



# Gäwa Christian School 2015 Annual School Report



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## Vision Statement

The vision statement of NT Christian Schools is, *'We desire to be a Christian community, learning together to live life as God intended, offering hope for the world'*.

The mission of Gäwa Christian School is, *'To be a learning community where God is glorified in everything we do'*.



## Principal's Message

Gäwa Christian School is a very remote school serving Indigenous homeland communities on the northern tip of Elcho Island. We are strongly supported by the local community who value Christian education that is culturally relevant and incorporates traditional language and culture.

Our focus for 2015 was one of strengthening relationship. Our strong bonds of family, connection and support enabled us to weather the significant trials and challenges that occurred during the year. With two cyclones significantly affecting our school and community in Term 1 and a critical incident in Term 3, this unexpected array of challenges stretched our school and community. We relied deeply on the school-community relationship to navigate our way through the year and to continue to build a strong future for the education of students in our homelands.

It continues to be a wonderful privilege to serve the homeland communities on the northern end of Elcho Island. Our strong partnership and focus on 'both ways learning', coupled with the unity we have in Christ, enables us to celebrate our diversity as together we strive to be a learning community where God is glorified in all we do.

Karen Fletcher  
Principal

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## Staffing Information

All teachers have a minimum of four years training and are registered with the NT Teacher Registration Board.

We actively seek to engage local community members in staffing roles. 11 casual employees identify as being Yolŋu. This works to increase the capacity and sustainability of the school, and provides flexibility and support within the classroom environment.

		<i>Qualification/Role</i>	<i>FTE</i>
<b>Teaching Principal</b>	Karen Fletcher	B Commerce (Business Systems Analysis), Grad Dip Ed (Primary) Grad Dip Christian Ed	1.0
<b>Full-time Teachers</b>	Suzanne David	B Primary Ed M Ed (Special Ed)	1.0
	Christa Forsyth (Additional Teacher Funded)	B Elementary Ed (Primary) B Special Needs Ed Grad Cert TESOL	1.0
<b>Additional staff</b>	Stephen Fletcher	Site, Maintenance & Community Liaison B Arts (English Lit) Grad Dip Ed (English/ESL)	1.0
	Salome Moes	Administration and The Arts	0.5
	Geoff David	Teacher(Sport/HPE), Teacher Aide	Casual
	Dwayne Dhamarrandji (Closing the Gap funded)	Teachers Aide	Casual
	Matina Gurruwiwi	Teachers Aide	Casual
	Rhonda Bukulatjpi	Teachers Aide	Casual
	Shane Bukulatjpi	Teachers Aide	Casual
	Wendy Bukulatjpi	Teachers Aide	Casual
	Hannah Gondarra	Catering Staff	Casual
	Eric Garrawurra	Catering Staff	Casual
	Stuart Forsyth	Special Projects – Community shop and garden	Casual
	Daphne Dhamarrandji (ERIS funded)	Mums and Toddlers Coordinator	Casual
	Madeline Dhurrkay (ERIS funded)	Mums and Toddlers Coordinator	Casual
Kathy Guthadjaka (Closing the Gap funded)	Language Consultant	Casual	

## Highlights of the school year

The students of Gāwa Christian School participated in a diverse range of activities and experiences in 2015.

Our students and community enjoyed spending a week learning on-country with Ian Morris, an environmental educator. They explored the local rainforest and open woodland habitats documenting flora and fauna and the effect the cyclones had on the surrounding environment. It was a wonderfully rich 'both ways' learning experience.



Hosting small eco-cruise trips continues to be a unique part of the school experience. This year we were able to share with visitors the direct impact of the cyclones on our school community as they visited just one week following TC Nathan. Our students continue to be encouraged by the wide interest in their creative works, with funds raised from sales contributing to the purchase of school resources.

Our Cultural Exchange program with Illawarra Christian School continued in Term 2 2015, providing visiting students with opportunities to appreciate and share in the diversity of communities and culture. The program has enabled blessings to flow to our whole community through a celebration of the richness of their own culture. Our students continue to love developing their skills in the Creative Arts. They enjoy practising and performing traditional dances for community events and visitors as a way of celebrating and sharing culture.

School attendance continues to be highly dependent on parents and guardians choosing to live in homeland communities versus the larger township of Galiwin'ku. The critical incidents experienced in 2015 also impacted on continuity of attendance as families moved between town and remote homeland communities. We continue to explore ways to support our community and maintain consistent student attendance in order to achieve strong learning outcomes for the students in our care.



