

*Review of the Strong and Smart Vision at
Cherbourg State School*



**Chris Sarra
Principal
Cherbourg State School**

12 August 2003

Education is your passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today. (El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz)

Introduction

For the past four years Cherbourg State School has operated under a new vision 'Strong and Smart'. As the school's first Indigenous Principal, I introduced this vision in 1999. At Cherbourg State School 'Strong' means being proud to be Aboriginal, proud to be from Cherbourg, and holding our ground without letting anyone put us down. 'Smart' means being smart enough to survive in any other school in Queensland; having the academic capacity to operate in any other classroom in Queensland; and to achieve academic outcomes that are comparable to any other child from any other school in Queensland.

At Cherbourg State School the aim is to:-

- *nurture a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in today's society; and*
- *generate academic outcomes that are comparable to any other school in Queensland.*

In 2000 a new team of teachers was established to ensure a more rigorous pursuit of this aim. To date significant progress is observable in many areas.

This report is designed to provide some insight into progress of Cherbourg State School over the past four years under its new vision 'Strong and Smart'.

Parts of this report have previously been published by the Australian College of Educators (Sarra, 2003).

Background

I commenced duty as principal at Cherbourg State School in August 1998. To say that the school presented many challenges would be quite an understatement. On reflection I recall things like children running on top of 2-storey buildings, in and out of the main office, staffroom and principal's office. It was impossible to leave your lunch in the staffroom fridge because students would steal it well before lunchtime.

Academic performance was extremely poor, with 93% of children being 'caught in the Year 2 Diagnostic net' for Reading. School classrooms looked more like baby-sitting facilities, with children coming and going as they pleased, and classroom numbers usually dwindling down to about 4 children on average by the afternoon session.

The Year 7 students left for high school, like many did in previous years, like lambs to the slaughter, with no idea about how to conduct themselves in a regular classroom and nowhere near the personal skills, or the literacy and numeracy skills to survive. Sadly, as expected, and like many graduating from our school before them, most would drop out before the end of Year 8 and disappear into the oblivion of society. Detailed analyses of 4260 student record cards of Aboriginal students leaving Cherbourg State School to attend Murgon State High School reveal that they stayed enrolled at high school for an average of 9 months (Schmieman 1995, p. 34). More recent analyses of retention into high school will be discussed later in this report.

The school grounds were covered in papers thrown and left there by the children and the many community people who would use the school as a thoroughfare. The school was subjected to continuous acts of vandalism, all of which was having a dramatic impact on the condition of the school and the ability to maintain a safe school environment. Senior officers within Education Queensland were having serious discussions about whether or not the school facility should be closed down. The overall condition of the school grounds and facilities reflected a severe lack of pride in our school.

Many non-Indigenous staff had been at the school for many years and seemed to enjoy being there. Several had been there for longer than expected periods in such a school (ranging from 4–15 years) and had no desire to move on because they believed they were performing satisfactorily given the complexities of the school and the community. They would describe their performance to me as something that should be valued, despite the desperately poor student outcomes generated by the school. For me it was difficult to value such efforts when, as noted earlier, what I observed was contradictory.

Several Indigenous teachers were on staff as well as several Indigenous teacher aides, however they had very little say in the operations or strategic directions of the school. As crazy as it may sound, their classrooms were never as well resourced as other classrooms that boasted many flash¹ computers and deadly² classroom resources. When I asked them why they would tolerate such unacceptable circumstances, they expressed a sense of despair and powerlessness to make any meaningful and productive change.

Members within the Cherbourg community also expressed this same sense of despair and powerlessness. Their frustration associated with this was reflected in declining student enrolments, with student numbers in the primary school dropping by approximately 60%. Concerned parents ‘voted with their feet’, as Murries³ often do, and transferred their children to a nearby state school where they believed their children would receive a better standard of education. Those who kept their children in the school expressed that they wanted change, but indicated they had no idea about how to pursue it. Some said they didn’t know they could pursue change.

In broad terms the following was reflected at the school:

- Lack of student pride in self, school, Aboriginality;
- Extremely poor school attendance rates;
- Very low expectations of student behaviour and student performance;
- Acceptance of very poor student behaviour and student performance that was described by some staff as a social and cultural legacy; and
- Very low and decreasing enrolments, with many Cherbourg parents sending their children to nearby Murgon State School to get a better deal for their children.

Suffice to say things in our school had to change and it was never going to be easy. It would call for different, yet imaginative approaches to schooling. Friere and Shor (quoted in Slee 2001, p. 174), would suggest that such approaches ‘... can be exercised as a resource to expel dominant ideology and open up some spaces in consciousness for transcending thinking’. In other words, we had to approach these challenges differently, because if we did the same as what we always did, we would get the same as we always

¹ Good quality.

² Excellent; The best.

³ The term used for Aboriginal people from Queensland, like Koories in NSW and Victoria.

got! We wanted more than what we were getting in the past, and we knew that with new approaches we would get it.

This notion underpins the very first requirement in facilitating the extent of change required: that is, to shift the mindset that seemingly accepted Aboriginal underachievement as normal to one in which we all had to believe we could get better outcomes from our children.

Methodology

Whilst discussion about school strategies pursued by the team at Cherbourg State School is likely, this report is primarily designed to provide some analyses of school and student performance outcomes. These outcomes are examined via a range of mediums including:-

- Systemic data collection from Education Queensland's Corporate Data Warehouse;
- School-based data collection;
- Focussed and open conversations and surveys with:
 - All teaching staff, teacher aides and other ancillary staff, (conducted by the QUT as part of a community based action research project);
 - Students in Years 5, 6 and 7, (conducted by Cherbourg State School teaching staff);
 - Most parents, (conducted by Cherbourg State School Community Liaison staff and the South Burnett District Education Partnerships Team)(See Appendix One);
 - A sample of Elders and community members, conducted by Cherbourg State School Community Liaison staff and the South Burnett District Education Partnerships Team;
 - Cherbourg Community Council by Cherbourg State School Principal and Executive Director, Schools.

Terms of reference

Analyses Framework

The report was conducted and reviewed against an emerging Education Queensland framework anchored by the Crosby Grid, which identifies the following as crucial components of school operational management:-

- Leadership and Planning
- Management and Resources
- Relationship and Community
- Teaching and Learning

Reporting Framework

The outcomes for this review will be reported in alignment with Education Queensland's corporate goals:-

- Learning
- Schools
- Workforce

This report is designed primarily to report on specific school and student outcomes without elaborating too much on specific strategies to achieve positive change.

Review team

An extensive and expert review team was assembled for this process. The review team consisted of:-

- Principal, Cherbourg State School (Chris Sarra)
- Executive Director, Schools, South Burnett (Cecily Andersen)
- Principal Education Officer, Performance Measurement (Chris Keates)
- Director, School Performance (Peter Mulcahy)
- QUT Researcher (Gary McLennan)
- Community partnerships Team (Zona-Hussey-Smith, Robert Clancy, Ashley Malone)
- Cherbourg State School Ancillary & Teaching Staff
 - Mr Gabriel Hill
 - Ms Serena Duncan
 - Ms Christina Bond
 - Mr Richard Coleman
 - Mr Llew Conlon
 - Ms Iris Blow
 - Mr Frank Malone
 - Ms Mary Blair
 - Mr Fred Cobbo
 - Ms Rosetta Harrison
 - Ms Winifred Aubrey
 - Mr Dion Fewquandie
 - Ms Angela Renouf
 - Ms Michal Purcell

Analyses

This analyses outlines where Cherbourg State School is currently located against the Education Queensland framework anchored by the Crosby Grid.

