out and will spend four days in, four days out or two weeks in, two weeks out, in this town, 26 years ago, the mining company decided to buy land from three local farms, and they bought the land and they have built a town that is purposely just for mining families and then anyone who needs to service the houses (Principal, Onsite Interview)

Some of the contractors, contracted to do specific work for the mining operations, do not live in the community. These people are often referred to as ‘seagulls’ most of the contractors were what we called seagulls - they would fly (drive in) for their rostered shift and then fly (or drive) back to where their families were - usually on the coast’ (Email communication with the Principal).

The history of the town and its strong relationship with the economy of the mining industry means that the demography of the area is predominantly made up of miners who work under difficult and dirty conditions. The work consists of long work shifts, ‘workplace danger and boredom’ http://queenslandplaces.com.au/tieri. As the population figures show, in 2006 there were 939 males and 740 females in the town (total population 1,679). Between the 2001 census, the ratio of males to females became closer, but there were still proportionately more males in the population than females and this relates to the type of work that is available in the town. The wages that are paid for this work means that the miners had a proportionately high income level compared to the average in the Australian population. ‘Mine wages provided for affluence, and house rents were nominal’. http://queenslandplaces.com.au/tieri

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<th>Indigenous persons: 30</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
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Table 10.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

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<th>Indigenous persons: 49</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
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<td>525</td>
<td>1155</td>
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<td>47</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

In the 2006 Australian Census, the population of Tieri (Statistical Local Area) was 1,637 people. Of these, 55.0% were identified as males (cf 49.4% of the national figures) and 45.0% were identified as females (cf 50.6% of the national figures). The indigenous population was 5.5% compared with a national rate of 2.3%.
The economy around Tieri is based on the mining industry. As such, Tieri is a centre for the local Oaky Creek coal mine. The local Oaky Creek mining operations commenced open cut drag line operations in late 1982 with saleable coal being produced in December 1983. Underground mining commenced in July 1989, with longwall operations being established at Oaky No. 1 Mine in late 1990. The coal produced at Oaky Creek is a medium volatile, low ash, high quality coking coal, with a range of required features that are vital to the production of good quality coke for modern blast furnaces. 


The Oaky Creek project is a modern, large-scale mining operation producing 10 million tonnes of coking coal a year, and achieving record levels of productivity. It is part of a globally competitive coal mining industry.

Photo of a train taking the coal from the Oaky Creek mine to the port near Mackay.

All raw coal is washed to further ensure consistency of product quality, and product coal is then transported by train to loading facilities at Dalrymple Bay near Mackay and Gladstone. From there, the premium quality coking coal is shipped to major steel makers in Japan, Asia, Europe, United Kingdom, North Africa, South Africa and South America. 

Photo of the coal mining operations at Dalrymple Bay near Mackay.

In the November Xstrata Coal Employee magazine it was reported that

*The Oaky North underground mine has set a new Australian monthly longwall production record, producing a total Run of Mine (ROM) of 1.2 million tonnes in August. Oaky North takes the Australian record from the Newlands Northern underground, which recently produced 961,891 tonnes earlier in the year. The Oaky team attributes their success to teamwork and the optimal performance of underground systems (Xstrata Coal Employee Magazine November 2009 Issue 2).*


Oaky Creek has a workforce of around 450 and a further 225 operating contractors. These employees, and their families, live mainly in Tieri in contemporary housing and motel style single accommodation. The amenities in the town are modern and attractive and include educational facilities such as a pre-school and primary school, community facilities such as a shopping centre, service station, and hotel-motel, and a youth centre with an indoor stadium for activities such as cricket and roller skating, a gymnasium and organised youth activities, as well as sporting facilities such as a swimming pool, squash, tennis, basketball courts, bowling green, golf, and sports fields.
Photo of the shopping centre in Tieri. It is a well planned site for the community. The first shop opened in the Mall on 22 February, 1983, which was the same year that the local school was established [http://www.tieri.net.au/home](http://www.tieri.net.au/home).

As the website of the mining company states,

The Oaky Creek Project has contributed significantly to the region through the development of major infrastructure. In addition to ongoing investment in exploration, new mines and expenditure on existing operations, MIM contributes through the payment of royalties, rail freight, port and other charges and payroll tax to the Queensland government. Where possible, Oaky Creek Project spending is directed to the Central Queensland region, contributing to the local economy. Annual spending in Central Queensland amounts to around $130 million. Oaky Creek also supports a wide range of community groups and contributes to improving local educational, sporting, cultural and medical services. This includes support for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and Queensland Ambulance [http://archive.xstrata.com/mim/www.mim.com.au/oaky.html](http://archive.xstrata.com/mim/www.mim.com.au/oaky.html).

All of the families who live in Tieri have at least one family member employed by Xstrata or their affiliated services, therefore, all families at the school have at least one parent in paid employment. Due to the limited nature of available housing, extended family members do not normally live in the town. Tieri, like other nearby towns of Middlemount and Dysart, is a service centre for the local coal mines in the area. Within the town of Tieri, the families all live relatively close to the school and parents often visit the school and classrooms.

It is important to note that the town of Tieri is made up of the employed miners and people employed to service the mining community. As one of the graduate teachers who was interviewed made it clear:

> this is a mining community. Purely a mining community. With the exception of teaching and a few support services, you can’t reside in this town unless you’re employed by the mine (New graduate teacher, Site Visit Interview).

She also explained that she did not see this town as a rural town and went on to explain why she thought that.

> I don’t see it as rural at all, it’s just a town put here to accommodate the people that work at the mine, which is all it is... Originally the school was out on the mine site and then of course as the population grew and everything changed, they moved the town to here (New graduate teacher, Site Visit Interview).

The teacher then went on to explain how she sees a disconnect with the town of Tieri and the idea of a rural community.

> there’s no affiliation with the rural lifestyle whatsoever. These kids could drive from here to Emerald and not have a clue about what’s growing in that paddock, would not have a clue what that machinery is on the back of that tractor, they don’t have a clue. There’s no expeditions to farms, there’s no relationship or connection with this highly productive farming community around them. There’s none at all. So I don’t see it as a rural school in any shape or form (New graduate teacher, Site Visit Interview).

This idea that the town does not have a close connection with the rural lifestyle, is a challenge to the concept of rural towns being closely connected to agriculture and the farming economy, and necessarily related to the surrounding environment. Certainly the demography and economy of this town is intimately linked to the economy of the mining industry. This school and
community, therefore, are somewhat different from other schools where the school population is more diverse and drawn from the surrounding rural areas, where children travel some distances by school bus and where the community is made up of all age groups, young and old, rich and poor. In this community, all of the families are employed either by the mines or the service related industries. Therefore, how the school and the community can and do work together to attract and retain teachers, is worthy of note in the ways it is similar to or different from other schools set in rural and remote locations. Clearly the production, work and industry in the area are crucial to the character and ethos of the town and are a remarkable feature of this school and community.

10.2 THE SCHOOL

The photo above is taken from the front entrance of the school. Tieri State School, like the whole town community, services the Oaky Creek Coal mine and, therefore, most of the students are from mining families. The School began classes at the beginning of the school year in 1983 with 178 students in Grades 1 – 7. The school profile, presented on the national MySchool website for 2010, indicated that the school had 62% of its students in the middle quadrant of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 7% Indigenous students. It has 13.3 full time equivalent teaching staff, 6.1 full-time equivalent non-teaching staff, and 206 students, of whom 104 were male and 102 female.

The My School website of the Tieri School gives the mission statement of the school as 'Every child achieves their full potential as an individual and as a member of society'. It highlights the focus the school places on the importance of: the development of the whole-child; teaching and an inclusive curriculum; and providing stimulating, supportive learning that encourages the development of independent and self-motivated students. There is a sense of a whole school approach to providing stimulating teaching and learning processes. It also indicates that the school provides a number of welfare programmes and many extra-curricular opportunities
including eco-footprint work, camping and art celebrations. The values of the school are stated as safety, effort, respect and self-responsibility. Students, teachers and community members have commented on the ways that the school population works together to support each other in learning. The school offers Japanese and Instrumental Music, including brass, wind, string and percussion (http://www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SchoolProfileRep.aspx?SDRSchoolId=31000001926&DEEWRId=12879&CalendarYear=2010&RefId=mPO8ON%2b269eqdFiP%2bM0FD6MIyB%2b7A6w8).

The Tieri School’s own website gives figures from the Annual School Opinion Survey 2009, which indicate that of the parents surveyed, 78.9% believe their child is treated fairly, 89.4% believe their child is safe at school and 73.7% are happy with the level of student behaviour. Of the students surveyed, 88.6% believe they are treated fairly and feel safe at school and are satisfied with students’ behaviour (http://tieriss.eq.edu.au/school-reports/annual.pdf).

Figures given as part of the Annual School Report, comment on school performance as perceived by the parents and students, which indicate that 76.3% of parents/caregivers were satisfied that their child was getting a good education at school and 77.6% of the students were satisfied that they were getting a good education at the school. Overall 82.8% of the parents/caregivers were satisfied with their child’s school (http://tieriss.eq.edu.au/school-reports/annual.pdf). Therefore, the school is generally meeting the needs of the students and parents in the community.

Parents are encouraged to attend the school for the regular weekly assembly. Whilst present at the school, I was able to observe the joy on the faces of the children whose parents were attending the assembly. The parents who work in the mines, are often employed in shift work and live close to the school, therefore, on the days they are not rostered for work, many parents are able to join in the school daytime activities. Many of the mothers of the children who do not work are also closely involved in school activities.
Photo showing flowers in the school gardens and the murals on the school walls.

Photo of the sports day from the school website
http://tieriss.eq.edu.au/wcmss/index.php/component/option,com_zoom/Itemid,54/PageNo,1/catif,3/hit,1/key,0/page.view/
TIERI STATE SCHOOL

The playgrounds are well cared for and places where children are able to make friends and play sports. There are murals of children playing together around the school.

Photo of two children playing in the school grounds.

Photo of the entrance to the school with a mural of children playing together on the front wall.
Photo of the new school building constructed as part of the Building Education Revolution.

More photos of the new school building, constructed as part of the Building Education Revolution.
10.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

10.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

The Tieri School is an attractive school in a relatively new community setting. The teachers at the school are generally happy with the housing, as it is relatively new compared to teacher housing in other rural community settings. As one teacher said ‘the house that I’m in is very good, actually, (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview) another noted the good facilities in the town ‘There’s a good gym as well, everyone goes to the gym’ (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview).

Therefore, for a few of the experienced teachers at Tieri School, it was a matter of doing the expected country service to allow them to gain a permanent teaching position, rather than be employed in a contract position with uncertainty of ongoing employment. Many staff mentioned that they needed to do their mandatory country service so they could gain points, allowing them to apply for in demand teaching positions associated with larger populations, particularly coastal areas. For all teachers, employed in the Department of Education and Training in Queensland, it is stated that:

‘It is a condition of permanent employment with the department that teachers may be required to work anywhere in Queensland to meet statewide staffing requirements. Permanent teachers should expect that they will be required to teach in locations across Queensland, as all teachers are likely to be required to transfer at some stage. This condition applies to all teachers appointed on a permanent basis regardless of location preferences at the time of application for teacher employment. (http://education.qld.gov.au/hr/recruitment/teaching/employment-conditions.html)

Along with this, there is also a The Remote Area Incentives Scheme (RAIS) which ‘aims to encourage quality teachers to teach in rural and remote schools and to remain in those schools beyond the minimum required service period’ (http://education.qld.gov.au/hr/recruitment/teaching/remote-area-incentive.html). This RAIS provides generous incentives and cash and leave benefits to teachers
in schools and other educational settings in rural or remote locations in Queensland, the Tieri school is classified as a category 4 school.

Most of the young teachers in Tieri had only been employed previously on short term contracts. For example, when asked ‘And why was your first job a rural school?’ one fourth year out teacher replied Because we were told that we had to do out back service, and I thought I’d get it over with while I was young. When asked to explain her comments further she said that in her previous teaching position she only stayed the mandatory two years ‘It was just very far from home and very far from the coastline, and I was pretty much a teenager, I was into going for a surf all the time, so it was a bit of a shock for me’ (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview). She is back in a rural area now but, as she explained, it is not so far from family and friends, her previous teaching was in a more remote location.

The majority of experienced teachers at the school are often only 4 or 5 years into their teaching career and state they came to make sure they received a permanent employment position. For example

they [employment personnel] said if I went there, then I’d then get Tieri permanency…The very first time was to ensure I’ve got a job, a permanent job, and to pretty much get it [country service] over and done with. [laughter] Before I had a family, before I settle down and have a family. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Others stated how they applied and then how they responded when they were told they were to go to a place they had never heard of and knew nothing about,

then we filled out the form saying, We’ll go and do our voluntary country service. To get it out of the way… and then we just received a letter saying you’ve been posted to Tieri. And we went, Tieri? We looked it up on a map [laughing]. And we went, Oh, yeah. I’ve got a friend at Middlemount. That’s not too far away…Because I taught with her at my last school. So I rang her and she said, “Oh, that’s just down the road.” And my thinking of “down the road” was a bit different to hers. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The teachers at Tieri were all generally pleased with their original perceptions of the place when they initially arrived. They were pleased with the school and the town facilities. As one said It is actually quite a good school, we’ve had a lot of other, it’s, the town’s got everything we need, behaviour is terrific, the kids, compared to other rural schools I’ve been to, and so that we can get some of our mortgage paid off, and so that we are settled... So we can afford to buy where we want to buy. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

For some teachers it took a while to settle in, as it was a mining town rather than a rural setting which they may have expected. It was also easier for a married couple because they came as a couple. For example, a young married teacher said

It took us a long time to get used to it. Nothing with the school though, the school and the staff are lovely and it was very sociable in the first year too, there were lots of younger people to go out with. Second year, we settled in more, we started to enjoy it. Third year, we liked it as well. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The other issue that stood out was the support that was given to the teachers. It was mostly the newer teachers that were mentored but one teacher reported on how the Principal mentored staff:
I do know this year though, this year and last year, with the new teachers Anita has done mentoring on one afternoon a week with those new teachers, and teachers coming back off leave. So I think that’s really good. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Apart from the principal, there was another teacher who was obviously very supportive of new teachers to the area and was commended for her work by the principal as well. One teacher said ‘I don’t hesitate asking anybody and I’ve asked all different people, everybody. I’ve asked the prac teacher staff, I’ve asked the two fellows staff, I’ve asked all people. I’m not somebody who is hesitant to come forward and ask for help’. Another teacher said ‘It’s pretty good. Jane’s really good in the curriculum, like, if you need help she’s really good and she’s not condescending or anything like that if you’re a bit lost. So she’s really good. And if there are any problems, like, I’ve been able to come to the Principal or who I could find’. So it is clear that if you need help and support in the school, it is there if you ask and need it, and it is also organised for those who are new to teaching in the area.

Another teacher explained why she liked working in the community. The town it’s small enough that you get to know enough people so that you feel comfortable in getting involved in the community. (New graduate, Site Visit Interview).

The reasons that teachers enjoy working in the school were also clearly expressed ‘as what I enjoy about being a teacher here is the small school, like, you do know everyone and over the four years I’ve seen a lot of the children progress through, like, you see a big change’. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

One teacher mentioned the small town aspect, The town it’s small enough that you get to know enough people that you feel comfortable in getting involved in the community. (New graduate, Site Visit Interview).

Another teacher explained why she enjoyed teaching in the school as ‘Probably the close knit community, it’s a safe environment... And with this school, the behaviour is just excellent’. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another comment that indicated Tieri is different from other surrounding schools, and is used to explain why the children are all well behaved is, as one teacher said:

Perhaps because most of the mothers don’t work, and they know exactly what’s going on, they are very involved in the school, perhaps too involved sometimes [laughter]. Not so much involved in helping with the school. [Laughter] Yes. And there’s no broken families. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Furthermore, she went on to explain that:

They’ve all got both parents. I don’t know any single parent families in the school. They’ve all got equipment, it’s kind of a rich community, obviously, and they’ve got everything they need, to the point that sometimes they are a bit spoiled. You don’t have, like in city schools I’ve taught at, you don’t have the drug problems and those sort of things. They don’t have the bad example from older siblings. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This point highlights the issue that the employed miners, with families, are mostly fathers employed in the mines with wives and children at home. There do not appear, from these comments, to be any single mothers or fathers employed in the mines. Mining in areas such as this is traditionally a male occupation and the few women employed are in more skilled areas and not on shift work. Also, the fact that there are no older siblings, acting as bad examples for the children, because older children are often sent to boarding schools on the coast, or to live with relatives in the larger cities in order to complete their secondary education.
The other issue affecting this school, are the local people who already live in the area surrounding Tieri, who want to become teachers and, therefore, complete their teacher education on the coast or by distance mode and apply for a local teaching position when they become qualified teachers. One local person, for example, who did a teaching qualification to change from another career, clearly did not like to travel far for work. She was only interested in applying for teaching positions within a short distance of where she lived. She was also only interested in part-time work because she had children and her husband worked shift work. Therefore, when asked why she had applied for a position at Tieri she stated, ‘Simply because I live here with my husband and children.

Another teacher explained she was in the ‘right place’ at the right time when a contract position became available. ‘I spent three years at the Kindergarten and I took 12 months maternity leave and while I was on maternity leave I did some supply and contract up here and then they just needed a Prep teacher so I was in the right spot’. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview).

As another teacher explained ‘my parents own a property here and I did relief work and I got a position through that’ (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview).

Therefore, the school staff is made up of some teachers who grew up in the area and know the benefits of living and working and have a sense of the ‘place’ in this locale. Another aspect that was clearly attractive to some teachers was the possibility of flexible employment conditions, including part-time work and sharing classroom teaching responsibilities. Some teachers who were mothers, who wanted to work, were pleased to be able to job share. As one teacher stated ‘I wanted part time though. That was my thing, that was my catch’ (New graduate teacher, site visit interview). She was so pleased when she realised another teacher also wanted to job share and that the school was happy to accept this arrangement.

This teacher was also keen about living in this community because it allowed her to be involved with groups and activities that she would not have been involved with in a larger city. As she said,

\[\text{you have an opportunity to be involved in things. You actually had the chance to get in there and do it, whereas in the cities there’s so many people doing everything, you feel like you could never burst through that wall and be somebody to have a go at something. Whereas here I feel there’s not as many people here, it’s not as overwhelming or daunting to go and have a go. I’ve been president of the P & C, I led the Girl Guides Leaders, I’d never have done that in Townsville…. I go to the town planning meetings, social planning meetings. I’d never do things like that in a city because they’re all run by suits and bigwigs who get paid to do it whereas here it’s all voluntary and if you don’t do it, nobody does it and the town doesn’t do anything. The town, it’s small enough that you get to know enough people that you feel comfortable in getting involved in the community. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)}\]

This teacher also makes it clear that she is pleased her husband has such a good job and high income which is a direct result of working in the mines.

\[\text{Oh, he loves his job out here because my husband’s an untrained Year 10 school leaver, didn’t even finish Year 10 for that matter, as soon as he turned 15, and he’s come out here and got a job and he earns a very good income, and we both like the quiet lifestyle. We like that our kids can walk up the road to school. I can watch the kids from my front gate walk in the front gate of the school. We like that. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)}\]
This point is interesting because it highlights the idea of the availability of jobs for spouses as an important issue for rural and regional areas in trying to attract professional staff to come and stay. Recent research by Miles et al. (n.d.) indicate that ‘personal and family issues were some of the most influential in determining whether a prospective employee would take up a position, and whether they would stay. Availability of jobs for spouses was one of these factors. Another factor related to this was the education of their children and in particular how ‘families tend to relocate to major cities as their children move on to secondary school’ (Miles et al., n.d., p 12). This will be discussed further under challenges for rural areas.

10.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

The community members associated with the school, see the school as a central and important part of the town and their children’s lives. Therefore, new teachers are welcomed into the town and encouraged to become involved in town activities. The school does an induction for new staff but there was no particular mention of how the community welcomes new teachers. This community, as discussed in detail previously, is solely focused on servicing the production of the local coal mine. The community provides good quality housing, quality health facilities and first class sporting and community facilities including the Tieri Sports and Recreation Centre where volleyball, netball, indoor cricket, squash and a gym area available. There is a kindergarten, a prep centre as well as the primary school in the area and the closest secondary school is in Capella, 38 kilometres away.

The families in the community are generally financially well off in terms of earning a high disposable income. The main focus of the mining community is to make sure that the mines are productive and world class in economic terms and that the workers and their families are satisfied with the working conditions and the various education, welfare and community services. In terms of providing a good education for the children locally, it is important to have a good quality school with effective and supportive teachers so that the children of the miners are happy in their learning and achieving competently at school. The mines also provide work for the partners of teachers, who move to Tieri to teach. For example, some teachers came out to Tieri to take up a teaching position and then their partners applied for mining jobs and were employed in the mines.

One teacher commented on how the school had a singular focus and how the community worked together with the school:

‘It’s a mining only community. Yeah they do work together to a degree… Things like well Under 8s Day, the mine usually help us out with the Under 8s day… last year they helped us financially to put it on. Yeah I can’t think of anything else (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview).

If pushed by the principal, the parents have assisted in coaching the students’ sports teams. In this situation, the teacher works as a specialist between two schools, Tieri and Capella. The teacher, therefore, is not available at both schools for after school coaching of the students in both places. As she reported:

because it’s two schools and I travel a distance between the schools to take training, like trials. They choose a team and they, the parents in this town expect you to then coach every single team as well and then take them away on the day and be their coach on the day…. So because of that, last year Anita put it forward that the parents are to be coaches this year so parents sort of, I’ll help
run the trials, but parents actually do the afternoon, the after school coaching sessions (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview).

So provision of excellent town facilities and trying to work together with the school and the community appeared the main way that the area was attractive to teachers. One of the challenges for this community is to look at further ways of working together to facilitate and enhance the recruitment and retention of teachers and to make newcomers feel welcome and have a sense of belonging.

A photo of a house in the community. From the ‘Welcome to Tieri website. http://www.tieri.net.au/"

10.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

The school is generally supportive of teacher education students and of pre-service programs, however, not many students choose to come out to Tieri to undertake their professional experience. Some local pre-service teachers do request to undertake experience at the school. As the Principal stated

_We don’t have a big call, [to take teacher education students] I talked with Sunshine Coast University last year and said we are quite happy to have people to come out, because they contacted us, but no one wants to come out, but what I find, the pre-service ones are normally people living in the local community so we currently have one pre-service teacher here …_ (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The student teachers who do come to Tieri are placed with experienced teachers who are working in the same curriculum areas that students want to work within. The principal talked about how she handled the situation when teacher education students were interested in doing their professional experience at the school. She said:

_‘Knowing which teachers have had enough experience to take on one and being a mentor and, have had enough experience, so normally it’s about a third of the staff who have had over three years teaching experience, and then it’s which teacher would like to have a student teacher’. _ (Principal, Site Visit Interview).

For example, when asked about recent experience with student teachers, one experienced teacher said
'Yes the two that I do know of that did their prac here, yeah are the wives of miners.'

(Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Sometimes it can be a little difficult when local people want to undertake professional experience at the school and no teacher is prepared, able or willing to supervise them. There was one time when there were no staff available to take on a local teacher education student.

The Principal tried to explain the resistance to having student teachers who are relatives of students at the school:

I think because they're parents as well and I know that's why last year, they didn't want to take her because she was the Parents and Citizens President, parents of the school it's uncomfortable, they thought it would be uncomfortable. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Part of the issue with this, is the fact that the teachers need to assess the student teachers and have had, in the past, some responsibility for the final assessment the student received prior to employment with the education system. The Principal explained that usually:

normally the university sends out a handbook of what they would like them[the students teachers] to do and I will give that to the teacher, they normally just do that through their non-contact time…..with ones in this area, they will not, they don’t not tend to get the campus visits. They will just have the information sent out to the teacher, they will ring and have a conversation with the prac supervisor and that’s normally the limit of it, so that again is something that they don’t, you know that they miss out on I think….. I think more face to face, having a visit is invaluable, it’s just the distance. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

So distance is the reason given to explain why the student teachers do not get face-to-face meetings with university staff while they undertake their professional practice. Travel time and costs for university staff is a factor here. If, however, the student teachers are having difficulty in their placement, then this would be taken into account by the university staff involved and particular arrangements made so that both the student teacher and the classroom teacher were adequately supported.

10.4. FUTURE CHALLENGES

10.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

The challenges that Tieri State School faces, to sustain the quality of recruitment and retention of teachers, are best understood in the context of the framework of rural social space used in this study. It is important to understand the actual events and social and cultural practices in this particular place that so strongly influence the community. By continuing to examine the ways the economy, geography and demography of the local area work together to produce the relationships between, and amongst the people and the place, we can get an idea of the challenges faced by this community and the ways to recruit and retain quality teachers. Society and space, in Atkins’ formulation, interact, so that location and landmarks along with the people in the community interact together in the environment. The mining community has set up an attractive town with good facilities and the school community works in partnership to make this a caring, pleasant and affordable place to live. Many teachers expressed enjoyment with living and working in this community:
‘I like this school because it’s smaller and you get to know all, like, not just your class, you get to know a lot more of the kids. And I suppose, you know, people know you more and I think that sometimes that can’t be a good thing but, yeah.’

There were also some drawbacks mentioned by the same teacher:

*Probably, in being a close knit community, what I don’t particularly like is, you don’t go out to the shops, and parents asking you questions, and parents knowing everywhere you are, that sort of thing.*

(Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This comment raises the issue of privacy that is commonly expressed by teachers in small towns. As one participant said, when asked what would make her stay in the community:

*A really big high fence around my yard… the privacy is a big thing and the distance is a big thing… but the distance I think from the major cities.*

Another issue is the mobility of the teacher population. As mentioned by one teacher, there is a sense that there are the ‘locals’, and that the teachers are:

*‘just here for a little while, …I think that works against the town because they don’t feel that you are going to stay long enough so you don’t feel like you are a part of it and respected’.* (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There is also a sense that the teachers are not treated as equals in the community. As was stated, ‘the teachers don’t get the same access to facilities’ and ‘we are outsiders’. There is also some town culture that doesn’t involve the whole community, at least from the perspective of some teachers. For example:

*union day, the union labour day is a big day here, everyone does a float…. And they start from the school and go to the grounds, so the one thing the mine does do and the teachers are welcome to come to is they have things nearly every term but you know so labour day, the end of the year at the Christmas time and they normally do something at Easter as well, they all put on free food, free soft drink, entertainment, like rides, like a show with all the rides and they put that on, so that’s there and teachers can go to it so it’s not like we are not invited but so they do a lot of those sorts of things and we do work with you know like, in two week’s time there’s a meeting with the community links office where all the other managers or whatever in town should come and share what’s happening in dates wise because even just not communicating last year we had four biggest morning teas because everyone had organised their own.* (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

So overall, it is clear that the school and the local community of Tieri work together in many ways but there are also tensions. The mining industry has contributed significantly to the region through the development of major infrastructure in the area. However, it is also important to establish good partnerships with teachers and others who work in the town, but are not employed in or by the mines. This is one of the main challenges. As Shearer from the Department of Communities – Central Queensland Region wrote:

*State and Federal governments, councils, mining companies and the community itself must all partner together, invest appropriately and respond to community need to ensure that our regional resource communities are places where people want to work as well where they want to live and raise their families* (Shearer, 2010).

This resonates with the writing of Kinnear et al, who also comment on the need for all parties to work closely together:
Partnerships and regional coordination between industry, government and the community are important, especially those that take a regional and multidisciplinary approach. Positive outcomes can be achieved from community-driven initiatives in particular — and ultimately, the desired outcome of these is where townships can develop in a complementary and coordinated way that benefits industry together with the region and the individual communities that host industrial activity (Kinnear & Miles, n.d., p. 1).

It is imperative that communities, schools, employing authorities and community groups work together in partnerships to ensure that towns and communities like Tieri can attract and retain quality teachers who choose to live and work in such towns. There is a need to strengthen partnerships with all community groups, to enable such towns to be places and spaces where people live in sustainable communities that meet the needs of the local populations and build the infrastructures necessary for the common good. This community is a result of major social and demographic changes and is and will be affected by mining industry changes, work practice changes and technological advances, which will impact the demography, economy and the geography of the region. This will have a critical impact on the people, including the children and teachers in the school and the community, and is, therefore, an opportunity and a challenge for all involved.

A picture showing regrowth and regeneration of vegetation in the area.

The
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
Schools
11 St JOSEPH’S SCHOOL

St Joseph’s School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium economic and social base.

11.1 THE COMMUNITY

11.1.1 The Barmera community

Barmera is located about 216km north east of Adelaide – in the river country – and it sits on the shore of Lake Bonney, which was an ideal destination for windsurfing, waterskiing, canoeing, fishing, and watching the pelicans, on the manicured foreshore, until severe drought curtailed such activities. The drought has made the lake so toxic that fish are dying and it is closed to swimming. There was a significant incident of “fish kill” (whilst I was in Barmera) and the government agreed to admit water to the lake, which was cut off from natural river flow in order to save water for other uses.
I left the rolling hills of the wheat country and headed southwest towards the riverlands and the vast expanse of flat, seemingly endless harsh red desert and mallee scrub, before reaching the outskirts of the community. It was such a shock to encounter the enormous rich green orchards that seemed to spring from the red rock. On my drive, I had the delightful experience of crossing the Murray, on a ferry (free 24 hour service run by the SA government) – a vast cry from the punts of my childhood that allowed my family to cross the rivers of northern NSW. The slick shiny craft made for a very smooth crossing. The red dirt banks rose up from the dusty green waters – levels clearly below those of days gone by. There are 11 crossings still in operation and each of the ferries/punts is named after birds of the river and surrounds.

I stopped on the plains to drop my apples in the fruit fly bins – not sure who else ever stops, as they were pretty empty. As I get closer to my destination I am amazed by the beautiful jacarandas rising out of the orchards and lining the streets. I am also surprised at the overloaded orange trees that look to be well past harvesting.
The area has probably been occupied for at least 30,000 years - the Aboriginal people living in the district at the time of European settlement, belonged to the Narwiji-Jerook tribe. Sources claim that Barmera is an Aboriginal word for ‘water place’ or “land dwellers”. However, others suggest it comes from Barmedjie, the name of a tribal group of Aborigines who lived on the northern banks of the Murray River before European settlement. The township is nestled in the middle of a swooping hairpin bend of the Murray River, close to the Victorian border.

Fresh water was the original attraction of settlers to Barmera. Lake Bonney, which is really the centre of Barmera, was first sighted by Europeans in 1838, when Charles Bonney and Joseph Hawdon drove cattle along the banks of the Murray River. They reached Lake Bonney on 12 March, 1838, and Hawdon recorded in his journal: “At sunset we opened on plains, sprinkled with tufts of grass. I discovered a fine lake of fresh water, about 30 miles in circumference, and on its margin we encamped ... The Blacks were encamped further along the lake and from the noise they made we know they must have noticed our arrival”.

Lake Bonney is very popular for canoeing, kayaking and many other water sports and has been the site of several attempts on the world water speed record, including Donald Campbell who hit 347.5 kph in 1964, before abandoning his attempt.

The first white settlement in the area grew up around the Overland Corner Hotel (built 1859) which was a popular haunt for drovers moving through the area. As early as 1850, there were so many drovers passing through the area that a small police station was established to control the problems which flared between drovers and the local Indigenous population. By 1867, the area was dominated by the Cobdogla run or station, which at one time stretched from Overland Corner to the N.S.W. border. Superb horses were raised here and ultimately, chosen for the SA Police Greys, the British army in India and for John McDouall Stuart’s (Charles Surt’s protégé) heroic overland journey of 1861-62.

In the late 19th century, with the success of fruit growing at Renmark and Mildura, people suggested that the area around Barmera could also be a rich orchard and vineyard location. By 1911, surveys had been carried out to see if the area between Cobdogla and Berri could be irrigated. It was on the basis of this survey that an irrigation system was established in 1921, leading to the town being gazetted and an influx of soldier settlers, who had been promised properly irrigated land, following WW1.

The Cobdogla District Council, (as the District Council of Barmera was originally known) came into existence and was gazetted as a Council area on 17 June, 1924, with an area of 23,338 acres. Several years later, a proposal was put that the Council’s name be altered, and after many years of opposition by the Cobdogla Councillors, a referendum by ratepayers was held, the result being 114 to 59 in favour of the change. However, the Minister of Local Government refused to allow the name change. It was not until 16 June, 1937, that the District Council of Cobdogla was proclaimed the District Council of Barmera. The first meeting of the Council was held (at Barmera) in a cubicle (used as a shop) on 24th January, 1924. Mr Bruce was elected the first Chairman, and it was decided to ask the Irrigation Commission “to erect a cubicle on the Town Hall site at Barmera for use as a Council Office”.

The railway was opened in 1928 and the following year Barmera was declared a town”.  

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In 1941, an internment camp was established south of Barmera in Loveday and was one of the largest World War II camps in Australia, covering approximately 180 hectares. The site was selected because of its rail and road connections, its irrigated fields and because both electricity and telephone communications were available. The camp was built to house German, Italian and Japanese internees and prisoners of war. At its peak, the camp held 5,380 as well as over 1,500 Australian Military Personnel. The camps supplied a variety of products - tomatoes, wood, pyrethrum, flowers, pigs, poultry, soap and morphine (which was made for the forces from the harvested opium poppies grown in the camp grounds). The camp was closed in December 1946 and many of the buildings sold off.

The Barmera Public Library has a long history, being the fourth country library in the state. It was opened in 1961 and has recently undergone a large re-development program, which has more than doubled its floor space. In 2001, library staff computerised its collection, making access even easier for patrons. The library is run by the Berri Barmera Council in conjunction with the Berri Library & Information Centre. Barmera is a strong community with a focus on working together, according to much of the documentation available from the Tourist Office. The Rotary club has been running since 1963, and it’s first project was to build a fountain in the main street.

In 2009, a $14m effluent treatment plant came into production, resulting in 100% of effluent, generated in the towns of Berri and Barmera, being treated and available for reuse. This new water supply provides a much needed new water source in an area that relies heavily on the ever-declining Murray River, and will help ensure an environmentally sustainable future for the region as well as employment opportunities.

Loch Luna Game Reserve comprises a range of water bodies including narrow creeks and shallow swamps. It is a popular area for people who enjoy fishing, boating or just enjoying the river. Keen observers and listeners will find Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, as well as darters, which regularly breed in Loch Luna. Sea eagles, regent parrots, pelicans, white-faced herons and many other birds inhabit the reserves. Kangaroos graze beside the creeks, and water rats swim along the edge of the reed beds.

Barmera has a range of accommodation including hotel, motels, country club, lakeside caravan parks, a backpacker hostel, bed & breakfasts, self-contained cottages and numerous lakeside camping sites.

11.1.3 Demography: The People and Community

Barmera boasts a range of community facilities besides sporting fields. It has a rich historical infrastructure which adds to the very strong geographical attractions of the community e.g. the lake.

