



RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN IS HELPING GROW THE SCHOOL AND BRING ABOUT CHANGE

A focus on building a "culturally safe" environment with a strong sense of Indigenous cultures has created a tangible feel of community at St Alipius Parish School, Ballarat East. The school celebrated the launch of their Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) on November 4. It is believed to be the first for a school in Ballarat and has caught the interest of many Indigenous families in the area.

The school has had a strong focus on Indigenous issues, teachings and learnings for several years and for the past twelve months a committee

of staff, parents, community members and students have worked to develop the RAP. The result is a safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families which is drawing new students from across the city.



Next year there will be a 50 per cent increase in Indigenous enrolments, with seven prep pupils and one older child joining the school to bring the total Indigenous enrolment to 24. One family recently identified as Indigenous after three years at the school. "They told us that the positive focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture at St Alipius has given them confidence to do so," said Principal Eileen Rice.

"For years at St Alipius we made a commitment to all our family and our kids that we would learn deeply about our first people and Indigenous culture and particularly because of that and because of our acknowledgement of the traditional owners and celebration of NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week and Sorry Day, we have become known in the Indigenous community as a place where it's safe for kids to learn."

Wellbeing coordinator Emily Clark invited members of the community to join a working party to explore the RAP process through the Narragunnawali platform and received strong support from the entire community.

"We invited them to be part of creating a vision of where we could go and what we could do and develop some specific actions that we can chart a course forward under three headings - relationship, respect and opportunity," Ms Rice said.

Building stronger cultural competency among teachers and staff and a physical sign of acknowledgement of country were among the suggestions. "For a long time we have always had acknowledgement of country, but haven't had any physical sign. So we have put a sign in the front office and are exploring how we can do another in the school grounds."

The school has also committed to placing Indigenous culture in any topic that is explored to deepen the community's understanding.

St Alipius also has an Indigenous choir, made of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as well as members of the community who are connected to the school and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. "Delama Voices means embracing voices and it's such a beautiful notion that some children have been able to recover their language," Ms Rice said. "For students to know their language and be able to say hello in that language, that empowers them."



Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier, text by Michelle Smith and photos by Kate Healy

Top: Sharni (Grade 6), Jet (Grade 5), Wellbeing Leader Emily Clarke, Ethan (Grade 5) and Sarasa (Grade 5) welcome the new St Alipius Parish School Reconciliation Action Plan.

Middle: Sarasa (Grade 5), Wellbeing Leader Emily Clarke, Jet (Grade 5), Ethan (Grade 5) and Sharni (Grade 6) read about Indigenous culture at St Alipius Parish School.

Bottom: Jet (Grade 5), Ethan (Grade 5), Wellbeing Leader Emily Clarke, Sarasa (Grade 5) and Sharni (Grade 6) with their copies of the St Alipius Parish School Reconciliation Action Plan.