Leadership and Planning

Assessment	Description	Reflected in:-
Best Practice	Strategic Leadership - All staff understand and share the school and systemic vision to improve student outcomes. Evaluation of the leadership climate within the school is a matter of routine. There is strong evidence of successful team building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School Opinion Survey - QUT qualitative review - Review by exception process
Best Practice	Strategic Planning - Effective planning and accountability are fundamental to the school management. Such processes reflect the unique nature of the schools and support innovation and responsiveness to local and systemic priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of ICTs - Cyber Camps - Smart Plans in classrooms - T/A training - DVD project

Management and Resources

Assessment	Description	Reflected in:-
Best Practice	Resource Management (Human) - School human resources are utilized in a planned way. Resources are successfully deployed to deliver the planned strategic priorities and improve student-learning outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RATEP - Partnership with Council - Targetted recruitment - Induction program
Best Practice	Resource Management (Physical) - School resources are utilized in a planned way. Resources are successfully deployed to deliver the planned strategic, priorities and improve student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnership with Council - CDEP/RATEP - Teacher mentoring - Indigenous leadership processes
Best Practice Involvement	Monitoring and Review - The school uses data that is appropriately summarized and analysed to inform planning and decision-making. - Processes of review are being developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smart Plans - Accelerated Reader - Student Profiles - SB ICT competencies - Benchmarking and tracking
Best Practice	Professional Support - Professional learning initiatives reflect the school vision and link to pedagogy and issues pertinent to the school. The school provides developmental opportunities to support all staff roles and develop potential for the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Support worker - Professional dialogues - Teacher leadership - Indigenous T/A leadership - RATEP
Best Practice	Structures for engagement - Achieved a high standard in establishing processes, services and an environment that monitors and supports learning and the general welfare of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human Values program - Dialogue with Elders, Council - QUT partnership - Interagency dialogue

Relationship and Community

Assessment	Description	Reflected in:-
Best Practice	Parent/Community Partnerships - Parent and community partnerships impact and support the learning successes of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elders in school policy - Interagency partnerships - Council partnerships - Professional dialogue with Day Care centre
Best Practice	Stakeholder Ownership - Stakeholders have a shared view on the school's vision and take collective responsibility for school and student outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elders in schools (Redgate building) - P&C/ASSPA - Council partnership - Interagency partnerships - Student Council - Aboriginal Studies program
Best Practice	Student Welfare - Achieved a high standard in establishing processes, services and an environment that monitors and supports learning and the general welfare of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous T/As & Reading Tutors - Human Values program - Interagency partnerships - Family Support Worker
Best Practice	Social Interactions - Shared values and understandings underpin the social interactions of both adults and students within the school community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elders' parades - RATEP - Human Values program - Newsletter - Radio Us Mob program - Indigenous Leadership camps

Teaching and Learning

Assessment	Description	Reflected in:-
Best Practice	Learning - All members of the school community take responsibility for their own learning characterized by inquiry and creativity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong and Smart throughout the school - RATEP - Aboriginal Studies - Accelerated Reader
Commitment	Teaching - Teacher pedagogy is mostly reflective of the school vision and there is an alignment of pedagogy curriculum and assessment most of the time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnership with UQ on Productive Pedagogies - Ongoing professional dialogue with Ts and T/As - Smart Plans
Best Practice	Curriculum - Curriculum programs are responsive to students' interests, needs and abilities and are reflective of the school vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal Studies program - Human Values program - Literacy focus - Strong and Smart in the classroom
Commitment	Student Achievement - Continuous improvement and value adding in the level of performance attained by students across most performance measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smart Plans - Student Tracking procedures - Benchmarking

Reporting

As noted earlier progress reporting here is against the background of Education Queensland's corporate goals, Learning, Schools and Workforce.

Learning

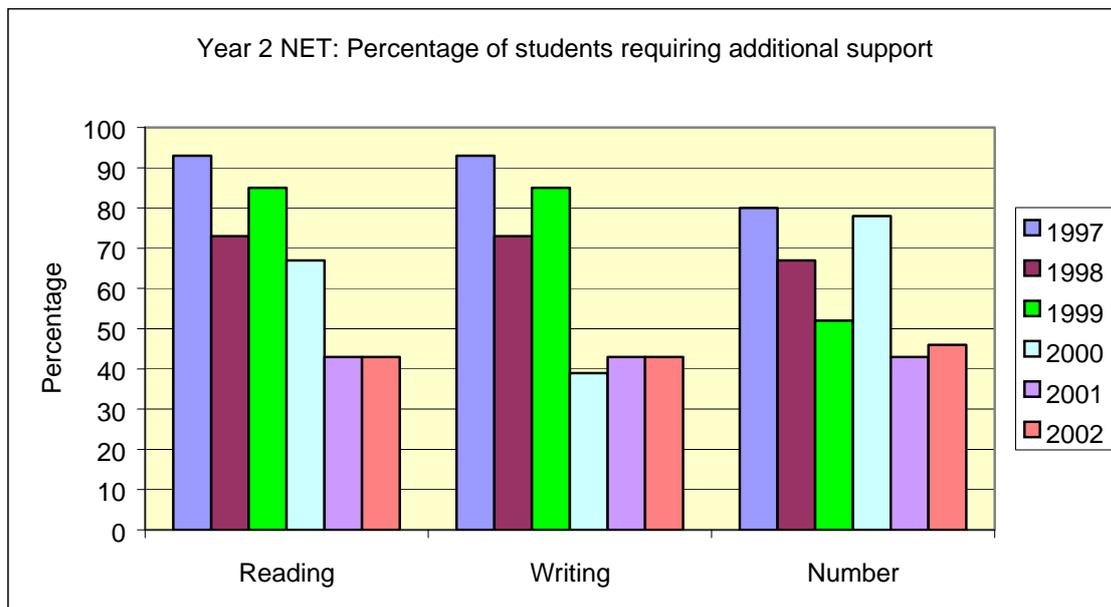
Most of the systemic data available via Education Queensland notes the *current location* of the school in terms of Student Performance presents as *below* in comparison to respective state school means. Such data however does little to provide a sense of distance traveled, and on face value, does little to reflect the entire story behind the data.

Notwithstanding, the notion of presenting as similar and/or better on systemic data is readily acknowledged and indeed rigorously pursued. The systemic data and other school data reflecting student learning performance is presented here for discussion.

Year 2 Net Data

Figure 1 provides an overview of progress in relation to Year 2 Net Systemic Data. The figure clearly indicates reductions in the number of students 'caught in the net' or not at the expected student performance standards for Year 2.

Figure 1



The chart indicates the percentage of students identified as requiring additional support from 1997 to 2002.

- *The percentage of students requiring additional support in Reading and Writing has decreased by 40%.*

- *The number of students identified as requiring additional support in Number has decreased by 33%.*

Year 5 Diagnostic Data

Figures 2.0 and 2.1 reveal that in terms of Year 5 performance on systemic tests for Literacy and Numeracy overall, student performance reflects slight improvement, yet continues to remain below the State Mean in comparison.