8 http://www.riverland.net.au/~bbc/barmeralibrary/home.htm
Throughout the year, the town comes alive for many festivals and events. The Barmera 5RM Main Street Markets, where purchases of local produce, arts and crafts can be made, are held once a month from February to April and October to December. However, the teachers indicated that these had not been so well supported since the drought and resultant severe water restrictions have started to take a toll on the community.

Barmera has a significant public Library with a long history, being the fourth country library in the state. It opened in 1961 and has recently undergone a large redevelopment program which has more than doubled its floor space. The library is run by the Berri Barmera Council in conjunction with the Berri Library & Information Centre.

There are numerous tourist attractions in Barmera, including a Country Music Hall of Fame, with extensive memorabilia, and the town hosts an annual country music festival attended by people from all over Australia. There are remnants of history - Napper's Ruins once stood strong as a hotel built for former workers of the Cobdogla Station and now includes interpretive information around the site.

The historic Overland Corner Hotel, 18 kilometres north of Barmera, is now both pub and a museum. John Chambers commissioned the hotel in the 1850s and it was a refreshment point for weary travellers and locals. There are other natural attractions besides the lake - different river environments, from the floodplain and billabongs to the limestone cliffs on the Overland Corner Walking Trail, which explores the European and Indigenous heritage of the area and features an ochre quarry with fossils. There is also a heritage walk that explores the between-war architecture.

It is evident from the population data 2001 – 2006 (see tables below) that the population of Barmera was slightly declining and aging in the first decade of this century. The population typically live in detached single storey residences and are descendants of at least 30 different cultural groups from right across the globe. The main ancestral groups are English, Greek, Italian German and Scottish, which is also reflected in religious affiliations – Catholic, Anglican, Uniting church and Lutheran dominating.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 1946</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 83</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>923</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1095</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 1929</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 87</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1037</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>1032</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

11.4 Economy: The Production, Work and Industry

The shopping centre offers a full range of retail outlets – chemists, coffee shops, fashion etc., though the range is limited. I see little sign of heavy industry but rather a significant collection of light industries related to farming – heavy machinery, car yards, irrigation, fishing, etc.

There are many closed businesses - only one supermarket remains open; shop windows with ‘For Lease’ signs, but there are also signs of prosperity – green playing fields, clubs, new sections of housing with beautifully manicured streetscapes.
Barmera has a 19 bed hospital and an 83 bed nursing home, with high and low level care and a dementia unit, on site. There is an Aboriginal population within the town, making up about 7-8% of patients. The Riverland Regional Hospital (with 34 acute beds) and the Riverland Private Hospital (with 12 private beds), together with the Riverland Community Health Service, serve the local government area of the Berri/Barmera Council and the adjacent council areas in the region. Both the Berri & Barmera Hospitals accommodate air retrieval, with a helipad adjacent to the hospital grounds. The community has a child care service providing care for children under 5 years old – at a kindergarten, in the form of play groups at St Josephs and other schools as well as occasional care places.

Signs of the drought are evident in the gardens of many of the homes – non-existent or dying, few flowers but a preponderance of cacti of all shapes and sizes. As a result, depression is an issue for parents who cannot work their ‘blocks’9 (because of their inability to purchase water). The Principal also indicated that many of the children are aware of the dire situations their families are in, and their behaviour reflects the difficulties at home. Consequently, there are a number of students who have been diagnosed with depression. This is not an isolated issue and the community has one of the highest levels of mental health issues in the state.

House prices have fluctuated markedly under the influence of a down-turned economy. The graph10 below of median property trends for properties in Barmera shows that very clearly as does the statistic that the average time on the market for a property is 242 days.

9 Small acreages of oranges, grapes etc
10 http://www.homepriceguide.com.au/Research/Default.aspx?LocationType=Address&State=SA&StreetId=27845&UnitNumber=&StreetNumber=943
Employment distribution reflects a traditional gender divide with women most predominant in the nursing/teaching “professional sector” and administrative roles, with the managerial and technical roles being heavily weighted towards men (see below - ABS 2006 data). 85% of workers undertaking unpaid domestic work are female and it would be these individuals who typically have the greater interaction with the schools that children attend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Professionals</th>
<th>Technicians &amp; trades workers</th>
<th>Community &amp; personal service workers</th>
<th>Clerical &amp; administrative workers</th>
<th>Sales workers</th>
<th>Machinery operators &amp; drivers</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
<th>Not stated</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALES</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2,537</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALES</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2,259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.2 THE SCHOOL

The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 95% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 11% Indigenous students. It has 7.4 full time equivalent teaching staff and 107 students, of whom 65 are male and 42 are female.

The school is located on the top of a hill, near the local parish church. The Principal greets me warmly and I am immediately taken to the very small staffroom to meet the staff. The student population has exploded in the last few years so there has been a number of new buildings and demountables added to the site. Parents and friends provide the labour to upgrade gardens and
ST JOSEPH’S SCHOOL

grounds. Concomitant, according to the Principal, is the very hands-on approach that many parents want to play in their child’s learning – the school is seen as the centre of the lives of many families but for staff this can have implications for their teaching.

60% of the community have a Christian affiliation, 1.3% other religions and 27% have no religious affiliation. About 30% of the primary school aged children attended St Joseph’s. However, there is no Catholic secondary school in the district, so the majority of students move into the public education sector for that component of their compulsory schooling.

The school community offers an outreach program for students in Year 6, as they prepare to leave St Joseph’s to go to the local high school. The co-ordinator works with the students when they are in high school, to assist the transition from Year 6 to Year 7, as well as from Catholic to public education.

In terms of a Principal’s life and roles, a small school/community such as St Joseph’s and Barmera can be professionally isolating as there are no other executive staff in the school with whom they can discuss leadership issues. The Principal deliberately maintains a “distance” from the staff, because it “makes harsh decisions possible”. A significant issue for a principal in a remote community is access to peers - there are few other principals in the district with whom this Principal can share ideas and/or seek support etc. The advantage, however, of a small staff is that everyone gets the opportunity to take a leadership role in curriculum – *Every staff member is responsible for at least one curriculum, if not two* [Principal]. The school is growing in size because it has a good reputation – the teachers are active in the community, which the community appreciates, so numbers have increased from 60 to 90 in a relatively short time.

The staff were identified as being “stable”. However, the Principal is only confident that 3 will be retained at the end of the year, as “they’re local, they live in Barmera, they like working here”. According to the Principal, it is noticeable that having children or not being in a relationship can change the dynamics of young teacher’s connections to the community and consequently their retention.

Teaching in a rural community offers a faster path to permanency but it is also a site where teachers get to know the children and there is great support from the staff. The fish bowl situation is also an issue for experienced teachers - *being a teacher in a small country town means that you’re in everybody’s lives all the time* (Teacher) – and that appears to be daunting at times. The insular nature of this small community can influence teachers’ decisions in relation to their need to change schools, as the staff suggested that the community/school closeness can, at times, become constraining.

Teachers support parental involvement but are conscious that some parents overstep the boundaries and attempt to “run” the school. Often parents in communities such as this don’t
have work, so their child’s school is their life, and they become what one teacher described as “helicopter” parents who:

*hover about their children constantly, don’t let their children actually unpack their bags, put their lunch order where it has to go. They’re always doting over their children, hence the term helicopter. Their children aren’t getting the chance to make mistakes for themselves, therefore, learn. It’s these helicopter mothers who have to know all the information.* (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

All staff interviewed mentioned that there is no formal induction beyond the OH&S policy and fundamental orientation to the administrative structures in the school. All new teachers interviewed described the importance of having support from peers and the Principal. The school had a very collegial learning/teaching ethos and staff worked closely to develop quality teaching programs, on a professional as well as personal level.

Staff were highly appreciative of the support given by the Principal in facilitating PD opportunities. School documents indicate that in 2008, $5806 ($967 per teacher) was spent on professional learning, which is a 40% increase on 2007 spending. To supplement this, Catholic Education SA provided further professional development and consultancy services focussing on religious and special education for all their schools – addressing systemic needs. All beginning teachers have access to a consultant who provides support in any area identified by the beginning teacher. Further, they start on a reduced teaching load. However, the teachers indicated that if they wanted access to professional development in areas of “personal” interest, these were typically only conducted in Adelaide and casual relief was limited:

> We have to go to Adelaide to do all of our PD and that's really frustrating because we have to leave at six to get there at nine and we don't get home till late and they don't really make any allowances for us with that. That is something that does deter you from coming out here, knowing that you have to keep driving back to Adelaide all the time to do your training. (Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The community play an active role in the school. As indicated elsewhere, that can be a two edged sword. However, the school newsletter shows the level of participation in building the school/community as one:

> The Working Bee on Saturday was an eleven hour marathon of productivity, laughter and most importantly, a celebration of community. Parents worked tirelessly throughout the day to ensure the school environment is a safe and tidy place to be. Of interest was the growing number of parents who had attended the school themselves continuing to support St Joseph’s. (Newsletter, Oct 2009)
11.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

11.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain its teachers?

To contextualise staff retention at St Joseph’s, Barmera, the schools’ website indicates that student numbers are stable as is staff retention (5/6 teachers retained) with all classes consisting of composite groups. Feedback from staff indicates that they are positive about the direction the school is taking, but there is scope for increased democratic decision making. Staff are provided with significant opportunities to undertake systemic and some personal choice professional development. In terms of retention, there was initially a desire by the new teachers to return to the city on a regular basis (to play competitive sport, visit family) but after a year of doing this, they made the decision that their lives were actually in Barmera, so they stopped:

“When I first moved down I was still playing in Adelaide so I was travelling up and that was just not going to work so I settled in and played down here, more for social reasons whereas I was playing for more competitive reasons in Adelaide. I guess your values change a little bit, some for the better, some maybe not for the better.” (First Year Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Teachers outlined the need to understand the specific issues of rural communities. Some suggested that people are often not attracted to rural communities because they do not understand them:

“It’s a completely different context to work in and I think a lot more people would be attracted to working in rural communities, if they actually had some experience of it. It’s like working with disability or Indigenous ed. It’s the lack of knowledge and experience that prevents us from understanding the context and people who come here, they like it and they stay.” (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Traditionally, attracting teachers to the rural sector has been problematic. However, the Principal suspects that the financial situation has resulted in teachers seeking permanent positions – to offer stability to their lives. Appointment to the school gives ‘part-timers’ access to steady work, as there is a shortage of casual relief teachers. The CEO plays an active role in attracting teachers to rural communities through information sessions to final year graduates, where Principals, ‘sell’ life in a rural community. The Principal’s presentation resulted in a new member of staff applying for a position at St Joseph’s. While the CEO takes no responsibility for finding accommodation, typically staff and the community are forthcoming when accommodation is required. There are numerous vacant properties in the community, so accommodation in Barmera and surrounding villages is available and affordable.

New teachers in this school apparently accepted appointments, not so much because of any desire to come to Barmera; but rather they came because it was the only way to get a teaching position and it was a pathway to permanence in the sector – this view supported the one expressed by the Principal:

“I did [my prac] at Middleton, because at uni it was all the rave to go out into the country and you’d get a permanent job and then you’d move back to the city. That was my whole intention.” (New teacher, Site Visit Interview)

However, offering contracted teacher permanency is also a technique used to retain teachers.
Yes, and I would have kept her here because she’s irreplaceable. I couldn’t do her job. I used to teach reception and I don’t know how I did it. [Permanence is one way of keeping her.] That’s it. She was looking to go and she was convinced not to go back. (New teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Marrying into the community is an aspect of retention, more so than the school doing something specific, because teachers noted that if a particular teacher doesn’t have ‘family’ in the community they often felt lonely and isolated from family in the city ie the school wasn’t always able to provide barriers against loneliness and isolation – staff relied on family and friends in their personal rather than professional lives. Staff described the “closed/cliquey” nature of the community, noting that once a newcomer has been accepted it is fine, but bridging the gap can be stressful.

The Principal discussed the importance of staying loyal to staff and “honouring the relationship the school has with the staff”. For example, there is a young teacher who was not able to be offered a position in 2008, but there was a position in 2009 “so she was able to come back in”.

11.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

The community members described various ways in which they actively welcome new teachers into the community (invitations for dinner when they first arrive), as well as ongoing ‘inclusive’ activities to enhance the sense of ‘welcome’ – inviting teachers to go skiing, camping, BBQs etc, so the school has a strong family feel about it. One young teacher was ‘taken under the wing’ by an elderly couple and they helped her to feel welcome “as part of their family”. Community members are proactive in finding accommodation for new staff – if they know new staff are coming to town they look for suitable accommodation.

There are numerous activities in the community so that any teacher who didn’t want to participate in school events or sport could still find something to do in the district.

Leadership and retention are closely linked, according to community members. Both staff and community members recounted how some staff were considering leaving if the previous Principal had not moved (as she struggled with the administrative load associated with leading a small school with few senior staff to assist). However, they also note that it is important that leaders listen to their staff and community, so that all views are considered before decisions are made, particularly when the decisions involved ‘traditional’ aspects of school/community life.

The community members remember, very positively, the previous principal’s proactive stance in assisting potential and newly-appointed teachers to find affordable and available accommodation.

Parents are actively involved in the school, volunteering as parent helpers, feeling a part of the school and being available for discussions in relation to their child’s progress. This was seen as a “double-edged sword”, because the open school policy meant that parents took it upon themselves to come into the classroom whenever they wanted to – a situation that teachers found disruptive.
Teachers spoke positively about the children in their classes – in relation to the “naivety, such that there were few management problems, which was a very attractive aspect of their work. They described how the children appreciate all that is done for them:

it’s generally their attitudes and they have that enjoyment to see you all the time. And they’re willing to give most things a go. (New teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The teachers reported that their students and their families looked positively on teacher participation in the community.

No access to a Catholic High school has implications for the school, as each year a family leaves so that the children are settled in Adelaide (nearest Catholic secondary) before high school. However, there is also the option, for some families, of ‘boarding’ their child in Adelaide, which is quite close, so that ‘day trips’ for shopping, seeing specialists etc. are not uncommon.

11.3.3 How has this school supported pre-service teacher education?

Staff indicated that they were supportive of pre-service teachers, but there are few who take up the offer to come to St Joseph’s – they have had one each year but would welcome more. Most want to be placed in the junior primary area. Since the main model is distributed days followed by a block placement, typically the pre-service teachers are from the local area. During the block placement the PST are not permitted to go back to the university so that they “get that feeling of what it's like to be in a country community, because it’s certainly different”.

In terms of ‘mentor teacher’, the school executive typically matched the university requests to the staff member who volunteers to meet the needs of the pre-service teacher – often that is as simple as what class/grade the PST needs to be placed with. The Principal recounted how Rachael, who mentored the last pre-service teacher so enjoyed the process - “reflecting on her own teaching and learning experiences” which resonated with the needs of the newly appointed beginning teacher. Rachael will take on the role of mentoring the new teacher who is due to commence teaching at St Josephs the following year.

The principal described her typical interactions with pre-service teachers. She undertakes an OH&S induction as well as pre-placement visits and meets with them during their placement, both with the mentor teacher and individually to monitor the program.

11.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

11.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to retain successful recruitment and retention strategies?

Teachers living in a small community are ‘teachers’ even after they leave the school premises. They are aware, as is evident from their interviews, that their comments, behaviour and contribution are noted by many in the community. Young teachers are particularly vulnerable to the ‘eyes’ of the community, such that there is a sense that the community has certain expectations of staff – “a certain type of community member”. New teachers who understand the discourse of a rural community would probably find it easier to settle in. It could be suggested that an important component of the school’s induction program would relate to ‘orientation’ into a rural community. The interviews revealed that the only form of induction was related to OH&S. Such a situation could be a reflection of a range of issues including lack of expertise, lack of time/resources or even workload of current senior/experienced staff.
Access to PD outside the district is more problematic due to a combination of distance to state capital, cost of travel and an inability to access casual relief. There is certainly strong interest and commitment of staff to PD, but it appears that they can only access PD offered at a local level (which is limited) and in their own time – such as weekend retreats. Those teachers who desire ongoing and broad access could well find this a challenge. It is worth noting that staff do travel to the capital for shopping and theatre, but events such as these do not require the other teachers to “cover” their class, nor does it require the teacher to drive the long distance back to Barmera at the end of a full day.

The school population is growing, so there will be a continuing demand for additional staff, assuming the situation with the agricultural sector does not decline significantly. It seems that the community and school are well positioned to attract teachers and most will remain because of the genuinely pleasant lifestyle offered by the school and importantly the community. However, there will continue to be a situation where young teachers, particularly, may seek other opportunities and some services that are not available, such as sufficient child care places and a broad arts and cultural community.

Some staff conceded that often a school community such as St Josephs at Barmera retains some teachers for too long, because there are no options for transfer and/or promotion within travelling distance. This is particularly noted by female teachers who are not mobile, as their partners and children are ‘attached’ to the local area.
12 JAMESTOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Jamestown Community School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium-strong economic and social base.

12.1 THE COMMUNITY

Jamestown is a town in the Mid North region of South Australia, 209 km north of Adelaide. It is on the banks of the Belalie Creek and on the railway line between Gladstone and Peterborough, and ultimately on the main line linking Adelaide and Perth to Sydney.

12.1.1 Geography: the Place, Space and Environment

I have never seen such an expanse of golden fields that seem to roll on forever. The road north from Adelaide passes through undulating hills but is interrupted by extensive road works. The many small communities I pass through appear to be unaffected by any march of progress.

There is an extensive wind farm on the eastern extremity of the district, which brought an influx of workers and money into the community.
There is limited accommodation available for visitors – a collection of hotels and cabins. However, the town has excellent medical facilities – so it can be assumed that tourism is yet to be established as a significant contributor to the local economy. However, the central mid-north location provides visitors with a chance to visit nearby attractions such as the beautiful Flinders Range and Mt Remarkable, Peterborough’s historic steam town, historic Burra and Quorn and an impressive number of wineries in the Clare Valley.

A visitor’s first sight of Jamestown is the grain bulk handling facilities at the railhead, which stand out against the nearby low lying hills. The town itself is characterised by wide tree-lined streets with the main street being so wide that it seems like a town square. On either side of the street are a number of prominent buildings including the National Australia Bank (1885), the Belalie Hotel (1877) and the Commercial Hotel (1877).

12.1.2 Demography: The People and Community

It is likely that the Ngadjuri Aborigines lived in the district before European settlement, which began in earnest with the granting of the first pastoral lease of 312 square miles (approx 81,000 hectares) in 1841 to John Bristow Hughes. He named his property ‘Bundaleer’, which in the local Indigenous language means stony place and between the hills, and started farming with 30 sheep brought from Tasmania.

The current population is predominantly of western European descent, with English, German, Irish & Scottish heritages dominating the cultural landscape of Jamestown. The first Catholic church was built in 1872 and although the Wesleyans had bought a block of land in December 1871, it was not until 1874 that a school room was completed and used as a church. This was followed by the Presbyterians and Anglicans who completed their churches in 1876. A year later
The Baptists finished their church and the Salvation Army arrived in 1884 under the leadership of Captain and Mrs Llewellyn.

The first two hotels, to be completed in 1873, were the Belalie Hotel, known as the Globe Hotel, built by Robert Hall and the Jamestown Hotel, built by Albert Trilling. The Commercial Hotel was built in 1874 by William Savage. This was followed by the Railway Hotel in 1878. Until 1883, most horse and cattle sales were conducted in the yards of the hotels, after 1883, they were moved to proper stock yards. It was also from rooms at the Commercial Hotel that Dr Robert Riddell operated his medical practice.

The Jamestown Show was first founded in 1874. It is an annual show held on the Labour Day public holiday at the showgrounds, Victoria Park, and features cattle, sheep and horse demonstrations and judging as well as a poultry pavilion. Exhibitions form a large part of the presentation with a trade and machinery display being popular also.

Jamestown was incorporated as a town in 1878 and Dr J.A. Cockburn was elected as the town’s first Mayor. The first hospital was built on Clifton Road in 1879 and this Cottage Hospital was also owned by Dr Cockburn. He was later elected to the House of Assembly and in 1885 became Minister of Education. The following year he left Jamestown and his medical practice and was eventually elected Premier of South Australia in 1889. The government built its own hospital in Jamestown in 1884 and a branch of the St John Ambulance was established between 1885 and 1886.

According to the 2006 Australian census, there were no Indigenous people residing in Jamestown at the time of the census. However, there were some, albeit few, who were listed as residents of the community. The 2001-2006 data indicates that the town has an “aging” population, with fewer children attending preschool and increasing numbers in the over 65 age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 1,352</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 10</th>
<th>Under 15: 15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 635 Female 717</td>
<td>Male 7 Female 3</td>
<td>283 737 326 20 155 75</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 12.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 1,407</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 14</th>
<th>Under 15: 15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 670 Female 737</td>
<td>Male 4 Female 10</td>
<td>240 793 371 11 130 82</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 12.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

12.1.3 Economy: The Production, Work and Industry

Jamestown was named after Sir James Fergusson, the Governor of South Australia when the town was surveyed in 1871 and the first town blocks were released. Fergusson’s home county of Ayr in Scotland accounts for many of the Street names found in Jamestown today: Ayr, Irvine, Muirkirk, Cumnock, Clyde, Doon, Kilmarnock and Arran Streets.

The community around Jamestown was established under a pastoral lease. With the early successful harvests, the need for a flour mill became obvious and in 1873 Albert Trilling, originally from Sevenhill, built one, only to be killed in the engine room a few years later. The business was carried on by his sister, Ida Trilling, until 1896 when she sold it to the Adelaide Milling Company. Most of Jamestown’s early secondary industries have been connected and dependent on the agricultural industries and later the nearby forest plantations. As early as 1875, the Mellor Brothers of Adelaide had a factory established and in 1877, Thomas Carter started a smithy, manufacturing all kinds of farm equipment. The Mellor Brothers also had factories in Quorn and Kapunda. To reduce the cost of transport, Francis Opie started the production of Stump jump ploughs for the local market. The majority of industries were related to farming, and later to the forestry sector, which commenced planting in 1876 – 17,000 trees were planted by the end of the year in what was the first forest plantation in the world. The railway was extended to Jamestown on 25 June, 1878, and the local communities were also linked that year through the production and distribution of the first newspaper - the Northern Review, with its first copy hitting the streets on 14 March. The largest employer at that time was the brewery.

The collapse of the wheat industry in the late 19th century had little effect on the town, it continued to prosper, and is now the major service centre for an area, which relies on wool, a range of cereal crops and timber, from Bundaleer Forest, for its prosperity. Although grain and legumes are highly profitable crops, wool has long been the dominant product in these parts, and Jamestown’s monthly sheep sales are the largest in rural South Australia.

Local Museum

Jamestown and Burra Hockey Team, August 1911

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13. Radiata pine forest
JAMESTOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

There are very substantial community resources such as the indoor sporting complex, numerous grass tennis courts, very green playing fields (significant in a time of drought), hydrotherapy pool and railway museum. The townspeople are proud of what the community offers because much of what is there is the result of significant lobbying and work by local community members. For a town this size we’ve got huge facilities. We’ve probably got facilities that a town twice the size wouldn’t have. In terms of sporting facilities … We’ve got a forty bed home for the aged. We’ve got thirty+ hospital beds”. The perception of the community here is, if the community needs something, the community will organise for the funds to be raised. “Like our big shed that we’ve got— you’ve heard about our big shed? Well if the community perceives a need, right they’ll get up and raise the money”.

The hydrotherapy pool, and a child care centre are further examples of outcomes of community initiatives. The community identified the need for a child care facility. In 2006, there were only 40 children between 0-4. However, by 2008, there were 150 young children requiring prior to school education, while the centre only provided care two days per week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Professionals</th>
<th>Technician &amp; Trades Worker</th>
<th>Community &amp; personal service worker</th>
<th>Clerical &amp; Admin Worker</th>
<th>Sales worker</th>
<th>Machinery operator &amp; driver</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>328</td>
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<td>MALES</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>260</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALES</td>
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<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Occupation was coded to the 2006 Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO). (ABS 2006)

Many of the town’s people are employed in the rural sector and related industries, which appear to be the main employers, while a number commute to Roxby Downs for work. Employment is distributed along typical gender lines, with female employees predominantly employed in service, caring professions and the administrative sector, while males dominate managerial, trades and heavy industry. Also interesting, is the level of qualifications held by members of the community, with more women (45) holding Bachelor degrees (teacher education & caring professions) or higher, than men (22), while significantly more men have TAFE certificates etc.

When the substantial wind farms were being constructed, they provided employment. However, the downside of that innovation was the elevated cost of accommodation for newly appointed teachers (and others). Employment is variable according to this teacher, with projects such as wind farms having a positive impact on employment when they are being created but often such employment projects do not provide ongoing employment.

The population is probably more transient in the last five years – five to ten years maybe – with the likes of the wind farm and the likes of the mining industry where there’s a lot of fly in, fly out type work. The town has definitely grown in the last 10 to 15 years. Prior to that, people could have walked up and down the street and they would have known everybody, now they don’t. It’s noticeable in the submarket, every second person is a stranger because we have the wind farm and the mining, and its noticeable how many strangers there are. The demographics has certainly changed

14 A very significant indoor sports stadium
There is a new light manufacturing park being built in town and it is hoped that it will provide increased employment opportunities as well as places for students/trainees emerging from the new Trade Training School initiatives.

Census data, 2006, shows there is a significant proportion of the population who are not in the workforce. This is consistent across the age groups, with the number in each age category in work, being very similar to the number outside of the workforce. The table below shows basic employment data from the 2006 census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT RATES</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed, looking</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total labour force</strong></td>
<td><strong>339</strong></td>
<td><strong>266</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the labour force</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour force status not stated</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>561</strong></td>
<td><strong>607</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Principal lives in a new home in an expanding housing estate on the edge of the town – indicating optimism for the town and the school. Quite recently, the SA Department of Education, following lobbying by the community, built a number of units for housing local teachers. The commercial section of the town is centred on a wide main street but there is also new development occurring in the side streets – e.g. Franklins.

At the time of the study, there were three full-time doctors shared between Jamestown and Peterborough. The Jamestown Medical Centre is centrally located within easy access to the main street and the Jamestown Hospital. It is staffed by a full time practice manager, several other receptionists, a practice nurse, a midwifery nurse and a primary health care nurse. The Mid North Division of General Practice provides invaluable support to both doctors and staff in the way of CME activities, workshops, practice meetings and general support. A video conferencing unit has been provided for the interns and is also available for public hire. The hospital provides asthma and diabetic clinics and a physiotherapist, all of which are located at the Jamestown Medical Centre. The Medical Centre attracts many visiting specialists, e.g. orthopaedic, ophthalmologist, paediatrician, psychiatrist and allied health professionals including a dietician, a speech pathologist and a podiatrist. The ambulance centre and office is attached to the Medical Centre with a hydrotherapy pool next door. The Rural and Remote Areas Placement Program (RRAPP) is an innovative program which enables up to 100 junior doctors, throughout Australia, to undertake a high quality rural community-based term during their first three postgraduate years. Jamestown Medical Centre is a location where medical students can go as part of the RRAPP program.
One aspect of life in the Jamestown community that also impacts on the school is the seasonal nature of rural life. One very experienced and long time member of staff noted that:

"You've also got to work around the farming seasons as well. Seeding times are April/May. May you can't program a lot of things. Now it's coming to reaping so you've got to think when you programme things and not exclude anyone, particularly the fathers. And the other factor is the drought factor and I think that's a bigger factor than people realise. There are stresses in families. They've forward sold grain and they haven't got the grain to fill orders and they're under huge financial stress and that's going to tell more in the next 12 months because this season is not marvellous. No rain for 2 or 3 months and that creates huge stresses and kids come along and they're frazzled. But anyway...you've got to work around that." (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

12.2 THE SCHOOL

The first school in Jamestown was established by the Catholic Church in 1873. St James Catholic School currently offers a R-7 curriculum to the community. In 1877, the government built a primary school with a residence for a teacher. From 1883-1892, it had a ‘Ladies School’ and then secondary students were supported with the establishment of a school in 1910, when teaching commenced in the old primary school. Twelve students, including some from Yongala and Caltowie attended. A separate secondary school was built in 1923.

The current school – a community R-12 complex – was developed after lobbying by the local community, when it became obvious that the town could not sustain two separate entities. The entrance of the school is new, with many examples of a positive school life – photos, trophies and samples of student work – decorating the walls. The staff room is large, well equipped and comfortable, with large glass windows that provide a very pleasant outlook onto the school garden.

The teaching spaces are a mix of old world and new, incorporating parts of the old with new corrugated iron constructions. There is a ‘memorial’ rose garden celebrating the uniting of the two schools. The whole community is particularly proud of the ‘community’ library, which is an integral part of the school as well as the township, and remains open after school hours and during school holidays.

As well as being instrumental in the establishment of the community school, parents and community members were very active in the consultation process to implement current technologies across the school. The inclusion of high level technology media in all learning areas serves as an attraction in the staff recruitment process.
The school is divided into three sections – Junior, Middle and Senior school, offering a traditional yet diverse curriculum. The 2008 year began with an enrolment of 287 students with average class sizes well below the stipulated DECS class size recommendations. Composite classes were a common feature as they effectively meld with the teaching and learning of the SACSA framework. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 90% of its students in the middle quadrants and 10% of its students in the top quadrant of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 2% Indigenous students. It has 22.3 full time equivalent teaching staff, 287 students, of whom 152 are male and 135 are female.

The school has undertaken a number of programs in the Junior and Middle school to enhance the student’s achievements on tests such as NAPLAN. They have instituted a Reading Recovery program, appointed Literacy & Numeracy Co-ordinators and commenced the WRAP literacy program.

Positive results by Year 9 students indicate that the school may have found the most appropriate class structures for the Middle School. The school report suggested that year six students are better suited to a primary school model of teaching and the maturing year seven students are more prepared for the rigor of middle school.

While the Year 12 class was small, with only 13 students, the school offers a broad curriculum by employing interactive technologies to teach with cohorts of students in other nearby communities through the MNSEC15 project (Involves Gladstone High School, Peterborough High School, Booleroo Centre District School, Orroroo Area School and Quorn Area Schools). The MNSEC Cluster took its first steps to re-modelling the delivery of its teaching and learning programs by initiating an expansion to schools outside the cluster. Students undertaking distance learning have the same teaching/learning time as students in regular face-face classes. Historically the MNSEC Cluster (started 1998) was confined to six schools with an approximate distance north to south of 1,000 kilometres. The Cluster currently has 15 participating schools with an anticipated increase to 20 by 2011, operating across a circumference of approximately 500 km. Past experience has shown that teachers of senior classes would have left the region if it had not been possible for them to teach in their professional area. This remains a major issue in rural communities with declining student populations. The MNSEC cluster ensures that vital student numbers are maintained, to guarantee curriculum delivery to senior students, as are experienced senior teachers in these communities. Delivery included students in the host school and involved an expanded use of the Bridgit technology, which demanded an increased level of interaction between the students. Burra Community School and Leigh Creek Area School became part of the cluster for curriculum delivery, and delivery of specialist Mathematics to Waikerie High School has resulted in their participation in return delivery to MNSEC at Stage 1 level in 2009.

Other shared activities include:

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15 MNSEC – Mid North Secondary Education Corporation (Gladstone High School, Peterborough High School, Booleroo Centre District School, Orroroo Area School and Quorn Area Schools). Comprehensive distance learning, sporting, the Arts and social programme and cooperatively promote a cluster based training and development programme for staff.
JAMESTOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

- Student driver training
- Successful sporting teams and events
- MNSEC Formal is rotated through the original 6 schools.

The achievement of the small cohort of Year 12 students is reflected effectively in their decisions about further study and employment for 2009, which include:

- University entrance: 47%
- TAFE: 30%
- Employment: 23%

Jamestown Community School and its consortium schools became the first rural schools to be recognised as a Trade Training Centre. Trade Training Centre courses were delivered in 2008 to promote the development and delivery of trade training opportunities. Planning was underway for a fully serviced workshop, providing Engineering and Metal Fabrication training courses, at Jamestown Community School in semester 2, 2009.

The new Trade Training centre now offers senior students courses in:

- Certificate 1 & 2; Doorways to Construction in conjunction with Industry Training Board;
- Certificate 1 & 2; Sport and Recreation in conjunction with Sport SA;
- Certificate 1; Retail in conjunction with Skills training;
- Certificate 1 & 2; Rural Operations with Skills Training;
- Certificate 1& 2; Engineering Pathways with TAFE SA.

Jamestown Community School students achieved individual and team success in diverse endeavours such as clay target shooting, touch football, netball and football, Duke of Edinburgh awards as well as agriculture exhibits at the state show – all indicators of the breadth of opportunities offered to the students. According to the 2008 Annual School Report:

The increase in retention since 2006 is attributed to the development of alternative learning pathways within the mainstream curriculum delivery. The increased use of MNSEC distance delivery for mainstream learning has created more flexibility in our staffing and increased learning opportunities in the ‘trades’ area. The implementation of learning programs from State and Federal funding initiatives has supported students completing their SACE whilst also moving into the world of work.

Two schools closed when the community school was created, and as a result, 6 buses travel in from smaller communities everyday. The nature of the industries often means that parents in these smaller feeder communities are often working long hours, particularly in the sowing and harvesting seasons. However, the school schedule of meetings and special events reflects sensitivity to the workplace demands of the large farming community – meetings are scheduled for Wednesday evening when parents are in town for their children’s sporting events.

Often parents will take the opportunity to talk to teachers at sporting events, in the supermarket etc, which reflects the 24-7 nature of living and working in rural communities. Teachers
acknowledged it was important for them to make links to the community, even if there was additional travel involved, as some staff lived outside the township. Accordingly, those staff members who resided outside of Jamestown made a special effort to attend community events that enabled those links to the community to be established and maintained.

Staff and community members also indicated that it was productive to have a sense of the history of local families in order to provide the best support. Teachers who had worked at the school for a long period were often seen as trusted community members. Both experienced and inexperienced teachers suggested that students attending the school were typically well behaved and typically responded positively to teachers’ involvement in the community. Teachers also indicated that most students appreciated their knowledge of students’ interests and were well aware that their parents and staff had interactions beyond the school, which facilitated communication between parents and teachers. Young teachers met community members through sporting teams and by socialising at the ‘pub’, as well as local community events such as the Carols by Candlelight – “if you’re not in sport then you’re not in the community”. While staff are expected to support new teachers, there is also an expectation by community members and teachers that new staff will show initiative and make the effort to become involved in the broader community.

Small towns can have very “clicky” communities and individuals have to work to belong – to fit in, to be included. “I do try to fit in and I do but they say that the reflection of you is who you hang out with - some of the things I don’t agree with, but I try to do some social things”. The more remote the community, the greater the requirement of teachers to “make your own fun” and so the community becomes even more closely knit, according to some staff.

One teacher, born and bred in Jamestown (several of the current staff taught her), indicated that she had only ever wanted to teach in the country and wanted a rural appointment. However, she conceded that if her partner, who had found work in Jamestown, was appointed to the city, she would follow him there. The attraction of the family relationship is stronger than the attraction of rurality.

12.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

12.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain its teachers?

