



**Yirara College**  
of the Finke River Mission Inc  
ABN 12 832 689 950

**SCHOOL  
PERFORMANCE  
REPORT  
2010**

*This report has been prepared in accordance with the Schools Assistance Act 2008 and Administrative guidelines as regulated by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Workplace Relations.*

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## Part (1) Contextual Information about the school

### (a) History of the School

Yirara College was established in September 1973 as a government secondary residential college specifically for traditionally-oriented Aboriginal students from remote communities in the Central Australian region. The main objective of the college was to provide Aboriginal youth with educational programs that advanced academic and life skills, and widened socio-cultural understanding and outlook to allow successful integration into mainstream Australian society.

In 1991 the Northern Territory government decided to pursue a privatisation option for Yirara similar to that pursued and enacted for Kormilda College in Darwin in 1988. Expressions of interests were sought from various organisations. The majority of Aboriginal people living in the feeder communities in Central Australia expressed their support for Yirara College becoming a Christian college. They also expressed significant support for the proposal that the college be operated under the management of the Finke River Mission (FRM).

Later in 1991 negotiations began between FRM, Central Australian Aboriginal parent-family groups, the Northern Territory Government and the Federal Government with the aim of FRM assuming control of the college under a suitable funding arrangement from the beginning of 1993. A compelling factor in FRM's consideration to undertake the management of college was that the change in status from government to non-government would give effect to the clearly-expressed view of Aboriginal people that Yirara be a Christian school where students learn about God. Among the conditions under which the college was given to FRM was the condition that Aboriginal people would be involved in the governance of the college.

In 1993 Yirara College officially became a non-government provider of education. Its name was changed to *Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc* to reflect that it was now operating as a school under the auspices of the Lutheran Church of Australia. Since that time the college has continued to enjoy significant support from the Aboriginal families in Central Australia, and in more recent times, increasing support from communities in the Top End of NT.

## **(b) Yirara College in 2010**

Yirara College is a vibrant and busy community providing a wide range of academic, pathways, recreational, sporting, life-skills and social development programs for students. These programs are run through the two educational divisions of the college: the day school and the residential facility. The academic program is carried out predominantly in the day school and the social development program predominantly through the residential program, but other programs, e.g. life-skills and sport, operate across both divisions. The vision of the college is:

**To be an excellent provider of Christ-centred education, encompassing life-long learnings for Indigenous youth from remote Australia.**

Developing the English languages skills of students in oracy and literacy is a key objective of the college. Corollary objectives include providing students with experiences to help them develop an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which the English language operates, and confidence in using spoken English in accordance with the expected protocols of social exchange.

Despite the importance of developing the English language skills and socio-cultural understandings of students, Yirara College celebrates the fact that it is a cross-cultural community. Our students come with their own world-views, Aboriginal language background and priorities. Sadly, many also come with the latent scars of complex trauma and grief as a result of belonging to communities that are affected by the longitudinal loss or diminution of language, country and law. Accordingly, Yirara recognises the importance of respecting and affirming the identity of each student. Yirara is also fully cognisant of its responsibilities to the Aboriginal families who are willing to entrust their children to the college's care for significant periods of time. The teaching of vernacular language, the observance of Aboriginal *mores* as guided by our parent-reference group, (e.g. separation of gender groups in particular contexts), assisting students to attend funerals and other significant social and cultural events during Term time, valuing regular communication with families as partners in education, are some ways in which the college affirms the identity of its students and seeks to honour the trust families have placed in the college. But beyond this, the majority of our students come from communities where Christian missionaries have worked. And so it is especially in the context of a shared faith in Jesus Christ that staff and students come together in a united way each day at our morning chapel service to proclaim that we are "One Family, God's Family."

The majority of students come to Yirara with low-level achievement in the core areas of literacy and numeracy learning. The college seeks to accelerate the learning of all students by providing suitably scaffolded teaching and learning programs for students to the Year 10 level. Students who attain at higher levels enter the Stage 1 and 2 NTCET program at Centralian College while continuing to board at Yirara. Students whose levels of attainment preclude them from mainstream senior secondary studies are offered a rich program of integrated learning and Vocational Education and Training in which their literacy and numeracy learning is embedded in authentic contexts. These learning experiences then become possible pathways for students to move into employment. The college's Pathways program individually case manages and monitors students as they transition from school to employment.

2010 has been a year of change in the life of Yirara College. Part of this change includes the appointment of a new Principal, Dr Andrew Mirtschin, in August. He replaced Mrs Gail Donaldson who had filled the position in an acting capacity since mid-2009. At the end of the year, long-serving senior staff members Mrs Fay Genuth (Assistant Principal) and Mr Murray Schwab (Business Manager) retired from their respective position.