Figure 2.0

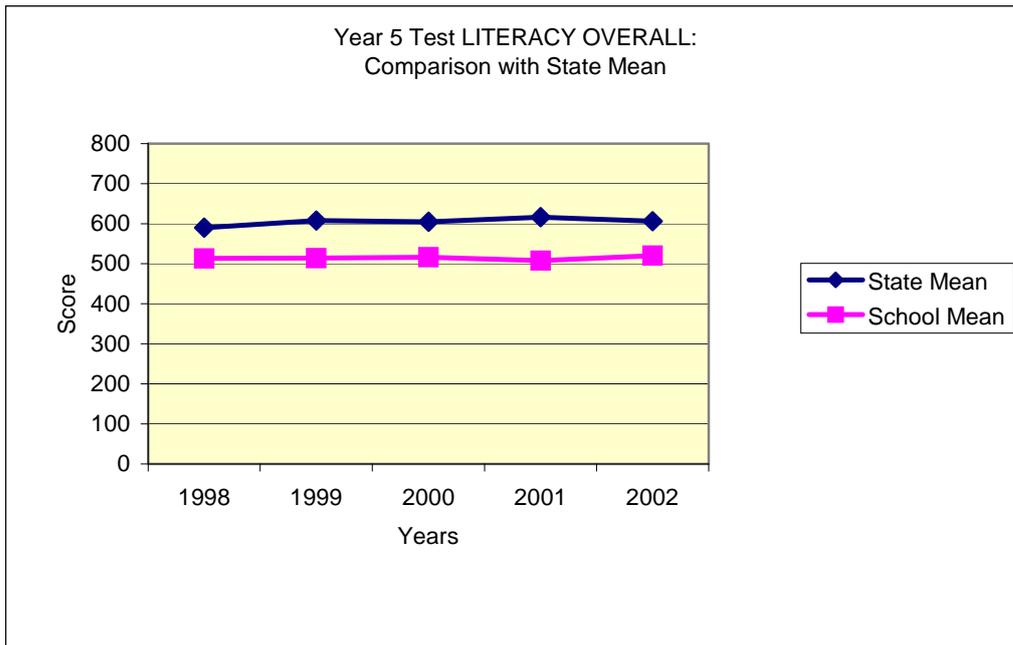
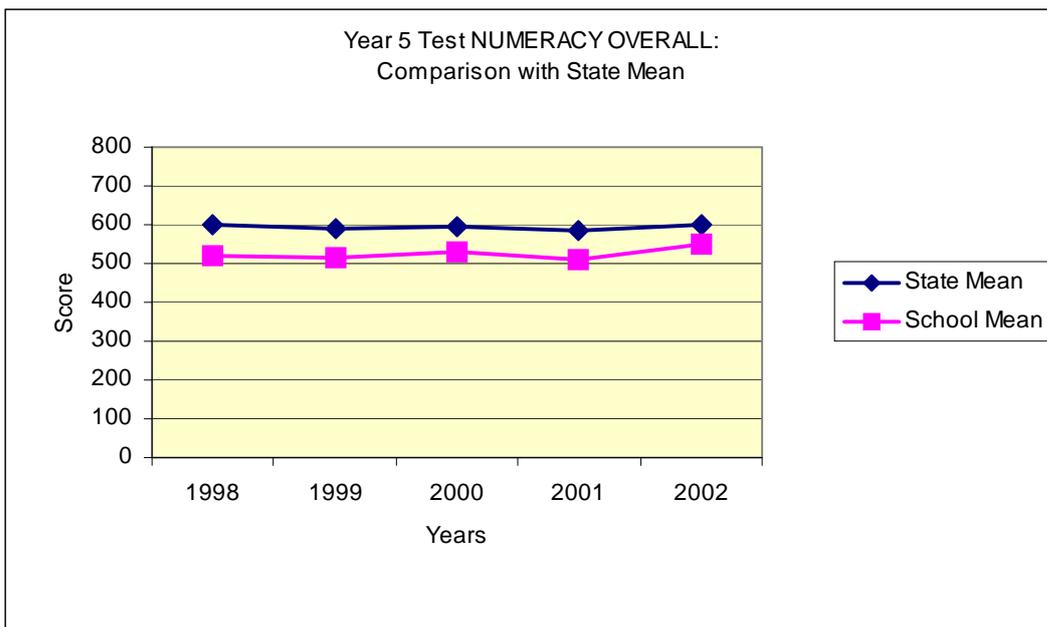


Figure 2.1



Year 7 Diagnostic Data

Figures 3.0 and 3.1 reveal that in terms of Year 7 performance on systemic tests for Literacy and Numeracy overall, student performance again reflects slight improvement, yet continues to remain below the State Mean in comparison.

Figure 3.0

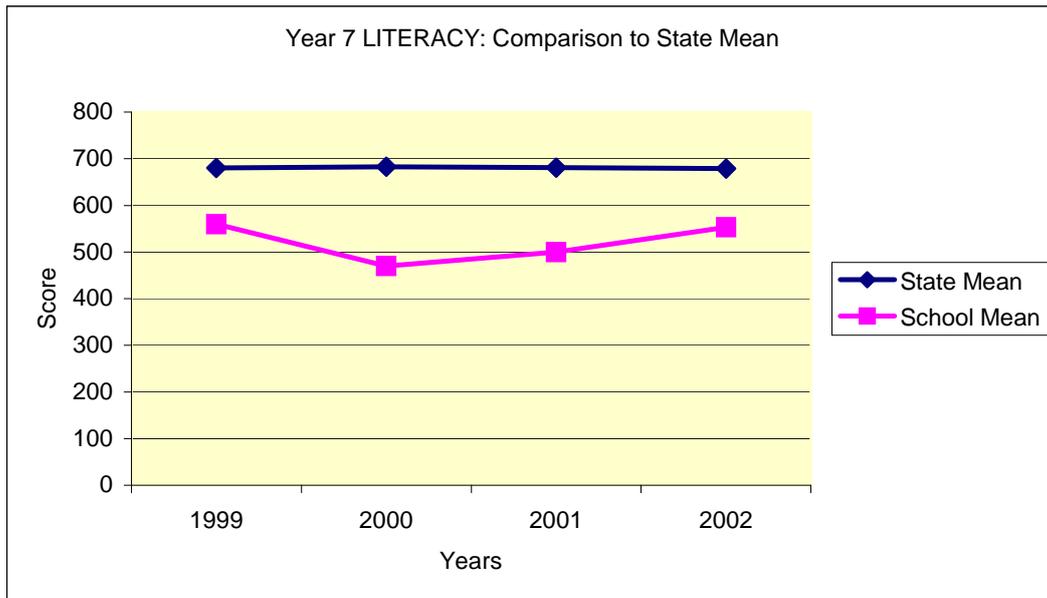
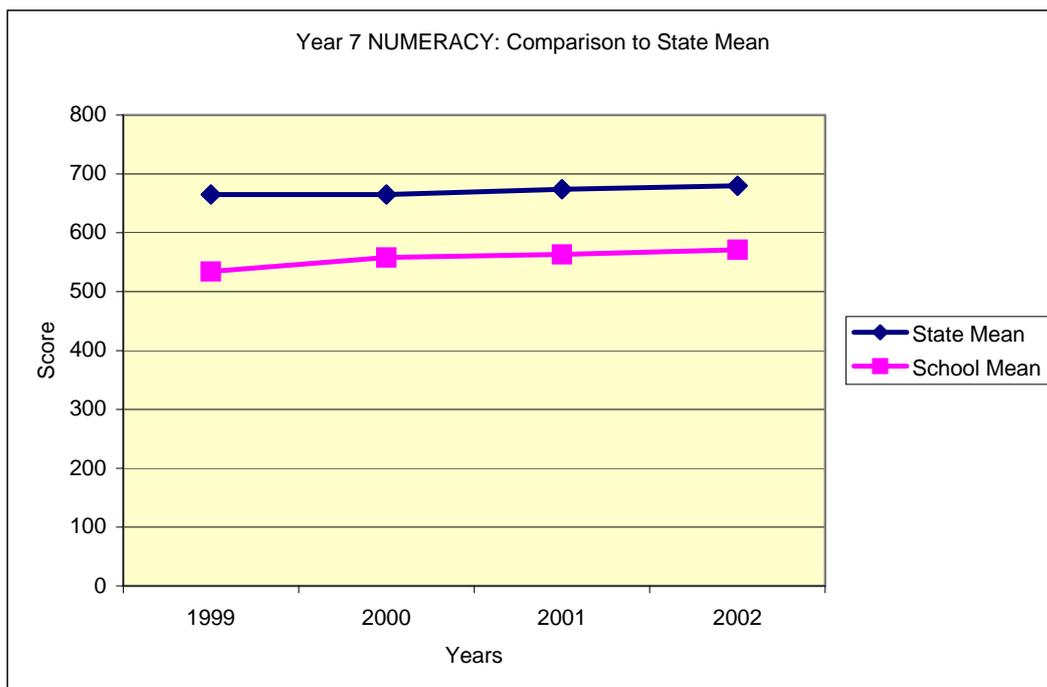


