

Students eagerly await learning time in cultural centre

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Briar Road Public School's Cultural Centre has been a labour of love for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff that is paying off for students at the south Campbelltown school.

Principal Tammy Anderson said the benefits of the room - home to cultural artefacts, teaching resources, and kinship stories as a classroom for all - have had a significant effect on all students and the broader school community.

"The knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal people, community and culture has deepened across the entire school," she said. "We have many non-Aboriginal students who eagerly await their designated learning time in the cultural centre each week and show absolute delight in sharing their new knowledge of the world's oldest surviving culture."

The school has 105 Aboriginal students, making up 35 per cent of the school population, and Ms Anderson, a former student and school captain at Briar Road, is a Biripi woman who grew up in Dharawal country.



She said the centre was created initially as a space for community to feel culturally safe.

"Its beginnings, while humble, have grown over a long period of time," she said. "The cultural centre is a classroom where cultural studies are implemented for all children K-6."

Ms Anderson said the school community has supported and embraced the cultural studies program.

"The learning that takes place in cultural centre has been a major part of the school reconciliation plan and provides an authentic space where curriculum perspectives are explored in deep, meaningful ways from a community-driven perspective."

To support learning at the centre the school uses RAM Aboriginal Education funding to have an Aboriginal Curriculum and Culture Teacher (ACCT) work in the space and support teachers with curriculum implementation in their classrooms. The studies use a team-teaching approach to build the capacity of non-Aboriginal teachers across the school.

A number of programs have a specific focus for Briar Road's Aboriginal students, including the Junior Aboriginal Education Consultative Group's (AECG) Bro Speak and Sista Speak leadership programs and community hearing program, over the course of the school year.

“Our school is immensely proud of the work of the cultural centre,” Ms Anderson said. “Aboriginal students report in the school ‘Tell Them From Me’ surveys that they feel a strengthened pride in their identity, align with feeling safe and supported culturally in their school.

“Another good news story is that enrolment numbers of Aboriginal students have continued to climb despite a changing school community.

“It has been amazing to watch the transformation of Aboriginal students and watching them proudly articulate their pride and how the school assists them to achieve as an Aboriginal student.”

Ms Anderson knows all too well what the support of Aboriginal mentors can bring to students.

She attributes her Aboriginal Studies teacher with giving her the belief in herself to go to university.

“I owe my enrolment in university to my Aboriginal mentor,” she said.

As a Centre for Professional Learning presenter Ms Anderson strongly believes that the change in outcomes for disadvantaged and Aboriginal children is possible through developing strong school cultures, empowering community partnerships and high-quality curriculum delivery that caters to each child’s needs.