To contextualise staff retention at Jamestown, official figures indicate that of 28 teachers employed at Jamestown in 2007, 23 remained in 2008 so that the percentage of teaching staff retained at Jamestown Community School from 2007-2008 was 82.14%. Teachers’ stories indicated that typically they stayed in the community because of the rich quality of life offered – through social and sporting activities – and strong personal relationships with other community members. It was evident that establishing strong personal relationships, particularly through marriage, is a common theme associated with retention.

The school had not experienced difficulty in attracting ‘normal’ classroom teachers. In relation to what made Jamestown attractive, many teachers commented on the demeanour of the students – “the kids are great”; there are few management issues; as well as the very pleasant teaching environment and “the staff that are already here are welcoming and easy to get along with”. The Principal set up buddy groups so that each member is in a group of four colleagues who are responsible for each others’ well being – birthday cakes, ‘debriefing’ over coffee after school - “you feel really rotten if nobody remembers your birthday”. The school does have a good feeling about it – “a friendly place”. While it was identified by senior staff that effective induction was an essential
aspect of retention, it was apparent from a significant number of interviews (both experienced and newly appointed teachers) that induction at Jamestown was limited, in that much of what the teacher learns is by ‘watching’ and questioning other staff members rather than having a specific induction/mentoring program in place – mentoring arrangements appeared quite ad hoc.

Rather than putting someone with someone, they throw you in and see who you gravitate towards and then they become your mentor. Staff induction is associated with housekeeping - keys, resources etc – and then ongoing meetings to check to see how everything is progressing. (Young Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The school leadership saw the need for fresh ideas and had deliberately instigated programs of staff renewal. However, it was identified that attracting experienced leaders was difficult because of the “appointment” system. Leadership is important for a successful school. In response to the apparent reticence of experienced teachers to apply for leadership positions, the Principal explained how he (and his peers) often needed to actively use networks to ‘head hunt’ quality applicants for these positions, which were advertised state-wide. The state faces a shortage of suitable candidates for principal positions, which require educators to have:

A wealth of experience, having experience of rural communities, enough learning experience to lead; it’s about curriculum knowledge; it’s about managing people; it’s about the school role in the community. I just think there’s a lack of depth in those areas and not enough people to step up and take on that role. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Being part of the school community was seen as a really positive aspect of a teacher’s identity, as the ‘community of scholars’ ideal was an important component of a successful rural school. There was an expectation that teachers would engage in professional development through initiatives such as MINSEC, which assisted the maintenance and provision of quality teaching. PD is offered locally through interactive technologies and/or hub meetings. Some teachers suggested that opportunities for professional development had diminished over time, particularly in relation to ‘new’ issues such as behaviour disorder or opportunities for leadership courses for aspiring and current executive staff. Staff training totalled 940.45 hours across a FTE of 26 with an average of 36.17 hours for 2008. Budget expenditure on PD in 2008 was $14,214.77. However, it was noted that a small school could potentially offer more leadership opportunities than might be possible in a large school; such a situation would enhance teachers’ employment potential if they chose to seek an appointment in another school.

Teachers noted that it was not successful to attempt to live two lives – weekdays in the country and weekends in the city – they had to make a choice. Successful communities such as Jamestown can be seen as a transition for new ‘city’ teachers to learn about country life. The step to a more remote community could be very difficult for a city person.

Knowledge of issues within the community can often assist with effective management in the school – family histories, relationships, tensions – that flow into the school. “I might hear of different things happening outside of school that might affect the school or a decision that might be made here a school that might be affected by what’s happening within the community so [the roles of community/school] complement each other”. While at times it may be a disadvantage to have parents/community members questioning staff about school issues when they are ‘outside’ school, community

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16 Executive positions are “spilled” after 5 years, so that a teacher who moves to a rural community for promotion/leadership opportunities might find they have to relocate back to the city or a completely different school, as there is no guarantee of retaining an appointment at that level. This can have significant impact on not only the teacher but their family as well.
members consider this as an advantage because they can obtain accurate information without having to wait until school resumes. When teachers engage in class discussions with their students or attend community events, they access ‘strategic’ information in relation to issues such as student welfare; consequently they believe they are better placed to respond effectively.

While the ‘new’ teachers indicated that many of their colleagues would not accept an appointment in a rural school, there are those that are keen for an appointment and accept the opportunity for employment and access to ‘permanency’. Most concede that if other new teachers were to take the risk of a rural appointment, they would benefit in a number of ways. Further, every person interviewed suggested that if a pre-service teacher was not from a rural background, then it was essential that they undertook a rural placement prior to accepting an appointment to a rural school.

In relation to long term commitments to this rural school, if a young teacher did not pick up a permanent appointment after their first year, then there was sufficient casual work available to enable them to remain in the community.

12.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

Community members saw the school as the core of their rural community and welcomed new teachers, at the beginning of each year, with a community barbecue on the weekend before school commenced. A special assembly was also hosted, to which community members were invited, to welcome all new teachers to the school. However, there was also an expectation by the community that the teachers would take the initiative to become involved in the community, rather than waiting to be invited.

_A newcomer into the town, is not going to be led around by the hand and nurtured; they’re going to be expected to join in and provide their knowledge, ability, skills and so forth to the benefit of the town, the benefit of the community. You see that in any club, any organization, that they are looking for people to get on board and to deliver. Anyone who’s a passenger is quietly dropped off the back_ (Parent, Site Visit Interview).

While the staff was very ‘stable’, this was seen as a double edged sword by some community members, who indicated that some teachers had been in the school for more than 20 years – too long. The community members indicated that staff renewal was important and saw the appointment of new staff – four new early career teachers in the past three years – as a positive change at the school.

It was a community initiative that led to the development of substantially improved teacher housing for newly appointed teachers, which has impacted on the ability of the school to retain teachers. Clearly the community as a whole is active in building Jamestown and it is through their efforts that the town boasts extraordinary facilities for such a small community. Many of these facilities are seen as attractions by the teaching staff.

_It’s cultural things that the community gets involved in and you don’t just come here now for sport because you can go to Adelaide to get to your highlighted social things like your balls and your races and your cultural weekends. That stuff is now here and that’s very much supported by the community. We keep bringing that stuff and keeping that stuff in the community. There were people who were, perhaps, rural kids, who have been to Adelaide to uni or work and they might work back in the rural area and they miss Adelaide but don’t want to go to Adelaide_
anymore. They just change a bit. They're having a good time here. They're the ones that are getting the like of the Ram and Ewe ball... they're the ones that are bringing the city back here .... It all gets back to the facilities. It's just a draw card, and if you bring those people in they attract others and it just comes to a hub and it's a good place to be. (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

12.3.3 How has this school supported pre-service teacher education?

The school staff are very supportive of pre-service programs and typically support 6-8 students each year. Although some students are from the local area, many now come from a wider community base as a result of the schools work with the universities. The school has for some time now advocated a more structured approach from the universities. As a result, all visiting pre-service placements are now negotiated prior to the year of placement. This allowed some of the students to experience school life in the hectic first weeks back. It also enabled the students to be more flexible with their placement and by accommodating multiple students simultaneously it meant students were able to work and share with each other because of their similar level of understanding.

The school executive matched university requests to the staff member who they believed would best meet the needs of the pre-service teacher. However, all staff contributed to their learning irrespective of who a pre-service teacher was allocated to, through providing resources, opening their classroom for visitors etc.

Jamestown community as a whole, welcomed all pre-service students to participate in local sporting activities, which include football, cricket, tennis, netball, basketball, lawn bowls, darts, volleyball and croquet. The community expectation of newly appointed teachers as well as pre-service teachers was that they should initiate the engagement.

12.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

12.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to retain successful recruitment and retention strategies?

Teachers living in a small community are ‘teachers’ even after they leave the school premises. They are aware, as is evident from their interviews, that their comments, behaviour and contribution are noted by many in the community. Young teachers are particularly vulnerable to the ‘eyes’ of the community, such that there is a sense that the community has certain expectations of staff – ‘a certain type of community member’. New teachers who understand the discourse of a rural community would probably find it easier to settle in. It could be suggested that an important component of the school’s induction program would relate to ‘orientation’ into a rural community. Teacher induction had diminished as a result of limited staff turn-over. However, the increase of new teachers and leaders to the school in recent years has required an increased attention to this process.

Access to PD outside the district is more problematic due to distance to state capital, cost of travel and an inability to access casual relief. “The school is really supportive but it’s about whether or not you can physically get there sometimes. We’re a small school; we’ve got Year 11 & 12 classes and it’s a bit of a luxury I suppose to leave groups like that behind”. According to community members and other school personnel, some of the longer serving teachers appear to have lost their enthusiasm. It was not clear if access to appropriate PD could enhance levels of engagement by staff.
While sport is an aspect of rural school and community life, what the community and school lacked was a similar profile in the arts and languages. While there was a burgeoning arts community in terms of painting, there was limited access to theatre or music within the entire ‘basin’, which was why some teachers felt the need to travel to larger cities. These same teachers explained that the lack of a vibrant ‘cultural dimension’ to the community would eventually result in them leaving Jamestown. The absence of a theatre culture is reflected in the school curriculum as staff struggled to develop a drama and/or music program. Staff explained that it was very difficult to attract teachers with those credentials to the school/community to enable the school to offer a substantial breadth to the whole curriculum. Young people are looking for apprenticeships in the town, so the school curriculum had to reflect that need, but even a state-of-the-art trade training centre was not enough to attract industrial technology teachers to Jamestown to fill the teaching positions created in response to the TT centre. It was not evident, from the interviews, that the community lacked many facilities but there was concern in relation to the inability to access specialist services such as speech pathologists, counsellors and psychologists that are required by students and members of the community in general. The ongoing changing nature of the community, with an increase in itinerant single parent and blended families, is providing a new challenge for staff. In association with this, the broadening nature of the SACE curriculum, increased student interest in alternative learning pathways and the requirement that student learning be more prepared to meet the demands of Australian employers, is continuing to impact on the manner in which the school is staffed. In smaller rural schools, teachers need to be flexible, be fluent in more than one learning area and be able to teach across more than one sub-school. These needs have precipitated staff movement [transfers] which continue to challenge school leaders to seek out qualified staff who are prepared to live in smaller, but in their own way quite vibrant, rural communities.
The
TASMANIAN
Schools
Smithton High School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a low to medium economic and social base.

13.1 THE SMITHTON COMMUNITY

Smithton is the major industrial and administrative centre for ‘Circular Head’ in the northwest region of Tasmania. The Smithton area was first explored by Bass and Flinders as they circumnavigated van Diemen’s Land in 1793. The first settlers came to Smithton in the 1850s, which by then, was a shipping centre for potatoes. By 1868, the population of Stanley was around 500. A flour mill and brewery, along with bacon, cheese and butter factories, were in operation. By 1870, the first wharf was built at Smithton and in 1884, the first steps were taken to establish the timber milling industry, whilst mine construction increased during the Victorian gold rush. By 1904, the industry in the area had diversified sufficiently for the Duck River Butter Factory (to meet the requirements of local dairy farmers) to be built. In 1905, Smithton was proclaimed a town and
the drainage of the first swamp, Mowbray, commenced. This brought into use some of the richest dairy country in the state. The railway line between Smithton and Irishtown was opened in 1921. In 1920, the Council Chambers were moved to Smithton and by 1935, Britton’s Swamp had been drained by the Government and became available for settlement. Smithton High School was opened in 1937 and in 1948, the re-aligning and sealing of the Bass Highway between Boat Harbour and Wiltshire Junction was commenced by the Department of Public Works.¹⁷

I reach Smithton, via a very picturesque drive from Launceston, on what proves to be an exceptionally good quality road. Evidence suggests that there is a deliberate infrastructure focus to improve the road to the northwest tourist centre. The photo below shows recent road works, east of Smithton (on the ‘Sisters’). Over the ‘Sisters’ is a line of hills and the Principal of the high school noted that:

*It is a line because it’s physical. You have to go up and over it and it’s also a distance thing and it becomes like a mental barrier in a way. And it’s only one that’s come into my vocab in the last eighteen months. You actually start to see the impact of it.* (Principal, Site Visit Interview)


### 13.1.1 Geography: the Place, Space and Environment

I found the environment invitingly attractive, as the Smithton area is kept green and lush by the rains of the ‘Roaring Forties’ and has an average rainfall of 110mm, with an average temperature of 16°C. Smithton is on the edge of the Tarkine wilderness area, 350,000 ha of remarkably diverse country (the largest unprotected wilderness area in the South-East region of Australia), and lies between two of Tasmania’s largest rivers, the Pieman and the Arthur. The summer daytime temperature of 24°C attracts a solid tourist industry.

The community is located ‘over the sisters’ – a series of peaks that appear to divide the NW from the rest of the state, as well as a psychological barrier for some long-term residents of the Smithton community, which is located about 135 km from Devonport and 86km from Burnie, (the latter being the ‘industrial hub of the NW’). Smithton was the first European settlement in the north-west and settlers reclaimed the blackwood swamps to produce an economy based on farming, blackwood timber and fishing. There is some dispute about the origins of the town’s name, with some sources suggesting Peter Smith, a policeman who arrived in the area in 1855 is the basis of the name, while others claim that James ‘Philosopher’ Smith, who was responsible for the development of much of western Tasmania, was the inspiration.
Travellers along the Bass Highway will see this long jetty jutting out into Bass Strait at Port Latta, where ore is transported to waiting bulk ore carriers.

In the town itself, there is a lookout tower on Tier Hill, with great views over the town and river, but the town offers numerous attractions for tourists, beyond the obvious scenery. The Duck River and Duck Bay are popular for fishing and boating, while there are several forest reserves in the area, offering a wide range of recreational opportunities.

There are bushwalks suitable for all levels of fitness and ability. Individuals interested in gardening will enjoy a visit to Allendale Gardens on the road to Edith Creek. It is a privately owned botanical garden with a unique rainforest walk. Sumac Lookout provides great views over the river and the surrounding forest. There are several small communities close to Smithton and all offer different and appealing features. Stanley, about 20 minutes drive, is a thriving tourist destination as well as a popular location for teachers to reside. There are 24 B&B’s among a range of accommodation options for visitors, as well as numerous quaint retail outlets. The community rests in the shadow of ‘The Nut’, an imposing granite outcrop that offers spectacular views of the area. The Nut, a free to enter State Reserve, protects the nationally endangered straw daisy and provides an important breeding site for short-tailed shearwaters (mutton birds), peregrine falcons, Australian kestrels and little penguins. The Nut was also the site of the first microwave telecommunication
SMITHTON HIGH SCHOOL

experiments between Victoria and Tasmania, and the first television transmission to Tasmania, bringing pictures of the 1956 Olympic Games to viewers at the base station, now the Nut Rock Café & Store.

The reserve protects significant Aboriginal and historic heritage sites. The Nut and the Aboriginal sites are of deep significance to the Aboriginal community, both present and past.

The local area is seen as particularly attractive by the teachers:

There’s plenty of things to do if you like the outdoors. We have some of the best beaches I think in the state. There’s plenty of bushwalking around this area, and because it is a small community, if you’re prepared to get in and meet the locals, then that can be a very big draw card too. (Site Visit Interview)

13.1.2 Demography: The People and Community

There has been marked change in the demographics of the area between 2001-2006.

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<th>Indigenous persons: 295</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
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Table 13.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

The 2006 Census data provides insight into the nature of the population of Smithton. According to that census:

- 87.5% of persons usually resident in the Smithton region stated they were born in Australia, compared to 83.2% for Tasmania, and 70.9% for Australia overall. The four other most common responses within the region: New Zealand, 2.7%; England, 2.0%; Netherlands, 0.6%; Scotland, 0.4%; and Germany, 0.3%.
- English was stated as the only language spoken at home by 95.6% of persons usually resident in the area. The most common languages spoken at home, other than English, were: Dutch, 0.3%; German, 0.2%; Russian, 0.1%; Cantonese, 0.1%; and Korean, 0.1%.
- There were 2,218 families in the local government area, of which 45.8% were couple families with children, 40.2% were couple families without children, 12.8% were one parent families and 1.1% were other families.
3,932 people aged 15 years and over, who were usually resident in the local government area, were in the labour force. Of these, 61.4% were employed full-time, 26.9% were employed part-time, 4.2% were employed but away from work, 3.3% were employed but did not state their hours worked and 4.1% were unemployed. There were 1,955 usual residents aged 15 years who were not in the labour force.

Employment was broken down to - labourers 25.5%, (12.5%-Tas), managers 23.1% (12.8% -Tas), technicians and trades workers 11.8% (14.6% -Tas), machinery operators and drivers 10.3% (7.1% -Tas) and clerical and administrative workers 8.3% (14% -Tas). Retail, manufacturing, mining, education and support services were employment areas that experienced significant increases from 1996- 2006.

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Table 13.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

13.1.3 Economy: The Production, Work and Industry

The Smithton area was first explored by Bass and Flinders as they circumnavigated van Diemen’s Land in 1793. The town itself was established in the 1850s, expanding when demand for timber, for the construction of mines, increased during the Victorian gold rush. By 1904, the industry in the area had diversified sufficiently for the Duck River Butter Factory (to meet the requirements of local dairy farmers) to be built.

Smithton has thrived in recent years, when compared to other major cities and towns, despite its remote location. Much of the area’s industry is built around farming – farming of the land or farming of the sea, so the economy of Circular Head is agriculturally-based, consisting primarily of beef and dairy farming with other major industries contributing to the local economy being fishing, aquaculture, crop farming, timber plantations and tourism.

Today, Smithton is in the forefront of the area’s dairy farming and vegetable growing activities, and processing of these products is an important part of the local economy. Circular Head is Tasmania’s largest dairy area with more than thirty per cent of the State’s dairy farms, and is one of the largest prime beef producing areas in the State. The municipality has its share of successful niche industries including Leatherwood honey production, seaweed fertiliser manufacturing and Japanese Wagyu cattle breeding.

Smithton sawmills supply local, interstate and overseas markets with some of the world’s most valued timbers such as sassafras, myrtle and celery-top pine. While these might seem inconsequential, they are central to the economic success of the town. Gunn’s Timber Mill is the largest hardwood mill in Australia. Forestry and timber production is a driver of the Circular Head economy. Forestry Tasmania manages State Forests in the Murchison Forest District, which includes the Circular Head municipality. Forestry Tasmania, a government business enterprise, also maintains tourism and recreation sites including the Forest Reserves of Milkshakes Hills, Julius River, Lake Chisholm and Dip Falls, along with the Dismal Swamp Blackwood tourism development. Circular Head’s forests reflect the area’s high rainfall, undulating terrain and variable geology. Wet eucalypt and mixed forests dominated by Eucalyptus obliqua, E. brookeriana and E. nitida occupy large areas, particularly towards the
centre of the District. Tree species including celery top pine, leatherwood, myrtle, sassafras and Blackwood occur in cool temperate rainforests to the south of the District and in gullies throughout. The distribution of rainforest is related to rainfall, fire history and geology.

Besides the large prosperous successful timber mill and a potato processing plant, fishing is a major section of the agricultural life of the Smithton area. Abalone, oysters, crabs, salmon, lobster and sea kelp are just some of the varieties of aquatic life that provide income to the local community.

East of Smithton is the Roaring 40s wind farm, located on the historic ‘Woolnorth’ grazing property on the far north-west tip of Tasmania, which generates electricity from the cleanest air in the world. The nearby Cape Grim air monitoring station has recorded the air purity of the prevailing Roaring 40s winds as the cleanest measured on Earth. The plant provided a major new source of employment during the construction phase, with resultant economic flow-on benefits to the local community. Electricity generated by the Woolnorth Wind Farm will supply enough green energy for 70,000 homes and is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by around 300,000 tonnes per year.

Smithton’s main street indicates that the community is prospering, with a well cared for streetscape and few vacant shops.

The community is reasonably well provided for in terms of government and private infrastructure, such as education and health as well as sites supporting a range of sporting pursuits.

In terms of education, the community offers: a government primary and secondary school; an independent catholic primary; and a local Christian School (K-12). Smithton also has a TAFE offering a range of courses throughout the year. An examination of other education-based initiatives in the community would suggest that education is valued on a range of levels. For example, the Tasmanian Department of Education also provides a community Online Access Centre, currently consisting of 6 multimedia computers, that enables locals to access emails, online training, research, scanning and small business support. It is managed by volunteers from the community for the community. Further, the mayor of the council offers a significant bursary ($5,000) to support Circular Head residents to engage in further study by helping to offset some of their costs. Applicants are required to demonstrate that they would find it difficult to access
further education without funding support. Applicants whose courses are relevant to the needs of the district, are given preference.

Circular Head has a group (Education & Training Consultative Committee -CHETCC) that is proactive in developing networks and programs to enhance educational outcomes in the local community. The group is a consortium of Council, UTAS, TAFE, Department of Education, non-government schools and Dept of Economic Development, it is responsible for:

- establishing recognisable and sustainable programs with young people;
- supporting and liaising with community groups;
- engaging and creating partnerships with business and industry; and
- promoting local learners.

Smithton Hospital was built in 1963 to meet the health needs of a community which was rapidly expanding as a result of the development of new agricultural and timber industries. It has a strong focus on meeting the present and changing health care needs of the Circular Head community, which includes Smithton, Forest, Stanley, and outlying rural communities.

The hospital has 16 inpatient and 22 acute aged care beds, an Accident and Emergency unit, an oncology day ward and obstetrics services. The hospital runs various clinics for diabetes; occupational health, palliative care, counselling, ante & post-natal, podiatry etc. as well as a 24 hour on call GP. It is a teaching site for a number of health disciplines. The oncology service has an excellent treatment room that was established through donations and support from the Circular Head community and voluntary cancer support groups.

Smithton has sporting facilities including an indoor heated swimming pool, and a basketball, squash and volleyball centre. Other popular sports include golf, football, hockey, netball, indoor and outdoor lawn bowls, cricket and tennis.

Smithton and the surrounding district are also serviced by the SES, Ambulance, Police and Fire Brigades. An example of the manner in which the community takes a proactive stance is the Limited Coast Marine Rescue Radio Base at Smithton, which has been run by volunteers for over seven years. The Smithton Radio Base, now known as the Smithton Coast Guard, operates in co-operation with Sea Rescue Tasmania Inc., after it was originally operating in co-operation with the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol Base and more recently following the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association.
13.2 THE SCHOOL

The first school was built in Smithton in 1880. Smithton High School is a co-educational school, with 29 teaching staff, which caters for approximately 303 students from Year 7 to 12 (154 male, 149 female). The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 93% of its students in the lower and middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 17% Indigenous students.

The High School students come from seven primary schools in an area that extends from Marrawah in the west, to Hellyer Beach in the east, and south over the Arthur River. Approximately half of the students travel to school by bus each day.

According to its website, the school has provided an excellent learning environment since 1938. The school is committed to the Circular Head community and has well established links with various industries such as agriculture and dairy. The staff endeavour to provide the best teaching practices and develop life skills for the next generation to continue the growth of the region. Smithton High School staff and students take pride in the academic, creative and sporting achievements of the students, past and present. The school staff provides many educational opportunities for students to learn in different ways and for different purposes. A wide range of courses are available which are designed to cater for the individual needs and aspirations of all students.

The school received a 1.9 million dollar upgrade over the last few years, which resulted in the refurbishment of Technology, Music, canteen and Grades 7, 8, 9 and 10 classrooms. These facilities are assisting with the current teaching and learning reforms. There is a ‘separate’ southside campus that has been developed into a centre of learning to meet the needs of students from Smithton High School as well as TAFE and The University of Tasmania. According to the Tasmanian government website, the staff satisfaction with the school has jumped markedly, while parent and student satisfaction are both trending upwards. Indigenous student results have also improved markedly in terms of the average percentage point gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous students in achievement of reading and numeracy benchmarks in Year 7.

Interestingly, Tasmania only has 8 government schools that offer education past Year 10, which, according to media sources, has a significant impact on retention to Yr 12 – Tasmania currently has the lowest in Australia, dropping from 65.2% to 61.8% from 2005-2008, but is as low as 42% in northwest Tasmania. Staff indicated that Smithton High School has only a limited senior curriculum, such that students who wanted a broader matriculation pathway were often not catered for. In response to this situation, Smithton High School has entered into a partnership with Hellyer College, where students intent on pursuing a tertiary path are able to study at Hellyer College in Burnie 3 days/week, with the remaining two days spent at Smithton High School. There are also the added benefits for Smithton teachers working with colleagues from Hellyer on curriculum and support issues.

According to school staff, there is a strong Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathway, offered by the school, that provides opportunities for students to study subjects such as business and food technology. The school also has a range of other subjects that cater for all ability levels and areas of interest.

Within the community, students are provided with a range of opportunities that enhance their educational outcomes. For example, students and staff at Smithton High and Primary Schools worked together to undertake a scientific inquiry, as part of the Australian Schools Innovation in Science, Technology & Maths (ASISTM), and senior students mentored grade 6 students to undertake authentic enquiries related to pasture growth, as well as visits to laboratories and farms. Further, staff engaged in professional development opportunities that were designed to embed local industries in teaching/learning opportunities.

The school has a comfortable feel, the buildings are in good condition and the students’ work is prominently displayed in the foyer and along the corridors.

It is evident that the school has diminished in size from a time when it housed 700 students, because there are a significant number of unused classrooms within the main campus. The school has been able to utilise the space for the benefit of students – for example, the creation of a senior common room (see photo to the left). According to staff, the school has reclaimed some of these lost numbers, as a result of improved curriculum offerings and school leadership.

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19 Tasmania's Education Performance Report 2008 – based on retention from Yr 10 to Yr 12.
20 One of the 8 government secondary schools to Year 12
21 School website
13.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

13.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain its teachers?

Data from a state-wide survey indicates that staff, at Smithton High School, are increasingly satisfied with their school. The following table is part of the 2008 data submitted by the school to the Tasmanian Department of Education. In recent years, Tasmania has moved away from centralised staffing so that Principals have autonomy over staffing appointments, with the intention that staff appointed are a ‘better fit’ for the school – “So straight up you’ve got people who are aware of where they’re coming to, of the expectations and I think that’s made an incredible change” (Assistant Principal, Site Interview).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Category</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Current Year</th>
<th>Intermediate Range</th>
<th>Previous 3 Years</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Overall Progress</th>
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<td>Index of staff general satisfaction</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.0 to 6.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Trend Up</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The current principal has been at the school for three years. In the last five years, there appears to have been a very positive change in the outlook for the school as a whole (in terms of enrolments) as well as the general perception of the staff – “The tide turned here five years ago when we got an excellent principal – and things have rolled on [from there] really well with [the Principal]. The school has a very welcoming feel and staff seem genuinely positive about the future. The staff were described by most interviewed teachers as being very welcoming – like a big, happy family.

ECT receive a literacy pack and information folder when they start and their mentors are typically chosen from the same stage/grade team, but there is no ongoing formal mentoring program, rather just semi-regular meetings with senior executive staff to air concerns and discuss their probationary reviews. One ECT felt that new staff just had to ask for support and it would now be forthcoming – but that wasn’t the situation when she first arrived and encountered some difficult children. She described her anxiety that the standard ‘one-size-fits-all’ response did not work with the students. She noted:

“They weren’t willing to try things … but they didn’t know what it was like to be in a classroom with those kids and to battle through each day with those kids. They would say ‘oh no he’s fine. You need to do this and you need to do this’. You try all that and you’re at your wits end because nothing works, can you get this child some help? It didn’t work.”

(ECT, Site Visit Interview)

There are a number of different staffing strategies that the school has adopted to ensure ongoing stable quality staffing for Smithton High School. It appears to be a very pro-active and ‘holistic’ stance in terms of attracting and retaining new teachers.

“You don’t just look at, say, getting a person here to the school and say “that’s it. You’re here now and things will be right”. You have to take a view in terms of their personal and professional life. I mean not living in their personal life, I mean making sure that they feel there aren’t any pulls or tags beyond school that impact on their capacity to teach.”

(Principal, Site Visit Interview)

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22 This index combines responses from multiple questions in the staff survey. The survey is designed to gain staff opinion, school culture, colleagues, leadership, learning and students. From 2007, all Department of Education staff are invited to complete the survey each year; prior to 2007, the surveys were conducted on a three-year cycle.

23 First year teachers (BETTRD) have a slightly reduced teaching load and the time can be accumulated to be used for professional learning.
The principal appears to take a long term view of staffing such that he anticipates future staff changes and attempts to fill them early so that there is a crossover period. For example, the current music teacher (who had built an enviable program at the school) decided to take the opportunity to travel overseas. In order to ensure the continuation of the program and to support the new music teacher, the principal employed both of them for one term – an expensive but fruitful solution.

I want to have teachers here that a) can teach, b) like kids and c) want to be here, so there’s no point having someone who is always thinking that they want to be somewhere else, because that just impacts. So, if we find someone who really shows a capacity to connect with kids straight away, … they are actually keen to teach with us with their subject skills … then I’ll work the budget or work whatever it is to get them to be here. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Similarly, he gave new teachers time to make their choice to accept an appointment to Smithton. Once the teacher accepted the offer, the Principal organised accommodation and furniture for the teacher and his family to assist in his settling into the town. Staff involved, commented that it was just such an attitude that convinced them that it was a good decision. Others commented that he is really sensitive to what’s going on in peoples’ lives. Staff also indicated that the staff are very supportive – the deputy’s door is always open and we do lots of social stuff together, so we’re like friends as well as being teachers together, so I think it works really well. Similarly, staff commented that the Principal notices if staff seem to be struggling – having a bad day:

[The Principal] notices immediately and he comes down and makes sure you’re OK which is really nice for the principal to actually give a rats. In a lot of the larger schools, people I think wouldn’t notice because there are so many people around and so much stuff to do... I think he actually really does care. He is actually sincere which is nice. (ECT, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal assisted a new teacher to make connections to the local Thai community so that his wife, whose background is Thai, would feel welcome. That act aided in the final decision of the teacher to accept the offer of appointment. The role of the Principal was seen as critical in building such a supportive culture. The chaplain noted that:

He includes people and so he’s very strong at connecting people, building very strong teams within the system. The way the system’s designed is very, very supportive and strong but it’s very intentional as well, so I think he’s played a major part in that. He’s also quite pastoral in his approach, so he checks in with his staff to see how they’re going on a regular basis. I think that’s another key component in being attractive (to teachers in terms of retention). (Chaplain, Site Visit Interview)

When interns are appointed to the school for their final semester placement, the Principal often employs them above establishment to assess their ability, with the view for possible employment. He works to make their employment a positive one:

[S]o rather than say ‘Oh look I might be able to offer you something in January’ I’d get them here as soon as they finish, or as soon after they finish, maybe the last month and they work right through. They get to work alongside other staff and they get to know the kids that they are going to have next year, then start at the beginning year. It gives me a really good foundation. It means that we don’t have a bunch of people who are really, really, really nervous starting, they actually know the place. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
He has also allocated funds to have permanent in-built relief because there was such a shortage of readily available casual relief. This model ensures ‘relief teachers’ know the school and are an intrinsic part of daily operations, which supports the goal of stability for the students.

One of the important aspects of attracting teachers is the reputation of the school. The principal indicated that there has been a noticeable change within the last five years – prior to which young teachers would not have chosen Smithton for their internship – it was thought to be too tough. However, in the past few years:

I think we’re now at a stage where people saying I’ve been there - in fact some of the interns we’ve had this year and some of the people who have been on relief – has been on the recommendation of people who have come in and really liked it. Sometimes it’s that word of mouth stuff. It’s something that you can’t actually put your finger on but you know it’s happening. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The school staff have also developed a trusting working relationship with the Christian school; a relationship which is perceived by the community ‘in a favourable light’, as the schools work together, particularly in the senior school program. Further, when necessary, the local public schools work together to attract quality teachers – even to the extent of advertising nationally. This strategy led to 14 applicants, six interviews and the appointment of a world-renowned meteorologist to the maths/science staff. Similarly, the principal has an arrangement with local Department officers to ‘try out’ any teachers applying for appointment from interstate. The basis for all of these strategies is succession planning but also developing “a team, a really good A team, actually” (Principal). The Principal indicated that he had no intention of leaving the school because:

The notion of school improvement means you actually don’t pay lip service to it. You have to build those relationships and you have to cement them. I always say, don’t just aim for a really great rural school; we’ve got to be an outstanding high school, full stop; to do that you actually have to really spend the time and dig in. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

School initiatives include the appointment of a fulltime Chaplain, who is a lay member of the church. Her role is focussed around both staff and student welfare, and to a lesser extent parents. According to staff, this role has had a very positive impact on the tone of the school. She makes contact with new teachers, early on, to ensure that they are settling well into the community and have access to essential resources, she also acts as a linking person with different associations in the community so it’s a natural thing for her to be able to make some calls and do some connections. Another significant change, implemented by the new leadership, was a restructuring of the grades/stages. They are now organised into blocks such that one class will have the same teacher for four subjects –Maths, Science, HSIE and English – ‘a primary model’ as part of a

24 Funded 3 days by federal government and 2 days by the school
SMITHTON HIGH SCHOOL

transition into high school program. According to the staff interviewed, they have adjusted to the demands of teaching outside their content area and the change has also led to a reduction in behaviour management issues in the school, this adds to the positive outlook of the staff because staff know the students better.

Teacher housing provides a good option for some new teachers – it is of a reasonable quality and very cheap (approximately $68 per week compared to Hobart which is about $450 per week), so young teachers are able to readily save money to purchase a property – it’s definitely a big draw card. Staff also noted the role of the school in sorting out appropriate accommodation: “the school did their absolute best to accommodate that, so that’s nice”.

However, purchasing a property means a longer term commitment to the area and if renting is the preferred option, there are limited quality private rentals available because of the low house prices.

Some young teachers choose to travel from Burnie each day, while others live in Smithton during the week and travel home to Devonport on the weekend, usually because they have partners or family in those communities. Other incentives for teachers include a subsidy on electricity, though one long term member suggested that the current incentives are probably not quite as lucrative as they were thirty years ago.

One of the early career teachers (ECT), who had been at the school for four years, indicated that her original appointment was the result of the school contacting the university specifically to get new staff to the school. She accepted the offer because she was familiar with Circular Head and her family was located in Devonport: “it’s not too far away and I thought that an area like this would guarantee getting into a job. This last comment was very common of early career teachers at Smithton – the attraction of permanence in the department was greater than any concern with isolation. Her position is as a generalist, teaching Yr 7 English, Maths, Science, HSIE and ‘pathways’, such that the students stay with the same teacher for all four subjects. A second ECT had been contacted by a friend who was already teaching at Smithton High School. She is now in her fourth year, has completed her probationary period and has been granted permanent status, so is entitled to a transfer after five years.