Figure 3.1



Schools

Unexplained Absences

Unexplained absenteeism was readily acknowledged as a major issue in Cherbourg State School. Many children were either not attending school, or disappearing from school at various stages throughout the day. When a child did not attend, or disappeared from school, we as a school just did not know the whereabouts of the child. Extensive consultation with parents and guardians revealed that they too didn't know. Many would indicate that they sent their children to school, however, they were obviously not getting there.

As a school we changed the reporting processes for absenteeism. Rather than expect parents to send a note to explain student absenteeism on a child's return to school, the teachers would present students with a note to take home and get parents to sign. The note was made very simple for parents and read as follows:-

<p><i>(Student Name)</i>.. was away on <i>(date)</i> because he/she:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> was sick<input type="checkbox"/> family reasons<input type="checkbox"/> don't know<input type="checkbox"/> other..please comment. <p><i>Parent Signature</i></p>
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The pursuit of explanations for student absenteeism was initiated by the school in a format that would be easy for parents to attend to.

In addition to this we developed an incentive program which would encourage all students to reduce the number of unexplained absences. This strategy basically involved recording on parade, the number of unexplained absences for each class, and giving a free ice block to the class with the lowest number. At the end of each term the class with the lowest score overall got to go to McDonald's in Kingaroy for lunch.

- *Unexplained Absences in Term 3, 2000 were recorded at 1,185. In term 4, 2001 unexplained absences had dropped to 68.5. This represents a reduction of 94 %.*

After 2001 we applied a greater focus on 'real attendance' rather than unexplained absences.

Absenteeism

The following table provides a sample analyses of student absenteeism of the most senior class for each year from 1999 to 2002. The table was developed by calculating the percentage absenteeism of the most senior class at week 5 of every term.

Table 1 Percentage absenteeism of most senior class

Year	1999				2000				2001				2002			
Term	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
% absenteeism	34	52	41	24	26	38	26	21	24	10	24	15	10	18	11	12
Annual %	37.75%				27.75%				18.25%				12.75%			

- *Table 1 indicates clearly reflects a 25% reduction in absenteeism for the most senior class in the school.*

Table 2 presents some analyses of students with continuous enrolment at Cherbourg State School over the last 4 years.

Table 2 Absenteeism of Students with Continuous enrolment

Student Initials	1999	2000	2001	2002
V.A.	51	44	24.5	18
M.D.	71	94	13	15.5
G.F.	19	27	2	4
M.G.	18	26	5	35.5
H.M.	44	44	5	5
L.S.	1	1	3.5	2.5
L.D.	97	146	31.5	46
S.A.	72	128	3.5	31
S.M.	135	50	39	25
W.M.	49.5	96	20.5	12
K.B.	16	27	7	6
N.C.	64	124	5	34
D.C.	14.5	12	3	10
N.G.	48.5	65	17.5	18
D.J.	54.5	140	15	18
C.S.	46	120	23.5	36
M.M.	57.5	79	70	7.5
C.G	55	47.5	11	23.5
J.A.	34	21.5	1	14
<i>Total Absences</i>	947.5	1292	300	360.5

Clearly some individuals have made significant improvements to attendance patterns. Worth noting specifically are:-

- *MD down from 94 in 2000 to 13 in 2001;*
- *HS down from 125 in 2000 to 25.5 in 2001;*
- *LD down from 146 in 2000 to 46 in 2002;*
- *SA down from 128 in 2000 to 3.5 in 2001;*
- *WM down from 96 in 2000 to 12 in 2002;*
- *NC down from 124 in 2000 to 5 in 2001;*
- *DJ down from 140 in 2000 to 18 in 2002;*
- *CS down from 120 in 2000 to 18 in 2002;*
- *MM down from 79 in 2000 to 7.5 in 2002.*

Enrolments

In 1998 a significant yet unknown number of students that were living in Cherbourg were attending Murgon State School. In discussions with parents about such a choice many parents articulated a high degree of dissatisfaction with the standard of educational delivery at Cherbourg State School, as well as a perception that the school offered a 'community' or 'watered down' curriculum.

Enrolments at Cherbourg State School have significantly increased since 1998.

- *Total school enrolments have increased from 144 students in February 1998 to 265 in February 2002.*

In 2002 there are several students living in Murgon and commuting to Cherbourg every morning to attend Cherbourg State School.

Retention into High School

Earlier this report indicated that student retention into secondary school has historically been a major concern. More recent analyses reveals that while a degree of progress is being made here, the issue remains firmly as one of major concern.

Destination data that tracks all Cherbourg State School students that have left Year 7 since 1998 reveal that:-

- *of the 10 Year 7s of the 1998 cohort from Cherbourg State School, 9 have dropped out of high school. 4 dropped out of high school in year 8, 4 dropped out in year 9, one dropped out in year 10, and one has continued and is currently in*

year 12. Four of the children who dropped out have spent time in a detention center.

