

NEWS: Doomadgee Do Things Their Way

Doomadgee State School in far north Queensland has set up a special 'village school' to net erratic and non-attending students, with impressive results.

The village school, which began in July this year, holds classes in parks, on the river bank and on bush tucker expeditions as well as in the school grounds.

The program includes contextual literacy and numeracy activities which begin outdoors and move back to the school to access classroom resources and coincide with mainstream classes.

This allows village school students to interact with their peers and experience the social life of the regular classroom.

The village school's teachers Malcolm Pumpa and Ruth Goodall aim to:

- make erratic and non-attending children feel welcome in the school community; and
- counteract the cultural barriers that discourage students from regular school attendance.

The results of the village school have surprised everyone according to Doomadgee State School principal Fiona McKenna.

'Our expected intake was a group of perhaps 15,' she said. 'Between July and December, about 55 children have participated in the village school programs.'

A core group of 20-25 students has emerged, most were perennial non-attenders – some had literally not been to school for years –

but whose attendance at village school is virtually 100 per cent.'

Ms McKenna said the village school students ranged from Year 1 to Year 9 and many had previously considered themselves the non-achievers of their mainstream classes.

They had a range of academic problems due to previous poor attendance.

'Many are a long way behind their peers in literacy and numeracy skills which leads to a lack of self-esteem and motivation,' Ms McKenna said.

It also caused disruption and misbehaviour in the classroom.

The village school is 'a half-way house for poor attenders' to move towards regular school and caters for Aboriginal needs.

The aim is to eventually include the village school students in the regular classroom.

Ms McKenna said catering for a group of 25 students with poor literacy and numeracy skills in multiple age groups was challenging.

'The task of the village school program is to stay flexible yet remediate students, some of whom are four to five years behind their peers in the regular classroom,' she said.

Next year will see an increased interaction of village school and regular school classes, daily contact with the learning support teacher and greater involvement of the local people for cultural activities. □