Staff indicated that the children in the school were, for a period, very wary of new teachers because typically they would start but not stay for very long. Consequently new teachers often read the students’ behaviour as ‘standoffish’ – “they don’t bother about us. So why should we” but that has changed in recent times. A number of staff commented on the students:

‘they’re like your own kids’; ‘they’re gorgeous’ … They’re more grounded. They want to tell you about their cows and they care. Like I have a fish tank in the classroom and a kid brought in a trout. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

I love Smithton High because it’s so small and the kids are great because most of them are rural kids … I prefer a rural school to a city school though, because city school kids are very street wise and they have different attitudes to the schools like this. (ECT, Site Visit Interview)

The school is seen by staff as a place where there are opportunities, particularly in the area of leadership:

This school is really good in terms of promotional positions. There has always been a lot of opportunity if you wanted to work your way up and the leadership has been spread over all
SMITHTON HIGH SCHOOL

teachers and if you’re willing to put your hand up and have a go, then there was always something other than just being a normal classroom teacher that was available.
(Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Similarly: This is a good school for experience because it’s smaller and the staff is so supportive and the community is involved with everything. Community and school partner up, people know everything. One ECT indicated that she wanted to teach in the rural sector to dispel the myth:

‘That rural schools are crap, they only have crappy teachers. I think that’s rubbish so I thought I’d come here and give these kids exactly the same sort of education that they’d get anywhere.’ (ECT, Site Visit Interview)

The school actually has a videoconferencing facility but ‘it sits and it’s very rarely used. It’s just something that hasn’t really taken off that strongly … Partly it’s the discomfort with it I think might be part of it. It was not evident that there were plans to bring this technology into the life of the school in the foreseeable future’.

13.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

When there were larger numbers of new teachers coming into the community, the council organised a formal welcome activity that took all new teachers, irrespective of their school, on a bus tour to orient them to the local sights. By way of explanation, there appears to be less need, in terms of this school, as:

‘I’ve found in this school in particularly, there’s a very strong supporting staff culture here in that we have quite a few youngish teachers and they tend to embrace each other so there’s a lot of interaction between themselves.’ (Chaplain, Site Visit Interview)

The community still undertakes activities to support the staff. For example, the Rotary Club provided morning tea for the staff on World Teachers’ Day and other groups do similar things.

Opinions were divided on how readily newcomers find a place within the community. It appears that incumbent teachers assist new teachers to make community connections but sustained access is variable. Specific groups such as sporting teams, the arts community, churches (‘we have a very strong church culture here’ - Chaplain) are very open. However, if a teacher was not part of such a group then it would be “difficult to break into the area - that’s a problem for newcomers … once a newcomer finds a group, then the community rallies around” (Chaplain), and: “I think they can be a little standoffish, to start with, until they get to know you” (Long term teacher and local).

Some teachers, who interact with community members through sport etc., see this as a positive thing and they suggest that the longer you stay, the more you are seen as a local. It is generally a very caring community, and according to one community member, it does rally around particularly if there are people who need support. However, it appears that the community is not heavily involved in the school.

As the community grows as a tourist destination, it is also attracting higher quality cultural events, such as the Tasmanian Symphony. Similarly Burnie, only 50 minutes away, is losing its ‘industrial only’ tag and becoming more culturally diverse and has much to offer. Such initiatives will enhance the attractiveness of Smithton as a possible location for new teachers.
The community is quite insular in its views, according to some staff, and many of the children appear to lack aspirations to move beyond the local community, which has a very high unemployment rate. One member of staff spoke of the community’s apparent inability to accept a female principal:

“I wouldn’t put myself through that sort of torture - because I don’t think that this community can cope with it, a female boss. The community had their perceptions of the school: What they say is not really what’s going on and that’s one of the worries and it’s one of the things I learnt, you have to get in bed with the community and whatever it takes, that’s what you need to do.”

(Staff member, Site Visit Interview)

13.3.3 How has this school supported pre-service teacher education?

The school supported six pre-service teachers (PST) in the year in which this study was conducted. The Assistant Principal selects the site-based teacher educators (SBTE) and then works with both the SBTE and PST when they are at Smithton High School. The school is very keen to support PSTs: We offered to have as many students as we can and I’m in contact with the university people (Assistant Principal) in terms of the appointments, but until the university established a campus at Burnie, the school wouldn’t see anybody for years and years. Burnie’s site (Cradle Coast campus) now means that the school has access to support – I’ve got to meet people that I talk to via email and telephone – as well as information on the university’s website. The University of Tasmania now has a campus in Burnie and so is able to more readily provide access to professional development for SBTE. Senior staff, from Smithton High School, have attended such sessions and have found them to be of significant benefit.

The school has been able to make use of the Tasmanian government’s PEIRS program, which is a recruitment strategy of the Department of Education, Tasmania, and encourages and supports pre-service teachers to undertake school experience in participating rural and isolated schools by providing support for accommodation and travel. Often pre-service teachers will access a spare room in the teacher housing complex, if one is available, or there is also affordable hostel accommodation.

As noted previously, pre-service teachers might come for a placement on the recommendation of a colleague but come back for their internship because they typically have a positive experience. The Principal targets final year interns as a source of staffing, because the staff overall is quite experienced – they are appointed in casual/relief positions when they complete their internships.

13.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

13.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to retain successful recruitment and retention strategies?

The school is actively working to address many of the issues faced by “rural & remote” schools. Isolation is a well documented issue and in the case of Smithton HS, the degree of isolation is felt in different ways by different teachers. Some spoke in terms of relativities, in comparison to more isolated areas, such as the west coast of Tasmania:

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25 There had been a female principal about 5 years ago, but she did not stay in the position for very long.

26 PEIRS – Professional Experience in Isolated and Rural Schools.
SMITHTON HIGH SCHOOL

It is isolated and it is a rural area but you’re not that far away from Burnie or Devonport and even Launceston. It’s different from being down the west coast where I think that is very isolated and in winter time you can’t get out of there sometimes. (Experienced teacher and long term resident, Site Visit Interview)

The other side to is you’re only as isolated as you make yourself. There’s an issue – going back to one of the challenges – is that’s actually providing staff and students with the capacity and belief and confidence to travel beyond that line. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

Staff described the lack of ‘night life/social life’ as a limiting factor in terms of retention but also noted the absence of culture for the students attending the school.

The provision of professional development (PD) is seen as a challenge by some staff. Some activities are offered in Burnie, which is an hour away, while many are only available in Devonport or Launceston. There are some online courses available to staff but that is a less favoured option. Some faculties have been able to provide PD for both primary and secondary staff by hosting ‘external’ educators in Smithton rather than sending individuals to programs offered in Burnie, Devonport or Hobart. Teachers also noted, that at times, they were not notified about potential courses on offer. However, other teachers believe that they have access to a range of PD opportunities – staff are required to write a submission outlining the intended outcomes of the PD and if approved, they attend the PD and their classes are covered. Activities such as benchmarking assessments with staff from Reece High School in Devonport are seen as very positive opportunities for the school.

The small size of the school and the degree of isolation means that while there are opportunities within the school to take on leadership roles, such as ‘grade team leader’, there are not many opportunities for promotion beyond that to Principal or Assistant Principal. When asked about her ‘staying on’ if she had the choice, a senior teacher indicated she would move for a promotion but that wasn’t possible because of family commitments. Some staff noted that most people leave Smithton High for family reasons – it is not typically a desire to leave because of issues in the school or community, rather that their family lives elsewhere. This is an issue that neither the school nor community can overcome.

Teachers and community members noted the absence of specialist medical support in the community so that a trip to Devonport is often the only option. As the community expands, there is increased possibility for specialist support across the allied health sectors, particularly.

The ‘fishbowl’ situation was noted by a number of teachers. The notion that teachers are always on show in the community is experienced differently by different teachers: It doesn’t worry me because I’m not doing anything that I need to hide, while others who liked to party find it more constraining … because teachers get to see a lot of things that you probably don’t want to see the kids do.
14  SMITHTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Smithton Primary School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a low to medium economic and social base.

14.1  THE COMMUNITY OF SMITHTON

Smithton is the major industrial and administrative centre for ‘Circular Head’ in the northwest region of Tasmania.

The Smithton area was first explored by Bass and Flinders as they circumnavigated van Diemen’s Land in 1793. The first settlers came to Smithton in the 1850s, which, by then was a shipping centre for potatoes. By 1868, the population of Stanley was around 500. A flour mill and brewery, along with bacon, cheese and butter factories, were in operation. By 1870, the first
wharf was built at Smithton and in 1884, the first steps were taken to establish the timber milling industry, whilst mine construction increased during the Victorian gold rush. By 1904, the industry in the area had diversified sufficiently for the Duck River Butter Factory (to meet the requirements of local dairy farmers) to be built. In 1905, Smithton was proclaimed a town and the drainage of the first swamp, Mowbray, commenced. This brought into use some of the richest dairy country in the state. The railway line between Smithton and Irishtown was opened in 1921. In 1920, the Council Chambers were moved to Smithton and by 1935, Britton’s Swamp had been drained by the Government and became available for settlement. Smithton High School was opened in 1937 and in 1948, the re-aligning and sealing of the Bass Highway between Boat Harbour and Wiltshire Junction was commenced by the Department of Public Works.

I reach Smithton, via a very picturesque drive from Launceston, on what proves to be an exceptionally good quality road. Evidence suggests that there is a deliberate infrastructure focus to improve the road to the northwest tourist centre. The photo below shows recent road works, east of Smithton (on the ‘Sisters’). Over the ‘Sisters’ is a line of hills and the Principal of the high school noted that:

*It is a line because it’s physical. You have to go up and over it and it’s also a distance thing and it becomes like a mental barrier in a way. And it’s only one that’s come into my vocab in the last eighteen months. You actually start to see the impact of it.* (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

14.1.1 Geography: the Place, Space and Environment

I found the environment invigoratingly attractive, as the Smithton area is kept green and lush by the rains of the ‘Roaring Forties’ and has an average rainfall of 110mm, with an average temperature of 16°C. Smithton is on the edge of the Tarkine wilderness area, 350,000 ha of remarkably diverse country (the largest unprotected wilderness area in the South-East region of Australia), and lies between two of Tasmania’s largest rivers, the Pieman and the Arthur. The summer daytime temperature of 24°C attracts a solid tourist industry.

The community is located ‘over the sisters’ – a series of peaks that appear to divide the NW from the rest of the state, as well as a psychological barrier for some long-term residents of the Smithton community, which is located about 135 km from Devonport and 86km from Burnie, (the latter being the ‘industrial hub of the NW’). Smithton was the first European settlement in the north-west and settlers reclaimed the blackwood swamps to produce an economy based on farming, blackwood timber and fishing. There is some dispute about the origins of the town’s

name, with some sources suggesting Peter Smith, a policeman who arrived in the area in 1855 is the basis of the name, while others claim that James ‘Philosopher’ Smith, who was responsible for the development of much of western Tasmania, was the inspiration.

Travellers along the Bass Highway will see this long jetty jutting out into Bass Strait at Port Latta, where ore is transported to waiting bulk ore carriers.

In the town itself, there is a lookout tower on Tier Hill, with great views over the town and river, but the town offers numerous attractions for tourists, beyond the obvious scenery. The Duck River and Duck Bay are popular for fishing and boating, while there are several forest reserves in the area, offering a wide range of recreational opportunities.

There are bushwalks suitable for all levels of fitness and ability. Individuals interested in gardening will enjoy a visit to Allendale Gardens on the road to Edith Creek. It is a privately owned botanical garden with a unique rainforest walk. Sumac Lookout provides great views over the river and the surrounding forest.

There are several small communities close to Smithton and all offer different and appealing features. Stanley, about 20 minutes drive, is a thriving tourist destination as well as popular location for teachers to reside. There are 24 B&B’s among a range of accommodation options for visitors, as well as numerous quaint retail outlets. The community rests in the shadow of ‘The Nut’, an imposing granite outcrop that offers spectacular views of the area. The Nut, a free to enter State Reserve, protects the nationally endangered straw daisy and provides an important breeding site for short-tailed shearwaters (mutton birds), peregrine falcons, Australian kestrels and little penguins. The Nut was also the site of the first microwave
telecommunication experiments between Victoria and Tasmania, and the first television transmission to Tasmania, bringing pictures of the 1956 Olympic Games to viewers at the base station, now the Nut Rock Café & Store.

The reserve protects significant Aboriginal and historic heritage sites. The Nut and the Aboriginal sites are of deep significance to the Aboriginal community, both present and past. The local area is seen as particularly attractive by the teachers:

*There’s plenty of things to do if you like the outdoors. We have some of the best beaches I think in the state. There’s plenty of bushwalking around this area, and because it is a small community, if you’re prepared to get in and meet the locals, then that can be a very big draw card too. (Site Visit Interview)*

14.1.2 Demography: The People and Community

There has been a marked change in the demographics of the area over the period of time 2001-2006.

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<td>Male 251</td>
<td>Female 2441</td>
<td>Male 457</td>
<td>Female 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 14.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)*

The 2006 Census captured data that provides insight into the nature of the population of Smithton. According to that census:

- 87.5% of persons usually resident in the Smithton region stated they were born in Australia, compared to 83.2% for Tasmania and 70.9% for Australia overall. The four other most common responses within the region: New Zealand, 2.7%; England, 2.0%; Netherlands, 0.6%; Scotland, 0.4%; and Germany, 0.3%.
- English was stated as the only language spoken at home by 95.6% of persons usually resident in the area. The most common languages spoken at home, other than English, were: Dutch, 0.3%; German, 0.2%; Russian, 0.1%; Cantonese, 0.1%; and Korean, 0.1%.
There were 2,218 families in the local government area, of which 45.8% were couple families with children, 40.2% were couple families without children, 12.8% were one parent families and 1.1% were other families.

3,932 people aged 15 years and over, who were usually resident in local government area, were in the labour force. Of these, 61.4% were employed full-time, 26.9% were employed part-time, 4.2% were employed but away from work, 3.3% were employed but did not state their hours worked and 4.1% were unemployed. There were 1,955 usual residents aged 15 years, who were not in the labour force.

Employment was broken down by respondents - labourers 25.5%, (12.5%), managers 23.1% (12.8%), technicians and trades workers 11.8% (14.6%), machinery operators and drivers 10.3% (7.1%) and clerical and administrative workers 8.3% (14%).

The most common industries of employment for persons aged 15 years and over and usually resident, were dairy cattle farming 12.0%, fruit and vegetable processing 6.0%, school education 4.9%, sheep, beef cattle and grain farming 4.6% and meat and meat product manufacturing 4.0%.

### Table 14.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 3360</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 388</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1653</td>
<td>1707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>709</td>
<td>2116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>322</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.1.3 Economy: The Production, Work and Industry of Smithton

The Smithton area was first explored by Bass and Flinders as they circumnavigated van Diemen’s Land in 1793. The town itself was established in the 1850s, expanding when demand for timber, for the construction of mines, increased during the Victorian gold rush. By 1904, the industry in the area had diversified sufficiently for the Duck River Butter Factory (to meet the requirements of local dairy farmers) to be built.

Smithton has thrived in recent years, when compared to other major cities and towns, despite its remote location. Much of the area’s industry is built around farming – farming of the land or farming of the sea, so the economy of Circular Head is agriculturally-based, consisting primarily of beef and dairy farming with other major industries contributing to the local economy being fishing, aquaculture, crop farming, timber plantations and tourism.

Today, Smithton is in the forefront of the area’s dairy farming and vegetable growing activities, and processing of these products is an important part of the local economy. Circular Head is Tasmania’s largest dairy area with more than thirty per cent of the State’s dairy farms, and is one of the largest prime beef producing areas in the State. The municipality has its share of successful niche industries including Leatherwood honey...
production, seaweed fertiliser manufacturing and Japanese Wagyu cattle breeding.

Smithton sawmills supply local, interstate and overseas markets with some of the world’s most valued timbers such as sassafras, myrtle and celery-top pine. While these might seem inconsequential, they are central to the economic success of the town. Gunn’s Timber Mill is the largest hardwood mill in Australia. Forestry and timber production is a driver of the Circular Head economy. Forestry Tasmania manages State Forests in the Murchison Forest District, which includes the Circular Head municipality. Forestry Tasmania, a government business enterprise, also maintains tourism and recreation sites including the Forest Reserves of Milkshakes Hills, Julius River, Lake Chisholm and Dip Falls, along with the Dismal Swamp Blackwood tourism development. Circular Head’s forests reflect the area’s high rainfall, undulating terrain and variable geology. Wet eucalypt and mixed forests dominated by Eucalyptus obliqua, E. brookeriana and E. nitida occupy large areas, particularly towards the centre of the District. Tree species including celery top pine, leatherwood, myrtle, sassafras and Blackwood occur in cool temperate rainforests to the south of the District and in gullies throughout. The distribution of rainforest is related to rainfall, fire history and geology.

Besides the large prosperous successful timber mill and a potato processing plant, fishing is a major section of the agricultural life of the Smithton area. Abalone, oysters, crabs, salmon, lobster and sea kelp are just some of the varieties of aquatic life that provide income to the local community.

East of Smithton is the Roaring 40s wind farm, located on the historic ‘Woolnorth’ grazing property on the far north-west tip of Tasmania, which generates electricity from the cleanest air in the world. The nearby Cape Grim air monitoring station has recorded the air purity of the prevailing Roaring 40s winds as the cleanest measured on Earth. The plant provided a major new source of employment during the construction phase, with resultant economic flow-on benefits to the local community. Electricity generated by the Woolnorth Wind Farm will supply enough green energy for 70,000 homes and is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by around 300,000 tonnes per year.

The main street indicates that the community is prospering, with few vacant shops and a well-cared for streetscape.

The community is reasonably well provided for in terms of government and private infrastructure, such as education and health as well as sites supporting a range of sporting pursuits.
In terms of education, the community offers: a government primary and secondary school; an independent catholic primary; and a local Christian School (K-12). Smithton also has a TAFE offering a range of courses throughout the year. An examination of other education-based initiatives in the community would suggest that education is valued on a range of levels. For example, the Tasmanian Department of Education also provides a community Online Access Centre, currently consisting of 6 multimedia computers, that enables locals to access emails, online training, research, scanning and small business support. It is managed by volunteers from the community for the community. Further, the mayor of the council offers a significant bursary ($5,000) to support Circular Head residents to engage in further study by helping to offset some of their costs. Applicants are required to demonstrate that they would find it difficult to access further education without funding support. Applicants whose courses are relevant to the needs of the district, are given preference.

Circular Head has a group (Education & Training Consultative Committee -CHETCC) that is proactive in developing networks and programs to enhance educational outcomes in the local community. The group is a consortium of Council, UTAS, TAFE, Department of Education, non-government schools and Dept of Economic Development, it is responsible for:

- establishing recognisable and sustainable programs with young people;
- supporting and liaising with community groups;
- engaging and creating partnerships with business and industry; and
- promoting local learners.

Smithton Hospital was built in 1963 to meet the health needs of a community which was rapidly expanding as a result of the development of new agricultural and timber industries. It has a strong focus on meeting the present and changing health care needs of the Circular Head community, which includes Smithton, Forest, Stanley, and outlying rural communities.

The hospital has 16 inpatient and 22 acute aged care beds, an Accident and Emergency unit, an oncology day ward and obstetrics services. The hospital runs various clinics for diabetes; occupational health, palliative care, counselling, ante & post-natal, podiatry etc. as well as a 24 hour on call GP. It is a teaching site for a number of health disciplines. The oncology service has an excellent treatment room that was established through donations and support from the Circular Head community and voluntary cancer support groups.

Smithton has sporting facilities including an indoor heated swimming pool, and a basketball, squash and volleyball centre. Other popular sports include golf, football, hockey, netball, indoor and outdoor lawn bowls, cricket and tennis.

Smithton and the surrounding district are also serviced by the SES, Ambulance, Police and Fire Brigades. An example of the manner in which the community takes a pro-active stance is the Limited Coast Marine Rescue Radio Base at Smithton, which has been run by volunteers for
over seven years. The Smithton Radio Base, now known as the Smithton Coast Guard, operates in co-operation with Sea Rescue Tasmania Inc., after it was originally operating in co-operation with the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol Base and more recently following the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association.

14.2 THE SCHOOL

Smithton Primary School draws its population from the town of Smithton and surrounding rural areas. Many of the students travel long distances on the bus in order to attend school. The current teaching staff is 28, the student population is approximately 345 (192 males and 153 females), and the school consists of 13 classes, Prep to 6, and a rotational Kinder group of 29. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates: 97% of students are in the lower and middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA); 23% are Indigenous students.

A particular challenge for the school, are the number of students who have little or no contact with the school or education prior to their Kindergarten year. The implementation of a Birth to Four Program, Kids Out and About at SPS began in 2008, and has already impacted positively on the opportunities of the Kindergarten students, according to the school report. NAPLAN results also indicate an improvement in early literacy levels. In 2008, Indigenous students at Smithton Primary continue to achieve at a high level when compared with non-Indigenous students. The implementation of Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap Literacy initiative at Smithton Primary, and the ongoing commitment to Count Me In Too and Mental Computations in Numeracy, are other programs designed to positively impact on continuing gains in literacy and
numeracy levels of students in the school. However, NAPLAN results show a significant decline from 2008 – 2009 across all indicators for Year 5.

The staff report, supported by the report published by the Tasmanian Department of Education, indicates that there are concerns in early years literacy and numeracy, with excellent results in value-adding in literacy. However, the departmental report indicates significant concerns in relation to numeracy. Attendance can be seen as an indicator of a school’s success, and at the time of this case study, student attendance had ‘trended down’, while staff attendance was stable. The proportion of permanent teaching staff retained from 2008 to 2009 was 19 out of 25 (76% retained). The report also indicates that student and parent satisfaction is excellent and acceptable, but that staff satisfaction on issues such as school culture, colleagues, leadership, learning and students had declined.\(^\text{28}\) It is worth noting that the school had received awards for exemplary literacy programs in the past (2001).

The school buildings and surrounding grounds are in good condition and students’ work is prominently displayed in the foyer and along the corridors. There has been significant refurbishment around the school – the library, specialist performance rooms etc. were funded by a $150,000 grant in June, 2009, and offer a physically pleasant learning and teaching environment for staff and students.

14.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

14.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain its teachers?

It is difficult to identify what the school staff have done to specifically attract teachers to the school and community. The most commonly identified attraction to Smithton is the promise/opportunity to obtain a permanent position in the state education department, as well as starting on the second salary step:

\begin{quote}
Of course the permanency was a big thing, coming out on a second year pay was a huge thing, I mean you can’t turn that sort of thing down especially when I know at the time when we had our graduation ceremony which was about the 20th December, so a fair while after we’d actually finished Uni, I’d say maybe 10% had work and it was really, you just can’t turn down permanency in those sorts of circumstances, so it came up and it’s the best thing I’ve ever done! (Young teacher, 4 years out, Site Visit Interview)
\end{quote}

There is still strong attraction and competition for ‘permanency’ offered by a rural/regional appointment, as evidenced by the response to two recently advertised permanent positions – the school received 23 applicants for one teaching position and most applicants were early career teachers. In addition to those attractions, the Tasmanian Department of Education offers the BeTTRD program for first year teachers, which means they have a slightly reduced teaching load to enable them to participate in professional learning opportunities offered both within and

outside of the school. Similarly, accommodation and living costs in Circular Head are well within
the means of beginning teachers, so there is a genuine opportunity to save money, particularly
for those that access cheap teacher housing. Shared teacher housing is seen as a benefit,
particularly in the early stage of an appointment to the community, as it gives the new teacher a
link to the school as well as to community activities. However, it was noted that shared housing
can have drawbacks, for those involved, if they have non-complementary personalities and/or
interests with housemates.

A significant number of teachers interviewed had family connections in Smithton and/or were
actually originally from the area prior to undertaking their teaching qualifications. Consequently,
they had in-built support networks or had an ‘experience’ of the northwest before applying for
or accepting the appointment. Staff also noted that:

[The] local schools typically worked collaboratively, such that resources are becoming more shared,
ideas are becoming more shared and I think that is important for isolated schools… and that’s got
to be good for those smaller schools attracting teachers. (Teacher/parent, Site Visit Interview)

All staff commented that they felt the children were a positive aspect of school life, and there
was strong social support for the newly appointed teachers from each other – they develop really
close bonds (Experienced teacher). This was a view shared by a parent, who suggested that:

I think with a lot of those young teachers, here and the high school … They sort of reach out for
each other. I think they kind of know you [are expected] take in the new kid on the block and
look after them a bit. (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

Similarly, it was noted that there are a significant number of parents that contribute very
positively to the life of the school, particularly those that act as classroom helpers in junior years,
assisting the school to be a positive environment for staff as well as students. However, it was
noted that parents of young children are most likely to be involved in school activities.

The school provides many opportunities for professional development and leadership. Staff
noted that if they were in a larger urban school, they believed they would not have had the
chance to take on leadership roles as they had at SPS. Interview responses indicated that
induction was somewhat ad hoc – even though a ‘mentor’ is appointed, the arrangement
appeared to be more of a ‘buddy system’ rather than any systematic formalised induction. Some
staff members felt that induction was well co-ordinated but others identified it as something that
could be done better. It was also noted, that DET Support Services once ran an induction
program for beginning teachers, but that unit had been disbanded, so the service was no longer
available.

While many of the staff had been in the area for a significant time, it was not uncommon for
them to have taught in a number of local schools – all within driving distance of Smithton. Staff
were attached to and/or attracted by the local area, and the need/requirement/desire to change
schools was often associated with maternity leave or casual positions associated with maternity
leave finishing. Consequently, for these teachers there was a need to find another placement in
the local area.

I am restricted in staying in Circular Head [husband’s job]. So I went to Forest and I actually
had another two children while I was there and then when I came back after my third child, once
again there was a position at Edith Creek, part time position rather than full time employment and
so I took a “tender” position at Edith Creek and stayed there three years and came back. But I
was happy at all the schools, they were all really fantastic. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit
Interview)
Many of the current staff (almost all female) were married to locals, while those not married, typically indicated that they would move at the end of the 5-year period they were required to complete in order to gain status as a permanent teacher. One teacher indicated that those that leave do so because of homesickness, rather than dissatisfaction with the school and/or staff.

School management and leadership issues were associated with the ‘desirability’ of the school. The current principal has been at the school since the beginning of 2008, after an extensive career with the Tasmanian Department of Education, working most recently, in the area of Inclusive education. Data from state-wide surveys indicate that staff satisfaction with the school has declined in recent years. The following table is a section of the 2008 data submitted by the school to the Tasmanian Department of Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Category</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Current Year</th>
<th>Intermediate Range</th>
<th>Previous 3 Years</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Overall Progress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Index of staff general satisfaction</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.0 to 6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Trend Down</td>
<td>Issue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff indicated that the principal was supportive and understanding of their needs in terms of access to medical services or family concerns. Leave to visit ailing parents or visit specialist obstetricians were examples of ‘unquestioned’ flexibility in staffing.

14.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

It seemed very clear that it is the community, what it offers and the physical attractions of the local area, that have aided in the retention of school staff, as much as the school itself. Typically, staff were adamant that:

*It’s more the community that attracts the teachers to stay. The school is sort of a pleasant working environment and offers a great support for the children. I’ve had the full range from high level special needs through to gifted and it has supported our children particularly well, the full range really. But it’s more the community that we came back for.*

(Young teacher, Site Visit Interview)

There is, according to a number of teachers, a lovely quality of life – no traffic, no bustle – and the strong sense of community.

*So for me, it’s having that quality of life, also I know that some teachers and the teachers that we do lose are those that have difficulty I think in the fact that you are not anonymous, the community knows who you are even though you might not know who they are, you know you go to the supermarket and people can see what you’re buying, you know they know the various ins and outs of your life.* (Young teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Not long before I undertook my interviews, there had been:

*A number of quite major accidents and things that have devastated the community that have involved a lot of the community and what that’s reinforced to us as well is the fact that this is a very strong community and if you ever need help, you have a community that rallies around you. I really think this community is amazing.* (Young teacher, 4 years out, Site Visit Interview)

The community is also seen to be very supportive of its members, but staff were not aware of any community welcoming/induction activities being conducted. However, the staff indicated
that the community is involved in fundraising for the school, with businesses sponsoring events, such as the walk-a-thon. Community members also come into the school as part of a singing group – drawing in parents as well as past parents. However, it was noted that it is difficult to convince parents of upper primary children to come into the school. According to the teachers, most community members know who the teachers are, but often the teachers don’t know the parents of the children in their class, and so you pass them in the street.

Many teachers commented that as teachers they were always on show in the community and there were certain expectations associated with that, particularly in relation to behavior in public. One young teacher described how she always leaves the area for the holidays – to get a taste of somewhere else, because she loves teaching in Smithton and feels ‘safe’ in the school and doesn’t want to leave, but suggested that she needed to “get out and go somewhere and that’s my little fix”.

It was noted that new staff usually made links to the community, initially through other teachers or by joining local sporting clubs or groups. However, it was asserted that it was a community expectation that newly appointed staff should:

   *make an effort … but if they are not prepared to fit in or chose to live up the coast and travel down each day … that would not be well-regarded by the community* (Long term teacher, Site Visit Interview).

Apparently, some sections of the community and longer-serving teachers thought that it was not appropriate for staff to commute from Burnie (50km) away – they will get sick of it or it will take its toll.

Many of the teachers who have come to the community have married locals and that is why they are still in the community and school – not that they want to leave, either.

Teacher housing provides a good option for some new teachers – it is of a reasonable quality and very cheap (approximately $68 per week, compared to Hobart which is about $450 per week), so young teachers are able to readily save money to purchase a property - it’s definitely a big draw card. Staff also noted the role of the school in sorting out appropriate accommodation “the school did their absolute best to accommodate that, so that’s nice”.

However, purchasing a property means a longer term commitment to the area and if renting is the preferred option, there are limited quality private rentals available because of low house prices.

As noted previously, some young teachers choose to travel from Burnie each day, while others live in Smithton during the week and travel home to Devonport on the weekend, usually because they have partners or family in those communities. Other incentives for teachers include a subsidy on electricity, though one long term member suggested that the current incentives are probably not quite as lucrative as they were thirty years ago.
14.3.3 How has this school supported pre-service teacher education?

Staff have supported students under the PIERS program and have assisted pre-service teachers who come to the school, by arranging accommodation if they need it. Staff suggested that in many cases pre-service teachers come to Smithton because they have family members living in the community, which is often the reason they chose Smithton for a placement/internship. Typically, the school hosts about 4 students per year, but this was expected to change now that Burnie has a University of Tasmania campus (Cradle Coast campus), offering a full teacher education program. Pre-service teachers only get a visit from university staff if they are an intern or if they experience difficulties. School staff are able to participate in professional development associated with the programs, by attending training at the Burnie campus.

14.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

14.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to retain successful recruitment and retention strategies?

As with many of the cases in this study, some teachers are able to cope better with the ‘fishbowl’ nature of small communities such as Smithton. Many suggested that the community’s closeness and support outweighed any loss of privacy. One teacher commented that new teachers are wary of meeting somebody local because it means that if they are meeting somebody local they are staying here for life. There are also limited cultural activities offered by the community, which is suggested as a disincentive to stay for teachers interested in such pursuits.

While a small school offers ‘leadership’ opportunities, such as grade leader or Advanced Skills Teacher (AST), there are few opportunities for substantive promotion. AST positions are fixed-term contracts typically attached to special programs, such that if the program doesn’t continue then neither does the AST position. Consequently, teachers who are appointed to these positions face instability in relation to ‘location’.

One of the significant challenges faced by teachers new to the school – either early career teachers or more experienced staff appointed to the school – is what they describe as entrenched ways of doing things, such as literacy programs. Several newly appointed teachers commented that their suggestions of alternative approaches or strategies were often either dismissed or not explored in any meaningful way. Some found frustrating, the lack of ‘new thinking’ in relation to current policies that were proving to be ineffectual – such as the time-out room. They suggested that it was just such ‘closed mindedness’ that could force them to look elsewhere as soon as possible.

I don’t feel like when I do suggest things that it’s taken seriously or a lot of the time I just don’t contribute because I don’t feel like its going to get me anywhere, because the people who have been here a lot longer and it’s a quote, they’ve said it, “That’s not the way we do things here.” So why would you want to contribute and change things when I thought schooling was all about change, when you are shot down like that to say, “That’s not the way we do things here.”

For example, some staff commented that data indicated that current low literacy levels are not being met by school policies:

They have this low literacy level and we’ve been doing the same things for years and years and years... And half the things we are still doing the same, not changing. And the newer teachers can see things; they can see how it’s not working, but the people who have done it for years can’t. (Teacher <5 years, Site Visit Interview)
A second example suggested was the ‘time out space’ did not appear to change children’s behaviour, but no alternative programs were considered, according to a number of ‘new teachers’ interviewed.

The level of wealth in the community is an issue, in that it is distributed bi-modally with extremes at each end, which impacts on the school’s capacity to attract additional funding. Poverty is inter-generational in some families, while many families enjoy full employment with significant salaries. Further, long-term teachers suggested that many of the children were getting ‘tougher’ to teach because of the transient nature of the population. It was these same teachers that were able to draw on their relationships with parents (as their ex-students) because it helps to know the family background – something that new teachers were less able to do.

Lack of funding also affected the level of teacher aide support available, beginning teachers particularly noted that the difficulties they faced with problematic children were either unrecognized or simply not addressed because the school was so busy:

You are fighting for yourself and I feel like I am just fighting all the time for yourself. And everyone is doing that and yeah. We get together and have staff meetings but there is no general time to just chat about things, it’s just so busy here.

While literacy is a concern, the community members noted that there was also no permanent speech pathologist and that had been the situation for several years. The issue of specialised support services such as a speech therapy, and even a maternity ward, are issues facing many rural and regional schools and their communities. However, the Principal was hopeful that the new initiatives to increase preschool attendance to three days per week as well as the Launch into Learning program would have a positive effect on school socialization and overall student learning.
The VICTORIAN Schools
15 ALVIE CONSOLIDATED PRIMARY SCHOOL

Alvie Consolidated School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

15.1 THE COMMUNITY

15.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Alvie

Alvie lies approximately 18 km northwest of Colac, in South West Victoria. The town itself is small, with a population of less than 100. It consists of only a handful of houses and service buildings, with a local community hall, tennis court and church. Against the wisdom of the local farmers - who said “why take good dairy country for vines?” sits the Red Rock winery. The vines represent in many ways the new ideas - a sign of how the area is diversifying to ensure its survival. The town, also has two schools at either end, a Catholic Primary School and Alvie Consolidated State Primary School, the site of this case study.
Alvie as a place, is both beautiful and fragile. It is on the cusp of old country and new ideas. Driving into the township of Alvie, is a country vision of rolling green pastures, windmills and slow grazing dairy cattle. The fertile land is the result of the plains around Colac once being subjected to intense volcanic activity. Victoria’s youngest volcano formed the craters, floating islands and crater lakes which are now a striking feature of this region.

Below, is the view from the top of the Red Rock Scenic Reserve. The Red Rock Winery is located at the volcano’s base. Nearby, Lake Colac is the largest freshwater lake in Victoria and Lake Corangamite, also located in the area, is the largest permanent salt water lake in Australia. Interestingly, it is the home of one of Victoria’s most important bird habitats, with approximately 75 species, and is one of the few remaining breeding grounds for Pelicans.

Historically, the people of the local “Colijan” clan of the Wathaurong Aboriginal tribe lived in the area and in the time before white settlement, the forested landscape supplied game such as wallaby, possum, koala and kangaroo. In 1835, John Batman landed at Port Phillip and claimed the area for white settlers - a series of skirmishes between the two groups then began over the period from 1835 to 1837.