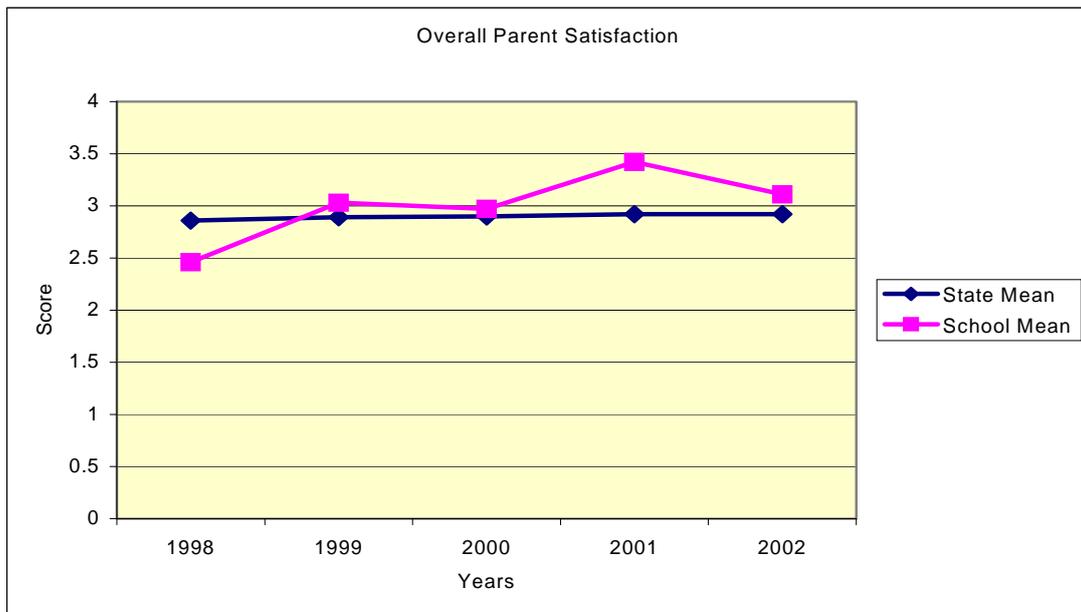
- *of the 11* Year 7s of the 1999 cohort from Cherbourg State School, **8 have dropped out of high school**. One dropped out in year 8, four dropped out in year 9, and three dropped out in year 10. Of those remaining in school two are participating in the Annex program⁴, and only one is participating in a regular Year 11 program. All three students reportedly have high levels of absenteeism.
- *of the 17* year 7s of the 2000 cohort from Cherbourg State School, **9 have dropped out of high school**. Five students dropped out of high school in grade 8 and four dropped out in grade 9. Three students remain at Murgon SHS but only participate in the Annex program. Four students are participating in a regular secondary school program but in high schools other than Murgon.
- *of the 12* year 7s of the 2001 cohort from Cherbourg State School, **1 has dropped out and 1 has been excluded**. One is in Grade 9 in Townsville. Of the remaining 9 students at Murgon SHS, one is participating in the Annex program. One student is in a special needs program. Of the remaining 7 students participating in a regular secondary program at Murgon SHS, three reportedly have high levels of absenteeism.
- *of the 13* year 7s of the 2002 cohort from Cherbourg State School, **2 have dropped out of high school**. 3 students are attending secondary school away from Murgon, although one of these did not enroll until term 2. Of the 8 students remaining at Murgon SHS, 4 are participating in a special needs program.

⁴ The Annex program is an alternative to mainstream education program run by Murgon State High School

Parent Opinion Survey

Figure 4 is a chart comparing the overall parent satisfaction from 1998 to 2002 with the State Mean.

- Overall Parent satisfaction increased from 2.46 in 1998 to 3.03 in 1999 to be comparable with the State mean
- Overall Parent satisfaction increased to 3.42 in 2001 and 3.11 in 2002 to be flagged above the State mean



More comprehensive information relating to parent satisfaction is reflected in discussion about community perceptions of the Strong and Smart vision.

Community Surveys on the Strong and Smart Vision

In July 2003 a consultation team was established to conduct face-to-face surveys to determine the extent to which the people of Cherbourg were happy with the progress of the school. Those participating in the survey were asked how they felt about the school now, compared to how it was prior to the development of the 'Strong and Smart' vision. More specifically they were asked questions relating to:-

- the school progress in general;
- parent/community partnerships;
- principal/teacher leadership; and
- the Strong and Smart vision.

154 people participated in the survey. This consisted of 70 parents/caregivers, 23 Elders and 61 general community people.

Survey participants were asked to rate their perceptions against the following Ratings Legend.

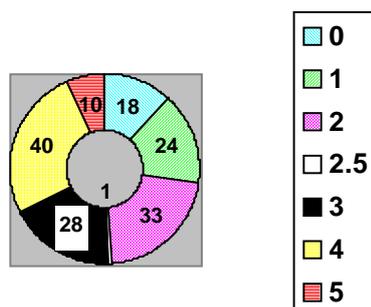
Ratings Legend	
0	No response
1	Very Poor
2	Poor
3	Satisfactory
4	Good
5	Very Good

The precise survey questions and subsequent tables and discussion are presented here for analyses.

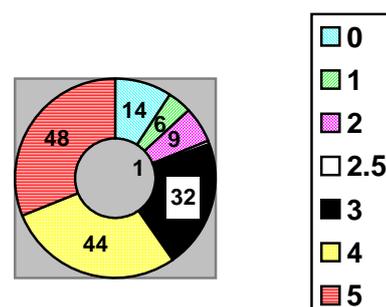
General School Progress

- What was the school like before?
- What is the school like now?
- What is the main difference?

Q1 - School Before



Q2 - School Now



When asked generally about the school before, 78 (50.6%) people provided a positive response compared to 124 (80.5%), who provide a positive response when asked about the school now.

48 participants (26%) surveyed described the school as very good now compared to only 10 (6%) when commenting on the school before.

In commenting on the main difference between school now and before, participants commented on a broad range of issues. Most prominently though were suggestions that the school has improved because attendance has been dramatically improved, expectations and performance of students seems to be higher, and further, that there are more Aboriginal people on staff at the school.

Individual responses include:-

Children are learning more (do more things, kids more interested, curriculum is better, picked up a lot).

Children like going to school a lot more; enjoy learning (attendance levels are much higher).

They are being taught discipline and respect and it shows in some children.

More interaction and consultation between staff and parents/community members.

More understanding of student needs, culture and community

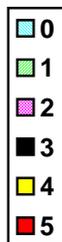
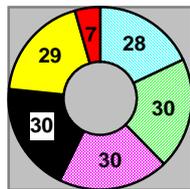
More incentives for kids to learn

Children are achieving and developing not only intellectually but artistically and culturally as well (eg producing their own music)

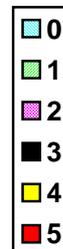
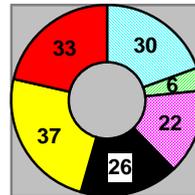
Parent/community partnerships

- What were the school and parent/community partnerships like before?
- What are school and parent/community partnerships like now?
- What is the main difference?

Q4 - Partnerships Before



Q5 - Partnerships Now



When asked specifically about school partnerships before, 66 (42.8%) people provided a positive response compared to 96 (62.3%), who provide a positive response when asked about the school now.

33 participants (21.4%) surveyed described the school as very good now compared to only 7 (4.6%) when commenting on the school before.

Again when commenting on the main differences participants provided a broad range of responses. Significantly though, many again felt that the main difference is the increased presence of an Aboriginal principal, Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides. It is worth noting that many participants noted the particular significance of having more Aboriginal males on staff at the school.

Individual responses include:-

The staff make me feel more welcome.

There's a more welcoming feeling in the principal's and teachers' attitudes towards the parents and community members; they feel part of the school, they encourage involvement.

You can talk straight with Chris.

School is being recognized by the outside world.

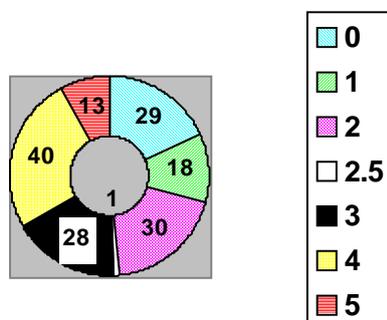
School and grounds are cleaner.

Aboriginal staff; Mr Sarra and more black men on staff (kids from single parent families show more respect to male staff).

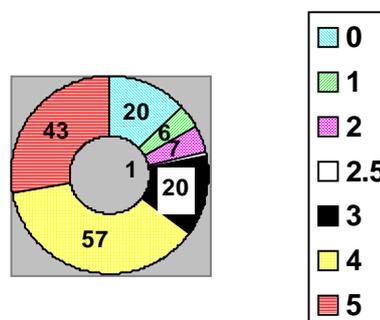
Principal/teacher leadership

- What was the principal/teacher leadership like before?
- What is it like now?
- What is the main difference?

Q7 - Leadership Before



Q8 - Leadership Now



When asked generally about school partnerships before, 53 (34.4%) people provided a positive response compared to 100 (64.9%), who provide a positive response when asked about the school now.

43 participants (27.9%) surveyed described the school as very good now compared to only 5 (3.2%) when commenting on the school before.