Yirara College is a 24 hour, 7 days-a-week boarding school. The lights never go off during Term time. Yirara is blessed with a highly dedicated and committed staff, many of whom feel called to work in this context. There are significant challenges for all staff in meeting the diverse needs of our students, and our efforts must be combined and supportive of each other if our students are to be well served. With challenge comes reward, and working at Yirara is truly a rewarding experience. The relational nature of our students and their families leaves a lasting impression on all who work at the college. To work with Aboriginal students, our first Australian brothers and sisters, in the end is the work of enormous privilege. May God continue to bless the students and staff of the college, and the families who entrust their children to our care and safe-keeping!

## Part (2) Teacher Standards and Qualifications

All staff hold current Working With Children (“Ochre”) Cards and teaching staff are registered with the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board. All staff receive Professional Development as required by Lutheran Education Australia, the Lutheran Schools Association (LSA) and the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board. This includes continually updating the knowledge and skills of teachers for Educational and Spiritual enrichment. Additional Professional Development is offered to staff to meet the needs of the College’s Strategic Plan with a particular emphasis on Cultural Orientation.

The qualifications of Yirara’s teaching staff are as follows:

Last Name	First Name	Qualification 1	Qualification 2	Qualification 3
Botha	Sherill	H Dip Education		
Cann	David	Dip DM	NSW Teaching Certificate	
Casey	Andrew	Bachelor of Teaching	B Teaching & Learning	
Chapman	Jennifer	Grad Dip Arts	Dip Teaching	
Chapman	Suzanne	B Education		
Dietz	Peter	B Education		
Doecke	Neville	B Education	Grad Dip Theology	Dip Lutheran Education
Drury	Nigel	BA Fine Arts	Grad Dip Education	
Eckermann	Judy	Dip Teaching	Grad Dip Theology	
Hutchins	Diana	BA Arts	Grad Dip Education	
Johns	Sarah	B Education	Masters Education	
Keating	Josh	B Education		
Keegan	Emma	B Education		
Map	Malaserah	B Education	Cert Teach	
Mayne	Kellie	B Education		
Mirtschin	Andrew	B Science (Hons)	PhD Theoretical Physics	Dip Education
Modlin	Russell	B Arts	Grad Dip Education	MA Education
O'Conner	Ben	B Arts	Grad Dip Teaching	
Onkundi	Miriam	B Education		
Qualischefski	Antony	BA Humanities	Grad Dip Education	Grad Cert Ed Leadership
Qualischefski	Rebecca	B of Teaching		
Reading	Julia	B Science	Dip Teaching	Grad Dip Info Science
Smith	Julia	B Education	MA Education	
Spiers	Elisa	Dip Education	MA Education	B Arts
Westmoreland	Linda	BA Visual Arts	Grad Dip Education	
Wierenga	David	B Arts	B Teaching	

### Part (3) Workforce Composition

Staff details as at the 2010 Commonwealth Census were as follows:

<b>Teaching Staff</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	9	-	9.0
Female	11	1.1	12.1
<b>Total Full-time Equivalent</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>21.1</b>

<b>Non-Teaching Staff</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	28	3.9	31.9
Female	17	7.5	24.5
<b>Total Full-time Equivalent</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>56.4</b>

The above includes three full time and two part time indigenous staff.

## Part (4) Student Attendance

Student attendance as per the 2010 DEEWR collection was as follows:

### ALICE SPRINGS CAMPUS

<b>Rates of Attendance</b>	<b>% 2010</b>
Year 7	93.7%
Year 8	93.7%
Year 9	95.8%
Year 10	95.7%
<b>Total Average Attendance</b>	<b>94.0%</b>

### Composition of Student Body (100% Indigenous):

Males:	62
Females:	65
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TOTAL:	127
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### KINTORE CAMPUS

<b>Rates of Attendance</b>	<b>% 2010</b>
Ungraded	33.9%

### Composition of Student Body (100% Indigenous):

Males:	5
Females:	14
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TOTAL:	19
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### Procedure for management of non-attendance

Parents are contacted by the school to confirm the reason for non attendance on the days of absence. All absences are documented in our electronic student administration system (QUAD) and patterns of non-attendance may be followed up directly with parents/carers. Total days absent are recorded on student reports.

## Part (5) Student outcomes in standardised national literacy and numeracy testing.

### Academic Performance

Yirara College draws students from remote locations across the Northern Territory and over the border into Western Australia, South Australian and Queensland. The majority of students entering Yirara have low levels of oracy and literacy in Standard Australian English, and generally operate at well below an age-for-grade level in numeracy. Many students have English as a second or third language, and a worldview that is predominantly shaped by community life and the distorted images of the Western world as portrayed through the media. Accordingly there are significant challenges for many of our students in knowing how to respond to the NAPLAN testing instrument and in understanding the mainstream socio-cultural assumptions implicit in many of the questions. Students do, however, move ahead in their literacy and numeracy development if they stay at Yirara for a period of time, but as is common with ESL students a plateau effect can occur once students move beyond the rudiments of literacy (Year 5 and beyond) and are asked to engage in tasks requiring higher levels of English comprehension. Low-level competency in English oracy also contributes significantly to the plateau effect.

