CONTEXT

Cowell Area School is an R-12 school catering for approx 175 students in a small rural/seaside community. Farming, Aquaculture, Tourism and Mining are the main industries along with services which provide support. Students are co-operative and engaged in their schooling and reflect supportive family backgrounds within an active community. The past three years have been especially difficult because of the drought. Drought relief has been available to families for the past three years.

School card holders comprise 22% of the school population. The school is serviced by two DECS school buses which transport approximately 17% of the student population. The Site Improvement Plan highlights three major areas: Continuing to raise the standards in learner achievement especially in Literacy and Numeracy, Maths and Science: Improving learner well-being, inclusion and intervention: Reforming Senior Secondary Pathways and Transition to the world of work.

2009

This year saw new leadership in the school a new Principal and Deputy Principal and a number of new staff. One of the school’s coordinators was on leave for term one.

Discussions held with the Principal and Deputy using the DIAF Review demonstrated clearly that both the staff and the Governing Council were looking for a different direction for the school. A list of priorities was drawn up and shared and this began the initial strategic directions document. At the heart of these changes “Attending to Culture” ranked highly and was therefore the first place we began.

To enhance the social capital of the school it was essential to listen to the staff, parents and students to gather their ideas and opinions and look to ways in which we could have an impact on managing change.

It seemed that there had been issues in student behaviour management, systems and decision making and clarity of roles in some instances. A number of staff reported that they felt “business” in the school had been carried out behind closed doors.

Meeting and decision making processes were clarified. An undertaking was given by Leadership to review a number of policies with staff and ensure that they reflected the beliefs of the staff as a whole.
Literacy and Numeracy.

Literacy results across the school are good especially in the Junior School. Running records demonstrate a high level of interaction in both Literacy and numeracy.

Year 1:

Year 2:

Intervention and Special Needs

6.5% of our students are identified with significant special needs under the Students with Disabilities guidelines. Another 16% are identified as having specific needs and are supported by the school through SSO and LAP support.

It was clear that a number of students in the school had not been assessed in relation to their specific learning needs and the Deputy undertook to carry out this role. The outcome of this has been the allocation of time/funds to many students across the school and the employment of SSO staff to support one to one support in some cases. Physical resourcing is taking longer but many plans are in train. The IVEC course (Certificate I of Employment) was purchased and is in use in the senior school to further support our NEP students in literacy and numeracy skills.

Parents report that they are very pleased with the progress made. See Parent Opinion Survey:

This will be an ongoing process and students move through the school and new children arrive. It has to be said that since these strategies have been put into place student behaviour has improved noticeably with limited or no exits from classes and students saying they feel more able to seek help as needed.

Comments from parents and staff have referred to the calm nature of the school now and the growing respect shown by all parties to each other. From a well-being perspective this is what we would always be aiming for.

Governing Council took the opportunity to have governance training and similar opportunities were taking up by the Aquaculture Committee in particular.
A thorough review of finances was undertaken and clarification sought about some earlier decisions and whether they would still be relevant. A more equitable allocation system was applied. 

Strategic Plan attached


Science and Maths
Considerable work has been done in both of these areas. The Middle School Coordinator and Maths teachers are part of the Numeracy in the Middle Years and One Senior School staff member completed the Maths Science Initiatives Program successfully. Project through Flinders University and the feedback for them has been outstanding. Science through Aquaculture has become much more of a focus as we endeavour to reconnect the curriculum to our ‘hands on’ areas of the school. Cowell has mostly Science and Maths teachers on the staff in Middle and Senior School.

We have been successful in achieving grants through sustainable futures and have used this funding to establish hydroponic vegetable gardens and to venture into permaculture. We have invested in new science equipment and are currently running a course in Forensic Science with connections and excursions to Flinders University for support.

Facilities
The school is waiting for information about a major redevelopment which was to begin during the year. The impact of this would be significant in the short term through disruption and in the longer term by the provision of fantastic new resources and a learning centred environment. Twelve months later we are still waiting and hope to hear any day if we have been successful. The budget has blown out considerably to 4.6 million dollars and so, once approved by the Minister will go to public works and through parliament for approval.