One of the early landowner’s, William Robertson, named the place Alvie after his birthplace in Scotland. In the township there still stands the Historic Saint Andrews Anglican church built in 1895.

After the gold rush and the introduction of rabbits, dry stone walls were built. In driving through Colac to Alvie and then through to Warrnambool, the roads are lined with these. The area historically has one of the most impressive dry stone walls in Australia.
15.1.2 Demography: the people and community of Alvie

Although visually rich and picturesque, Alvie, according to Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) is relatively economically poor. The majority of families living in the area are either third generation small scale dairy or sheep farmers, or work in the local dairy processing factory, Bonlac or in small business employment. ABS data from 2006 indicates that 16.6% of the population in the area are involved in dairy/cattle farming compared to a national average of only 0.2%. One of the beginning teachers, when discussing this data, highlighted the importance of not only knowing the relevant statistical information but also in ‘knowing’ the families, their work and lives.

*Just look around and talk to the parents and see what they’re doing. Some are busy milking cows ... and also ... there was one girl I was tutoring her in the afternoon ... so I’ve been to her home and I know how they live, and their daily routine and how they live, and that supports my teaching too, because I understand their daily life and their wellbeing too, that helps understanding their lifestyle. That their school life is affected by their lifestyle...(Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)*

As consistent with national trends, there is a growing population of families moving from urban areas into the surrounding rural areas looking for cheaper housing, and there are also some ‘tree change’ families looking for diversification and alternative boutique business opportunities such as wine and cheese making and flower growing. Slight population growth is reflected in the tables below. These reveal that between 2001 and 2006, 207 people moved into the Colac-Otway Shire Local Government Area.
Table 15.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Colac-Otway Shire Local Government Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 20,089</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 95</th>
<th>Under 15:</th>
<th>15 Years and Over</th>
<th>65 Years and Over</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10,005</td>
<td>10,084</td>
<td>48</td>
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Table 15.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Colac-Otway Shire Local Government Area)

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<th>Total People: 20,296</th>
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<th>15 Years and Over</th>
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<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10,116</td>
<td>10,180</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The community surrounding Alvie, and from which the school draws its students, reflects a dominant Anglo-Saxon background. In the 2006 Census, only 5.8% of the population were born overseas. Given the lack of cultural diversity in the township, and the fact that international travel and work on dairy farms do not couple easily, residents have relatively limited opportunities to experience different cultures.

This data is significant, as one of the newly qualified teachers to Alvie Consolidated Primary School was first generation born Chinese, moving from his home in Shanghai to study teaching in Melbourne and then beginning his teaching career at Alvie. A section of this case study later discusses how the school assisted in the retention of this beginning teacher and of his success in teaching. This story is significant and timely, as federally; there is recognition of the importance of widening participation in Higher Education and the need to diversify the teaching population to be more inclusive of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

15.1.3 Economy: production, work and industry in Alvie

Local historian, Dawn Peel, notes that the Colac area was “fortuitously placed economically”. Geographically it was located on fertile soils and situated between the timber of the Otways, the dairy farms of the lower slopes, and the sheep farms of the plains to the west and north. In addition, it was on the Princes Highway, the earliest route through to the western districts of Victoria. The height of the timber industry in the Otways was between 1870 and 1920, when a vast network of tramways was built through the ranges, to the south of Colac, to transport logs to mills. The logging industry is still important to the area, however, it has had to adapt to changing times as the Principal of Alvie describes below:

Because of the changes in the logging industry, the mills have had to diversify, they’ve had to move away from old growth, which has now stopped and I thought it would impact on Colac, but it didn’t and most of them [mills] have changed to plantation timber and are processing blue gum and pine, which I thought was very smart because otherwise they were finished. As much as I don’t particularly like the logging industry, it’s good if they don’t lose any jobs. … So there’s continued growth. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The township of Alvie was historically the heart of a rich potato and onion growing district until the latter half of last century. Alvie’s pre-dominate industry today, is small dairy farming with the Bonlac dairy processing factory located in the nearest town of Cororooke. A variety of small boutique businesses has begun to emerge in and around the town with the local vineyard and winery (Red Rock Winery) established in the early 21st century. This alternative use of the land has since sparked others to re-consider how business might thrive in the rural community.
The labour force in the area follows ‘traditional’ gender based roles with the majority of males employed in manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction. Females on the other hand are largely employed in retail, health care and social assistance, education and training and in administrative and support services.

The majority of the children leaving Alvie, move on to one of the High Schools in nearby Colac. Although the Alvie students perform well in NAPLAN, overall the Colac-Otway area is under-represented in terms of students leaving high school to participate in tertiary education.

15.2 THE SCHOOL

Alvie Consolidated Primary School, or simply ‘Alvie’, is so named as it was the physical site where many small schools in the area were relocated and consolidated. The school history states:

“…in 1950 about 11 acres of land was bought from Mr George Buckle, this land together with the adjoining 3 acres of the Alvie State School land amounted to almost 15 acres. The surrounding schools were closed in 1951 and 1952 and their pupils were conveyed to Alvie by bus”.

Historical documents indicate that at one stage the school had children up to middle school years, with a population of around 500 students. The school now, however, maintains a population of just less than 40 children. Currently, it has 3.6 full time equivalent teaching staff, and 37 students, of whom 18 are male and 19 are female.

The vast grounds have been maintained for student use, and the school community takes great care and time to ensure the maintenance of the school’s environment.

Although the school is small, this case study highlights how the school Principal, staff and community have been able to creatively retain and recruit its teachers, including newly qualified teachers, through difficult periods. A thriving rose garden in times of drought, within the school grounds, is symbolic of the underpinning philosophy of the school that of nurture it and it will grow. Alvie is an interesting case study due to the successful dynamics of the different generational, social and cultural mix of teachers in a small school, and as an overall example of what can work for teachers and students particularly in a small rural school.

When the Principal of Alvie Consolidated Primary School arrived almost a decade ago, he found that even though there were vacant teaching positions, filling these positions was often difficult and the number of applicants low. Given this situation, a number of initiatives and successful strategies were put in place to both recruit and maintain a stable teaching population as well as student population. The strategies are designed to counter the external forces of economic downturn, drought and mobile families. The Principal of Alvie comments on the importance of stability:

“We’re unique! Obviously, you’ve {the researcher} alluded to the fact that we’re different to the trend of what’s been happening in schools across the state, and probably more so in metropolitan schools. We are retaining teachers, and I’ve been very pleased to maintain that. I think maintaining staffing stability is important – the students know what to expect, the community knows what to expect, a lot of the problems have been sorted out. Every time you have a new teacher the process starts again, you need to then go through getting to know them, the students knowing them, the parents knowing them, so it’s a great stabilising effect [to keep teachers]. I think we’re a very stable school and I think we’ve been selected and nominated because of our stability and ability to retain quality teachers, especially like the teachers we have here. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)
ALVIE CONSOLIDATED PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Principal and staff are also dedicated and committed to ensuring ‘country kids’ have as many options as their city counterparts and as such, there are many programs and pathways set up for the students. The wetlands project described below is an example of a school community initiative offered to students.

“The Alvie Consolidated School Native Wetlands project was commenced in 1995, as a result of declining rural populations and addressing an ongoing problem maintaining the school's enormous grounds. After consultation with parents, students, staff and the community, a grant was successfully applied for from the Department of Education. This allowed work to proceed. The native wetlands project was opened in 1996 with students, parents, staff and the wider community planted over 900 trees and shrubs” (School website)

Our analysis of the information, collected during the site visit, strongly suggests that the Principal and his school leadership have enabled others to take on a leadership role, and as a staff team they have all worked very hard over a considerable time to develop an ethos of care and a feeling of familial connectivity within and across the school and its community.

15.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

15.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

Alvie Consolidated Primary School was nominated as a successful school for recruiting and retaining teachers for three main reasons.

- The School's on-going commitment to pre-service teacher education and school-university partnership.
- The school’s ability to retain a beginning teacher beyond three years in a relatively small (Equivalent of 4 full time staff) staffing population and fluctuating student numbers.
- The school’s staffing record overall, with evidence of long term stability of all staff, both beginning and experienced, including the Principal, through changing community times and with fluctuating student numbers.

In the analysis of the data, these reasons were explored further and what emerged was evidence of a particular working ‘culture’ or environment and leadership style which appear significant in the
contribution to the success of maintaining the staffing of the school. The following quote from one of the experienced teachers highlights how the staff viewed each other’s efforts together.

> At the end of the year we give each other a hug, and there’s a lot of weight in that hug, because unless you’ve been on the journey, you don’t know. Particularly when we’ve had ups and downs, it’s just been wonderful to know that at the end of the year we say that whatever the new year brings, together we’ll face it and do whatever is best for the children in the school. And it’s been wonderful to see people returning after the group hug, we put a lot of faith in it. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The work culture or environment could be described as:

1. Supportive
2. Building from individual teacher’s strengths
3. Flexible work relationships

Throughout the interview data, there was constant reference to the importance of ‘supporting each other’. This support was described in terms of classroom practice, administration duties, curriculum development and day to day problem solving of issues associated with a small school and its community.

Alvie Consolidated Primary School, although small, has been strategic in the ways in which the staff has worked flexibly and across each other’s classrooms. Teachers have taken the attitude that all of the children in the school are their responsibility, and while students are grouped in particular ways, the staff remain more flexible and able to teach across the levels. Each year the staff team meet to discuss collectively the best way to resource and staff the school, and staffing loads have remained flexible to adjust to the local changes – particularly due to fluctuating student numbers.

Staff have been enabled to work in and across each other’s classrooms and a particular successful strategy has been to pair teachers according to the strengths that each brings to the school learning environment and their own balance of skill sets. All teachers articulated that they see themselves as learners first and each with equally something to contribute by way of professional learning to each other. The Principal summaries some of these strategies:

> Strategies we’ve got in place are mentoring – we’ve got a very good experienced teacher here that moulds excellent qualities with her teaching and is able to mentor any beginning teacher. She has excellent teaching skills and excellent assessment skills as well, and so is very valuable. We work as a team and have a very close working relationship with each other, often classes are combined and all teachers know all students, so that’s one thing that helps to establish more of a team feeling because there is a collective responsibility that all of us share … We have professional development and we try to involve graduate teachers in any sort of professional development that might assist them. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

One of the more memorable quotes that came from the transcripts, was from an experienced teacher in the school. She stated simply “When you come to Alvie you come with your whole self”. In further unpacking this statement it was revealed that this view is collectively shared by each and every staff member and to them it means that as a teacher, it is worth investing in knowing the ‘whole’ person, their family and background and their skills and strengths.

> When you come to Alvie you come with your whole self. We are aware that your family and your friends are an important part of your life and they help you be the teacher you are and so
we have to recognise that involvement you have with them. And on many occasions we can incorporate the expertise of your family and friends into the school life and this happens on a needs basis; it's not timetabled or programmed, but people are very generous with their time, and quite often its not just the teacher who works in the school, but there's a definite positive impact from their family and friends too. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The notion of coming as your 'whole self', emerged as a significant factor particularly in retaining the newly qualified teacher who could have been at risk of feeling very marginalised or pressured to behave in culturally stereotypical and gendered ways, so that instead he felt valued and part of the team. This next quote further illustrates how staff valued each other and built meaningful relationships to support each others' professional lives.

So he gives back to us, he's had us to his home for meals, and there's something about eating with people, food that he's prepared for us from his region in Shanghai, and that's been wonderful because we've been able to talk about the food and talk with each other and perhaps cover things that we don't normally cover in school time, but centring on the food and the family, about growing the vegetables and how the food's been prepared. And then when we come back to school, you're working with someone you've got a lot more interconnecting links to, so you're not just talking to a staff member, you're talking to someone who has become a part of your life. (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

It was evident that the Principal had developed this particular culture where all staff felt valued and believed, no matter how experienced, that maintaining a respectful working environment was a clear way to retain staff. Below are two quotes that highlight the contribution of the leader (Principal) in building the culture of staff inclusion:

And he's interested in us and doesn't just think of himself alone. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Since the Principal arrived at the school, things have gone from strength to strength and up to where they are today. (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

15.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

Unlike some of the case studies, the community’s contribution to the retention and recruitment of the teachers did not emerge from the data as significant in the retention of beginning teachers, for example, the community did not actively participate in organising housing for new teachers or participate in orienting the new teacher to the town. However the community members and parents who were interviewed did demonstrate a belief that new teachers were important and valued.

I think we have a lot of contact with the teachers and I think we certainly make them feel welcome and wanted and encourage them to stay. (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

From a school council perspective I think we do [encourage new teachers to come to the school]. The parents who are involved on the school council and the parents involved with the ladies committee, or the mother’s club, I think we have a lot of contact with the teachers and I think we certainly make them feel welcome and wanted and encourage them to stay. (Parent on School Council, Site Visit Interview)

15.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

‘Alvie’ has worked in partnership with pre-service teacher education over an extended period of time. The Principal and the teachers strongly believe that pre-service teachers had much to offer in
terms of the student learning and the teacher’s own professional development opportunities, and in turn, believed that the school had much to contribute to the growth and professional learning of student teachers. This belief and willingness to engage in pre-service teacher education resulted in a particular initiative titled the ‘Apple experience’ as written and published in the Journal of Research in Rural Education, 2008. A short extract is provided to highlight the school’s on-going commitment to pre-service teacher education and school-university partnership.

Extract:

In 2005 and 2006, a group of 30 student teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Teaching program, elected to work with a rural school on a program we identify here as the “Apple” experience. Apple Primary School (a pseudonym), is located in the Colac-Otway ranges in southwest Victoria, two and a half hours from Melbourne, where the students who studied in this program lived. Apple is a town with a population of fewer than 100, with the majority of the children travelling to school by bus from surrounding dairy farms or other small towns in the area. Over the past couple of years, the school has sustained an enrolment of approximately 40 children. The Apple experience involved 40 student teachers of a cohort of 160, who chose this particular school program from six school choices—all the others being metropolitan schools. When asked why they had signed up for the experience, most said that they were interested in knowing more about country teaching even though they had little experience of rural life. Some of the students who selected the experience were international students from Canada, and they said that this was also an opportunity to find out more about Australia.

The Apple experience involved different opportunities for the city-based student teachers to work with the Apple Primary School children. One way was through a field trip which offered a range of learning opportunities about the lives of rural children. One of the highlights was a trip to a local dairy owned by one of the families from the school. On arrival at the dairy, three of the Apple children greeted the students and gave them a tour of the farm. The children’s grandfather, “Pop,” also talked to the students about the work on the farm and the particular chores expected of the 8 children, considering their various ages, both before and after school. Students had the opportunities for milking the cows and feeding the calves and asking questions of the three generations of dairy farmers about their lives. The dairy visit was designed to allow students to
ALVIE CONSOLIDATED PRIMARY SCHOOL

witness children outside the classroom participating in their everyday worlds. Student teachers are matched to students and spend two full days taking activities with the children.


The participation of Alvie Consolidated in the ‘Apple experience’ is indicative of the school’s enthusiasm around pre-service teacher training and promoting rural education more generally.

15.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

15.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

1. The threat of closure through diminishing numbers
2. Opportunities for professional learning and development
3. Good publicity

The most significant and constant threat that the school faces is that of closure due to declining numbers. The Principal outlines the competing pressures under which he is faced as a leader:

At a recent Principal’s meeting we were presented with issues about our future and it’s looking at where we want to be in the future and how we’re going to be providing education and in particular how our small schools are going to be placed in the future. So some of the results of the data presented to us were quite alarming, they were saying that because there’s an upward figure of growth in Colac, it doesn’t necessarily correlate to the numbers of kids that are coming through, so that’s actually falling. So the families that are coming in are either retired farmers or people who don’t have children. And the figures that were presented to us, I don’t know if they were Department manufactured figures or not, but they were saying that it’s going to be in the next six to twelve years, there’s going to be a fall in the numbers of students enrolling … So they were saying that, therefore, you must now start looking at how you’re going to provide and what you’re going to do. Are you going to survive out here or should you be looking at
clustering or joining up with another small school or ... and that's the issue that I've presented to the school council lately. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The second challenge the school faces, which is tied in many ways to the first, is the constant need to highlight ‘positive’ stories about learning in rural schools. Selling positive stories to parents about small rural schools, who often believe 'bigger is therefore better' when it comes to providing educational choices for students, is a constant battle.

Finally, Alvie, like many rural schools, continues to face the challenges of providing professional learning development opportunities for staff. The realities for the school means that it is difficult for staff to be on leave for a day, even though they have put in place successful strategies to enable staff flexibility and mobility. Rural staff are usually required to travel greater distances to participate in professional learning programs and this can be physically taxing on staff resources.

In this case study an extra section has been included on the story of the beginning teacher at Alvie. His story is significant and is an example of how to retain a teacher from a culturally and linguistically diverse community.

This case study highlighted some of the issues for a beginning teacher from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (from the mainstream).

15.4.2 Tao* story of coming to a rural school: A is for Alvie

Tao came to Alvie, from Melbourne, with no understanding of rural life or preparation for teaching in a rural school. Tao believed he had a better chance of seeking employment in a rural community and so he literally started at the beginning of the alphabet in terms of choosing a school, thus A is for Alvie. He described choosing a rural school as a good opportunity to work and to learn.

I wasn't born here and English is my second language, I knew at that time I would have less opportunities getting a job in Melbourne or metropolitan areas, because I think they are competitive, so I thought going to a rural area would be a good idea to start a career, and I did tell myself I would stay only a couple of years and go back to Melbourne ... so it's interesting that I have changed my mind. (Tao, Site Visit Interview)

In this extract from his interview Tao highlights some of the difficulties he faced in finding accommodation and the strategies he used to find a ‘place’ for himself in entering a ‘foreign’ environment.

First, I was looking for accommodation, and I emailed the principal, because at that time I didn't know him and he said he might be able to help me ... but what I did was have a look around Colac, because I didn't know where Alvie was anyway and after the interview I knew, and I thought I might look for a rental property in Alvie somewhere, but they were all a house on a farm, and that was a big shock, because I didn't expect that ... and I was looking and saw a rental property and saw it was a house in the middle of nowhere in the middle of a paddock somewhere ... and I was scared and didn't know what to do ... then I drove to Colac and had a look, and I found a town with lots of people and shops. So as a Chinese the first thing I did was I went to the Colac Chinese restaurant and had a meal and asked the Chinese person in the shop where I could find accommodation in Colac ... so I got accommodation in Colac first and then when I started teaching at Alvie, I've been fully supported by the staff and I still remember when I had the first Christmas here - it's not my big celebration, but it's a big Australian celebration – and our principal invited me to go to his
family Christmas the first year and it was very sweet and I appreciated it so much. And another employee … invited me to Christmas dinner … so that was the first year. Also I was helped by my mentor, in different subjects, if I wasn’t sure about something, so the staff would help, so they’re very helpful, and in lifestyle … because I was single, but I survived … (Tao, Site Visit Interview)

In an earlier discussion, it was noted that Alvie is a predominantly Anglo-Saxon community and at the time of Tao coming to Alvie, the majority of students had not had an opportunity to meet people from cultures different to their own. Upon his arrival, Tao was asked by one of the children he was teaching “Are you Italian?” Below is the response articulated by Tao, concerning his contribution to broadening the students’ understanding about different cultures and languages.

Most of the parents in this community are very supportive, and they don’t mind that I’m Chinese, and I think also that I’m an ambassador to teach them or to introduce my culture to this community … because I’m probably the first Chinese they’d ever seen. I still remember the first time when I came to Alvie and one of the boys asked me ‘are you Italian?’ and I said ‘do I look Italian?’ – that was the very first impression, they were sheltered kids, they didn’t know the difference between the different people, they might look different or speak a different language. But I’m sure now the kids in Alvie they probably know Asian culture and the world better than at other schools really, because I personally believe that my vision is quite broad, and that’s the way I was brought up, so that’s something I’m really enjoying – sharing my experience, to open their mind, to broaden their vision and to develop their interest and to look into their future. (Beginning Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In summary, the overall school staff’s philosophy of ‘you come with your whole self’ appears a significant factor in contributing to the retention of Tao. In the overall analysis, the data indicates that it was the staff’s ability to ensure Tao felt that the strengths and the skills he had to offer were highly valued and promoted, and this feeling of being valued was key to his success in teaching and to his retention in the school.

The Alvie case study showcases the innovative ways in which a small rural school responded to the issues of recruiting and retaining staff through maintaining positive staff relationships and a valuing of the personal qualities a beginning teacher brought to the whole school community.
16 THE HAMILTON & ALEXANDRA COLLEGE

Hamilton and Alexandra College was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

16.1 THE COMMUNITY

16.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Hamilton

Hamilton has a population of approximately 9,500 people and is situated in the South Grampian Shire in Victoria. It was once known as the ‘wool capital of the world’ and while still significantly contributing to the nation’s wool industry, now its dominant industries and employers are health (7.2%) and education (6.4%), with sheep, beef cattle and grain farming the fifth main industry in the area (3.7%). Average temperatures range from 11.6°C (min) in January to an average maximum of 25.4°C, and in July, an average minimum of 5.1°C to a maximum of 13.4°C. The average annual rainfall is 670.8mm (http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/melbourne-and-regional-victoria/south-west-victoria/hamilton).

The town of Hamilton is close to the New South Wales/South Australian border and is a four hour drive from Melbourne and a six hour drive from Adelaide. The larger regional centre of Warrnambool is approximately an hour’s drive away. The local facilities offered within Hamilton, as well as its proximity to other regional centres, have been described favourably by residents:

… we're an hour to Mt Gambier, we're an hour to Warrnambool on the coast or Port Fairy, or we're an hour to the Grampians, we're an hour to Coonawarra for the wines. There's actually plenty locally. (Assistant Principal, Site Visit Interview)

… we have a very vibrant art gallery, we've got a very vibrant musical community, so generally you always have your sport as part of the country life, but we have a lot more than that here. (Librarian, Site Visit Interview)

You've got the Grand Pines National Park, so you've got a lot of outdoorsy stuff, you've got the beaches and the coast down an hour away. (Experienced teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The scenery from Melbourne to Hamilton is picturesque, with large parcels of pastoral land; first dairy then beef cattle and sheep farms. The Southern Grampian’s landscape is dominated by the Grampian mountain range and the Black Range State Park to the north, only 90 kilometres from Hamilton. The Kanawinka Geopark encompasses South Western Victoria and is made up of four main precincts: Craters and Limestone; Coast and Caves; Cones and Falls; and Lakes and Wetlands. The southern edge of Hamilton is bordered by the Grangeburn River and Lake Hamilton is located to the East.
The Southern Grampian Shire Council has strategically recognised its unique ‘place’ and wealth of the various landscapes, to invest significantly in the marketing of the Hamilton region’s geographical position. The town’s logo, or brand is ‘naturally rich’.

16.1.2 Demography: the people and community of Hamilton

Population statistics published on the Live in Melbourne website (http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/melbourne-and-regional-victoria/south-west-victoria/hamilton) indicate that while 11 percent of residents were born outside of Australia, only four percent speak a language other than English at home. In 2006, there were 2,437 families in Hamilton, of these over 40 percent were families with children. The most common religious affiliation was Catholic (21.7%); the number of Indigenous persons grew from 64 in 2001 to 74 in 2006 (see tables below); and the number of children attending primary school dropped from 840 in 2001 to 757 in 2006 (http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/LocationSearch?collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=UCL220400&producttype=QuickStats&breadcrumb=PL&action=401). Hamilton had 4.5 percent unemployment, compared to the 2006 average of 5.2 percent. (http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/LocationSearch?collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=UCL220400&producttype=QuickStats&breadcrumb=PL&action=401).
At the same time as the number of children under 15 decreased from 1,833 to 1,750, the number of people aged 65 and above increased. Interestingly, because of the simultaneous population growth, the percentage of people under 65 has actually decreased. Despite this, the population is described as aging:

*The demographic of the local area is aging, the birth rate is not massively high, so the local area without an increase of new blood, if you like, will decline or will continue to decline as it probably has for the last little while.*  (Deputy Principal, Site Visit Interview)

2011 census data will provide further insight into these trends.
While many towns in Victoria and NSW were built on gold, Hamilton was built on wool and the gathering of industries to support the wool industry. While the town might owe its wealth to pastoralists, it is a community sense of ‘innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism’ that appears to sustain the community now and to place it in a strong position for growth in the future.

The town and its community has a strong sense of its growth vision, and of all the case studies contained within the TERRAnova project, has been significantly successful in capturing its own sense of ‘place’ through significant council focused research and marketing all aspects of the community to others.

For example, the town promotes four significant tourist attractions linked to its wool history. The Hamilton Regional Livestock Exchange is a working saleyard open to the public; the Hamilton History Centre captures the history of the town; the Hamilton Pastoral Museum has historical farm equipment and tractors on display; and the ‘Big Woolbales’ is a monument to the town’s past. The town also has a strong arts community, with a large Art Gallery and Performing Arts Centre. A prominent Australian, Sir Regional Ansett of Ansett Airlines, was born in the town and there is a Museum highlighting the story of his aviation career.

The town, for its size, also boasts a significant number of churches of various faiths and the community hosts a sacred music celebration annually:

> And we’ve just had the sacred music festival this weekend, in all our churches, so we’ve got lovely churches. (Community member, Site Visit Interview)

The history and architecture of the churches and other landmarks within the town are recognised by the community and the council as important attractions that bring people to the town to visit, and hopefully stay.

Hamilton also has a large number of schools – 10 Primary and 5 Secondary – and with other educational institutions such as RMIT University, with a small campus, and the South West Institute of TAFE, it is well positioned to also market itself as an ‘education town’. In addition, the town has a significant number of allied health and hospital services.

When asked ‘What makes Hamilton a great community to live and work in?’ an experienced teacher commented:

> It’s a very educated community, and I think that’s often a judgment that people make who come into the country as older people in general, not just teachers, that they come into the sticks, and I think they get a surprise when they come here, because we have a very vibrant art gallery, we’ve got a very vibrant musical community, so generally you always have your sport as part of the country life, but we have a lot more than that here. And probably the biggest disadvantage is that we are three or four hours from Melbourne, and that’s probably what puts people off. But as far as being in this community, it’s a really good place to be. Probably not so good if you are in your twenties and you don’t have a partner in your life. It would be hard to meet other people with professional qualifications. But if you’ve got a partner, got a young family, it’s a fantastic place to be living in. (Experienced female teacher, Site Visit Interview)

16.1.3 The Economy: production, work and industry

Localised efforts to boost the economy are evident across Hamilton with the Shire combining effort to grow the population with innovative strategies for promoting industrial growth.
I think the Shire Council have set a target of growing the town to about 15,000 and to do that obviously we’ve got to attract a range of things. The Iuka Mineral Sands processing plant is very new in town and that’s brought a new range of people, managers and so on and I think the Shire is keen to attract one or two other new industries of some kind. There’s a very good hospital here which provides excellent services and it would be important for us to maintain our size so that we can maintain the range of services that are available at that hospital. The demographic of the local area is aging, the birth rate is not massively high, so the local area without an increase of new blood, if you like, will decline or will continue to decline as it probably has for the last little while. I think it's perhaps been stabilized, Hamilton had slipped well below the 10,000 at one stage and I think it's back to the 10,000. The local economy's been good, the local environment’s been good and that’s helped that, but there’s also a desire I think to avoid a situation like happened in the 1990’s when the wool prices crashed and the town was devastated and it affected the school considerably as well. (Assistant Principal, Site Visit Interview)

There are currently a range of local industries and the cost of housing is affordable relative to pricing in capital cities. In November 2010, the median sale price of houses was $355,750 and in September 2010, the median rent for a two-bedroom flat in the Southern Grampians Shire was $185 per week, or $230 per week for a three-bedroom house (Live in Melbourne http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/melbourne-and-regional-victoria/south-west-victoria/hamilton).

**Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurial**

1. Skills Audit and Industry involvement
2. Business Training Program including:
   - Customer Service and Communication Skills Training
   - Christmas Window and Merchandising
   - Net profit - How the internet can help your small business grow
   - Applying technology to small business
   - eBay and internet
   - Workplace Relations
   - Business awards training
   - Strategic Business Planning
   - Marketing

The slideshow clip above from the Branding Hamilton 2010 launch, highlights the community approach to strategies to boost their economy. The vision of the town is to be “Australia’s Most Liveable Provincial Community”.

The Shire has been very active in its own sustainability and over recent years the Mayor, Mr Mick Leeming, and Shire and community members have commissioned a number of reports and developed a strategic community growth plan. For the purposes of this report, as the town’s sustainability strategy is intrinsically linked to the recruitment and retention of people into rural
and regional communities, a short description and history of the Hamilton...\textit{Naturally Rich} campaign is detailed.

A description of this project is attributed with thanks to Mr Hugh Koch, Tourism Manager from the Southern Grampian Shire, and the \textit{Branding Hamilton 2010} documentation.

16.1.3.1 Hamilton marketing plan

The \textit{Victoria in the Future} 2008 \textit{Department report into Aging trends in the community} identified that Hamilton was at risk (like many rural and regional centres) of having an aging population with less families coming into the community. As a result, the goal of the Shire is now linked to economic prosperity and recognizing an investment in people as important aspects in attracting people into the community.

The Shire’s most vital asset is its people, particularly its young people. We must focus on their development and give them opportunities to remain in the region. (Hamilton Strategic Plan)

The Shire worked with RMIT, as the closest University with a campus in the town, to look at reasons why people might be attracted to the community.

![Motivations for coming to the SGS](image)

Figure 1 highlights the main reasons identified by the RMIT study

- Closer to relatives
- Lower cost of Housing/ affordable housing
- Desirable natural environment
- Secure work for partner
The strengths of the community were discussed at many community forums and then distilled into 4 main strengths identified as:

- Community Spirit
- Quality Education
- Innovative, Creative Entrepreneurial
- Natural Assets

These 4 then became known as the ‘4 pillar’s for change’. They have then been used to market the town. Quality Education was identified as a key ‘selling’ feature to attract new families into the community. Next, a television campaign was launched with a short series of television advertisements based on the 4 identified strengths and aimed at families and working professionals.

Using local talent to tell the story of Hamilton – Naturally Rich

The television advertisements featured local ‘real’ people who told their stories of moving to Hamilton, thus ensuring authentic stories about Hamilton. Below is an example of the series of clips about Hamilton
Education

- New teacher orientation
- Skills Audit and Industry involvement

Discussions regarding:
- Academic Parade
- End of year Education Sector Dinner
- Establish a Board of Education Champions
- Compile a list of Hamilton alumni
- Work towards a simple and compelling idea that represents education in the Shire – “Hamilton University” “Department of Rural Education”
- Establish a philanthropic fund for education and learning a “Hamilton Education Foundation” “Professional Development Scholarships”

As Education was named as one of the 4 strengths of the community, a number of initiatives were identified that the community could focus on. It is important to note, that in Hamilton when pre-service teachers come to complete their professional experience, the Mayor will often host a Shire welcome.

But socially, one of the big things they did last year, I hope to do it this year too, is the shire gives them a big welcoming party as well, and makes a big do of it. (ASIV Pre-service teacher co-ordinator, Site Visit Interview)

Another important aspect of this education initiative is that it involves all the schools in the community and while this case study features The Hamilton and Alexandra College, it is also important to note the link the school has with all schools in the Hamilton community. A key
feature of recruiting teachers is that all the schools work together and view the opportunities for pre-service teachers to visit all schools. As a result, the interview data also includes interviews from Principals and leaders at other schools within the community.

THE SCHOOL

The Hamilton and Alexandra College is a co-educational day and boarding school (associated with the Uniting Church), catering for all year levels from Prep - Year 12 across two campuses. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 43% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants and 57% in the top quadrant of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 0% Indigenous students. It has 46.8 full time equivalent teaching staff, 471 students, of whom 230 are male and 241 are female.

The school draws widely from the local area and from other rural and regional centres, with some students spending over an hour on buses to and from school. Some families send their children to board at the school. The school, through its website, appears to have a good academic reputation and it was noted that many of the parents had attended the school and have subsequently sent their own children to the school:

*Well the school has a very good reputation. It gets very good results, and is known for its standard of teaching. I think in rural areas like this, and in Warrnambool as well, there’s a big tradition of I don’t know, generations going through the same place.*

*… I think there’s something really special about this school that families love and kids love.*

(PE Teacher, Site Visit Interview)
There is also a smaller population of international students, pre-dominantly coming from China, Hong Kong and Korea, boarding at the school. The Principal and many of the teachers identified a strong commitment to global awareness and the school hosts a student and teacher exchange program with their ‘twin’ sister school, Gaoyou Middle School in China: an initiative set up by the Principal. The school also has a similar partnership with Indonesia.

Below, the Assistant Principal describes the demographics of the school community:

**The school began as separate schools, boys school and a girls school in the 1870's and they operated sort of conjoint classes from probably the war years onwards, but 1961 combined into the current school. It's always been a boarding school, so we have at the moment about 530, 540 students, about 90 boarders. About 330, 340 students are secondary and all our boarders are secondary. We see ourselves as unashamedly an academic school. Most of our students would plan to go onto further study, most of our students would apply to go to university and most would get an offer of one of their high preferences. That’s one of our sort of main focuses I guess and so we attempt to offer subjects at senior levels that ensure that prerequisites for just about every course, if not every course at tertiary level can be met and we have students who go off to a range of things. Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, all round the country and our results are generally very, very good. The school catered originally for students of the graziers, which is why I guess it was set up, but it has increasingly attracted the professionals in town, and even beyond that, people who I think are aspiring for their children to have a good education, a quality education and the chance to move onto tertiary level. We do have students in the boarding house from the South East of South Australia, that's been a very strong area probably for 40 years at least, for the college. We have a number of students from a 100km radius and the numbers at senior levels are greater than the numbers at younger levels. Often people will travel by bus, Year 7, 8, 9 and then maybe will board in senior years. And we also have about 30 to 35 international students. They're mainly from Hong Kong or the mainland of the People's Republic of China. A couple of Korean boys as well at present and another one about to start. And they add another dimension which I think is good for our kids.**

Leadership at the school is stable and interviews with various members of the school community revealed that professional development and various leadership opportunities are accessible to staff.
The Hamilton and Alexandra College, like the Hamilton community, has a strong sense of itself and its place within the community. Similarly, like the Hamilton Shire, the school has a strategic plan: Towards 2010 Vision – Building Capability and Capacity 2009-2014 which outlines how the college will cope with rapid change and employ the ‘flexibility and adaptability necessary to achieve our aims whilst maintaining our core values’. The change the school is focused on concerns development of the ‘whole community’. This became evident through enactment of the school philosophy, and in particular, the school’s approach to recruiting and retaining teachers and maintaining a strong, healthy place to live and work.

The Principal had a clear vision for the school and displayed an ‘outward looking and future orientated’ position to recruiting and retaining both students and staff. He saw the opportunity to build strong community networks as well as link strategically with national and international partnerships. The Principal was identified by all at the school as ‘energetic’, ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘pro-active’ when it came to positioning the school for growth and productivity.

