



SPOTLIGHT ON RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

St Alipius Parish School in Ballarat East proudly launched their first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) late last year, and is continuing to make important steps towards reconciliation in 2020. Their Vision for Reconciliation speaks of “creating a culturally safe school community where all members flourish” and to “actively seek opportunities for authentic dialogue” about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing. It is widely acknowledged in the school community that a positive, collective focus on First Nations cultures supports a strong sense of ‘togetherness’ – this reflects the 2020 National Reconciliation Week theme, *In this together*, and is reflected in significant reconciliation achievements, such as a 50% increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments at the school just this year.



Building and maintaining strong relationships with the local community is an integral part of the journey of reconciliation and is certainly an important part of the RAP process for this school. Over twelve months, a team of driven and passionate staff, parents, community members and students worked hard to develop a RAP that bridged the path of established commitment to reconciliation that the school has walked with their intentions for the future. Some of the suggestions included building stronger cultural competency among teachers and all staff and establishing a physical Acknowledgement of Country within the school. Since the RAP launch in November 2019, the school is investigating how best to implement these as part of their reconciliation journey.

Deb Clarke, a primary school teacher with Torres Strait Islander heritage, formed the school’s Indigenous choir, Delama Voices (meaning ‘embracing voices’), further bringing everyone together through collectively highlighting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students and community members who are connected to the school and the First Nations community. “For students to know their language and be able to say hello in that language, that empowers them” Principal Eileen Rice reflected.

The school recently unveiled their newly acquired Torres Strait Islander flag to proudly fly alongside the Aboriginal and Australian flags during their commemoration of the Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations earlier this year. Students, staff and the community came together to reflect on the impact of past assimilation policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, embodying their commitment in their Vision for Reconciliation statement to “acknowledge the truth of our shared history and commit to ongoing reconciliation”.

St Alipius Parish School are a strong example of how implementing a RAP can empower diverse individuals to come together to foster a strong, shared and whole-scale journey of reconciliation, which ensures culturally safe environments in the classroom, around the school and with the community alike.

Article first appeared in the Narragunnawali News.

<https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/about/news/82/spotlight-on-st-alipius-parish-school-vic>

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