

## **FROM DR MICHAEL BARTON – PRINCIPAL DJARRGUN COLLEGE – 23/06/2022**

Internal and external investigations continue into the Monday's incident. The College is open. A contingent of boys are boarding at the Wilderness Centre campus for convenience of police access for interviews.

In relation to former mayor (2016) Mr Percy Neal's comments, he has not requested a meeting with Dr Michael Barton, nor ever met with him, however Dr Barton extends an opportunity to meet to discuss his concerns. Note that Yarrabah has a place-based state secondary school and that the current Mayor (of 8 years) has met with Dr Barton and other school leaders and actively involved and supportive of the school.

Djarrgun College assesses all enrolment applications fairly. Like many other boarding facilities and hostels throughout the Cairns region, the College accepts applications from remotely located Northern Territory families where in most instances there is no other secondary school option.

The College's Netat Bama Kodimir (NBK) Committee (ATSI staff advisory group that meets weekly) assists and supports the school and its leadership teams to continually develop and improve cultural competence, health, social wellbeing, emotional wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing. Staff from this group engage with the communities and families in the NT and all other communities from which the students come from. Inclusion is a very strong value of the College and the (NBK) Committee. The Committee is the core group that coordinates the relationship with Indigenous communities and visits to the College by Elders and other cultural and family leaders. The College stands for inclusion and cannot cater for only one or two language groups. All students are encouraged to live and work together and to leave kinship differences in their communities.

Djarrgun College is home to an extremely vulnerable population of students and families (from more than 50 ancestral language groups) that present with a diversity of complex social, often class-based challenges also shared by other school communities such as Mareeba, Smithfield, Woree, Trinity Bay, and Bentley Park College where school-based police officers are staffed permanently. As part of Djarrgun's ongoing management of school safety procedures programs such as these available to the State schools should be considered in collaboration with the independent school communities who fulfil an important educational role for these young people.

The College leadership is listening and works tirelessly to support students and families to meet the complex factors of transgenerational adverse structural impacts. It provides education and support that no other school can or will. No one else picks up kids door to door because these kids are often homeless, or pick up laundry from their homeless families, or delivers food during COVID lockdown, or offer cultural outreach services, or internet connections in remote homes during COVID schooling. The College works tirelessly through the complexities brought about by chronic disadvantage.

The College staff are committed to providing opportunities for its Indigenous students in school and beyond. The Health Clinic on site provides wrap around medical, health and

wellbeing support to students and families to grow health seeking behaviours. Our students generally start school typically academically behind levels of non-indigenous peers.

The school and its boarding facilities and practices are highly regulated and regularly reviewed. It should be noted that there is not parity in funding of boarding facilities – Djarragun as an Independent College receives a great deal less in state and federal incentives due to its Independent status, despite the level of poverty experienced by the families enrolled. Djarragun College would welcome equity in funding as it receives a third of the National Indigenous Australians Agency Boarding Pathways funding that other local boarding facilities (Indigenous) receive despite the school also providing for education.