

BLACKTOWN YOUTH COLLEGE



Strength & Wisdom

ANNUAL REPORT

2007

Blacktown Youth College Inc

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1. INTRODUCTION

Blacktown Youth College is a non-government school and during 2007 operated from one campus located at Bidwill Police & Community Youth Club. The school was first registered in 1997 and aims to meet the educational and social needs of troubled adolescentsexcluded from, or not coping with, mainstream schooling. Blacktown Youth College is registered as a 'special school'.

The school differs from mainstream schools both in respect to the students it accepts and the manner in which it operates:

- pupils undertake a flexible learning program which leads to the School Certificate with no exams.
- most pupils have been expelled, suspended from or dropped out of mainstream schooling
- many are referred by Home School Liaison Officers, Deputy Principals, school counsellors and the NSW Department of Community Services
- some have already been in trouble with the police
- some were bullied at previous schools
- there is a focus on basic literacy and numeracy, with no exams
- many of the rules are set and monitored by the pupils
- the school operates on shorter days, with 4 days a week of on-site schooling
- volunteers, student teachers and parents are encouraged to participate
- the school charges no fees and its primary source of income is through government grants

Blacktown Youth College has a large number of indigenous students. Like the great majority of our students, our indigenous students have rejected mainstream schools and in some cases their mainstream schools have rejected them. Mainstream schools don't suit them because they are too big and too inflexible and do not cater for individual needs.

The percentage of indigenous students varies, on average, between 30-40% in any given year. Some of our indigenous students have gone on to study Year 11 in mainstream schools.

30% of the school's staff are indigenous, and some are involved with further training at their local TAFE and at universities.

2. PHILOSOPHY

Our school's philosophy can be summarised by the simple statement:

"Teenagers, subject to high stress, need a low stress enjoyable learning program."

The essential features of our tried and true low stress program are:

- No exams
- Students have a say in a significant number of decisions made by teachers, including input into their curriculum
- A hands-on approach to learning (students still write in their books each lesson)
- Encouraging part-time work and volunteer work
- No useless rules e.g. uniform code
- Good working relationships between staff, parents and students
- Courtesy counts
- 4 day week

Students must have a 'fair dinkum' approach to learning and they can be asked to leave if this is not apparent. The day is roughly divided into 65% class time and 35% recreation time: basketball, pool, playing the guitar, cards and gymnasium are all available. Students encounter a high level of freedom here, but they have additional responsibilities too. Students clean the school, monitor excessive bad language, supervise the pool room, help struggling students in the classroom and assess all newcomers.

Blacktown Youth College is a drug-free and alcohol-free place and this policy is strictly enforced.

3. OVERVIEW OF 2007

Students received grades for 3 subjects only – Personal Development/Health/Physical Education/Physical Health, Art and Design & Technology. The average grade was “C” the category for “substantial” knowledge of a subject.

Over 50 adults attended the graduation ceremonies in December. A total of 75 awards were presented for good work in individual subjects or work outside of class.

The number of students receiving the School Certificate declined as the school enrolled a large number of students 14 years of age (and some were younger). These students will receive their year 10 certificates in 2008/9.

Currently more than half of those enrolled for their School Certificate are still receiving that award.

4. EDUCATIONAL AND FINANCIAL REPORTING

The following information has been compiled for submission to the NSW Board of Studies to comply with legislative requirements for the continuing registration of the school.

4.1 Message from Key School Bodies

Message from the Principal – Anne Ridgway

I took up my duties as School principal on 26th November 2007. Looking back on 2007, I perceive it as a year of recovery and transition. We are moving towards a more stable and resourceful place of learning, where our students can have greater access to a meaningful and practical education and thus be more fully prepared for the outside world.

Message from the Chairperson of the Board – Gabrielle McIntosh

Our revolutionary approach to education, for the many disenfranchised teenagers in Sydney continued to create success stories with record numbers of students attending the school and gaining their school certificate in 2007. The school saw the return of some students who had presented with very challenging behaviours initially, but were now ready to settle down and take advantage of our relaxed and fun approach to education.

The Board is hoping to add to its numbers next year and strengthen its role at the school. In November, we were fortunate enough to have Anne Ridgway take up the offer of Principal of Bidwill. Anne was formerly our Art and Science teacher. I have started talking to folks in Broken Hill about the possibility of a branch of our school in that area. The responses have been positive and it is envisaged that the new school would cater mostly for indigenous teenagers. Thanks to Board members for all their hard work and thanks to our great staff for persevering in the challenging year that was 2007.

4.2 Student Performance in Statewide Tests and Examinations

Blacktown Youth College is a “no-exams” school. Our School Certificate program is a modified program and students must complete 145 days (including work experience) to graduate and they must undertake some volunteer work in the community.

In December 2004 the NSW Board of Studies recognised our “no-exam” School Certificate as an innovative approach to the School Certificate in NSW. It was agreed that our students would study a combination of Life Skills courses and optional grade courses. Grades are available for Personal Development/Health/Physical Education, Art and Design & Technology.

Many of our students gain part or full time employment after graduation and some go on to further study at either TAFE or a mainstream school.