Not surprisingly most respondents again refer to the increased presence of Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal leadership within the school as the main factor contributing to positive leadership. Many refer specifically to an improved sense of communication between the school and the community, and again this is linked to a greater presence of Aboriginal people in the school.

Individual responses include:-

Better staff – (they show they care a lot about our children’s education; they want better outcomes for our children; they support our children)

Better behaviour management

Communicate well – (teachers are more likely to have relationships now, than before; they talk to parents)

Shows that a lot more can be done when the students’ education is a priority (more than just a job)

Principal now respects community input

It’s good that more Murri ways are being taught at school by Mr Blackman

Chris encourages positive attitudes in children and his staff – standards are set high

The white teachers have a better understanding of Murri kids

The ‘Strong and Smart’ vision

- What do you think of the Strong and Smart Vision at Cherbourg State School?
- What does it mean to you; your children; your family; your community?
- What difference does it make (or has it made) to the children?

On reflection on the school’s strong and smart vision, most of the 154 people surveyed described it as very good to excellent. Many commented that it made students feel a sense of pride and respect in themselves and their Aboriginal identity.

When asked what difference it makes to the children many suggested it makes them feel stronger and more positively about themselves.

Individual responses include:-

It gives them confidence.

The children bond together.

Makes us parents feel proud.

They respect their culture.

I get more respect (from the children).

It’s very powerful and strong

It’s very good – It’s excellent

Yes I know this is a good vision. If a person is not proud of being black then they are not honest with themselves and have got low self-esteem

It's good to keep on an equal par with other schools in Queensland

I think it is an ideal vision – one that recognizes the children's' culture and traditions s well as looking into the future

We didn't have the vision when we went to school – It would have been good

A complete analysis of survey responses is available at **Appendix One**.

Student Opinion

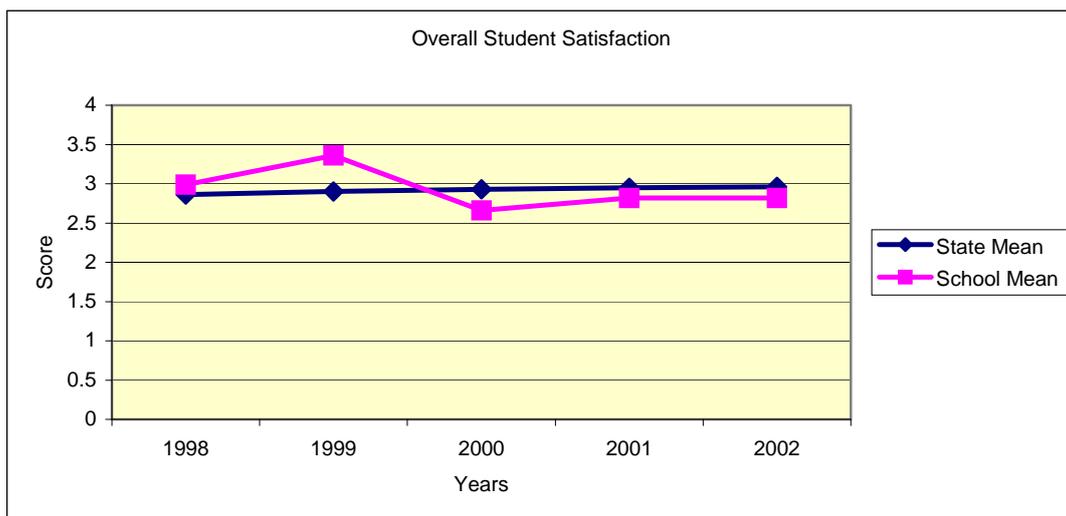
Student opinion presented here is articulated via two data sources. These include the Student Opinion Survey, and a survey about student perceptions of the Human Values in Education program.

Student Opinion Survey

Figure 5 is a chart comparing the overall student satisfaction from 1998 to 2002 with the State Mean.

- *Overall student satisfaction increased from 2.99 in 1998 to 3.36 in 1999 to be flagged above the State mean*
- *Overall student dis-satisfaction decreased to 2.66 in 2000, 2.82 in 2001 and 2.82 in 2002 to be comparable to the State mean*

Figure 5



Further analyses of student opinion are provided by the Human Values in Education survey.

Student survey on Human Values in Education

In August 2003, 17 students were surveyed in relation to their perceptions of the Human Values in Education program at Cherbourg State School.

- *In terms of **Academic** performance most students believe:-*
 - *they can work longer;*
 - *they can learn things faster; and*
 - *children are getting smarter.*

- *In terms of **Student Behaviour** most students believe:-*
 - *their teacher doesn't have to tell them what to do as much;*
 - *they feel safer playing in the playground;*
 - *the classroom is quieter now;*
 - *children follow classroom rules more often; and*
 - *the classroom is a more calm place to be.*

- *In terms of **Intrapersonal skills** most students believe:-*
 - *they are better than they used to be;*
 - *they like trying new things;*
 - *they are more likely to finish assignments;*
 - *they are better at getting their work finished;*
 - *children don't get as angry as they used to;*
 - *children wait in lines better;*
 - *they more often do their best work; and*
 - *they tell the truth more often.*

- *In terms of **Social skills** most students believe:-*
 - *students get along better;*
 - *children don't fight as much;*
 - *they do more things in the community;*
 - *they hear the words 'please' and 'thank you' more often;*
 - *the school grounds are cleaner;*
 - *other children show them more respect now;*
 - *there is less graffiti on the school grounds;*
 - *children are better at taking turns;*
 - *people use their manners more;*
 - *people listen better; and*
 - *classmates get along better.*

A more detailed analysis of student responses to the survey is at *Appendix Two (A)*.

Workforce

The complex nature of the Cherbourg State School community ensures that while it is unanimously perceived by staff as an extremely rewarding environment in which to work, it is an extremely challenging workplace, and one in which positive staff morale and a great sense of teamwork is crucial. This section presents some analyses of the workforce of Cherbourg State School, based on Staff Opinion Surveys, and a review of teacher and teacher aide perceptions. Importantly this section attempts to provide some insight into the ‘lived experience’ of teachers and teacher aides at the school. Three sources of data are examined in an effort to articulate workforce perceptions; the Staff Opinion Survey, a review of staff perceptions of the Human Values in Education program; and transcripts of one to one interviews.

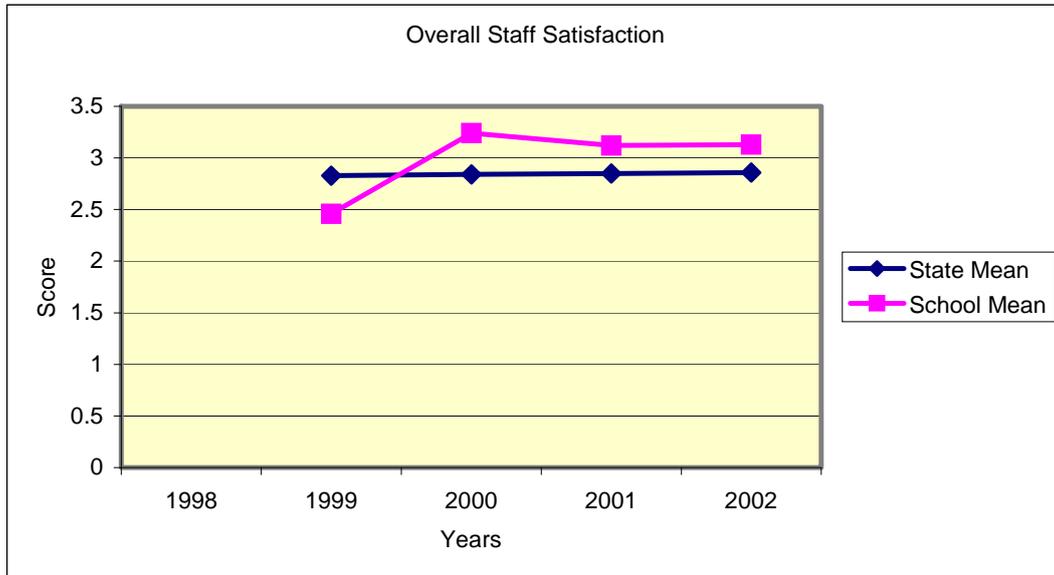
Staff Opinion Survey

Figure 6 is a chart comparing the overall staff satisfaction from 1999 to 2002 with the State Mean.

