

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Trangie Central School

Every student is known, valued and cared for
in our schools

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



I'm a big believer that wellbeing is at the heart
of everything. You get that right first and
everything else will follow.

Jessica Skinner, Relieving Head Teacher
Teaching and Learning

CESE would like to thank the Principal, Anne Holden, and her executive staff, Dimiti Trudgett – Deputy Principal, and Jacky Murtagh – Assistant Principal; as well as members of the school’s wellbeing team, Gary Hansen – Head Teacher Science, Robyn Moss – School Learning Support Officer (SLSO), Jessica Skinner – Relieving Head Teacher Teaching and Learning, and Ted Wright – Head Teacher Secondary Studies, for their valuable input into this study.

Introduction

Trangie Central School is a Kindergarten to Year 12 school that serves the rural centre of Trangie and its surrounding farming community. It is located approximately one hour west of Dubbo in a local community that has been affected significantly by the recent drought. Enrolments at Trangie have grown considerably in recent years with the student population increasing by almost 50% since 2010. More than 220 students are now enrolled at Trangie, including many out-of-home care students. Approximately half of all students are Aboriginal and nine of the school’s 24 staff are Aboriginal, including the deputy principal. Trangie has a lower than average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) with approximately 70% of students in the bottom ICSEA quartile. The school has established itself as an integral part of the local community and staff have worked diligently over the last nine years to establish an effective and constantly evolving culture of wellbeing for learning. In Trangie today, school is community, and that is a key part of their success.

Trangie’s success in relation to student wellbeing can largely be attributed to effective leadership. The key catalyst for change was Anne Holden who commenced her role as principal nine years ago. The buildings, including student toilets, were in need of repair when Anne started at Trangie. Attendance, academic

results and student engagement levels were low, and suspension rates and staff turnover were high. Many parents within the local catchment area went to great lengths to avoid sending their children to Trangie. This often meant scraping enough money together to send their children to the local non-government school, or choosing for their children to commute long distances each day to attend a different public school. Now, nine years later, the school has been transformed by Anne’s leadership and the staff’s commitment to working together as a team. Rising enrolments suggest Trangie has successfully gained the community’s support. Today Trangie even attracts students from outside the catchment area whose parents are keen for them to experience all that the school has to offer.

It has taken us years to get here, so it's not something that happens overnight. It takes a really long time, and a lot of persistence, and a lot of hard work, and a lot of dedication – from our whole staff. Having strong leadership at the top with Anne helps with that.

Jessica Skinner, Relieving Head Teacher



The message I got when I first came was that the staff wanted us to be out there involved in the community, to try and lift our profile so we do all sorts of things and get involved. Plus, we enjoy it.

Anne Holden, Principal

What has worked to improve student wellbeing at Trangie Central School:

- Effective leadership that focuses on: high expectations; student engagement; working with the community; developing a positive school culture; and staff wellbeing.
- Increasing student engagement and sense of belonging through creative and performing arts, including dance and murals.
- Setting high expectations in relation to uniform, behaviour, language and students always trying their best to develop and sustain a positive school culture.
- Earning the trust and support of the broader community by adopting a ‘school is community’ approach.
- Increasing community engagement and participation through activities such as astronomy nights and weekly student interest groups.
- Focusing on staff wellbeing to ensure that staff feel they are valued and supported members of the school community.

Our students are happy and they want to be at school. They love school, and this reflects in their academic results.

Dimiti Trudgett, Deputy Principal

Meticulously planned strategies and initiatives have resulted in a new school culture being developed at Trangie. Students are now highly engaged and they are supported by a stable and dedicated staff. Attendance and academic results have improved, and suspension rates are significantly lower. Trangie students now perform above average in NAPLAN compared to other 'like' schools. Most importantly, Trangie today is a place where students feel safe and is a school they are proud to say they attend. The school's wellbeing and executive teams commented on the strong sense of belonging that is felt by students at Trangie. This is corroborated by the school's outstanding *Tell Them From Me* student survey results. Trangie also excels in the wellbeing element of the School Excellence Framework.

The journey to achieving success at Trangie has not always been easy, and nor has it happened overnight. The school executive have had to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions. Nevertheless, Trangie's story highlights what can be achieved through perseverance, dedication, patience and collaboration. The success of Trangie provides an excellent example of what wellbeing for learning looks like in practice.

Changing the school culture through effective leadership and staff collaboration

Effective leadership has provided the foundation for developing a culture of wellbeing for learning at Trangie, however, the principal is the first to acknowledge that her vision for the school could not have been realised without also having the support and commitment of her dedicated staff. According to the principal, staff collaboration is crucial to Trangie's success.