## Parents and community

Parents and grandparents are involved in the life of the school in many ways. All of our teacher aides, kitchen staff, attendance officers and language consultants have children or grandchildren attending the school. Our community continues to partner with us in many aspects of school life as we build a hopeful future for the children in our community.

Our 'Mums and Toddlers' (*Amala Yothu*) program continues to provide useful preparation in school readiness and early literacy with a bilingual approach. It is also a social support for parents of pre-school age children in our community. We continue to train our Yolngu staff in the planning and delivery of a strong pre-school age program involving music, art, and early literacy and numeracy readiness through productive play.

Parents are encouraged by what the school has to offer their children. This is evident in the number of families choosing to live away from the main island township, Galiwin'ku (1.5 hours drive away) in order for their children to attend Gäwa Christian school. Many children live away from their parents and are cared for by grandparents or extended family members on-site.

Our non-indigenous teachers are excited about the quality of Christian education that is being offered here and enjoy living as part of the local community. Along with their families, they live life immersed in the richness and diversity of the small Gäwa community. Their own children

attend the school and they enjoy seeing their children thrive in a rich cultural environment.

Community meetings involving staff and community are an important aspect of communication and decision making. We continue to explore ways to involve parents and elders in the everyday life of the school to ensure the educational experience remains relevant in the cultural context.



## Critical Incidents

In February, the Gäwa school and community was severely affected by TC Lam. Our full-time school staff and their families were evacuated to Darwin whilst the local community left Gäwa homeland and returned to the larger township of Galiwin'ku to seek shelter. The main access road from Galiwinku to Gäwa was blocked for several weeks, cutting supply lines and access to the community by road.



School resumed in March, just one week prior to TC Nathan during which staff and community took shelter in Gäwa. The cyclones caused damage to school infrastructure, particularly the Wind Turbine, which had contributed significantly to the school power supply. Amazingly, other critical infrastructure such as school buildings and staff housing experienced minor damage which was subsequently repaired.

A tragedy occurred at Gäwa Christian School in August 2015, with the death of a student at a sporting event. This had a profound impact on the school and community and as a result, school was suspended for a number of weeks. For cultural reasons, school later resumed in a small schoolhouse located in a neighbouring homeland community and continued there for the remainder of the year.

## Facilities

Gäwa Christian School is well resourced with classroom buildings, grounds and teaching resources. The school buildings are 7-12 years old and require ongoing maintenance due to our close proximity to sand and salt water.

The Teacher Housing element of the Stronger Futures National Partnership is providing funding for a replacement structure for the Principal's house that has deteriorated due to its age and proximity to the harsh coastal environment. Additionally, funding for visitor accommodation will provide a much-needed space for those who visit to support our staff and students. This project is due for completion by June 2016.

The significant damage to our wind turbine facility has resulted in insurance funding being available to support the installation of a solar energy system that will supply power to the school. This project is due for completion by June 2016.

The school grounds were significantly damaged by the cyclones. All natural shade cover and vegetation was lost and will require ongoing planning and investment to restore the playground area.

Post cyclone assessment and insurance resulted in the repair of damage to our school facilities. New carpets and air-conditioning were installed as part of the restoration.

Gäwa Christian School is in a strong position regarding facilities as we look to the future.



## School self-assessment

NT Christian Schools supported the Principal in ongoing monitoring and improvement in the self-audit area of *Pastoral Care and Wellbeing*.

### Pastoral Care and Wellbeing

At Gäwa Christian School, we value the *People Matter* component of our strategic framework.

Continuing support from our community has resulted in increased participation of local aides in the classroom. This has had a positive impact on many aspects of classroom learning including strengthening the Indigenous Language and Culture program. This strong partnership with the community is a vital component for a positive, respectful learning environment.

The health and wellbeing of our students has a significant impact on educational outcomes. As a homeland community school, we continue to work those organisations involved in health provision to facilitate visits to our remote community. Whilst this has been a challenging objective, supporting and encouraging the provision of basic health services continues to be an important focus for us.

With support from the NT Christian Schools Special Education Coordinator, we continued to assess and plan special interventions for students with disabilities. Corresponding IEPs have been implemented for these students.

The health and wellbeing of our staff has been an important focus during this challenging year. Providing counselling and support following the critical incidents in 2015 has been a high priority. We have continued the Remote Family Relief program instigated in 2014, recognising the service and commitment of staff that work in our extremely remote location, and the challenges that come with this culturally diverse environment. Each term, staff families were provided with the opportunity to spend time-out through an off-island break. Staff feedback on this initiative continues to be very positive and is another part of our commitment to the *People Matter* aspect of our organisation.

### Future priorities

The School Improvement and Renewal Framework review area for 2016 is anticipated to be *Community & Culture*.