The strongly ESL background of our students is reflected in the College's 2010 NAPLAN results where most Year 7 and Year 9 students fall below the benchmark in Numeracy, Reading, Writing, Spelling and Grammar. It is universally known that ESL/EFL students are up to 5 to 7 years behind their first-language speaking counterparts. It is unfortunate that our students cannot be assessed against Year 3 and Year 5 benchmarks to measure their progress as ESL/EFL students.

	<b>Against Benchmark</b>	<b>Numeracy</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Spelling</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Grammar</b>
<b>Year 7 Students</b>	Below Yr 7 Benchmark	24	28	23	27	27
	At Yr 7 Benchmark	4	0	2	1	1
	Above Yr 7 Benchmark	0	0	3	0	0

	<b>Against Benchmark</b>	<b>Numeracy</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Spelling</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Grammar</b>
<b>Year 9 Students</b>	Below Yr 9 Benchmark	23	23	21	25	24
	At Yr 9 Benchmark	1	1	3	0	0
	Above Yr 9 Benchmark	0	0	0	0	0

## Part (6) Parent, student and Teacher satisfaction with the school

In 2009, Lutheran Education Australia initiated the Better Schools Project, providing staff, students and families the opportunity to provide feedback regarding various aspects of school life. In 2011, Lutheran Education Australia have conducted this survey again which will provide the opportunity to compare data from 2009 to 2011. The results from the 2011 survey are not currently available, but will form part of the School Performance Report in 2011.

In June of 2010, however, the College did conduct an in-depth review of its relationship with the parents of the College and the community, the narrative of which is as follows:

### Governing Council

An important element in the College's relationship with its feeder communities is through the operation of the Governing Council. This body is the major conduit by which the wishes of parents are reflected in the policies and practices of the College. In 2010, the Governing council consisted of Aboriginal leaders from remote communities as diverse as Katherine, Tjuwampa, Docker River, Hermannsburg, Haasts Bluff, Alcoota, Jilkminggan, Titjikala and Papunya.

In 2010, the Governing Council met on four occasions: 5 March, 14 May, 20 August and 30 October. At these meetings the male and female members of the Governing Council meet separately first of all to consider a range of issues within the college and/or raise their own issues or concerns. Members of the College's Extended Executive group divide themselves between the two groups. A plenary session is then held when feedback from the earlier meetings is given, and reports from the Chairman, Principal, Assistant Principal, Director of Teaching and Learning, College Chaplain, Student Coordinators, Heads of Boarding and the Business Manager are presented. The Chair of the Governing Council in 2010 is Mr Clinton Spencer of Ntaria/Yuendumu.

The College listens very carefully when its Governing Council speaks, and the attitudes and wishes of the Governing Council are a constant reference point for the College in making important decisions regarding college programs and practices.

### Community Liaison Office

In 2010, the Community Liaison Office of the College continued to be the significant continuous connection of the College to the families of our students. The role of this Office, consisting of two full-time CLOs and a full-time Administration Support Officer, is to recruit students, speak with parents about how their children are faring at Yirara, conduct community meetings, deal with student behaviour issues, manage homesickness and organise the incoming and outgoing travel arrangements required to get students to and from the College. Much of CLOs' time is spent "on the road" regularly travelling to the disparate feeder communities to talk with families about college programs, student welfare issues and to listen to parents' views on their child/children's education at Yirara.

### Priming

At the beginning of each term in 2010, the residential facility staff travel to the closer communities to Yirara to “prime” (help prepare) students in readiness for their return to Yirara and to meet their family members. Priming creates another important means by which community members can meet and engage with the staff of the college, and build relationships of trust and mutual respect. Priming is also as valuable cultural professional development activity, especially for staff members who have not lived in or previously visited remote communities.

### Student engagement in local events

In addition to all of the college-initiated engagements with our feeder remote communities, 2010 saw an ever higher engagement by our students with the local Alice Springs community. Students participated in major local events such as the Alice Springs Desert Festival, the Henley-on-Todd dry river race, and the local children’s literature festival. The school also supported and assisted students in travelling to major events in their own community, such as bush sports and cultural festivals, the Borroloola Rodeo and funerals.

## Part (7) Post school destinations of students

This data is currently unavailable.

## Part (8) School Income broken down by funding source

The below pie chart shows the College's income in 2010 broken down by funding source.

The College does not charge school fees but families are nonetheless called upon to contribute towards specific student activities (e.g. excursions and camps) from time to time.

**Yirara College**  
**School Income by Funding Source 2010**

