



St Teresa’s College, Abergowrie – Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program

School Profile

- Queensland
- Remote
- Catholic
- Years 7 to 12
- Located in Warrgamay country

Program Summary

St Teresa’s College, Abergowrie, is a Catholic secondary boarding school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys, located in the Herbert River Valley north of Townsville. Boys are drawn from over 50 communities across Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait.

The school offers a flexible vocational education and training (VET) program that caters for the diverse

interests of the students and the emerging local job market. The program puts emphasis on community engagement and two-way learning, whilst demonstrating an understanding of local context to provide real-world job pathways to students.

‘Students will come through the program in Year 9 ... taking an opportunity to do a bit of taste testing across the different vocational opportunities, then by the time they get to Year 12 they’re on a pathway to a particular area of study or area of interest, which will hopefully lead to gainful employment post-schooling.’

Robert Corboy – Principal, St Teresa’s College



Buddie, a student at St Teresa’s College, is given CPR instruction by Suzanne Fowler, Indigenous Health Trainer at Connect ‘N’ Grow RTO.



A key feature of the school's VET program is the Remote Health Trade Training Centre, which offers a range of certificate courses including a Certificate II in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care or Certificate II in Community Services. These qualifications lead into a Certificate III in Health Services Assistance. Students at the school often come from communities that are in need of qualified health professionals to work in essential services such as remote community health clinics, so there are clear links between the qualification and an employment pathway.

‘These boys come from such diverse areas: Papua New Guinea, Torres Strait Islands, remote Northern Territory. I would love to see them back within the community. One, as a role model with education and two, working within their health centre as a primary health care worker or health assistant.’

Suzanne Fowler – Indigenous Health Trainer, Connect ‘N’ Grow (RTO)

St Teresa's College's approach to VET is built upon flexibility through block training and on-site training at local training providers. The school offers internal certificate courses to students as well as liaison with external providers. This flexible approach involves pairing local employers with students who have the skills and capabilities that meet their needs. The school sees it as part of its role to identify potential training and employment pathways for its students, and to foster relationships with local industries and companies.

Outcomes

The school's outcomes in VET programs are well recognised by parents and the local community. The school has established a Community Consultation Committee which considers and provides guidance relating to the operations of the school. This level of community and parent engagement ensures students are entering into courses that have pathways specific to the student cohort's needs and has been recognised as an example of best practice. One of the key attributes of the school's VET program is the involvement of parents in the decision-making process. Their contribution supports effective employment pathways in local communities, across Queensland and all over Australia.

‘I think, being on the consultation committee, you have an input into your child's education and the future of your child, which is very important as a parent to be involved in – in decision-making, things they're happy with or not happy with – and you can just talk it out with fellow board members and try and solve the problems.’

Raymond Sibley – Parent, Community Consultation Committee



Community representatives attend a community consultation meeting at St Teresa's College, where they provide advice and feedback into the strategic direction of the college and its programs.

The positive feedback given by parents regarding the impact of community consultation is echoed by students, who have a clear picture of where their completed qualifications will take them.

‘I'm going to do a Certificate III in Health, so I can be a qualified health worker. You do have to do three courses next year, which will be long, but it will be worth it. I'm looking forward to next year so that I can graduate and be a worker up in Torres Strait.’

Buddie – Year 11 student, St Teresa's College

St Teresa's College has a genuine commitment to community engagement. The geographic spread of students' families presents challenges, however community representatives are invited into the school for a community consultation meeting twice a year. The Community Consultation Committee serves as an advisory committee to the school principal and administration team. Collectively, the committee provides advice and feedback on the strategic direction of the college, and programs such as the VET program. The school's principal stresses that the program is driven by parent demand.



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'They are looking to the school to form strong partnerships with industry and key employers. They are wanting the program to translate into jobs and traineeships.'