- *Overall staff satisfaction increased from 2.46 in 1999 to 3.24 in 2000 to be flagged above the State mean*
- *Overall staff satisfaction was 3.12 in 2001 and 3.13 in 2002 to remain flagged above the State mean*

Interestingly the 1999 Staff Opinion Survey result reflects the view of staff at the time when a culture of high expectation was introduced. Many teachers surveyed here had been at the school for lengthy periods ranging from 4 to 15 years. The new culture being introduced meant high expectations of staff as well as students. In 2000 five new teachers commenced at the school and this underpinned the development of dramatic overall school change.

Figure 6



Staff Survey on Human Values in Education

11 staff were surveyed in relation to their perceptions of the Human Values in Education program at Cherbourg State School.

- *In terms of **Academic** performance most staff believe:-*
 - *children are more receptive to learning;*
 - *children are better able to stay focused on tasks;*
 - *children grasp academic concepts faster;*
 - *childrens' academic results have improved; and*
 - *children are getting smarter.*

- *In terms of **Student Behaviour** most staff believe:-*
 - *they send less children to the office for behaviour issues;*
 - *playground behaviour has improved;*
 - *they are more confident that behaviour will be appropriate on excursions*
 - *the classroom is quieter when teaching;*
 - *children more often follow classroom rules; and*
 - *the classroom is a more calm place to be.*

- In terms of **Intrapersonal skills** most staff believe children:-
 - are more confident to speak in front of the classroom;
 - are more confident at tasks;
 - are more likely to take risks with learning;
 - are more likely to work independently;
 - are more likely to complete assignments;
 - complete independent work to a higher standard;
 - have greater control over their emotions;
 - show more patience towards others;
 - show greater leadership skills;
 - are more likely to tell the truth; and
 - will reflect on their work.

- In terms of **Social skills** most staff believe children:-
 - resolve conflict in a more peaceful manner;
 - participate more often in community activities;
 - use the words 'please' and 'thank you' more often;
 - are more likely to help their classmates;
 - keep the school grounds cleaner;
 - show more respect for others' opinions;
 - are more likely to take turns;
 - use values in their actions
 - use better listening skills in the classroom;
 - work more cooperatively; and
 - are more likely to use manners around adults.

A more detailed analysis of staff responses to the survey is at **Appendix Two (B)**.

Teacher and Teacher Aide Interviews

In term 4 2002, teachers and teacher aides were engaged in 45 minute interviews to get a deeper insight into their perceptions about working at the school and being involved in the 'strong and smart' vision. To some end it is worth investigating their perceptions separately. The following provides a collective account of their stories.

Teacher Perceptions

In overall terms the teachers discussed a range of issues including improved attendance and behaviour, expectations, what it was like at the start of their teaching time, and what it could be like in the future for the children they taught. In all of the discussions with teachers there was a very genuine sense of being an integral part of the school's progress.

Many teachers commented on the importance of setting high expectations for children and how this had contributed greatly to progress at the school.

The key here was setting high expectations of children. Previously, especially in the case of children with learning difficulties, the teacher asserted no or very low expectations.

Everyone worked hard and was convinced that the kids could do it. This was a sharp contrast from when (I) arrived when the staff seemed only to be united by a feeling that the kids were not capable of anything.

Key focus proved to be the overall emphasis by the school on pushing expectations and not letting the kids sink to a lowest common denominator.

When (I) first came to Cherbourg State School a regular practice was the setting of 'Free Play'. In practice this meant the abandonment by the teacher of any attempt to educate the children. It also reinforced an attitude in the kids that if they acted up they could avoid work and the teachers were colluding in that. 'Free Play' was so indicative of low teacher expectations that locked teachers into a vicious cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies... 'Free Play' is now a thing of the past. Kids finish their work and come to the teacher and ask for more.

Previous Principals had allowed kids to do what they wanted. As a result they had run wild.

It is pleasing to note that all teachers overwhelmingly appreciated and valued the knowledge, skill and expertise of the Indigenous teacher aides, as well as the need to connect with parents and the broader community.

(My) advice to any teacher coming to Cherbourg would be to talk to (Family Support Worker), Hooper Coleman and establish contact with the community.

.. getting to know the parents through parent-teacher interviews was invaluable... (I) stress the importance of getting to know the parents of the children and to form a partnership with them in the education of their children.

Teachers also referred to a great sense of teamwork.

The school is a real team school.

It was important to get to know the rest of staff and work as a team.

One of the best things that happened was when a colleague had come and said (I) am doing a good job with the class. This truly made my day.

2001 had been a very good year for the school. The staff were riding high on a curve. It was for everyone concerned 'a very productive year'.

Within those discussions about teamwork there was reference to the notion that together as a team, and in partnership with the community, we had changed the culture of the school from one which was largely quite negative, to one that was extremely positive.

The emphasis was on the child coming to school not to be minded, but to work and achieve.

Cherbourg kids now go to high school having done year 7 work.

... there had been a change in the peer culture. Previously students had used the peer culture as a cop out. They didn't have to work; they didn't have to care about the consequences of not working and not attending. Now the peer culture had been transformed into a 'pro-school culture'. Kids no longer hunted teachers in packs with the collective aim of destroying the lesson.

It has been good to be on board... In (my) opinion the staff had performed work for the kids and the community that personally feels 'historic' in terms of the education that has been provided.

One student had gone from struggling through one book to 'storming' through 65. A student phoned me up to talk about the books he had read and how he was progressing with his reading.

What had been achieved here was the creation of a different 'we' from that which used to rule at Cherbourg. The old anti-study solidarity had made way for a work culture, where pupils enjoyed each other's success... solidarity now was created at the point of scholastic achievement rather than at the point of misbehaviour or absenteeism.

The kids now know when they are not being 'strong and smart'. It may be true that kids from other schools may be smarter, but they could never be 'stronger' than the kids from Cherbourg.

Teacher Aide perceptions

As noted earlier it is worth considering teacher aide perceptions separately from those of teachers. The perceptions of Aboriginal teacher aides are made very distinct by a sense of knowing that while teachers will come and go from Cherbourg State School, they are

essentially there for 'the long haul'. Against this background the notion that their role in the school is crucial, is clearly and readily underlined.

Most of the teacher aides on staff are local Aboriginal people from Cherbourg. During the survey and interview process many took time to reflect on their own experiences as a student in school. Several attended Cherbourg State School as children.

The curriculum of course was Euro centric... so Captain Cook had discovered Australia and no one was here before him... It was clear the desired outcome was from the school was 'tame black fullas' who could be a source of cheap labour.

...(I) wondered why I was learning about the tall ships and not about my mother tongue. The school was negative and against Aboriginal culture. In many ways it was like a boot camp.