Two beginning female teachers, in their first three years of teaching, were interviewed together and both spoke about the community spirit, both in the school and in the community as a reason for staying and working in rural places:

Positives for me, I think the reason I keep going to rural places is for my wellbeing. I love a sense of community, which I think rural places give you. I’ve done lots of sort of teaching in Melbourne and I found that I didn’t know all the staff. There were maybe four staff rooms that, or there’d be over 1,000 kids in a school, it’s just impersonal. So that sense of community, that sense of belonging you can really have in the community, which the downside is that you are known. (Beginning female teacher, Site Visit Interview)

The teachers also spoke about opportunities provided in the school and in the community to make a difference, as reasons for staying. For example, one of the teachers wanted to initiate a community music program, a link between her personal interests and professional life:

But I think it’s very enriching in terms of student/teacher relationships to know each other within the school and outside the school, whether it is in the sporting teams or whatever. I also
think being a performing arts teacher as well, and very much into music, drama, performance, I, and having grown up in rural areas where perhaps they're a little bit starved of those things, I wanted to come in and bring my experience to the wider community, and open them up to a bit of those experiences that … . (Beginning female teacher, Site Visit Interview)

This quote illustrates not only a break down of the public/private divide, but also the way in which the school shares its expertise with the broader community.

16.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

16.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

Most importantly in this case study, The Hamilton and Alexandra College and the Co-ordinator of Pre-service teachers’ (a role described further below) works with the broader community and other schools throughout Hamilton.

The school and the community was nominated as a successful school for recruiting and retaining teachers for three main reasons:

- The school’s and community’s ability to develop, create and market an innovative school-community partnership to ensure school and community sustainability;
- The school’s ongoing commitment to pre-service teacher education and school-university partnerships through the establishment of a co-ordinator role;
- The school’s ongoing commitment to supporting pre-service teachers to experience a rural placement through a school-led housing initiative.

The school has been able to recruit and retain teachers due largely to:

- A significantly strategic community plan;
- A particular whole-school leadership style with a clear vision, whole-school approach, outward looking vision and positive attitude, and;
- A particular working ‘culture’ or environment of innovation and reward.

The work culture or environment of the School and Community could be described as:

- Innovative, creative and socially entrepreneurial;
- Resourceful, both across staff and by utilising individual staff’s personal and professional strengths, and;
- Rewarding, enabling staff to engage with various professional learning opportunities within the community and internationally.

16.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

As discussed earlier, the community contributes significantly to the recruitment and retention of teachers and rural professionals and their families within the community.
A number of the beginning teachers and new experienced teachers also spoke about community members offering free or subsidized rent for the early establishment phase of their transition into Hamilton.

One of the beginning teachers describes her experience:

“Well I was coming down here every day and just, I put it in the hands of the real estate. And when I said, I’m at the College, they did look after me very well. I think we have a good reputation. And also people like to have professionals in their homes.” (Beginning teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Aside from the provision of accommodation, the community, through the esteem it places in the school, in-turn contributes to teachers feeling both valued and welcome within the community:

“Positives definitely are that you feel like you are part of something bigger, other than just a school, so being part of the community and I play lots of sport as well, so you do feel as if you are connected to something and that you do sort of have a reason for being there. I like the lifestyle, particularly now that I have got my own kids and being able to grow up on a little farm and the opportunities that they have in a smaller community to participate in things.” (Experienced Teacher, Site Visit Interview)

16.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?

The school and the community have worked in partnership with pre-service teacher education over an extended period of time. All sectors of the community value and welcome new professionals: in this case, pre-service teachers, to the community.

This particular community case study was distinctive because of a dedicated investment in the role of a pre-service teacher co-ordinator. This paid role by the Australian Independent Schools in Victoria (AISV) was the equivalent of 2 days a week, with The Hamilton and Alexandra College providing a desk and computer space for the co-ordinator to work, although her role was clearly defined as contributing to all schools (Independent, Catholic and State) in the community:

“I’m not sure there is any agreement, but it was understood with this particular program that it was servicing Hamilton as a whole.” (AISV Pre-service Co-ordinator, Site Visit Interview)

Below is how the Co-ordinator explains her role:

“Basically, I have to liaise with the universities to get the students. … When we have got our students, it’s my job to keep a very close eye on them, organize accommodation for them, monitor them very closely. I was meant to assess them at one stage, but that’s now taken out of my role because they don’t think that you can be a mentor and an assessor at the same time. So basically look after their well being and handle any problems. … Also, my job is to organize some sort of seminar for them, so that after school they get together and they talk about their day’s work, and I might organize something very special around town for the kids to get together, all the students to get together and listen to various presentations, for example, the Principal does one on CV’s and how to write them, and interviewing techniques and that sort of stuff. And I’m supposed to organize some of those sort of things as well. Basically that’s it. I’m a mentor and a facilitator, I’m not an expert on all these areas and how to teach all of that, but I am supposed to find those who are and bring them together.” (AISV Pre-service Co-ordinator, Site Visit Interview)
One of the experienced teachers responded to the AISV-funded role in the following way:

So a group of trainee teachers have similar like-minded people, and an adult who sort of touches base. I think that values as the emotional support type of thing we are talking about. But also because we were located, as you well know, in a program where we can provide accommodation and the food, and protected space. (Experienced male teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Throughout the interviews, other staff were identified as playing a key role in supporting the pre-service teachers and developing additional professional learning workshops for them. For example, the Librarian and ICT teacher regularly prepared a workshop on IT skills for pre-service teachers. This was viewed as an important knowledge to learn and was also viewed as an important professional development opportunity for staff to share their knowledge and expertise.

In particular what we do, when we get trainee teachers here, we run a morning with them where they all come from all the schools, and I run an ICT session for a couple of hours with them usually here, and Margaret runs a library session, and what we do there, we talk about IT type things that they could encounter at schools, and how they’ve been used and what they can expect to find. And occasionally they get to play, but not very often, with white boards, internet, recording systems. And our feedback indicates that that’s probably seen as quite valuable to them, because it’s the real world rather than a pie in the sky. So there are some things we are doing. We can’t do anything about the travel. We can’t do anything about the employment. But we do a lot of the other things because we are aware of it from the other way. That’s my immediate impression. (Experienced male teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Beginning teachers have also participated in hosting professional learning opportunities and have been encouraged if they wanted to mentor a pre-service teacher:

I have, the last two years I have spoken to the group of students that have spent time here, and in the local schools, just to talk about my experiences as a beginning teacher. So I’ve done that twice, and I will be taking on a student teacher, or a pre-service teacher in the middle of the year, sharing time with myself and the other, another teacher. (Beginning female teacher, Site Visit Interview)

Another significant initiative the school has put in place to support pre-service teachers is the investment in suitable accommodation for them, with the purchase of a set of small units. The units were purchased from the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, where they housed athletes for that period. They were purchased and re-located to the Junior School campus, close to the boarding house rooms and canteen shared by the students boarding at the school.

Pre-service teachers can spend any length of time in the accommodation and receive board and food for free. In turn they are required to tutor students in the boarding school and assist with homework sessions. Below are pictures of the external and internal aspects of the units:
16.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

16.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?

While the community has worked hard to strengthen their position in order to face the challenges for the future, the constant challenge faced by many of the other case studies appear to be the same ones Hamilton are trying to combat, namely: decreasing numbers; loss of industry; an aging population; and loss of new families.

In an interview with the AISV co-ordinator, she identified the shifting ground of old and new rural and regional industries and the impact of this on the town. In this response below, she explains the emergence and fall of one of the industries, an initiative to try and enable farmers to keep their land and diversify.

Teacher: Well, it’s mainly industry, I suppose. If you have industry in a town, you’ve got the people, as soon as you start to close down those businesses, they go away. And we’ve got a couple of thriving businesses, the Mineral Sands down the road, and The Blue Gums, they’re in trouble now, but certainly they brought lots of people to town.

Interviewer: Why are they in trouble now?

Teacher: I don’t know, the bottom seems to have fallen out of the industry, and there are all sorts of problems.

Interviewer: This is like replacing the old timber, is that what The Blue Gum is about?

Teacher: The Blue Gum is taking over farmers’ land and planting trees, the blue gums, instead. And you either buy the farmers land off them or you lease it. Either way, the land is gone for pastoral use and you’ve got trees on them. The trees grow for I don’t know how many years it is, twelve years or something, before they could be touched, and then they cut them off. Then I think they come up again two or three times, and then after that, they deteriorate in quality every time you cut them. But I think they can stand about three regrowths, and then
they have to be pulled up and planted again. But this part they’ve got in the ground, I don’t think they’ve harvested them yet. It’s about time they were all harvested. When the bottom fell out of it for some reason, they had to wait for their money to come in and the returns. But that did bring a lot of people to the area. But a lot of people did not see it in a positive light, because of the land being taken over by the trees.

16.4.2 Recruiting and retaining CALD teachers

One of the additional challenges faced by The Hamilton and Alexandra College was attracting and retaining teachers to teach in their LOTE program. Interviews revealed the need to attract high quality teachers of other languages and issues emerged with retaining these teachers for more than a couple of months to a year. Retaining teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (while not always language teachers) was also a challenge. The main issues appeared to be the settlement of CALD teachers in rural and regional contexts which did not cater for particular lifestyle needs that these teachers identified as important to them. A teacher comments on this trend:

… we’ve had I think two first year outs and we haven’t managed to keep them. It’s understandable, they’re a very long way from Melbourne. Attracting a French teacher will be very difficult. The other French teacher is actually a Head of House, he may stay here because he’s being given career opportunities. Last year we had another French teacher here, who taught French in ESL, she was Canadian French, she was very lonely here. Excellent teacher, but we couldn’t keep her and she went home to Canada.

This teacher added that to keep French and Chinese teachers, they would have to be, as they termed ‘married off’ to locals.

16.4.3 Recruiting and retaining Gen Y teachers

While not explicitly referred to, the notion of ‘Generation Y’ wanting to have multiple careers and opportunities to travel appeared to be an issue. One of the beginning teachers herself described her reason for choosing teaching as an opportunity to travel. She wanted to work in rural schools but she wanted to have the flexibility to move. One of the more experienced teachers described the frustration of working with first year beginning teachers who stayed for the year and then left. He felt that there was too much invested in their first year for little return if they only stayed a year at the school. He wanted to provide incentives for those teachers to stay for three years with staggered payments for every extra year they stayed.
ST ARNAUD, VICTORIA
(Case Study conducted by Professor Simone White)

17    ST ARNAUD PRIMARY SCHOOL

St Arnaud Primary School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a
dow economic and social base.

17.1    THE COMMUNITY

17.1.1    Geography: the place, space and environment of St Arnaud

St Arnaud has a population of 2,273 people. The town is located at the south-eastern edge of the
Mallee plains, between the towns of Donald and Avoca, on the Sunraysia Highway, 235km north-
west of Melbourne. It is predominantly a service centre to a district that has mixed farming,
merino wool, grains, legumes and vineyards as its main industries.

Driving into the town of St Arnaud from Melbourne, along the Sunraysia Highway, there is a
sense of entering three geographically distinctive semi-circular layers as you come closer to the
town centre. The outermost rim is where there are scattered sheep farms and small businesses.
There are many signs to small wineries and vineyards, and small Bed and Breakfasts are scattered along the approach.

The next layer, is a rim of scrubby trees and little, if any, indication of a town approaching. Even though the signs indicate only 10 and then 5 kms to the town, there is little else except kangaroo warning signs between this layer and the last. The next rim is signalled with the town sign heralding that you have entered St Arnaud. As you pass the town sign you enter into another layer of stark contrast, with very large machinery and every indication of prominent farm-focused business. Large signs advertise a broad range of farming equipment and industry, and clearly the town serves a wider grazing community. Large trucks with livestock and equipment regularly pass by and the specific truck route through the town embodies the sense that the town is also a service centre and gateway for exchange of resources between the city and north western districts.

Entering and leaving St Arnaud, you pass over a railway line each way. The next rim, past the large equipment, changes again and as you get closer to the centre of the town itself you drive through quiet, leafy, tree-lined streets where the link to European history is evident and there is a distinct sense of pride in the tidy houses and well-kept gardens. The main street leads you to the very centre and at the core stands the Town Hall, which serves as a tribute to the men and women who died in the wars, and it is here where you understand the significance of the town’s name. It is named after French Marshal, Jacques Leroy de Saint Arnaud, commander-in-chief of the Army of the East in the Crimean War. The town centre has many historical features and the main street, Napier Street, has been declared an important area for conservation. As you head away from St
Arnaud to towns such as Mildura, the rims are not so defined as rather quickly, all various transport routes spread like spider webs with the large trucks rattling with their various goods to and from the city.

17.1.2 Demography: the people and community of St Arnaud

St Arnaud is a former gold mining town. European settlement in the region began with the establishment of the Tottington sheep station to the south, in 1838. Other pastoralists, who already owned grazing pasturage to the south, took up land to use for breeding purposes. While the earlier gold rush period would have brought a range of immigrants to the town, today the population reflects a small population predominantly from an Anglo-Saxon background.

2006 ABS data, in the tables below, highlights the town’s population has two opposing dominant age groups with 19.6 % aged 0 - 14 and 15.5 % aged 55 - 64. The smaller percentage of those aged 14 - 25 reflect the wider issues faced by many rural communities with a loss of young people to the city, often looking for employment or further education opportunities. Tables 1 and 2 below, show this data and also reveal that between 2001 and 2006 the town’s population reduced by 5.3 percent.
Table 17.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 2400</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 4</th>
<th>Under 15: 479</th>
<th>15 Years and Over 1418</th>
<th>65 Years and Over 498</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool 39</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School 208</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School 191</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 1175</td>
<td>Female 1225</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/Locality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 2273</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 7</th>
<th>Under 15: 411</th>
<th>15 Years and Over 1323</th>
<th>65 Years and Over 538</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool 36</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School 197</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School 144</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 1113</td>
<td>Female 1160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

St Arnaud is located in a relatively low socio-economic area. Twenty-five percent of the population have moved into the community in the last 5 years, with many of those appearing to be older retirees or single income families moving due to cheaper housing.

The community has suffered from drought and there is high unemployment. In 2006, ABS figures showed 8.5% were unemployed, a figure well above the state and national average of 4.8% in 2006. To add to this, there is decreasing employment for those aged 15 – 24. Interestingly though, there is a trend of rising employment for those aged 55 and over. While unemployment might be high, so too is the act of volunteerism. One in three people, in the community, volunteer for an organisation or care for others in the community (ABS, 2006).

17.1.3 The Economy: production, work and industry

Of those employed in the town, the majority are categorised as Labourers and Related workers (22.4%) followed by Clerical, Sales and Service workers (15.6%), according to 2006 ABS data. For those involved in rural industries, the main crops consist of cereals for grains, non-cereals for
broadacre crops and some orchard fruits. There are sheep farms which surround the town and a large local turkey processing plant which employs many people from the town.

Located in the main street of the town, at one end is a large Salvation Army store and at the other end, a large St Vincent de Paul store. The presence of two large charity organisations in such a small community indicates that in this community there is a heavy reliance on social support for everyday living. Although the community has suffered financial hardship, there is a strong determination and preparedness to help each other and rally together via various community projects.

A memorable quote from the local volunteer at the Information Centre, after finding out about the purpose of the TERRAnova project, highlights the community spirit of taking ownership for the sustainability of the town:

_We live in the town and we can put the blame on everyone else, but at the end of the day it comes down to those who live here to make a difference and ensure our town stays alive._ (Community member)

This quote is consistent with the high rate of volunteerism referred to in the section above. This attitude is also reflected in the running of St Arnaud Primary School and in the intricate support connections between the school and community.

17.2 THE SCHOOL

St Arnaud Primary School’s Charlton Rd site was officially opened in April, 1928. It’s Spanish rendered style is unique and was described at its opening as a ‘magnificent structure’ (The Hon. J.W. Pennigton M.L.A, [http://www.starnaudps.vic.edu.au/text/history_adyj.htm](http://www.starnaudps.vic.edu.au/text/history_adyj.htm)). The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 94% of its students in the middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and no Indigenous students. It has 12.6 full time equivalent teaching staff and 221 students, of whom 114 are male and 107 are female.

The vision of the school is 'To develop confident, caring, enquiring individuals equipped to be life-long learners in a diverse community.' This vision is reflected in the school’s motto - 'Today's Learners, Tomorrow's Future'. (St Arnaud Primary School (2011) History, retrieved on the 13th May, 2011, from [http://www.starnaudps.vic.edu.au/text/history_adyj.htm](http://www.starnaudps.vic.edu.au/text/history_adyj.htm)).
In 2009, the school won the prestigious school-community partnership award for its Right Choices programme and received $50,000 for its contribution to social disadvantage and ongoing commitment to rural sustainability. Led by the school Principal, the school programme has attracted further media coverage and this in turn has led to wider national recognition. Below is an excerpt from The Age which presents an overview of the programme:

One of the prime examples of an award-winning school-community partnership from 2009 that focuses on social disadvantage is found at St Arnaud Primary School in Victoria’s north-west. In 2005, a number of teachers at the school realised there was a need for a tailored program to support underprivileged students. In the years since, the program has evolved into a comprehensive partnership with St Vincent de Paul Society. Principal Mark McLay says the program, called Right Choices, works on the assumption that students' ability to achieve at school is directly affected by their home environment and their community. “We would say that about 50 per cent of our school population is "at risk" in some form. This partnership is about having an impact at all those other levels of a child’s life that affect their growth and development,” he says. "There's no point us working in isolation in any of those areas. It's the whole package ... trying to change lives."

Additionally, the following link to the *Sunrise* television programme provides a clip featuring the Principal, Mr Mark McLay, discussing the School’s First award: [http://www.schoolsfirst.edu.au/sf-tv-video-amp-radio-stories/](http://www.schoolsfirst.edu.au/sf-tv-video-amp-radio-stories/).

Participation in the Right Choices programme is only one dimension of the school’s response to social needs. St Arnaud Primary School has formed a distinctive partnership with St Vincent de Paul, and below the Principal outlines the pressures faced by his school community:

> What’s going on with as far as families and their lives; the effect of the drought and the effect on business closing, the stress that different families go through. If they lose their job, do they stay in the community and try and find something or do they leave? So we see all that through their kids. We see the pressures and we do a lot of work here in connecting with family relationships. It’s not accepted here to notice that a kid’s not happy and something’s going on and not to follow through as much as we can. That’s been very successful but it can only get better because at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter what we do here, if they go back to pretty crappy surroundings it’s a bit hard. We’re all going to struggle. We’ve been actually able to support a lot of families ourselves with our connections through St Vinnies and the Salvos. The school even now has a trailer with a water tank on it and a deal where we can get water for emergency water for families and deliver it. Anything like that we spend a lot of time looking at it making sure we don’t step on the toes of local businesses but in this case there isn’t anyone. So I guess that’s a challenge being able to support the families who are suffering hardships in rural areas. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The school actively assists families within the community who are struggling with a range of social and economic issues.

This response below, from the local literacy coach at St Arnaud Primary School, to the question “What do rural teachers need to know?” highlights the need for an understanding of the importance of social commitment in teacher’s work.

> It’s critical they have an understanding of how a small community works and the value of volunteerism and how that is the strength and the connectives in the community because of all those things that you heard listed before [programs], if it weren’t for volunteerism that wouldn’t happen. It’s like the glue and it depends on how strong your volunteerism is as to how long your glue is in your community and how fragmented and how united they are. Also it’s probably critical for your local government to have a collective vision in that the people know which way they’re heading otherwise you get this ‘pulling apart’ stuff. The school communities, everyone needs to be connected and there has to be that communication between your primary and your secondary and the connections between all your different services. (Literacy Coach, Site Visit Interview)

While it was evident that the school staff actively volunteered in community projects, likewise community members volunteered in the life of the school.

> We’ve got the sporting club up here, the chef Peter, who comes down and does basic food handling courses with the kids, and we have volunteers — my wife comes here and does some voluntary work in the program and Mark’s wife does too. We have lots of volunteers. We’re starting a little puppet thing next Monday for an hour and a half with six or eight little kids who are doing it hard and they’ll spend an hour and a half and it’s just that connectiveness with people and knowing that there are people who care and will just listen to them basically. (Welfare Officer, Site Visit Interview)
The two-way commitment between the school staff and the broader community appeared to positively influence student outcomes and established the school as central to the on-going life of the community.

A distinctive aspect of the school’s success in retaining and recruiting teachers is the relatively large student to adult ratio due to a range of teachers and support staff that work in and across the school and community. The Principal outlines below the approach to ‘staffing’ the school with an approach that is similar to the proverb ‘it takes a whole village to raise a child’:

“Well, I guess I try and see that everyone has a part in the school which is worthwhile. In fact, it’s easier sometimes to have non teachers involved with the major things so teachers can concentrate on what’s important and have a lot of concerns over all the additional things teachers are expected to do away from core business and in the end if we want them to do this really well then what can we do to help. So through that a lot of our non teaching staff have developed close links to the community through the roles that they do and the parent you are going to talk to is on the school council and the parent club and has a link, and will quite happily at any time come and see me, either give me something on the record or something off the record. She does as much for the community as everyone else but is happy to speak of the school in good terms and be very practical. If you’re not happy with something, have you told them? We look at the whole school as the whole school regardless of what you are and we have to have an understanding then of that and as far as the educational support staff go I’m well aware that they’ve paid about a third of the amount of teachers and are horribly underpaid for what they do but we’re just open with that. Role clarity stuff is really important but not something you want to hang your hat on. We’re trying to get away from the thing of walking past and it’s not my role. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

This belief in the importance of working with parents and community to support the learning of all students underpins all the curriculum and co-curriculum programs and is a key feature of why this school was nominated as successful in recruiting and retaining teachers. Enrolment documentation reiterates this stance, identifying the school’s aim to:

Encourage parent and community participation in a variety of programs including those which help parents to support their children. The formation of a strong bond of mutual trust and co-operation between home and school is essential. In this way we can work towards the same goals of providing your child/children with a stimulating environment in which the total growth of the individual can be fostered. (http://www.starnaudps.vic.edu.au/)

It is the sense of community spirit and support that makes St Arnaud Primary School both unique and an interesting case study to contribute to the knowledge base of the key features of a ‘successful’ school.

17.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

17.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain teachers?

St Arnaud Primary School was nominated as a successful school for recruiting and retaining teachers for three main reasons:

- The school’s ability to develop, create and market an innovative school-community partnership to ensure school and community sustainability;
- The school’s ongoing commitment to pre-service teacher education and school-university partnerships;
The school’s staffing record overall, with evidence of long term stability of all staff, both beginning and experienced, including the Principal, through changing community times and with fluctuating student numbers.

The school has been able to recruit and retain teachers due largely to:

- A particular leadership style with a clear vision, whole-school approach and positive attitude, and;
- A particular working ‘culture’ or environment.

The work culture or environment could be described as:

- Innovative and socially entrepreneurial;
- Resourceful, both across staff and by utilising individual staff’s personal and professional strengths, and;
- Flexible, enabling home/work relationships and acknowledging school staff positions also in the community.

Analysis of the information collected during the site visit strongly suggests that the Principal and his leadership in this school has enabled others to take on a leadership role and as a staff team they have all worked very hard over a considerable period of time to develop an ethos of care and a strong sense of familial connectivity within and across the school and its community. Many of those interviewed identified leadership as an important feature to the success of the school and also saw themselves as leaders in the community.

"It’s a very supportive staff and we’ve got lots of leaders." (Welfare Officer, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal has shown a strong investment in the school staff and acknowledged the importance of the many roles staff play across the school and community. The recognition of these ‘other’ lives and the flexibility to allow staff to maintain these roles appears as a key to maintaining rural teachers. It seems particularly important in rural communities for leadership to invest in knowing the ‘whole’ person, their family and background, and their skills and strengths.

"Quite often we try and use the approach that when we employ someone, we’re employing their whole family, so we’re actually employing their kids, their dog. We have to accept that too, that someone will want that day off to go and see their son who is going off overseas who they won’t see for a while, or for appointments and things that they just can’t get in a rural setting." (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In the staff room there were many photos of the staff and a real sense of team spirit. There were many displays of ‘staff at play’ and this also seemed an important feature of staff wellbeing and commitment to each other. This simple school mock photo reflects the sense of camaraderie and fun, which is a shift from the more ‘formal’ relationships between leadership and staff.
A beginning teacher discussed the importance of the friendly staff support she had received in the school which contributed to her desire to stay. The following three responses capture the informal and formal support she has received from the school and staff:

I haven’t had much experience in a bigger school, and the community support here behind you and all the staff seem extremely friendly and helpful and willing to help. They got the time to sit down and talk you through what you need to do and give feedback.

I think this school is supportive. Everyone will come up and introduce themselves and offer assistance if it’s required.

I’ve been made to feel extremely welcome. I’ve got the support I’ve wanted and needed. (Beginning teacher, Site Visit Interview)

In addition to staff photos throughout the school, there was constant display of positive messages and community initiatives.
Even in the staff toilets there was a home-made poster reminding staff of the aim of the school.

From the aim of the school to the attitude of the leadership team and staff, the message is consistent: the student is central.

*That's a big philosophy of the school that we care about the child.* (Chaplain, Site Visit Interview)

*I just think that we're on the cutting edge; I just think that we are open to try things different. My passion – I'm just going to keep talking about that because that's what I'm basically here for – I'm the Welfare officer – but we're on the cutting edge. We do try things different. We are a school and our top priority is our children – it's not about the teachers, it's not about me, it's not about Mark – it's about our kids. They're our assets. That's what we're here for.* (Welfare Officer, Site Visit Interview)
Community initiatives such as this one below were also displayed and participants constantly spoke about their community work.

![Community Initiative Poster](image)

I’ve done a lot of community work as well. I had a position called facilitator and community capacity building so I did a lot of collecting ideas from the community, what they want to focus on, where they were at, and their past, what they stand for, all the stuff that you were doing so I worked a year or so in that. I did some research work on child care and then we established child care centres. I’ve done quite a bit of that community style work. (Literacy coach, Site Visit Interview)

We do mostly fundraising and we put things back into the school – all our funds go back into the school. We do a wide range of things. If a family has had a tragedy we give out vouchers. Very school community orientated and it doesn’t matter who you are or what your circumstances are. (Parent, Site Visit Interview)

17.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of teachers?

A key initiative just started in the school was a community ‘buddy’ to help any new teachers adjust to the community.

And the great initiative we’ve just started with is that if a teacher is actually new to town, they have a mentor in the school, which is the academic support for them to supply all the answers on the little things like where’s the sticky tape and how much is morning tea, and now we’ve brought in the parent club – putting a parent up to be a town buddy who supplies the answers as to what’s available in town. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

While at the time of this study, this initiative had not been put into practice. The program’s focus highlights the need for a community approach to the successful recruitment of beginning teachers.
**17.3.3 How has this school and community supported pre-service teacher education?**

The school has worked in partnership with pre-service teacher education over an extended period of time. The Principal and the teachers have strongly believed that pre-service teachers had much to offer in terms of student learning and the teacher’s own professional development opportunities, and believed that the school had much to contribute to the growth and professional learning of student teachers in return.

The school has provided financial incentives for pre-service teachers to participate in field trips and extended professional experience opportunities. The Principal outlines the school’s attitude to teacher education:

> Yes, and we found them accommodation and got a couple of petrol vouchers some of the time they were here. So some of the time it didn’t cost them anything in fuel and accommodation was covered every time. As far as activities, some of them were up in the scrub doing things that the uni said they didn’t want to know about. That was the whole idea to give them a taste that it’s not just football club, there’s more to it. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

The Principal also actively attended the nearest University forums in order to showcase rural schools. He described the strategy as an investment in the rural teaching workforce:

> That program went over well and we were always under the thinking that if we did that well then they might tell five other people each that they had a good rural experience and we were looking at a picture beyond our school, just rural in general. As far as the recruitment on line system doesn’t allow for that. You’ve got a school profile and that’s pretty much it unless they go to the web site to look. You don’t have many opportunities to push your school and your town. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

He also outlines other strategies to broadcast the benefits of a rural lifestyle to potential graduates:

> As far as attracting, the word of mouth side and the fact that we are running some really fantastic programs is certainly an assistance. Having some sort of forum, whether it be the Uni or whatever, where you could have different areas or schools or regions with little stalls set up with promos would be an excellent opportunity. They did one down Gippsland way I believe. It would be a wonderful way to promote your school as such. We’ve focused on the web doing as much as we can because we know that a lot of students will look there. We’ve done a lot to improve that significantly in the last six months. We even have a web team who meets every second Monday so that’s continually improving, so that side of it, but as far as really getting the info out there that makes your school specifically attractive is difficult to do but we’re involved with programs that we did with universities makes a difference. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

**17.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES**

**17.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain effective recruitment and retention of teachers?**

- Decreasing numbers -Issues of unemployment and loss of families
- Opportunities for professional learning and development
- Good publicity

The most significant and constant threat that the school faces is that of declining numbers due to drought and unemployment. Below, the Principal outlines the competing pressures under which he is faced as a leader.
ST ARNAUD PRIMARY SCHOOL

The second challenge the school faces, which is tied in many ways to the first, is the constant need to highlight ‘positive’ stories about learning in rural schools. Selling positive stories to parents about small rural schools, who often believe ‘bigger is therefore better’ when it comes to providing educational choices for students, is a constant battle.

Finally St Arnaud, like many rural schools, continues to face the challenges of providing professional learning development opportunities for their staff. The realities for the school means that it is difficult for staff to be on leave for a day, even though they have put in place successful strategies to enable staff flexibility and mobility. Rural staff are more likely required to travel greater distances to participate in professional learning programs and this can be physically taxing on staff resources.

The Principal outlines the approach to professional development adopted by the school, but this requires the resources to provide local professional learning opportunities:

[...] other areas and doing it electronically because it’s two and a half or three hours of a PD day getting somewhere. I guess on teacher Professional Development is a challenge but it’s something we’ve tried to address. Our policy now is generally only to send teachers off now in pairs, preferably in threes or even fours somewhere, because the conversation they can have on the way back is as beneficial as the thing itself; but we try to run a lot internal. We’ve got the expertise here with the teachers. They go somewhere and listen to someone and they’ll know as much and the learning journey they go through to actually present something here is an experience in itself. Sometimes regardless of how the session goes, is the fact they have had to go through it is a good thing. We do a lot of that and we are totally open as far as three teachers coming and asking to visit a particular teacher at a school because they have a great history program, so I’ll ring the principal and we’ll set it up. Our whole mind set of what is professional development we are changing to try and get away from this having to go and see some guru. The other thing is we have been willing to get people here. The thinking that someone charges twelve hundred dollars for the day and you think that’s expensive but if you put it into terms of CRT days – and that’s four teachers – well, four teachers compared to the whole lot. So it’s just changing that mind set to what Professional Development is and not getting stuck with having to send someone off to some PD in Melbourne or Ballarat. (Principal, Site Visit Interview)

In summary, the overall school and community attitude of ‘don’t whinge – just do’ appears a significant factor in contributing to the sustainability of the school and its families.
The
WESTERN
AUSTRALIAN
Schools
18 BRUCE ROCK DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

Bruce Rock District High School was selected as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

18.1 THE COMMUNITY

18.1.1 The People of Bruce Rock

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 547</td>
<td>Female 510</td>
<td>Male 18</td>
<td>Female 20</td>
<td></td>
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Table 18.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Local Government Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 949</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 50</th>
<th>Under 15: 210</th>
<th>15 Years and Over 586</th>
<th>65 Years and Over 152</th>
<th>Children attending Preschool 20</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School 94</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School 43</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male 484</td>
<td>Female 465</td>
<td>Male 23</td>
<td>Female 27</td>
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Table 18.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Local Government Area)

The total population of Bruce Rock (according to ABS data above) remained relatively stable between 2001 and 2006, showing a small (around 10%) decline over this period.

The total number of people employed in the region was 430 (ABS, 2006) with 193 (almost 45%) of these individuals employed primarily in the agricultural industry. Interestingly, 164 of these were classed as working in either Managerial or Professional roles, with the remaining 15% indicating their occupations to be trades/technical, machine operating or labouring roles. Education and training was the next most heavily represented occupation, with 35 (around 9%) of the working population being employed in this sector. Other industries of note included healthcare (29), retail (27), public safety and administration (24) and construction (23).
Occupation by age/sex (ABS 2006) revealed a total of 250 males and 179 females. 136 males and 103 females worked in Managerial or Professional roles (total 239), which represents slightly over 55% of Bruce Rock’s working population. Interestingly, 8 males and 6 females, aged between 75 and 84, were working in these occupations. The vast majority (366 or 85%) of the workforce (male/female combined) were aged between 25 and 64 years, and 26 people aged between 65 and 84 were still actively employed.

18.1.2 The Geography of Bruce Rock

The Shire of Bruce Rock, in the central wheatbelt of Western Australia, is 240 kilometres east of Perth. The Shire incorporates the towns of Ardath, Babakin, Bruce Rock, Kwolyin and Shackleton within an area of 2,722 square kilometres and has a population of about 1,300 people, with about 700 living in the towns.

Bruce Rock includes some of the Wheatbelt region’s most impressive rock formations, including Bruce’s Rock and Kokerbin Rock. The latter is the third largest monolith in Australia, covering 9 hectares and 122 metres in height.

18.1.3 History of Bruce Rock

Bruce Rock was originally known as Nunagin, but confusion with other towns in the area led to the change to its present name. The town is named from a low granite outcrop, located two kilometres to the east, in a nature reserve on the Bruce Rock East Road. The rock was named after a sandalwood cutter named John Rufus Bruce who used the outcrop as his depot in 1869.
The last Aboriginal Corroboree in this district is thought to have been held at this site, and currently there are barbecue and picnic facilities available at the base of the outcrop.

The residents of Bruce Rock have access to quality facilities including a 33 metre heated swimming pool, a recreation centre, a fully serviced function centre and gymnasium. In 2001, the 500 seat Federation Amphitheatre, with an adjoining sculpture park was opened. Sports’ teams are catered for with indoor and outdoor basketball courts, together with squash courts, netball courts, a hockey field, indoor and outdoor cricket, tennis courts and a night-lit grassed football ground. There is also an equestrian centre, rifle range and golf club.

Between April and November, the Bruce Rock markets operate at the Federation Amphitheatre, providing an opportunity to purchase local products. The Bruce Rock Museum, located in the restored bank, includes a historical display, with adjoining reconstructions of an original one-roomed school, a typical mud brick settlers hut and a blacksmiths shop. An arts and crafts centre is located in the main street displaying a wide variety of work by local artists.

18.1.4 The Industry of Bruce Rock

Industry in the district includes wheat, barley, lupin, peas, sheep, pigs, goats, machinery and pasture. Light industry is also evident in the form of cabinet making, motor body building and light engineering. In addition, there is a full range of service industries including electrical, plumbing, transport and all the trades, which make up the building industry.

18.1.5 The Environment of Bruce Rock

As a consequence of large scale land clearing, which occurred in the 1960s, involving the replacement of deep-rooted perennial vegetation (only approximately 8% of remnant vegetation remains) with predominantly shallow-rooted annual crops and pastures, a decline in water use by vegetation has occurred. This decline caused the level of groundwater to rise and with it, salts that had been stored in the soil profile. Consequently, formerly fertile and productive land is now being threatened by rising water tables. This event can also impact towns, roads, pipelines, cables and rail networks.
In response to rising water tables, the Shire of Bruce Rock is involved in the Rural Towns Project, which is investigating the salinity risk to the town and is developing urban water management options (http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/PC_92361.html).