Improving student engagement and attendance by showing them that they are known, valued and cared for

The first step in developing Trangie's successful culture of wellbeing for learning focused on getting students engaged and attending school regularly. This has been achieved by tapping into the students' interests in creative and performing arts. The school has employed a music teacher, and also established an Aboriginal dance group, the 'Trangie Dancers'. The Trangie Dancers have become highly successful and they

Change – it's got to come from the principal's leadership.

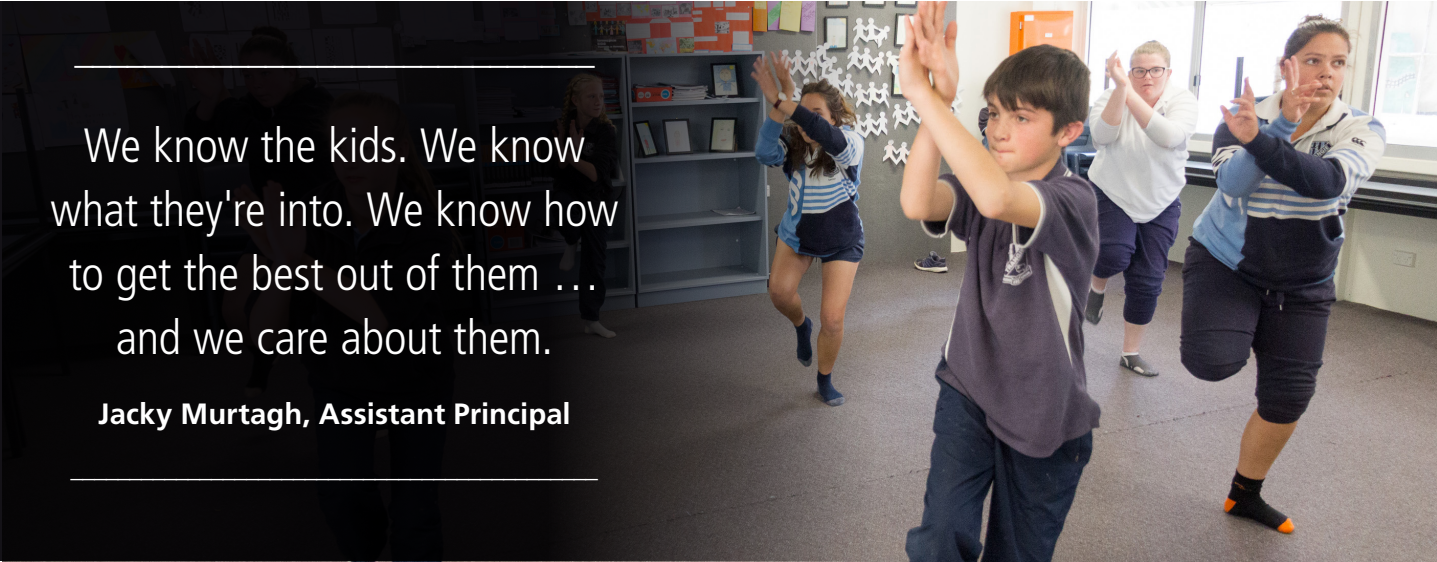
Garry Hansen, Head Teacher Science

regularly perform both locally and further afield, for example, in the Schools Spectacular, in neighbouring towns and for the NSW Parliament. Music and dance at Trangie have been effective ways to engage students as they provide opportunities for students to participate in activities that they enjoy and make them feel good. It also provides opportunities that are not available to most students outside the school.

Improving the school's physical environment has also led to higher levels of student engagement. While this has included repairing the dilapidated facilities and school grounds, there has been a particular emphasis on using the school's physical environment as a means to give students a greater sense of belonging and ownership of their school. The principal wants Trangie to be a school that students are proud to attend. Trangie has achieved this by employing an artist from Dubbo to provide the technical expertise required to paint murals in the school. Students have played a central role designing the murals that help to define and depict Trangie's identity. Giving students a central role in the design process, and enabling their participation in painting the murals, is a deliberate effort to help students understand that their input and actions are valued within the school community.

Setting high expectations

Setting high expectations has also played a major role in changing the school culture. Under the principal's leadership, and with the support of staff, high expectations for students, staff and the community have become the norm. Trangie's high expectations for students extend to all areas of school life including uniform, behaviour, language and effort levels. This culture of high expectations has been built on the concept of respect, that is, respecting yourself, peers, teachers, family and the physical environment. The principal explained that building this culture was difficult initially, with some students resistant to change, but the school's perseverance has been rewarded.



We know the kids. We know what they're into. We know how to get the best out of them ... and we care about them.

Jacky Murtagh, Assistant Principal

Trangie's culture of high expectations has contributed to improvements in student behaviour, happiness levels and academic results. It has also impacted positively on how the school is perceived by the broader community. The school's executive team commented on how something as simple as students attending community events in full school uniform and behaving in a respectful manner has helped to build and strengthen Trangie Central School's reputation in the broader community.