The Federal Government’s commitment to schools through BER funding saw us investigate plans for a community gym complex only to have the council be unsuccessful in their part of the application for funding. Back to the drawing board and it was agreed that we would build a four classroom area for the middle primary students.

This led us to rethink the junior area of the school and investigate the possibility of refurbishment with School Pride Funding.

ANTA funding will to further provide space teaching space in the Aqua area.

Trade Training Centre
A consortium across Eyre and Western involving agreements with twelve other sites and TAFE has been successful delivering approx
$800,000 to Cowell Area School across the two areas of Seafood and Marine and Metal Fabrication. These projects are also connected the major redevelopment of the new Technical Studies building and its resourcing.

**Aquaculture**

After a review in 2008 it was very clear that the school and department thought that the Aquaculture project should be shut down. It was no longer inclusive of students, no students were attending from across the state and if it was closed it would have little or no impact on the current curriculum offerings in the school.

The new Principal thought this was a huge waste of a great resource and set about trying to ascertain if there were any other options. After clarifying with the Aquaculture committee their roles and responsibilities a plan was drawn up to look into a number of options. Finally there seemed to be four choices. The status quo, research and development, close the whole enterprise or take it on as a full blown business with the expectation that it would and could be self sustaining within two years. The final option was the one finally chosen. It has to be said here that the impact and enthusiasm of the members of the Aquaculture committee provided the momentum for change which needed to be made.

A new manager was employed and very clear role statement was provided in this process. Clarity of the committees’ role was also stressed. A business plan was established modelled on oyster leases of a similar size over a two year span. The oyster lease was cleared of old stock and contact made with suppliers in Tasmania was re-established. Enormous benefit for the school has been gained through the Oyster Growers Association for which we remain very grateful. Three staff travelled to Tasmania to look at the science involved in the breeding and export of spat. This provided further impetus to encourage staff to take some ownership of the overall area. Two science teachers now use this area constantly and students are always engaged in some learning tasks in the Marine Science Centre. Seafood/Marine runs as a newly written integrated curriculum. At the time of writing it is early days but our plans certainly seem to be having a very positive impact.

**Boarding House**

At the same time as the review of the Aquaculture Program took place the Boarding House by the very fact that it was established to support Aquaculture was a risk of closing. Again advice was sought from the department in her SARSAP manager’s role.

The boarding house is a fantastic facility so a lot thought went into how we could utilise it in a different way.
We looked at the idea of an accommodation facility. If we changed our focus in Aquaculture to a work experience model and enlivened our connections with Flinders University as well as local schools and centre we could offer the boarding house at minimal cost to groups and it would be capable of becoming self sustaining. A briefing has been sent to the department supplying all details necessary to have the re-classification accepted and acknowledged.

**Teacher Qualifications**

3 Staff have multiple degrees, 2 have Masters Degrees in Education and one is enrolled for a Doctorate, 5 staff have two Degrees and various certification across a range of subjects. 7 staff have Degrees in Education and Graduate Diplomas in Education. 2 Staff have Diploma of Teaching.

**Workforce composition including Indigenous**

Cowell has 14 female teaching staff and 4 male teaching staff. We have no Indigenous employees.

**Student Attendance**

This graph demonstrates the effects of remote country living. Absenteeism is often associated with the need for families to travel for medical and other services requiring all children in the family to be away from school. It also clearly demonstrates the outcome of independent students in Year 12 struggling to maintain work and school.

**How absenteeism is managed**

We have established systems for recording attendance and follow up mechanisms in place. Calls are made to families and case work is instituted when students are in senior school and are working and or living independently. Many of the absent days in 2009 were related to a small number of students who went on extended holidays around Australia, suffered prolonged illness or family misfortune.

**Rates for each year level and whole school**
Senior Secondary Outcomes

See the attached graph


28% of Year 12 students achieved competencies in VET.

Parent Student, Teacher satisfaction


Post school destinations

In 2009 Cowell have 11 students in Year 12 completing their SACE. Two students have gone on to TAFE, (one will then enter the police force) the others are all in full time work.

Income (As attached)