In 1991, the Bruce Rock Land Conservation District Committee ("LCDC") recognised the severity of the situation and proactively sought legislation, under the Soil and Land Conservation Act, to ban all clearing of remnant vegetation, unless a special exemption was gained from the Commissioner.

### 18.2 THE SCHOOL

Bruce Rock District High School offers classes from Kindergarten to Year 10, with those students who wish to study at Year 11 and 12 levels being able catch a bus to nearby Merredin Senior High School. In 2011, there are 117 K-7 students and 31 in years 8-10, of these, 85 are male and 68 are female. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 93% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) compared with a 75% national distribution, and 13% Indigenous students (http://www.myschool.edu.au).

The school staff members comprise 10.1 FTE teachers and 6.2 FTE support staff. The teaching staff members include one principal and one deputy principal. Teaching staff experience ranges from graduate to in excess of twenty years.

The classroom teachers work alongside specialist teachers in Art, Design & Technology, Science, Mathematics, English, Health, Physical Education and Languages Other than English. The
school also employs a Getting it Right Literacy and Numeracy Specialist and a Learning Support Coordinator. This collaborative approach maximises learning opportunities for the students.

The school also offers a number of other programs including: TAFE units of competency at Certificate I level in Industrial Skills; the Primary Extension and Challenge Program (PEAC); the Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP); Academic Extension; an Academic Talent Program (ATP); and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS). Students are also offered learning opportunities at school camps.

The school has very well maintained grounds and excellent facilities for both students and parents. The former include: a computer laboratory; a well-equipped library; specialist rooms for Mathematics, Science, English, Home Economics, Design and Technology and Art. All rooms have Internet access, and sporting activities are well provided with two multipurpose courts and a grassed school oval. For the younger children there is new playground equipment and a first class early childhood centre. Parents are provided with their own meeting room.

In addition to these facilities, the school has an extensive range of modern teaching and learning resources covering the whole curriculum. These school resources are complemented by ready access to town and community facilities.

To assist the students in their progress, there are a number of services to which the school has access. These include visits from the school nurse; an occupational therapist, with access to a physiotherapist; a speech therapist; a school psychologist; a child development team; and a school chaplain. Community members with specialist skills also contribute to the learning program, and teachers are assisted by visiting teachers and education assistants.

Extra-curricular activities are offered to students and have included, but are not limited to: artists in residence - both arts and literary; Deadly Beat; circus skills/drama club; Be Active; Football Development Officer Activities; inter-house and inter-school sporting competitions; the school camp; and the speech and drama festival.

There is considerable parental involvement in and support for the school. Parents participate in school life through: daily reading in class; providing classroom support; assisting on excursions and sporting carnivals; and membership of the Parents’ and Citizens’ Association, the School Council; and sport committees.
BRUCE ROCK DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

18.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

18.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain quality teachers?

The principal of the school strategically recruits teaching staff through being aware of individuals who might be interested in teaching at Bruce Rock District High School. This approach tends to ensure that teaching staff appointed to the school want to be there and are likely to remain in the long term.

Upon appointment to the school, new staff members are contacted by the principal and when they arrive at the school, receive considerable support, both formal and informal, from the principal and staff. In terms of mentoring new staff, a buddy-system is available and professional development is aimed at school and teacher needs. Both the mentoring and professional development is seen as invaluable, with one teacher praising the ‘Getting it Right Literacy and Numeracy’ professional development. Other support included: the weekly Tuesday afternoon staff meetings, with professional development an integral part of each meeting (for example, staff members present, discuss any out-of-school professional development they have attended); and every three weeks, staff members meet in core groups: early childhood; primary; and high school, thereby providing a support network. One teacher described how she valued the assistance provided by her support teacher in ensuring that the needs of all children were being met.

Outside of school hours, staff members meet socially once a term and gather for a coffee day once a week. These events are seen as vital for new teachers as it helps them realise that any problems they are encountering are quite common and there are people to whom they can turn for support. In terms of teaching, these events help graduate teachers realise they “do not have to be brilliant straight away.” When asked about differences between metropolitan and rural schools, teachers noted smaller class sizes and staff numbers, and the closer connection with parents and children as being advantageous. The school was seen to have a calmer atmosphere, living in a small and friendly community was appreciated, people were observed to be more relaxed, staff members were very supportive, students better behaved and there was more opportunity for one-to-one teaching. As one teacher commented: “Well, the support has been fantastic. … all the teachers have been … very helpful. The principal is fantastic … and really supportive and helpful … .”

The positive and enjoyable aspects about being a teacher in a rural school included knowing the students very well. Other reasons mentioned were: the quality of the principal, particularly regarding flexibility for staff; close parent-teacher relationships; supportive leadership; great community support; the small number of school staff members; and the town not being too distant from Perth. With respect to the latter, being slightly less than a three hour drive from Perth was seen to make the school a less daunting appointment, with one community member suggesting that ‘word of mouth’ attracted teachers to the town.

There are a few challenges, which attracted comment. High school teachers have no opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in the same learning area and distance is a challenge. Interestingly, access to professional development is not seen as being a problem, with teachers being made aware of what is available and that ICT provided a very good ‘back-up’ for any lack of access to face-to-face professional development. In addition, teachers seemed not to think that living in a ‘fish bowl’ is a negative issue, suggesting that students appreciate seeing teachers in a social setting, and, thus, being seen as a ‘human being.’
When asked what advice they would give to newly appointed or graduate teachers in rural schools, responses were similar: find out about the town; get involved in the community; try to meet the principal and other staff members before school commences; evade gossip; and be careful – maintain control, the latter exemplified by the comment “There are some things that you would like to fly off the handle about, but you can’t because it will have immense applications down the track.”

18.3.2 How has the community contributed to recruit and retain quality teachers?

There is a very close and high quality relationship between the school and the shire council, with the latter being noted for its proactive approach to attracting and retaining professionals in the community, together with the provision of excellent community facilities. Several comments were made about the high reputation of the council at both state and national levels. At the start of each year, the shire council hosts a function for new residents, at which opportunities are provided to meet representatives of sporting and community clubs. This almost immediate introduction into the community was seen to ensure that new residents do not feel isolated.

Teachers commented on the welcoming nature of the community and how they became involved in community activities. They also referred to the welcome barbecue for people new to the town, and an invitation to meet the shire councillors; also stating that the Parents’ and Citizens’ (P & C) Association was very supportive.

According to community members, teachers remain at the school because they don’t feel isolated; they develop a sense of belonging to the community and become involved in its activities. All community members commented on the high level of community involvement by teachers. They saw positive aspects of this involvement, observing that teachers conducted themselves in a professional manner outside school hours. One of the community members suggested that a less positive result of living in a small community concerned parents wanting to talk about their children’s school-related matters on weekends. This person, though, could also see a positive side, in that meetings with teachers could result in invitations for afternoon tea or an invitation to a social or sporting event.

Teachers are respected in the community, with both the shire council and the P&C Association actively promoting positive stories about the school. Town facilities were also discussed, with reference being made to the fact that the town had a physiotherapist, dentist, doctor, nurses, a functioning hospital, a recreation centre and a swimming pool which influenced teacher retention. Personal relationships also play a role in staff retention; with several of the teachers having married local farmers.

Much of the conversations relating to why teachers remain at the school centred on the close relationship between the shire council and the school. This is exemplified by the shire council assisting in the sealing of the staff car park; the provision of an entry/exit road; its contribution to fast-tracking the building of new classrooms; and the school fund raising measure through a community crop, grown on land owned by the shire and leased through a peppercorn rent. The close relationship between the school and community was highlighted in 2009, when the farmer who had sown the seeds for the previous two seasons was unsure whether he could continue with the venture. However, he arranged for a business in a nearby town to give a demonstration of new equipment, which resulted in a new crop being planted.
18.3.3 How has this school community supported pre-service teacher education?

Most of the pre-service teachers, who have undertaken a practicum, approached the school in the first instance. Quite often (about half in the previous seven years) these individuals have relations in the town with whom they can stay during their practicum.

In describing how mentor teachers were selected, attributes such as excellent teaching skills, dedication and a willingness to try new approaches or use new resources such as technology were considered to be important. Mentor teachers at the school are not given any particular preparation, but throughout the practicum a member of the leadership team works with them, providing advice and support when appropriate. During the interviews, it was noted that the universities provide quite thorough and useful information packages.

When asked to rate the importance of pre-service country programs, the universal response was six, with one person commenting “Six, seven if possible,” highlighting unfamiliarity with country living issues such as buying gas cylinders and igniting pilot lights. Other observations about the importance of a pre-service country placement included that pre-service teachers need to realise how valuable the experience would be, as it provides opportunities to be made aware of the high levels of support available from school staff members and the community. Having pre-service teachers on practicum was also seen to be beneficial for country school staff as they become exposed to new ideas and new people. The principal also indicated that practicum performance at the school could be the basis of staff selection.

18.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

18.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain the quality of the recruitment and retention of teachers?

Like many other district high schools with low student numbers in the high school section, Bruce Rock District High School might face the possibility of becoming a primary school as the Department of Education is reviewing the viability of district high schools in relation to education provision for high school students. This will have implications for staff currently employed at the school, and may impact on the school being able to attract teachers in the future.

Probably the most significant challenge facing Bruce Rock District High School, together with many schools in Western Australia, is the projected shortfall in teacher numbers (Department of Education & Training, 2008). Staffing projections for secondary schools show that, while there will be a temporary surplus (2010-2012), the accelerating retirement rate will result in future shortages. Staffing vacancies will be prevalent in several subjects: Science; English; Mathematics; and Design and Technology, and with the move towards Independent Public Schools (in which Principals select their own staff), competition between schools for some specialist secondary staff might become intense. The ramifications of the half cohort in year 8 (due to a decision to change the school entry age to 6 years as at 1 July, commencing in 2003) will be felt in 2019 when there is expected to be a significant decrease in teacher graduates as there will be fewer applications for university entrance in general in 2015.

In addition to this possible inter-school competition for teaching staff, Bruce Rock District High School (and the WA Department of Education) will face challenges in staff recruitment from the private school sector and the resources sector, particularly the latter, with recent media
comments indicating that the Western Australian mineral boom could be long term. Rob Newton from the Chamber of Mines and Energy comments, "... the WA resource sector is punching above its weight in terms of delivering on the ground jobs to West Australians. It shows that we are in for a period of sustained economic growth and there's no greater indicator than putting wages in the pockets of West Australians." (http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/12/06/3086033.htm) Lane (2008) also provided commentary on the impact of the mining boom on future teacher numbers. In addition, and more recently, Ure (nd) stated “The teacher supply data for Western Australia indicates there will be continuing undersupply of teachers for the projected period 2012 – 2017. The mining boom in Western Australia can be expected to reduce the potential pool of candidates for teacher education programs.” (www.aitsl.edu.au/.../Edith_Cowan_University_-_School_of_Education.pdf)

Among the issues over which the school and community, have more influence, it is a matter of being able to sustain current effective practices and to think to the future in a strategic manner to ensure teaching staff are attracted to and remain in the school. The current major influences on staff attraction and retention are school leadership (and associated practices), school culture, lifestyle, community facilities and the appreciation shown by the community for both the work being done by teachers and their contribution to the community. With respect to school leadership, at all levels, the need for an effective succession plan, if not already developed, would appear to have some priority. Sustaining the school culture, characterised by high staff professionalism, the provision of quality learning experiences for students and the positive teacher-parent relationships, while retaining an acceptable work/life balance, is a challenge being faced by all schools. A previously published research report (Institute for the Service Professions, 2006) revealed that for teachers in regional locations, 60% of respondents (p. 30) reported difficulty in establishing an appropriate balance between the demands of work and life outside of work such as recreation and family time, and more than 80% of respondents (p. 27) felt under constant pressure and had difficulties in keeping up with their work load.

In a similar manner, the community should also plan ahead to ensure continuity of current high standards of facility provision and consider strategies to ensure sustainable economic development, while maintaining the attractiveness of the environment and associated lifestyle; issues considered important by teachers in deciding to remain at the school. There can be little doubt that the contributions, which teachers make to the life of the area, will continue to be appreciated by the community.
KUNUNURRA DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

Kununurra District High School was selected as a case study of a school in a medium sized community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

19.1 KUNUNURRA: THE COMMUNITY

19.1.1 The People of Kununurra

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<th>Total People:</th>
<th>Indigenous persons:</th>
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<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
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Table 19.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/ Locality)

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<th>Children attending Preschool</th>
<th>Children attending Primary School</th>
<th>Children attending Secondary School</th>
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<td>141</td>
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<td>142</td>
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Table 19.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Urban Centre/ Locality)

The total population of Kununurra (according to ABS data above) reduced significantly between 2001 and 2006, showing around 32% decline over this period.

The total number of people employed in the region was 1,795 (ABS, 2006). The highest represented occupation in the district was in the public administration and safety industry with 211 (around 12%) of the workforce employed in this capacity. Education and training employed 147 individuals (around 8%). Other industries of note include mining, construction, and healthcare and social assistance.

Occupation by age/sex (ABS, 2006) revealed a slightly higher proportion of males employed (55% as opposed to 45% female representation). Managerial and professional roles were almost evenly divided (284 male and 255 female), and perhaps not surprisingly, community and clerical workers were represented by females, with 204 quoting employment in these roles, compared with males (92). Machinery operators/labourers were represented almost 3 to 1 by males (versus females). The age range of workers (male and female) followed an almost perfect “Bell Curve” (normal distribution pattern), however, a total of 31 workers quoted their age as between 65 and 84 years.
19.1.2 The Geography of Kununurra

The town of Kununurra is located in Western Australia’s Kimberley region, an area of almost 423,000 square kilometres and an estimated population of about 30,000. Kununurra is located, by road, about 3,100 kilometres from Perth, 800 kilometres from Darwin and 1,000 kilometres from Broome, with the town of Wyndham 100 kilometres to the north. About thirty seven kilometres to the east is the Western Australia/Northern Territory border.

Kununurra is located close to the confluence of the Ord and Dunham Rivers, and about 120 kilometres by road from Lake Argyle, Australia’s largest artificial lake. The name Kununurra comes from the English pronunciation of ‘Gunanurang’ in the Miriwoong language, meaning “Big River”. The landscape surrounding Kununurra includes features such as Valentine Spring, Black Rock Creek, and Middle Springs, together with numerous waterfalls and swimming holes.
Kununurra is in relatively close proximity to a number of iconic areas including the World Heritage site Purnululu National park (Bungle Bungles), lake Kununurra, the Gibb River Road and El Questro Wilderness Park.

Kununurra has a tropical monsoonal climate with two distinct seasons: the ‘wet’ season, which usually occurs between about October and April when most of the annual rainfall occurs and maximum temperatures can be over 40°C; while the remainder of the year is known as the ‘dry’ season, with day temperatures between the high 20s and mid 30°C.

19.1.3 Community History of Kununurra

The first recorded white man to explore the Kimberley region was Alexander Forrest in 1879, and it was he who gave the region its name. Forrest became the land agent for the region and in 1883 leased 21 million hectares. The first settler to arrive in the area was Patrick Durack in 1882, with the Durack family eventually establishing the Lissadell, Argyle, Rosewood and Ivanhoe cattle stations, with the original Argyle Downs Homestead being rebuilt due to the creation of Lake Argyle and now serving as a pioneer museum. The pastoral history of the area is well documented in books by Dame Mary Durack.

Kununurra was established in 1960 as a service centre for the Ord Irrigation Scheme, which involved damming the Ord River and building a diversion dam 50 kilometres downstream so that the waters could be directed to irrigate about 750 square kilometres of land. By 1966 there were 31 farms on the Ord River plains and in 1972 the second stage of the scheme was completed with the opening of the Lake Argyle Dam. The Miriuwung Gajerrong people are the recognised Native Title holders of the town of Kununurra.

Since its establishment, residents of the town have gained access to government and private services, including retail outlets, medical services (including a well equipped hospital...
and specialist services such as physiotherapy and maternity facilities), a police station, schools, an airport, an aquatic centre, child care facilities, banks and hotels and accommodation. Since 2001, the Argyle Diamonds Ord Valley Muster has become a popular annual event. In a two week period during May, this event celebrates the character of the Ord Valley and showcases the area’s heritage and culture. The popularity of this event is exemplified by the growing numbers of interstate visitors. The opening concert, the Kimberley Moon Experience, provides music and entertainment in a balmy outdoor setting, with one of Australia’s most popular singers, John Farnham, due to appear in 2010.

19.1.4 Industry

Due to the expansion of the Ord River Irrigation Area, and the existence of a number of government departments servicing the East Kimberley area, the population of Kununurra is expected to grow strongly in the near future.

Kununurra's industries include agriculture, tourism and mining. The main agricultural activities include melons, dry culinary beans, chick peas, bananas, mangoes, lemon, lime, red grapefruit and sandalwood, and until recently, sugar cane. The thriving tourism industry takes advantage of the nearby scenery of the Ord River, Lake Argyle, the Diversion Dam and other local locations, including the Bungle Bungles. Other tourist activities include day cruises, four wheel drive adventure tours, fishing, Aboriginal heritage tours, scenic flights, canoeing, abseiling and camping.
Mining activities in the East Kimberley region include the Argyle Diamond Mine (the largest in the world), lead, copper, zinc and gold. There are also large deposits of bauxite and offshore reserves of oil and gas have been located.

19.1.5 Environment

The East Kimberley region, known as “The Last Frontier” due to its remoteness and untouched landscape, includes deserts, ranges, gorges, cliffs, escarpments, open plains, sandy beaches, rainforests and a wide variety of wildlife. The area has an abundance of water; Lake Argyle, Lake Kununurra and the Ord River, as well as the Pentecost, King, Durack, Drysdale, Dunham, and Keep Rivers located in the East Kimberley region. In addition, there are four national parks located in the vicinity of the town: Mirima and Drysdale National parks and Parry Lagoons and Prince Regent (which has UNESCO ‘World Biosphere Reserve’ status) Nature Reserves.

The pristine Kimberley environment is under threat from cane toads advancing from the Northern Territory. Cane toads have already reached Lake Argyle and have the potential to cause devastation to the local fauna. The only ‘on-the-ground’ volunteer group, the Kimberley Toad Busters Inc., are waging a 12 months a year campaign to slow down the advance of the cane toad into WA, with an annual ‘Great Toad Muster’ held in September and October each year.

19.2 THE SCHOOL

Kununurra District High School, established in 1964, caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 12. One of the largest District High Schools in Western Australia, the school has over 590 students in Kindergarten to Year Seven and slightly less than 257 secondary students in Years 8 - 12. Approximately 51% of the students are Indigenous, being spread across the year groups, with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers employed to assist with the education and cultural understanding of these students.

The school draws from the town population of about 6,000, with families coming from Aboriginal communities, agricultural, horticultural, mining and related service industries. The
Ord Stage 2 development, with the associated population increase, is likely to have a considerable impact on the school in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The school staff members comprise 65 teachers and 47 support staff. The teaching staff members include one principal, six deputy principals, one head of learning area and three program coordinators. Teaching staff experience ranges from graduate to in excess of twenty years.

In recent years the school has developed an excellent graduation record with 96 - 100% of Year 12 students completing their schooling with a Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). Twelve students from the 2007 class took up university placements. Over the past several years, 5 Indigenous students from Kununurra DHS have gained entry to university and in recent times, a Certificate of Excellence was awarded to a Year 12 graduate. In 2007, Kununurra District High School was the best performing Public school in Western Australia for Wholly School Assessed (WSA) subjects and was 6th overall in WA. The school also produced a student with a Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) result in the top 1% of all students.

Kununurra District High School hosts Australia's first Clontarf Junior Academy (established in 2008), which exists as a strategy to ensure the continued participation and engagement of Indigenous boys from Years 5-7 into the secondary years.

Despite the school's geographic isolation, opportunities are provided for students to expand their sporting, cultural, academic and social experiences. The school has a strong focus on retention rates, particularly in the transition periods from Year 7 into 8 and Year 10 into 11. This focus is exemplified by programs such as English as a Second Language/Dialect (ESL/D) and Getting it Right (Literacy), which build on the strengths of existing school initiatives aligned to the Australian Government's 'Closing the Gap' strategy. Other examples include a Year 10 Work Readiness Class, aimed at improving the vocational prospects of students; a program of
cooperative learning for students in Years 8 and 9 and multi-age groups, that targets students challenged by numeracy and literacy content. In addition to these initiatives, the school offers both VET and TEE pathways for students wishing to pursue academic and vocational careers beyond Year 11 and 12.

The school has an active Parents’ and Citizens’ (P&C) Association, with the School Council, school newsletter, local media, parent information sessions and P&C meetings being the principle means by which the school communicates its progress, to the community, in implementing the school plan.

Strong links have been developed with numerous outside agencies and the school works cooperatively to address issues of mutual concern. Inter-agency meetings involving: non-government organisations; the Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Services; the Health Department; the Department of Community Development; the Department of Child Protection; the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; the Indigenous Coordination Centre; Kununurra Youth Services; the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley; and the Police and Juvenile Justice ensure educational opportunities are maximised.

19.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

19.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain quality teachers?

Teachers interviewed, at the school, expressed a combination of personal and professional reasons for applying for a position at Kununurra District High School. The former was exemplified by previous knowledge of the town and its community atmosphere, while the latter was illustrated by a desire to work with Indigenous students and being unable to secure a position in Perth.

Prior to arrival at the school, teachers receive an information package about both the school and the community. Upon arrival, newly appointed teachers attend a staff welcome and tour of the school, and a ‘Welcome to the Kimberley’ day which is organised by the Department of Education district office. In addition, the Department of Education modules for new teachers were found to be very useful.

Newly appointed teachers are allocated a mentor, who is not their line manager. The teachers interviewed, expressed appreciation for this mentoring and for the advice they received from experienced teachers and line managers, and subject specialist (e.g. literacy) teachers.

Emerging from discussions about why teachers stay at the school, the personal-professional dichotomy again was apparent. Personal reasons included the relaxed lifestyle, with one teacher indicating that a lack of distractions allowed more attention to professional aspects. Home ownership and a high regard for the school, important for their own children’s education, were
cited as other personal reasons for staying. Community-based reasons included social and sporting activities, community facilities and the close-knit community atmosphere.

Professional reasons included: the professionalism of the supportive and quality teachers in an energetic and dynamic atmosphere; the school’s appealing environment; collegiality; the professional challenge; support from school leadership, who encourage the implementation of new ideas and support personal career aspirations; the closer relationship with parents and children; resource provision, exemplified by very good ICT access; the importance of being a role model for children; and socially active staff.

Graduate teachers were advised to realise that community involvement is important, as is becoming familiar with the community itself. As one teacher observed “Join in with the community, put yourself out there, make yourself available to join in and have a balance of doing the hard work and getting involved in the community ….” In addition, suggestions were made that graduate teachers should build relationships inside and outside school, make friends with non-teachers and be careful with work overload.

19.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of quality teachers?

In commenting on how graduate and newly appointed teachers are encouraged to participate in community life, interviewees indicated that the school is the main point of introduction. This occurred through the organisation of social functions, provision of a community information package and an introduction to the community via current and non-teaching school staff members.

The relaxed life style attracted several comments, as did the facilities provided by the community. Availability of a wide range of social and sporting activities was seen to contribute to an enjoyable lifestyle, as was the close-knit community atmosphere and the appealing natural environment.

19.3.3 How has this school community supported pre-service teacher education?

When asked about the importance of country pre-service programs, one teacher suggested between four and five, with five if pre-service teachers had no previous experience of living in a small rural community, while the remainder indicated six. One observation was that the different experiences and the desirability of ‘moving out of their own spaces was invaluable for pre-service teachers.’

Mentor teachers for pre-service practicum placements are on a voluntary basis. No special preparation is provided, although the deputy principal, with overall practicum responsibility, provides the mentor teachers with the university practicum information booklet and on-going support for the duration of the practicum. These teachers indicated there was no explicit university support; however, the information packages were very thorough and included contact details of key personnel.

A strong theme to emerge from the interviews was that universities should encourage pre-service teachers to experience non-metropolitan practicums, and perceived advantages in offering rural education modules or units. The need to de-brief pre-service teachers after country practicums was seen as being important, particularly so that those who had a bad experience realise that this is not the norm. Pre-service teachers were advised to be open-minded and flexible during these country practicums.
19.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

19.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain the quality of the recruitment and retention of teachers?

Probably the most significant challenge facing Kununurra District High School, together with many schools in Western Australia, is the projected shortfall in teacher numbers (Department of Education & Training, 2008). Staffing projections for secondary schools show that, while there will be a temporary surplus from 2010-2012, the accelerating retirement rate will result in future shortages. Staffing vacancies will be prevalent in several subjects: Science; English; Mathematics; and Design and Technology, and with the move towards Independent Public Schools (in which Principals select their own staff), competition between schools for some specialist secondary staff might become intense. The ramifications of the half cohort in year 8 (due to a decision to change the school entry age to 6 years as at 1 July, 2003) will be felt in 2019 when there is expected to be a significant decrease in teacher graduates, as there will be fewer applications for university entrance in general in 2015.

In addition to this possible inter-school competition for teaching staff, Kununurra District High School (and the WA Department of Education) will face challenges in staff recruitment from the private school sector and the resources sector, particularly the latter, with recent media comments indicating that the Western Australian mineral boom could be long term. Rob Newton from the Chamber of Mines and Energy comments, "... the WA resource sector is punching above its weight in terms of delivering on the ground jobs to West Australians. It shows that we are in for a period of sustained economic growth and there's no greater indicator than putting wages in the pockets of West Australians" (http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/12/06/3086033.htm). Lane (2008) also provided commentary on the impact of the mining boom on future teacher numbers. In addition, and more recently, Ure (nd) stated “The teacher supply data for Western Australia indicates there will be continuing undersupply of teachers for the projected period 2012 – 2017. The mining boom in Western Australia can be expected to reduce the potential pool of candidates for teacher education programs.” (www.aitsl.edu.au/.../Edith_Cowan_University_-_School_of_Education.pdf).

Among the issues over which the school and community have more influence, it is a matter of being able to sustain current effective practices and to think to the future in a strategic manner to ensure teaching staff are attracted to and remain in the school. The current major influences on staff attraction and retention are school leadership (and associated practices), school culture, lifestyle, community facilities and the appreciation shown by the community for both the work being done by teachers and their contribution to the community. With respect to school leadership, at all levels, the need for an effective succession plan, if not already developed, would appear to have some priority. Sustaining the school culture, characterised by high staff professionalism, the provision of quality learning experiences for students and the positive teacher-parent relationships, while retaining an acceptable work/life balance, is a challenge being faced by all schools. A previously published research report (Institute for the Service Professions, 2006) revealed that for teachers in regional locations, 60% of respondents (p. 30) reported difficulty in establishing an appropriate balance between the demands of work and life outside of work such as recreation and family time, and more than 80% of respondents (p. 27) felt under constant pressure and had difficulties in keeping up with their work load.

In a similar manner, the community should also plan ahead to ensure continuity of current high standards of facility provision and consider strategies to ensure sustainable economic
development, while maintaining the attractiveness of the environment and associated lifestyle; issues considered important by teachers in deciding to remain at the school. There can be little doubt that the contributions, which teachers make to community life, will continue to be appreciated by the community.
MANJIMUP SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

20 MANJIMUP SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Manjimup Senior High School was selected as a case study of a school in a small to medium community with a medium to strong economic and social base.

20.1 THE COMMUNITY

20.1.1 The people of Manjimup

<table>
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Table 20.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Local Government Area)

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Table 20.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Local Government Area)

The total population of Manjimup (according to ABS data above) remained relatively stable between 2001 and 2006, showing a small (around 8%) decline over this period.

The total number of people employed in the region was 1,810 (ABS, 2006) with 419 (just over 23%) of these individuals employed primarily in the agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacturing industries. These were the highest represented occupations in the district. Retail provided employment to another 274 individuals (15%), and education and training employed 160 people. Other industries of note included healthcare/social assistance (167), public administration/safety (160) and construction (103). Managerial and professional staff represented around 23% of the total workforce.

Occupation by age/sex (ABS, 2006) revealed a slightly male-biased gender of working population, with a total of 986 males and 824 females quoted as being in the district’s workforce. Managerial occupations showed an interesting trend with the ratio of males to females in this area being nearly 3:1, although this was somewhat reversed in the professional sector with around 30% higher representation by females. Another interesting point of note was the slightly higher representation of 15-19 year old workers compared with those aged between 20 and 24. This trend was present in both male and female populations. A total of 57 workers quoted their ages as being between 65 and 74 and were represented in all occupations other than sales.
20.1.2 The geography of Manjimup

The town of Manjimup is located about a 3.5 hour drive from Perth. The final 100 kilometre drive is mainly through agricultural country, including vineyards and tree plantations, a couple of small towns and a few hamlets, before entering state forests, which provide quite spectacular scenery.

Manjimup (town) has a population of approximately 4,000 and includes three primary schools, two senior high schools (to Year 12), a TAFE Centre, and an Education support unit. The area is renowned for the quality of its soils and enjoys a mild Mediterranean climate (cool wet winters and warm dry summers). The town is well provided with sporting facilities, including a Regional AquaCentre, with tourist accommodation in plentiful supply, including several small working farm-stays, which provide family friendly self-catering accommodation.
20.1.3 Community History

The area around Manjimup was first settled in 1856, close to the present town site. In 1871, the Shire area was included in the Plantagenet Wellington and Sussex Road Districts, and later included in the Nelson Road Board District. The Warren Road District was formed on the 3rd July, 1908, and in June, 1925, its name was changed to the Manjimup Road District. During the 1920s, group settlers, known as 'Groupies', ventured into the area to clear land as part of the State Government’s Group Settlement Scheme. With the enactment of the Local Government Act 1960, the Manjimup Road District name was changed to the Shire of Manjimup, becoming effective from 1st July, 1961. The name Manjimup was derived from the Noongar Aboriginal words "manjin", the name given for the edible root of a bulrush and "up" meaning place of water, together they mean "edible root of bulrush at watering hole". Table 3 below provides a very brief statistical overview of the area for which the Manjimup Shire Council is responsible.

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<td>Number of Employees</td>
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*Shire of Manjimup Roads Only

**Table 20.3: Manjimup Council Statistics for 2007-2008.**

20.1.4 The Industry

The area has strong links with the timber industry and other industries include horticulture, agriculture, viticulture, dairy, aquaculture and tourism. Agriculture includes dairy, vegetables (onions, cauliflower, peas and potatoes) fruit growing (cherries and apples) and beef and sheep farming. Manjimup is also fast becoming the truffle capital of Australia, with production, which started in 1997, increasing year by year. One of its most lucrative industries in the past was tobacco, but now, arguably, Manjimup is the centre of the forestry industry, with plantation timber becoming increasingly important. Other sources of income and employment include potatoes, fruit and vegetable farms, dairy farms, wool, grain and vineyards. Research is also being conducted on green tea production by the Department of Agriculture and Food, and the town is the leading Australian-mainland producer
of black truffles, with research on truffle-growing being conducted in collaboration with WA universities. The area also exports spring water to Saudi Arabia, Singapore and India.

20.1.5 The Environment

With an area of 7,028 square kilometres, Manjimup is the largest Shire in the south-west, with a population, according to the 2006 census of 9,773. The Shire incorporates four towns (Manjimup, Pemberton, Northcliffe and Walpole) and five settlements (Deanmill, Jardar, Palgarup, Quinninup and Windy Harbour), has 40% of the state’s potable water and 600,000 hectares (85% of the Shire area) is either National Park or State Forest. The Shire of Manjimup is the third largest wine region in WA (13% of production), has 140 kilometres of pristine coastline and contains 40% of the world famous Bibbulmun Track.

20.2 THE SCHOOL

20.2.1 About the School

Manjimup Senior High School was established in 1957, and is the only Senior High School in the inland corridor of the Warren-Blackwood Education District. The school has enjoyed a strong partnership relationship with Edith Cowan University, with a 2002 joint project resulting in the development of an on-site technology facility, and in 2006, fifteen students from Manjimup Senior High School gained entry to courses at ECU by participating in the University Preparation Course (delivered at the school), while in 2007 seventeen students also gained admission.

Over the past 50 years, the school has established a strong sense of tradition together with a positive and supportive learning environment. The school facilities have been modernised in the past decade through building programmes, while in 2005, two new schools, Manjimup Primary School and Manjimup Education Support Centre were built on the high school site. In addition, the Shire of Manjimup completed an indoor heated aqua-centre in 2006, adjoining the schools, thereby creating a kindergarten to adult education precinct on the one site.

Manjimup Senior High School is characterised by a stable group of teaching and non-teaching staff and in 2007, the principal was a finalist in the WA Principal
of the Year Award. The school has strong relationships with its community, as evidenced by an active Parents and Citizens Committee and School Council. Furthermore, it has formed an Education Visions Committee, a unique lobby group, which promotes future development of the multi-purpose campus and the provision of education within the region. Members of this group include the principals of local schools and representatives from the shire, the Department of Education and Training, the Chamber of Commerce, local government agencies and the South West Regional College of TAFE. The school has also established a strong partnership relationship with the regional campus of Edith Cowan University, with a 2002 joint project resulting in the development of an on-site technology facility. In 2006 and 2007, a total of over 30 students gained entry to courses at this campus by participating in a university preparation course, which was delivered at the school.

The school has an excellent reputation for its academic achievement and sporting prowess. TEE results have consistently placed Manjimup Senior High School as one of the top government schools in W.A. (In 2006, the school was ranked 7th in the state and the second Government School in the state, according to the TEE League Tables, and in 2007 was ranked 8th for the number of students in the top 33%, and 12th for the number of students with a 75% average in year 12 subjects). Success in netball, soccer and football in Country Week competitions over recent years has been supported via special programmes such as the Girls Focus Classes in year 9 and 10 Physical Education, Upper School Soccer and the Elite Football Programme in Years 9-12. The school's catchment area encompasses Manjimup, Bridgetown, Northcliffe, Pemberton and Boyup Brook, with 56-58% of the student population travelling to and from school on sixteen school buses. The most distant students travel more than 80kms, each way, per day. In total, there are approximately 570 students, with slightly over 5% of the total student population being Aboriginal.

The school is characterised by a long-serving principal and teaching staff. The school is local select, that is, potential members of the teaching staff have to apply for positions specifically at the school. Several former students are currently members of the teaching staff, while other younger teachers have been recruited after completing their final 10-week practicum at the school. Many of the former students, now teachers, expressed feelings of connection to the area, with some indicating an intention to stay for a long period of time. They also commented how their own student experiences at the school motivated them to become teachers and return to the school “to continue the tradition”.

Newly appointed teachers to the school are contacted by the principal when their appointment has been confirmed. While no formal mentoring program is apparent, comments from newly appointed staff members indicate that their well-being is a priority for the senior administrative team.