Establishing a shared school vision

The principal's plans for change at Trangie could not have been implemented successfully without a supportive staff who work collaboratively towards a common goal. A key part of Anne's role in developing a culture of wellbeing for learning at Trangie has been establishing a shared vision amongst her staff. Since Anne's appointment, the school's long-term, overarching goal has been to improve students' academic outcomes. Anne understood that this could not be achieved until Trangie's students had higher levels of wellbeing. By articulating this vision to her staff and getting them on-board, a shared vision was quickly established and the staff have committed together to focusing on improving student wellbeing.

I think in the early days we were trying to engage our kids in any way that we could. I mean, get them willing to take risks and get involved. But now that we've got a lot of that entrenched in our school culture, part of our strategic plan for the next few years is looking at the academics – trying to really improve results so that our kids can do whatever they choose to do.

Jacky Murtagh, Assistant Principal

Trangie's wellbeing and executive teams described how Anne earned the support of her staff by communicating in a transparent manner, continuously asking for staff input into the school's overarching plan, using data to inform suggested practice and strategies, and being open and approachable. Anne's approach has fostered the development of a positive and trusting relationship with her staff. The staff are proud of what the school has achieved over the last nine years, although they also know that they are only part of the way to achieving their longer term goals. Now that Trangie has achieved optimal conditions for effective learning, they are turning their attention to the longer term goal of further improving academic results. As with their success so far, this will require a whole-school collaborative effort.

A whole-school approach to embed a culture of wellbeing for learning

Trangie Central School focuses on using a whole-school approach to establish wellbeing as a foundation for learning. This whole-school approach involves staff, students, parents and the broader community. It is coordinated by the wellbeing team, which includes the deputy principal as chair, assistant principals, head teachers, and representatives from the primary and secondary staff.

Involving the community

The school places a strong emphasis on their relationship with the local community, and this has enabled a 'school IS community' attitude to grow within the town. Through constant consultation and by making a deliberate effort to cater to local needs, the school has harnessed the support of a community that was previously disengaged. Trangie has earned the trust of the community by showing that they have the best interests of students at heart, and that this extends far beyond teaching and learning in the

classroom. For example, the community appreciates the effort Trangie staff make to give students opportunities they would not otherwise have. In addition to dance and music opportunities, the school runs astronomy nights and student interest groups which have proved to be extremely popular. The community is invited to be part of the interest groups. Students can participate in activities such as robotics, rock band, cattle team, cooking, quilting, gardening and wood burning. The student interest groups, which receive a weekly period allocation in the school's timetable, provide opportunities for students to develop a variety of skills and to build relationships with peers in different year groups and also with members of the local community. Importantly, the interest groups also reinforce the culture of volunteering and community participation that is taught at Trangie.

Ensuring staff wellbeing

At Trangie, staff wellbeing is just as important as student wellbeing. The principal spoke about the importance of staff satisfaction and happiness, and the support network provided by the school to reduce the risk of teacher burnout. The school has worked hard to embed a staff culture where supporting each other is the norm. This is particularly important in a rural school where casual relief is not always readily available so staff often have to step in for each other. The wellbeing staff explained that this culture of support exists because teachers feel invested in their jobs as they know they are valued members of the school community. At Trangie, all staff are encouraged to share their ideas and opinions, and they see how receptive the school executive is to receiving their thoughts. The school's commitment to developing a culture where all staff feel like they are valued members of the school community has resulted in teachers going out of their way to look out for each other, such as covering an extra class or playground duty.

The principal is also conscious of the challenges associated with teaching in a small rural community, especially for teachers who are new to the area. The executive team at Trangie have contributed to the development of high staff morale by simply showing that they care deeply about their teachers' wellbeing. For example, they went out of their way to provide professional and personal support to a young teacher who had made the move to Trangie from Wollongong. This teacher is now thriving in her role, and has happily settled into life in the small rural town. The wellbeing team explained that the special attention given to staff wellbeing at Trangie has not only boosted staff morale, but it has also contributed to the school's happy, stable and committed staff. Further to this, the focus on staff wellbeing has been critical to them feeling valued and supported in their roles, which in turn is essential for effective teaching and learning in the classroom.

We're a very inclusive and a tolerant school... everything that we do, we have the students' and their families' best interests at heart.

**Jessica Skinner, Relieving Head Teacher
Teaching and Learning**





Authors: Kate Griffiths and Stephanie French

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001, Australia

Visit our website to subscribe to the CESE newsletter

☎ 02 7814 1399

Y Yammer

✉ info@cese.nsw.gov.au

🌐 cese.nsw.gov.au

Please cite this publication as:

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2018), *Trangie Central School – Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools*, NSW Department of Education, <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au>