Robert Corboy – Principal, St Teresa's College
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Industry Links

At St Teresa's College, industry links are thoroughly embedded across the more established VET courses. Students are given the opportunity to experience different trades through the school's relationship with Ausco Modular, a company that constructs modular buildings. Through this industry link students experience all aspects of the construction industry, including carpentry, plumbing, and the electrical and air conditioning trades. From an industry perspective, Ausco Modular recognises the broader benefits of this program for their construction work in rural and remote locations.

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'The benefit for us is twofold. It's a business arm, and it's also giving back to the community. Having the boys who come from the communities that we're putting our buildings into gives us the opportunity for more work and gives the boys some valuable experience in the building trade, and hopefully a chance to further enhance their career prospects after schooling.'

Edward Rossato – Procurement Coordinator, Ausco Modular
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In addition to Ausco Modular, St Teresa's College has established links with Cater Care, which provides catering and hospitality placements, and Toomby's Ultimate Rural Training Centre, which takes students interested in exploring pathways in agriculture and farming. A Defence Force partnership with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR) in Townsville also offers pathways to students, as do links with local university campuses operated by Australian Catholic University, Griffith University and James Cook University.



Through its relationship with Ausco Modular, St Teresa's College provides students with an opportunity to experience different trades in the construction industry.

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'I originally got involved with Ausco through school. Ausco had a relationship with St Teresa's College, the boarding school that I attended. And that's where the relationship started. That's where the ball got rolling. We came in here a few times just for work experience. Then I graduated, left school. Then I got a phone call one day saying that Ausco was offering an apprenticeship, so I was like, "Yep, I'll take it."'

Fred McGilvary – St Teresa's College 2016 graduate; Apprentice Carpenter, Ausco Modular
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'The wonderful relationship we have with industry, who are really supportive of what we're trying to do here and go far and beyond what a normal relationship would to provide opportunities for our kids, I suppose that's what I'm proudest of – that relationship with industry and ourselves ... I think that if I was to advise anybody in this space, [my advice/the priority] is taking your time to establish the relationship with key individuals in industry and then working together to see how we can move this joint project along, and provide authentic opportunities.'

Robert Corboy – Principal, St Teresa's College
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Why the VET Program at St Teresa’s College Works

Recent research indicates that the following key themes consistently underpin successful delivery of vocational learning and VET, including career education, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- **Context:** ‘Nuanced, contextual factors will influence individual or group learning undertaken by Indigenous young people (Cuervo et al., 2015; Rigney, 2011).’
- **Flexibility:** ‘... recognition that a rigid or singular mode of education, by definition, cannot meet the needs of diverse learners (Anderson, 2009b; Bottrell, Te Riele & Plows, 2014; Te Riele, 2014).’
- **Two-way learning and community engagement:** ‘... happens in the context of an evolving relationship and structured partnership between Indigenous and school communities that supports Indigenous young people to grow their learning aspirations and stay connected to school or training.’
- **Aspiration, self-esteem and belonging:** ‘To “dream big” was seen as an essential component in a young person’s ability to have vocational ambitions and to achieve them (Mission Australia, 2014).’
- **Real-world job pathways:** ‘In assessing what motivates Indigenous young people to study, a direct link to real employment, that is, getting a job, figured much more highly than reasons connected to a plan for career or further study (Fordham & Schwab, 2007).’

Applying these themes to an understanding of the design, delivery and operation of vocational learning and VET provides insight into “what works” and “what doesn’t work” for this cohort of students.

Source: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA), National Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Student Transitions Project report

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Links

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers from AITSL outline what teachers should know and be able to do. As part of the VET program at St Teresa’s College teachers are delivering vocational learning, VET or career education that aligns with the following standards:

Know students and how they learn

- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- 1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities

- 3.1 Establish challenging learning goals
- 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

Source: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2011), Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Contacts

If you want to know more about this program or think that it might benefit your community, please access the following links:

St Teresa’s College, Abergowrie

P: (07) 4780 8300

W: www.abergowrie.catholic.edu.au

My School

W: www.myschool.edu.au