4.3 Professional Learning and Teacher Standards

Teaching staff at Blacktown Youth College satisfy NSW Board of Studies requirements for

qualifications. Of the 8 teaching staff employed at the end of the 2007 school year, 5 were fully qualified registered teachers and another 2 were indigenous teachers 1 of whom is completing a teaching degree.

The following table lists the categories specified by the NSW Board of Studies, and the number of teachers in each category.

Category	No. of Teachers
(i) Teachers who have teaching qualifications from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognised within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) guidelines	5
(ii) Teachers who have qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution within Australia or one recognised within the AEI-NOOSR guidelines but lack formal teacher education qualifications	2
(iii) Teachers who do not have qualifications as described in (i) or (ii) but have relevant successful teaching experience or appropriate knowledge relevant to the teaching context.	2

4.4 Teacher Attendance and Retention

The average teacher attendance rate or average number of days attended per teacher and the proportion of teaching staff retained from the previous year. These can be reported in the most appropriate way according to each school's circumstances.

Average teacher attendance rate	3 1/2/per week
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4.5 Student Attendance and Retention Rates in Secondary Schools

Blacktown Youth College only takes pupils for the School Certificate, and therefore secondary school retention rates are not applicable.

4.6 Post-School Destinations

Post-School Destination	No. of Students
Workforce	25
Further study	8
Unknown	unknown

4.7 Enrolment Policies and Profiles

Our students are referred to the school by Home School Liaison Officers, Deputy Principals, school counsellors, through word-of-mouth, or by the NSW Department of Community Services.

Prospective students and their parents attend group interviews where our unique program is explained. About 30% of our intake is indigenous. As we are a “no-exams” school students can begin studying for their School Certificate at any point in the year without disadvantage to themselves academically.

Our school has been given “special assistance school” status. Students attend group interviews with parents and caseworkers. The nature of our school is explained and student representatives, as well as teachers, answer questions.

Students may enroll at any point in the year. About half of our kids are indigenous and a significant number suffer from extreme anger, depression or phobias.

4.8 School Policies

4.8.1 Student Welfare

A priority for the school is to provide a safe and supportive environment for students, particularly as they are at risk of not obtaining a basic education because they have been expelled from or dropped out of mainstream schooling. Processes are in place to ensure the safety of students and these are coupled with a focus on the social and educational development of our students, in order to promote their welfare.

Final decisions on all student matters are made by a full staff meeting or school executive meeting. Our drug-free/alcohol-free policy is strictly enforced.

More details on individual policies can be obtained by contacting the school’s administration officer on 9628 8072.

4.8.2 Discipline

The school aims to be fair and open in relation to discipline and disciplinary procedures. Final decisions on matters pertaining to discipline are made by the school executive. In some cases parents can request assistance from police, usually the officer attached to the local PCYC, in an appeal on disciplinary decisions.

4.8.3 Complaints and Grievances

Grievances are dealt with by school meetings or the school executive. Appeals can also be made to the police officer attached to the local PCYC.

4.9 School-Determined Improvement Targets

Graduation rates are one way that the school can measure performance and track improvements over time. Our graduation rates have improved in the last 12 months. Whereas only 60% of students were finishing Blacktown Youth College with the School Certificate 2 years ago, in 2006 78% of students graduated.

The school hopes to expand its in-house traineeship program and the number of students going on to Year 11 in 2008/9.

4.10 Initiatives Promoting Respect and Responsibility

Students now participate with the Youth-In-Search program. This will be mandatory for about half before graduation.

4.11 Parent, Student and Teacher Satisfaction

Parents receive “plain English” reports on students progress twice year. Parent representatives on School Board give feed back regarding the clarity of reports.

4.12 Summary Financial Information

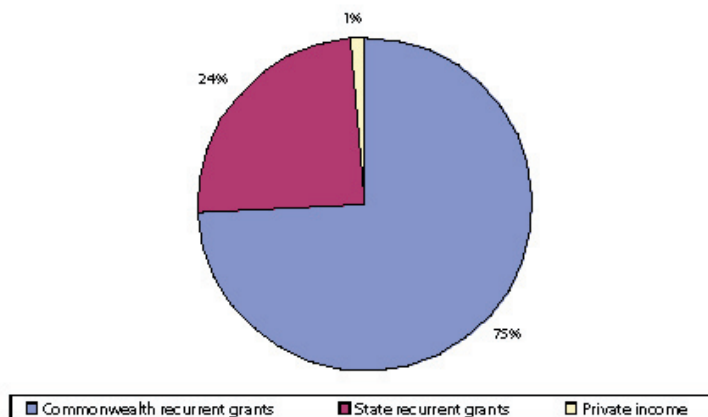
2006 saw defrauding of schools finances by the former Principal Marlene Elferson. The amount of money believed to be stolen is estimated at \$150,000. Marlene Elferson has been charged so far with \$46,000 with more to be presented in court late 2007.

Given the scope of fraud and how it was achieved the school is currently going through a 100% Audit check. Due to this not being completed the Financial Summary will be attached when available.

The following charts show the percentages of income and expenditure by category, taken from the detailed information provided to the Commonwealth Government in the 2007 Commonwealth Financial Questionnaire.

Note that the school is a “no-fees” school and did not have any capital income during 2007.

BYC Income 2007



BYC Expenditure 2007