The school has a calm yet purposeful atmosphere, sets high expectations for both
MANJIMUP SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

teachers and students, and has well-maintained buildings and grounds. Staff motivation is high, with the principal encouraging and supporting them to pursue curriculum-related initiatives. Teachers conduct well-attended Saturday “study camps” for years 11 and 12 students, and staff, students and the general population take great pride in the school’s academic, cultural and sporting achievements. School staff members also have a high rate of participation in community activities.

Given the general perception that the quality of education provided in rural schools is lower than that in metropolitan schools, and rural schools tend to have a high level of staff transience, Manjimup Senior High School is unusual in that its students achieve consistently high levels of learning outcomes and there is a low annual turnover of staff.

20.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

20.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain quality teachers?

The school’s reputation was cited as being a significant reason for attracting teaching staff applications. Evidence of this included its culture, high academic and sports’ achievements, staff commitment to the school, their perception of community pride in the school, the positive school attitude towards students, as shown by the provision of quality learning experiences and positive staff-student, and staff-parent relationships. As one community member observed: “... the teachers are just so good to get along with, ..., they get there and they listen about the problems that arise, they work with the students and are eager to put anything into place to achieve the goals they want to out of the students ...”. Overall, the impact of school quality in attracting staff is neatly encapsulated in the following quote: “… perception breeds reality because people start perceiving that you’re a good school with high standards … and they start acting towards you like you are a good school with high standards and then you act back to them like you’re a good school.”

Teaching staff retention starts with the induction program that is available to all new teachers. The induction program at Manjimup Senior High School does not have a ‘one-size-fits-all approach’, and is characterised by access to professional learning, regular meetings with the principal, mentoring from other teachers through a buddy program (and a recently developed Instructional Strategies program) and the opportunities for leadership positions within the school. Newly appointed teachers are also encouraged to become involved in community activities and community members are invited to talk to staff members about what is available in the community. Teachers described how appreciative they were of the various strategies: regular meetings with the principal; mentoring and support from Heads of Departments; meetings of the graduate teachers’ group; and general support from all staff members. One teacher commented that “… the support and mentoring I get from my head of department, and other teachers from within my department, plus the deputies and the principal has been invaluable.” Another teacher stated “I think having the support from your head of department or someone in a senior teaching role is very, very important. Someone who has understanding and ideally realistic expectations …” All newly appointed teachers regarded these strategies as being very effective. When discussing any other support mechanisms, all teachers referred to their previous comments, although one teacher expressed appreciation for the recognition given for undertaking extra work.

The school mentoring program for graduate teachers is complemented by Department of Education training units (Indigenous and classroom management), organised by the District
Office. These units attracted favourable comments in terms of their usefulness and effectiveness. In addition the District Office also conducts a welcome gathering.

Experience as a student at the same school was another reason identified for attracting and retaining staff. One of the teachers commented on the encouragement he had received from teachers, when he was a student, to become a teacher, together with the quality of the educational experience.

Another influence that attracted discussion was the stable and respected school leadership. As one interviewee stated “I think the people are not only comfortable with the school, but also with the leadership program and leadership team.” Leadership (both formal and informal) at the school was also linked to teacher invitations for newly appointed teachers to attend community events, while it was also stated that the information package sent to newly appointed teachers included information about the community.

The quality of the school site, making it an attractive place at which to work, was suggested as a reason teachers applied for and stayed in positions at the school. This was exemplified by the well-maintained buildings, grounds and gardens, the litter free environment and a relatively recent building program.

Finally, when asked to offer advice for graduates commencing a rural appointment, all teachers not only emphasised the importance of community involvement, getting to know the community and being aware of your profile in the community, but also recommended applying for a rural appointment. Undertaking a rural practicum was considered advisable, and if appointed to a rural school, it was emphasised that getting to know their colleagues and striving for a work-life balance was important.

20.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of quality teachers?

A number of community-related reasons emerged, which contributed to the very high staff retention rate, with community involvement attracting the most comment. While there was no formal community-organised welcome for new staff, interviewees referred to the community facilities, its warm and welcoming nature, and the natural environment.

Comments from the interviews indicated that the community appreciated teacher involvement and also revealed that long-serving teachers became valued community members. Other reasons identified for teachers staying at the school included: the natural environment; lifestyle (closeness to the ocean, wineries and restaurants); community sport facilities; opportunities available for teachers to become part of the community; positive staff-student, and staff-parent relationships; and good two-way teacher-parent communication. One statement, “I think the sense of belonging and connectiveness that you actually gain in this community keeps teachers here and encourages teachers to stay” presents a neat summary of the strong community influence on staff retention.

There were a number of former students teaching at the school, with some observing that the presence of family and friends in the area was an influence in attracting and retaining staff. In addition, interview comments referred to the affordability of real estate, and the comparably high socio-economic status of teachers in the area.
Another important influence has been the creation of the Manjimup Education Vision Committee (with membership from all schools, the Shire Council, and other groups and community members), which continually reviews the provision of education in the district and its role in developing the multi-purpose campus site on which two schools are located. Regular meetings with District High School principals and Keenan College (a Catholic Education Office School) ensure a coordinated, rather than competitive, district-wide approach to education provision. Comments by teachers and community members about their satisfaction with the quality of education provision in Manjimup, and the undoubted influence this has on teacher retention, shows the importance of this Committee’s work.

20.3.3 How has this school community supported pre-service teacher education?

When asked to comment about the importance of country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers, all interviewees rated this at five or six on a six point scale. Such experience was universally viewed as being indispensable. The following statement from one of the teachers, “… if you wanted to get more people to go to the country, then you should give them some country prac”, is perhaps, an apt summary from all the interviewees about the importance of rural practicum experiences in attracting and retaining teachers in non-metropolitan locations.

In terms of mentoring pre-service teachers’ practicum placements, the school ensures that they are placed with staff from whom the pre-service teacher will gain, due to their expertise. The mentor teachers receive booklets from the relevant universities, which contain more than sufficient information. Pre-service practicum placements also provide the school with recruitment opportunities.

20.3.4 Summary

A number of common themes emerged from the interviews with school staff and community members about why this school attracted and retained teachers. At the school level, all interviewees identified various aspects of leadership as a key reason for teacher recruitment and retention. These leadership aspects included the school culture, mentoring and support, opportunities for career development, and the able and respected school leadership.

Whether stated explicitly or implicitly within the interview comments, the professionalism of the teachers, their dedication to students and the resultant high student outcomes were reasons for attracting and retaining teachers. As one community member observed “… success attracts success and attracts people and to have a school that does perform as it does would naturally attract people on its own …”

In terms of pre-service teacher education, all school staff members commented on the importance of rural practicums in preparing graduates to teach in non-metropolitan schools.

An important non-work related influence identified by all interviewees was community involvement, with graduates and newly appointed teachers being advised to become involved in the community. In addition, these same people agreed that the lifestyle of the area contributed to teacher attraction and retention, with sport being seen as a prominent activity.
20.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

20.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain the quality of the recruitment and retention of teachers?

Probably the most significant challenge facing Manjimup Senior High School, together with many schools in Western Australia, is the projected shortfall in teacher numbers (Department of Education & Training, 2008). Staffing projections for secondary schools show that, while there will be a temporary surplus from 2010-2012, the accelerating retirement rate will result in future shortages. Staffing vacancies will be prevalent in several subjects: Science; English; Mathematics; and Design and Technology, and with the move towards Independent Public Schools (in which Principals select their own staff), competition between schools for some specialist secondary staff might become intense. The ramifications of the half cohort in year 8 (due to a decision to change the school entry age to 6 years as at 1 July, 2003) will be felt in 2019 when there is expected to be a significant decrease in teacher graduates, as there will be fewer applications for university entrance in general, in 2015.

In addition to this possible inter-school competition for teaching staff, Manjimup Senior High School (and the WA Department of Education) will face challenges in staff recruitment from the private school sector and the resources sector, particularly the latter, with recent media comments indicating that the Western Australian mineral boom could be long term. Rob Newton from the Chamber of Mines and Energy comments, "... the WA resource sector is punching above its weight in terms of delivering on the ground jobs to West Australians. It shows that we are in for a period of sustained economic growth and there's no greater indicator than putting wages in the pockets of West Australians" (http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/12/06/3086033.htm). Lane (2008) also provided commentary on the impact of the mining boom on future teacher numbers. In addition, and more recently, Ure (nd) stated “The teacher supply data for Western Australia indicates there will be continuing undersupply of teachers for the projected period 2012 – 2017. The mining boom in Western Australia can be expected to reduce the potential pool of candidates for teacher education programs.” (www.aitsl.edu.au/.../Edith_Cowan_University_-_School_of_Education.pdf)

Among the issues over which the school, and community, have more influence, it is a matter of being able to sustain current effective practices and to think to the future in a strategic manner to ensure teaching staff are attracted to and remain in the school. The current major influences on staff attraction and retention are school leadership (and associated practices), school culture, lifestyle, community facilities and the appreciation shown by the community for both the work being done by teachers and their contribution to the community. With respect to school leadership, at all levels, the need for an effective succession plan, if not already developed, would appear to have some priority. Sustaining the school culture, characterised by high staff professionalism, the provision of quality learning experiences for students and the positive teacher-parent relationships, while retaining an acceptable work/life balance, is a challenge being faced by all schools. A previously published research report (Institute for the Service Professions, 2006) revealed that for teachers in regional locations, 60% of respondents (p. 30) reported difficulty in establishing an appropriate balance between the demands of work and life outside of work, such as recreation and family time, and more than 80% of respondents (p. 27) felt under constant pressure and had difficulties in keeping up with their work load.

In a similar manner, the community should also plan ahead to ensure continuity of current high standards of facility provision and consider strategies to ensure sustainable economic
development, while maintaining the attractiveness of the environment and associated lifestyle; issues considered important by teachers in deciding to remain at the school. There can be little doubt that the contributions, which teachers make to community life, will continue to be appreciated by the community.
Morawa District High School was selected as a case study of a school in a small sized community with a low to medium economic and social base.

21.1 THE COMMUNITY

21.1.1 Geography: the place, space and environment of Morawa
21.1.2 The People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 934</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 72</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>506</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under 15:</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 Years and Over:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21.1: 2001 ABS Population Data (Local Government Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total People: 825</th>
<th>Indigenous persons: 85</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>436</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under 15:</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 Years and Over:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21.2: 2006 ABS Population Data (Local Government Area)

The total population of Morawa (according to ABS data above) remained relatively stable between 2001 and 2006, showing a small (around 12%) decline over this period. The total number of people employed in the region was 232 (ABS, 2006) with 53 (almost 23%) of these individuals employed primarily in the education and training industry. This is the highest represented occupation in the district. The healthcare and agriculture industries combined, provide employment to another 23% of the working population (total of 52 people). Other industries of note, include wholesale and retail (28), public safety and administration (19), accommodation/food services and transport (22).

Occupation by age/sex (ABS, 2006) revealed an almost evenly divided gender of population, with a total of 117 males and 114 females quoted as being in the district’s workforce. Managerial and professional occupations were evenly represented with 39 males and 39 females employed in these roles. Interestingly, this even divide was replicated in the labouring occupations with 17 males and females each indicating employment in these roles. The vast majority of workers (70%) were aged between 35 and 64 years. 26% were aged between 15 and 35, and the remaining 4% quoted their ages as being between 65 and 74.

21.1.3 The Geography

Morawa is located approximately 370km north of Perth, approximately 180km south east of Geraldton and about 114 kilometres to the east of the coastal town of Dongara. The Shire of Morawa, situated in the Midlands area of Western Australia, supports a population of approximately 1,000 people, and includes the localities of Canna, Gutha, Pintharuka, Merkanooka and Koolanooka. Covering an area of 3,528 square kilometres, the shire consists of agricultural and pastoral land, mining leases, Crown land, reserves and town sites.
Specifically, the area of remnant vegetation includes 22,224 hectares of private land, 54,007 hectares of public land and 15,825 hectares of private land modified for grazing purposes. The Shire is bordered to the north by the Shire of Mullewa, to the south by Perenjori and Mingenew, and Three Springs to the west, and Yalgoo to the east.

Climatically, Morawa experiences warm to hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. Rainfall is mainly during the winter and spring months and averages 337 mm per year. Temperatures range from moderate in winter up to over 40°C in summer. In spring time, the area around Morowa is renowned for its wildflower display.

Morawa is quite typical of the northern wheat belt towns. Servicing the surrounding farms, the town comprises a hotel which has been converted to include some motel-style accommodation, a caravan park, a bulk loading facility and wheat silos, a railway line and a small shopping centre.

21.1.4 Community History

Morawa is an Aboriginal name, first shown on maps of the area for a rock hole in 1910. The name is possibly derived from "Morowa" or "Morowar", the Dalgite, a small marsupial (a type of bilby), which burrows into the earth. Another possible meaning is "the place where men are made". This might refer to initiation ceremonies conducted in the area by the Aboriginal inhabitants, as evidenced by the discovery of sites and artefacts showing Aboriginal occupation of the district.
In 1846, the Assistant Surveyor, A. C. Gregory, travelled through the Morawa area, and over twenty years later, in 1869, John Forrest explored the area, as did Giles in 1876. The first European occupation of the Morawa district was by pastoralists, shepherds, sandalwood cutters and miners in the latter part of the 19th century.

In 1870, alluvial gold was found at Peterwangey, and a small deposit of copper was mined at Wooltana. Agriculture arrived in the early 1900's when Mr and Mrs John Stokes settled and cultivated a plot of oats and wheat. Morawa was settled in 1905 and declared a town site in 1912. Initially created in 1901, the Upper Irwin Road Board administered the town until 1916, when the Perenjori-Morawa Road Board was formed. In 1928, the Morawa Road Board came into existence.

In 1948, Prater Airport, which originally accommodated Dove and DC3 aircraft and now a regular port of call for light aircraft, was opened by the Premier, Mr McLarty. The airport has a fully illuminated strip allowing for night landings by the flying doctor and courier aeroplanes. The aero club building is dedicated to P. J. McGinness, co-founder of Qantas Airways.

Between 1966 and 1973, iron ore was mined by the Western Mining Corporation at the Koolanooka Hills, and exported through the Port of Geraldton to Japan. The total of 5.1 million tons was the first iron ore to be exported from Australia. In 2006, mining of Koolanooka Hills recommenced, this time by Midwest Corporation Limited, and is expected to have a significant impact on the region’s economy.

Town attractions include the Church of the Holy Cross, the small stone hermitage known as the Old Presbytery and the town museum, which includes displays of farming and domestic implements, old clothing and other local memorabilia.

21.1.5 Industry

The main local industries in Morawa consist of wheat, grains, legumes, sheep, pastoral, agricultural support industries, agricultural college, and mineral exploration. Wildflower farming
and olive oil production are also becoming established in the area. The agricultural support industries include contract spraying, shearing, mulesing, super spreading and share farming. Other support industries such as light engineering, steel fabrication and sandblasting services are offered. Morawa is the Shire’s service base, with businesses providing most, if not all, required goods and services. In recent years, tourism has become important to the Shire economy, particularly during the wildflower season (Spring).

Approximately 20 km east of Morawa (on the Morawa East Road) is the Koolanooka Hills Mine Site. This iron ore mine was worked between 1966-74 by the Western Mining Corporation, with the MidWest Corporation Limited recommencing mining in 2006.

21.1.6 Environment

The region is renowned for a diversity of flora, attributable to the diversity of landform and soil types. The Shire of Morawa includes large flat plains, rolling hills and breakaway country. Approximately 12,800 hectares of land, in the Shire, is salt affected land or salt lakes. Soil types are primarily York Gum soil (light/heavy) interspersed with Salmon Gum clay. The light land soils are yellowish brown or clay sands, normally one metre in depth overlying laterite or gravel.

21.2 THE SCHOOL

21.2.1 About the School

Morawa District High School caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 12, with students coming from the Morawa town site, nearby towns and adjacent farming areas. There is a blend of graduate and experienced teachers at the school. The school staff consists of a Principal (Level 5), a Secondary Deputy Principal (Level 3) and a Primary Deputy Principal (Level 3). A number of teaching staff take on special roles, which support the administration team in managing the implementation of strategies designed to address the School's priorities. The School has experienced staff in roles and programs such as Learning Support Coordinator, Getting it Right Literacy and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme, as well as having a School Psychologist based in the School. In addition to teaching staff, there are a number of assistants and non teaching staff that complement the school community. These include two Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, Laboratory Technician, Network Technician, Kindergarten Program Aide, special needs Aides, Home Economics Assistant, Clerical Staff, Gardeners and Cleaners.
The school provides a comprehensive curriculum for its K-12 students. There is an off-site Kindergarten Program and on-site Pre-Primary Program, while the curriculum delivered to students in Years 1 – 7 is based on the Curriculum Framework. The lower secondary program (years 8-10) provides students with a comprehensive curriculum, which includes all eight learning areas. Japanese is the language, other than English, taught at Morawa, from primary through to year 10. Overall, there are 137 K-7 students, 66 in secondary Years 8-12, with Aboriginal students comprising slightly over 22% of the student population.

Morawa District High School also offers a well recognised Music program for students from year 5 to senior school. All year 8 students attend Music Awareness, including a guitar component. Years 5, 6 and 7 students are involved in the choir and Year 5 students are provided with opportunities to learn a musical instrument: brass and/or guitar. The Morawa District High School brass bands perform at various local and district functions and in state-wide competitions.

A number of option subjects, from the Performing and Visual Arts, Technology and Enterprise, and Health and Physical Education learning areas, are available from years 8 to 10. Year 11 and 12 students have access to pathways including Tertiary Entrance Subjects and Vocational Education and Training (VET) through enrolment in Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) courses of study. The school meets the needs of all students in years 11 and 12 by employing a mixed mode of delivery: a combination of Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) delivered subjects and face-to-face learning with school staff.

In addition to the formal curriculum, staff and students participate in a number of extracurricular activities including District High School Country Week, North Midlands Cross Country Championships, camps, bands, the school ball, NAIDOC and Reconciliation Celebrations, and interschool athletics and swimming carnivals. The school has also established a unique Horse mastership course for lower secondary students. This course provides opportunities for students to develop horse care knowledge, riding skills, and self-confidence.

Curriculum delivery is facilitated by the availability of specialised rooms including a Design and Technology Centre, a Home Economics room, an
Art room, Performing Arts Centre, a Science Laboratory and a Computer room. In addition, the school has a purpose built Library, which incorporates a mini computer laboratory with 12 computers.

The school is supported by an active Parents’ and Citizens’ (P&C) Association, which provides strong support for the school community, with sub-committees taking leading roles in special events throughout the school year. Examples of these sub-committees include: the Sports Committee, the School Band Committee, the Canteen Committee, the Pre-Primary Committee and the Uniform Committee. The School Council, comprises representatives from the student body, parents and staff, and includes the P & C President and Principal. The School Council's role is to oversee the development and review of specific policies, the school priorities and expenditure.

A significant development, since the start of the twenty-first century, has been the establishment of The Morawa Education Alliance. This alliance, between the Shire Council, the Morawa District High School and the WA College of Agriculture Morawa, has a goal to revitalise the community through an innovative and dynamic approach to education. With input from representatives from each of the above stakeholders, a strategic plan has been developed providing a clear timeline and action plan, which aims to establish Morawa as an outstanding educational service provider in regional Western Australia.

21.3 CONCLUSIONS & OBSERVATIONS

21.3.1 How has this school been able to recruit and retain quality teachers?

Most of the teaching staff members have arrived at the school via two pathways. First, they have been recruited after completing a long-term practicum or were part of a university rural studies program. Second, and at the time of the interviews there were six in number, of what were referred to by one interviewee as “returning teachers”. These individuals had been students at the school and had returned to teach, or live in the community, returning as early career teachers.
MORAWA DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

and marrying local people. There have also been graduate teachers, whose parents are teachers, who apply for a rural appointment because they have been advised that this will give them a good foundation for their teaching careers.

Newly appointed teachers are allocated to a mentor, who is not their line manager. Support is also available from line managers and other teachers. Appreciation was expressed for the support and advice received from both the mentors and other sources, with planning receiving particular mention.

Teachers also commented on the usefulness of the professional development offered, both on-and off-site, and how this contributed to assisting them develop appropriate knowledge and skills. Staff meetings were also highlighted in relation to developing school-specific knowledge: for example, classroom foci.

Members of the teaching staff are kept abreast of Department of Education policies and all teachers are inducted into the Classroom Management and Skills (CAS) program. Access to professional development is assisted through funding made available by the Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP).

Two different perspectives, regarding leadership, were discussed as reasons for teachers staying at the school. First, the high quality of the school leadership attracted comment, and was noted for its clear vision, recognition of the importance of working with the community, personal capabilities and stability. The second perspective involved early career teachers being given leadership opportunities that they would not have received in larger metropolitan schools. Examples of these opportunities included acting as deputy principals, reviewing school policies such as behaviour management and becoming team leaders. Teachers expressed appreciation for these opportunities in terms of challenge, long-term promotional opportunities, and personal professional growth and interest.

Professionally, another attraction of working in a rural location is the variety of different opportunities available at the school. Teachers described being able to teach in different learning areas outside their specialisation, contributing to school productions, obtaining a bus-driving licence, travelling to Perth for Country Week and going on school camps as keeping them interested in working at the school. One teacher also expressed appreciation about the school size when stating, “… it’s nice and small, all the kids know everyone else, they are generally pretty friendly and get along, there’s not too many issues, it just nice as well and its relaxed.” In addition, teachers observed that the small staff numbers meant they learnt a considerable amount from each other.

In discussing advice for newly appointed teachers, emphasis was placed on being open-minded, taking opportunities that are available and becoming involved in the community; the latter being seen as essential. Before arriving, they should obtain information on the town and the school as there is a need to realise that they’re going to “a different town, different location, different school, you know, things you might have not seen before in regards to the school and the kids.” Graduate and newly appointed teachers should also realise that the community will be aware of what they are doing. As one teacher interviewee stated, “when we have new teachers and new staff come on board at the beginning of every year, we emphasise that they are being watched all the time and what they take out of the school, the work and professional life, there’s a very blurred line between it and they need to have that professional, you know, upstanding community member attitude all the time.”
Upon arrival at the school, graduate or newly appointed teachers are advised to go to their line manager or to their deputy principal and say, “Okay. I’m a graduate teacher. What programs, in regards to spelling and maths, do you have in place, am I meant to be doing?” These teachers should also realise that both the staff and community will be very supportive. The school is frequently the first community contact point to sporting and social clubs for newly arrived teachers. One teacher referred to the social lawn bowls as an example of an early activity, with the school entering a couple of teams in which new teachers can participate.

The following quote is illustrative of the advice given by the interviewees for graduate and newly appointed teachers. “If they’re going to apply, apply for places that you’re willing to go and stick it out and everyone says this but put in the effort. When you get there, go out on Friday and Saturday night; find out where the people are; what happens in the town; and be really open, you know, I’ve seen all types come through in my short four years here, the types that don’t leave their house after school hours or on weekends and they’re bored. And you can’t complain about being bored or any of those things if you’re not willing to make that effort, so get involved, belong to some of the clubs, do extra curricula things and you’ll really enjoy your time. I guess they’re aware that they’re coming to a small community, that there’s not a lot of facilities available and all that sort of thing, so it’s going to be very, very different to the city life that they’re used to. There’s not the movies, the shopping, all that sort of thing, the restaurants.”

In summary, one teacher’s comment highlighted the positive aspects of teaching in a rural school. “I think it’s a brilliant job if you’re committed to being a teacher and you want to be a teacher then you’ll absolutely thrive out in the country. You’ll meet people that you’ll just be friends with for a long time and you can have an awesome experience but you can also have a really bad experience if you don’t have that personality, I think.”

In giving advice to universities in preparing students before, and reflecting with them after country teaching programs or country practicum, interviewees emphasised the need for pre-service teachers to be made aware they are entering a developed community of people who have known each other for a long time. They should realise that resilience might be required in case of difficulties in adjusting to a new lifestyle and work demands. Persistence might be required, but it will become easier the more they learn.

21.3.2 How has the community contributed to the recruitment and retention of quality teachers?

The shire council holds a welcome to the town dinner, and at the beginning of the year the school has a welcome to the school barbeque. All new teachers are invited to the closest shire meeting from when they start. At this meeting they are introduced to the councillors and the community members who are in attendance. There is also a “Welcome to Morawa” pack, which was introduced in 2007 as part of the Morawa Education Alliance initiative, and that pack includes a town map, a local telephone book, and discount vouchers for all of the shops in town, including a coffee at the bakery. This pack is designed to give people the idea that they are welcome into the town from the day they arrive, by providing a positive first impression and making them feel that the community cares about their presence.

In addition to the formal welcome, new staff members are introduced into community activities through other teachers at the school. Many of the teachers have been at the school for considerable periods of time, and include local people who have returned to teach and those who have married farmers. These teachers spoke about the comfort of being close to families, and feeling secure in a safe community.
The formation of the Morawa Education Alliance, in 2004, resulted from the community realising it needed to revitalise itself through education. Among the aims of the Alliance is to develop community support to improve student educational outcomes and to provide better facilities to attract and retain teachers and students in the schools. As a result of the work of this group, the shire has built several houses and units for teachers in the last five years, with this accommodation being leased by the government.

Education in Morawa is also proactively promoted by the Morawa Education Alliance. A person has been appointed to ensure that any initiative or project undertaken will be promoted in the media. The shire uses its contacts both in Morawa and Geraldton to ensure that accurate messages are communicated. As a consequence of this and other promotional activities, the profile and the image of the school, and its reputation, have improved, and in the opinion of community members, Morawa District High School is seen to be the school of choice in the rural Mid-West area.

Community lifestyle contributes to teachers staying at the school. Teachers commented about feeling part of the community. They discussed the strong partnership between the town and the schools, and getting to know students outside school hours. Long serving teachers described how they had watched students from the early stage of their education through to year 12, and the advantages this brings in terms of issues such as classroom management.

Teachers commented on their active social lives, with one teacher observing, “Socially, I think a lot of my friends who are teaching in Perth have missed out.” They recognised the need to become an active community member, and also noted how much they enjoyed this participation.

**21.3.3 How has this school community supported pre-service teacher education?**

Mentor teachers are determined by experience, with interpersonal skills seen as one of the required attributes. Senior teachers are expected to play a role in either mentoring or supporting mentor teachers. The principal and deputy principals also provide support roles for the mentor teachers.

There is not really any special preparation for mentor teachers, as the information provided by the universities is seen to be sufficient. One of the teachers has been given the responsibility for overseeing the practicum placements and assessment of pre-service teachers, and acting as the contact point for the universities.

In addition to formal practicum placements, the school also hosts the annual rural field trip organised by the University of Western Australia. Accommodation is provided at the Agricultural College and a welcome barbecue is also provided. These pre-service teachers spend the following day at the school, and a morning tea provides them with an opportunity to meet community members. They are also given a tour of the town and its facilities.

When asked to rate the importance of country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a scale of 1 (no importance) to 6 (indispensable) in relation to the preparation of teachers to teach in rural areas, among the eight people interviewed, six gave a rating of six, and the other two interviewees, five. The following quote neatly encapsulates the comments made about this question. “I would definitely suggest it because living rural is so much different to living in the city. You’re living in the community and everyone knows you, everybody knows your business, everybody, yeah, when you’re a teacher, pretty much 24/7 in the country so everyone’s always knows what you’re up to and that’s something that, if you’re not used to it, it can be quite daunting.”
As a concluding comment to the importance of country experiences for pre-service teachers, the following observation from one teacher is noteworthy. “In order to attract and retain teachers in the country we need to get them early and we need to get them in their pre-service so they can see how valuable rural education is in the whole scheme of things. And we provide as good an education as anywhere else and to get these people who want to be involved in the community, at all levels, it’s a great thing so that’s how we attract a lot of our new staff is through the pre-service teachers and practicums.”

21.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES

21.4.1 What challenges do this school and community face in order to sustain the quality of the recruitment and retention of teachers?

At the school level, in terms of cost and time, one of the challenges facing the school might become access to professional development and resources. Two hours appeared to be the minimum travel time to attend out-of-school meetings and professional learning. The opportunity and monetary costs of this time might become an increasing consideration. However, teachers did comment favourably about technology helping to overcome professional isolation.

Probably the most significant challenge facing Morawa District High School, together with many schools in Western Australia, is the projected shortfall in teacher numbers (Department of Education & Training, 2008). Staffing projections for secondary schools show that, while there will be a temporary surplus from 2010-2012, the accelerating retirement rate will result in future shortages. Staffing vacancies will be prevalent in several subjects: Science; English; Mathematics; and Design and Technology, and with the move towards Independent Public Schools (in which Principals select their own staff), competition between schools for some specialist secondary staff might become intense. The ramifications of the half cohort in year 8 (due to a decision to change the school entry age to 6 years as at 1 July, 2003) will be felt in 2019 when there is expected to be a significant decrease in teacher graduates as there will be fewer applications for university entrance in general in 2015.

In addition to this possible inter-school competition for teaching staff, Morawa District High School (and the WA Department of Education) will face challenges in staff recruitment from the private school sector and the resources sector, particularly the latter, with recent media comments indicating that the Western Australian mineral boom could be long term. Rob Newton from the Chamber of Mines and Energy comments: “… the WA resource sector is punching above its weight in terms of delivering on the ground jobs to West Australians. It shows that we are in for a period of sustained economic growth and there’s no greater indicator than putting wages in the pockets of West Australians” (http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/12/06/3086033.htm). Lane (2008) also provided commentary on the impact of the mining boom on future teacher numbers. In addition, and more recently, Ure (nd) stated “The teacher supply data for Western Australia indicates there will be continuing undersupply of teachers for the projected period 2012 – 2017. The mining boom in Western Australia can be expected to reduce the potential pool of candidates for teacher education programs.” (www.aitsl.edu.au/.../Edith_Cowan_University_-_School_of_Education.pdf).

Among the issues over which the school, and community, have more influence, it is a matter of being able to sustain current effective practices and to think to the future in a strategic manner to ensure teaching staff are attracted to and remain in the school. The current major influences on
staff attraction and retention are school leadership (and associated practices), school culture, lifestyle, community facilities and the appreciation shown by the community for both the work being done by teachers and their contribution to the community. With respect to school leadership, at all levels, the need for an effective succession plan, if not already developed, would appear to have some priority. Sustaining the school culture, characterised by high staff professionalism, the provision of quality learning experiences for students and the positive teacher-parent relationships, while retaining an acceptable work/life balance, is a challenge being faced by all schools. A previously published research report (Institute for the Service Professions, 2006) revealed that for teachers in regional locations, 60% of respondents (p. 30) reported difficulty in establishing an appropriate balance between the demands of work and life outside of work such as recreation and family time, and more than 80% of respondents (p. 27) felt under constant pressure and had difficulties in keeping up with their work load.

In a similar manner, the community should also plan ahead to ensure continuity of current high standards of facility provision and consider strategies to ensure sustainable economic development, while maintaining the attractiveness of the environment and associated lifestyle; issues considered important by teachers in deciding to remain at the school. There can be little doubt that the contributions, which teachers make to community life, will continue to be appreciated by the community.
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23 APPENDIX

23.1 CASE STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for Pre-service teacher experiences*
*only if there are prac teachers in the school at the time of your visit

1. What strategies do your school and community use to facilitate pre-service teachers having an authentic country teaching experience including relationships with communities?
2. In your view, what are the benefits and downsides for schools and communities that participate in country teaching programs for pre-service teachers?
3. Please rate the importance assigned by your school and community to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1 (no importance) to 6 (indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale.
   1 2 3 4 5 6
4. What barriers do you see that inhibit pre-service teachers undertaking practicums in this location?
5. What advice would you give to Universities to prepare students before (and reflect with them after) a country teaching program?

Questions for Graduate and newly appointed teachers

1. Why did you apply for a position at this school? How much longer do you think you will be a teacher at this school? Why?
2. Have you lived mainly in rural/regional or metropolitan locations?
3. Describe the support with which you have been provided since commencing teaching at this school?
4. What do you enjoy about being a teacher in a rural/regional school?
5. What challenges have you found in being a teacher in a rural/regional school?
6. What advice would you give to Universities to prepare students before (and reflect with them after) a country teaching program?

Questions for early career teachers

1. On average how many graduate teachers are employed at your school each year?
2. In general for how long do graduate teachers remain at your schools?
3. What reasons do graduate teachers give for seeking transfers to metropolitan schools?
4. What support/mentoring programs are put in place by the school and community for both graduate teachers and newly appointed experienced (>3 years) teachers?
5. What opportunities are there for professional development?
6. In what ways do you feel encouraged to participate in the community?
7. Where do you see yourself in the next 2 years? 5 years?
8. What sort of things would encourage you to stay here longer?
9. Where would you like to go?

Questions for Principals
1. In your school, how are the cooperating/mentor teachers for pre-service teachers determined?

2. Are the teachers in your school, who accept pre-service teachers, given any special preparation by your institution? Please provide details.

3. Please rate the importance assigned by you to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1(no importance) to 6(indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale.

4. What is the level of support given by the university attended by the pre-service teachers during their practicums?

5. What opportunities are there for professional development?

6. Why did you apply for a rural/regional principal appointment? How long have you been a principal? How long have you been a principal at this school? How much longer do you think you will be a principal at this school? Why?

7. What do you enjoy about being a principal in this school?

8. What challenges have you found in being a principal in a rural/regional school?

9. What do you perceive to be the reasons why the following apply for positions at this school:
   - Classroom teachers?
   - Heads of learning areas?
   - Deputy principals?

10. Where do you see yourself in the next 2 years? 5 years?

11. What sort of things would encourage you to stay here longer?

12. Where would you like to go?

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Questions for Experienced Teachers

1. In your school, how are the cooperating/mentor teachers for pre-service teachers determined?

2. Are the teachers in your school, who accept pre-service teachers, given any special preparation by your institution? Please provide details.

3. Please rate the importance assigned by you to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1(no importance) to 6(indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale.

4. What is the level of support given by the university attended by the pre-service teachers during their practicums?

5. What opportunities are there for professional development?

6. Why did you apply for a rural/regional teaching appointment? How long have you been a teacher? How long have you been a teacher at this school? How much longer do you think you will be a teacher at this school? Why?

7. What do you enjoy about being a teacher in a rural/regional school?

8. What challenges have you found in being a teacher in a rural/regional school?

9. Where do you see yourself in the next 2 years? 5 years?

10. What sort of things would encourage you to stay here longer?

11. Where would you like to go?
Questions for Community Members

1. What do you enjoy about living in a rural/regional community?
2. What challenges have you found living here in terms of education for your children?
3. When pre-service teachers are appointed at the school, are there any strategies that the community uses to facilitate them having an authentic country teaching experience including relationships with communities?
4. Please rate the importance assigned by you to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1 (no importance) to 6 (indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale. Should we include the scale here?:

   1  2  3  4  5  6

5. What advice would you give to Universities to prepare students before (and reflect with them after) country teaching program?
6. In what ways are graduate and newly appointed teachers encouraged to participate in community life?
7. What do you think are the particular features of your local school, and community, that have led to teachers wanting to stay teaching here rather than moving on?