An appreciation for renewed approaches to teaching and more culturally relevant curriculum programs is clearly evident.

The Aboriginal Studies Program is central to the change in the kids. The Elders used to come to the school infrequently and now they come every day... This helps give the children their identity.

In terms of the attitude of staff, formerly this had been one where the school was 'just a black school'. They had stuck with it for the money. Those staff with that attitude have been weeded out. Now the staff is genuinely here for the kids.

Respect for Indigenous culture is crucial to all of this. The staff have to know about and understand Aboriginal culture. Formerly this was not so. For instance a former member of staff had pushed non-Indigenous culture aggressively. That would never happen at Cherbourg State School now.

The Aboriginal Studies Program was vital to the school's success. It told the kids where they came from. It told them about what their grandparents knew and had been through. They did not want to lose that part of their culture.

The role of the teacher aide in the school has a tendency to be of 'higher stakes' and this is clearly recognized.

Without (teacher aides) the teachers would not be able to bridge the gap between themselves and the community. They are part of the way of thinking and they help the teachers understand and give feedback from the community.

As a member of the community (I) can talk to parents if the kids had a problem with drinking at home. The majority of kids do come to the teacher aides and talk to them about their problems. They rely on the aides for support and to do something for them if there is a problem.

The role of the teacher aides was vital. They belonged to the community. They had done it. Their nephews and nieces were everywhere in the school. The family bonds between the aides and the kids were very important and this helped the teachers to do their jobs.

In many ways (I) didn't feel like a teacher aide but more like a parent or a father figure. A very important part of gaining respect from the kids was the fact that the aides knew the parents.

All of the teacher aides reflected positively on the changes at the school.

The new values that the school was promoting was becoming embedded in their brains. They learned them and lived them. This can be seen in the new school gardens and the performance of the kids in cleaning up the school. Now they are proud of their school.

The community could see the difference in the kids. They saw them smiling and happy to go to school. Bullying was being stamped out and the parents appreciated that. The school was now becoming a "safe house" for the kids. Added to this the encouragement from the staff, the rewards for efforts, the free lunches at McDonalds, and the ice blocks had all added excitement and fun to the experience of trying to do well.

When (I) started working at Cherbourg things were totally different. There was no school parade, uniform or school song. The kids just played and ignored the bell. They simply would not go into classes. Now it is a different story. All the smaller kids and the smarter kids from the older classes know that it is their school. So there is less vandalism. The smashing of windows is no longer a regular occurrence. Stealing has been stamped out. The kids in Year Five have been at the school since they were babies. They say it is "our school". They tell other kids "Don't wreck it".

Cherbourg State School is 'top of the charts' in Aboriginal community schools and moving up to the 'Top 20' of all state schools.

Parents respect the teacher aides because they can see results. One parent bought (me) a six pack because his child was happy. Previously the child had been stuck in the house in front of the TV. Now his son was out at school and was not afraid to talk to his parents about what was happening at school. When (I) get feed back like this from the community (I) feel proud.

A new and much more positive sense of hope for the future of the children of Cherbourg is reflected.

The kids had worked out under the previous system that if they really misbehaved then they got extra attention and got taken on trips and got made a fuss of. It never occurred to the people that were running the previous policies that the misbehaviour was learned behaviour and they had done the reinforcing of that same bad behaviour. Maybe at the heart of previous policy was the expectation that Aboriginal kids would be delinquent. Now the school and the staff expected the kids to behave as Aborigines, not as delinquents.

The teachers had once just been there for the money. Now they were there to support and help the children. They genuinely cared. He felt that gradually the

kids were learning that if you are strong and smart you can overcome any problem.

The school motto 'Strong and Smart' is the theme for the kids, which makes them proud and not "myall⁵" with their heads down as if they were beaten. We drum it into the kids constantly and they are beginning to react. No one wants to be "weak and stupid". Now the kids are saying it to each other. Recently (I) met an ex-pupil who was now at Murgon High and he said that he now understood what Mr Sarra was talking about. He saw white kids laughing at Aboriginal kids when they failed at school. He now felt he had to be 'Strong and Smart' and not let white people put him down.

Conclusions

In closing it is probably pertinent to offer some personal reflections on the progress of the school under my leadership and the 'Strong and Smart' vision. Some of these reflections have already been articulated throughout this report, but are worth revisiting.

- *Children these days are much more happier at school than when I first started. There is less putting each other down, and more praising each other up;*
- *Children borrow a CD player to practice dance moves in front of everyone at lunch time without feeling shame and without being put down by others;*
- *New children who come to the school and 'play up' are ostracized to the extent they have to conform to being 'strong and smart' so they can fit in with the others;*
- *Children are no longer afraid to read to the school on parade;*
- *Children are no longer embarrassed to receive 'Student of the Week' Awards;*
- *Most children are highly competent in the use of ICTs;*
- *One student (in Year 5) rang her mum on Palm Island a few years ago to say "Mum, I read a book today!". The following year she had read 60 books before the end of Semester One;*
- *Children stay in class all day unlike in the past when there would only be about 4 or 5 students in classrooms for the last session;*
- *Children run to class when the bell goes;*
- *Children have fun and are actively engaged in learning all of the time;*
- *Classrooms look and feel like classrooms, and not like baby-sitting facilities;*
- *Classroom curriculum now goes way beyond basic literacy and Numeracy;*

⁵ Myall: feeling shame about yourself

- *Many children in classrooms are working at their rightful year levels;*
- *Today we have a special needs class and can genuinely identify and attend to children with special needs much more effectively;*
- *The school grounds are cleaner;*
- *Five years ago I would have to report more than 20 broken windows every Monday; lately I might report about 2 to 3 a month;*
- *Before I had to discipline children at least 3 to 5 times a day. Today I would discipline children 3 to 5 times a fortnight;*
- *Teachers come to work early and go home late;*
- *Teachers mix and get out in the community in a much more positive way;*
- *Teacher aides are highly committed and much more reliable;*
- *Much less parent conflict and dissatisfaction;*
- *Visitors have difficulty telling the difference between who are the teachers and who are the teacher aides;*
- *There is a 'real' sense of Indigenous ownership and control of the directions of the school;*
- *The children feel stronger and smarter and act stronger and smarter;*
- *They are proud to be Aboriginal;*
- *The place feels like a school!*

Sometimes people in Cherbourg, or visitors to our school, say to me that they are happy that *I* have been able to make such changes. However, the extent of the changes that have occurred at Cherbourg State School in the past four years cannot be attributed to just one person. There is no way that just one person can achieve all that has been achieved.

As I reflect on the dramatic changes within the school, I think the most important things I did was **believe** in the people already at Cherbourg, as well as the new teaching team that was established, and be prepared to value and act upon what they had to say, to the extent that it **truly** influenced the directions of the school.

Of course it is true that many of the people at Cherbourg did not have all of the flash education degrees, but they, like the teachers and me, harboured an intense passion and desire to see change in the school, and to see our children become 'young and black and deadly'.

At Cherbourg State School we are all highly committed to our work; we are all highly committed to our school; and we are all highly committed to the children of our school.

This has been enough, to change the direction of the school. Day (1994:101) notes the importance of making the learning environment purposeful for children.

Our purpose is to get them ‘Strong and Smart’.

Chris Sarra
Principal
Cherbourg State School, Queensland

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Appendix One

Cherbourg State School – Review by Exception

Interview Questions Community Consultation June 2003

- a) Community responses*
- b) Parents and caregivers responses*
- c) Elders responses*

Appendix Two

School Survey on Human Values in Education Program

- a) Student Responses**
- b) Staff Response**