

EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

**FLEXIBLE
SCHOOLS**

**END OF YEAR
REPORT 2024**

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

As the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which our schools are located. We are inspired and nurtured by their wisdom, spirituality and experiences.

We commit ourselves to actively work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for reconciliation and justice, and we pay our respects to Elders, past and present. As we take our next step, we remember the first footsteps taken on this sacred land.

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Designs used throughout this report reflect elements of an artwork developed by Danielle Leedie Gray, proud First Nations woman from Bidjara and Wakka Wakka country. The artwork is represented in its entirety here, which is also displayed throughout the EREA Flexible Schools Eagle Farm Office on Jagera and Turrbal lands in Brisbane.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

While we are fast approaching the end of another school year, for a number of my colleagues and I, it marks the beginning of our journey with EREA Flexible Schools.

It has been a busy and exciting few months since I was appointed Chair, where I have become more familiar with Flexis' unique approach to education, as well as the dedicated and highly capable team of staff, educators and schools, led by our CEO Matt Hawkins. In only a short time, we have worked together to initiate strategic planning, to streamline reporting and performance benchmarking, and to document a coherent risk appetite statement which now informs our strategy process.

Of course, in that short while our teams on the ground have been busy doing much more, supporting and encouraging the more than 2,400 young people who attend Flexi schools across Australia. On behalf of our Board, I extend our thanks and gratitude to Matt and his team for their openness and support as we strengthen the strategic vision and purpose of Flexis.



We have also found an education ministry committed to valuing and constantly renewing its foundations in the Edmund Rice tradition. Flexis reach out to and embrace young people who have disengaged from mainstream education and then do everything possible to keep those young people attached to schooling. The same can be said of the approach and commitment of our two Special Education Schools. The young people travel a different path, but the goal of delivering the best possible education for each young person remains. The Flexi commitment to justice, radical inclusion and solidarity with young people would be very familiar to Blessed Edmund. With these two observations we can be confident the ministry is sound at its heart and the capability to lead into the future is in place. It's heartening to confidently make this observation so early in my tenure as a new board Chair.

As this year closes and 2025 begins, there is much to be done. In addition to leading ongoing operations and strengthening our national office and team structure, the CEO and team are responding to growth in demand for flexible education. Meeting this unmet need speaks to our core purpose and it is just as relevant for Flexi schools as it is for our Special Schools. We are well placed to meet this challenge in the coming year.

Finally, I extend thanks to my fellow directors, new and enduring. We have experienced significant change and been challenged as a Board. I believe we are showing ourselves to be fit for the task. Thank you for your openness and ongoing efforts.

Peter Pearce
Chair, EREA Flexible Schools



“Flexis reach out to and embrace young people who have disengaged from mainstream education and then do everything possible to keep those young people attached to schooling.”

- Peter Pearce, Chair of EREA Flexi Schools



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

What does success look like at Flexis?

It's a question I asked before starting my journey at Hemmant Flexi in 2016. It was a question posed countless times as we established our new national entity and structure in 2023, and again this year as we've worked closely with the EREAFSL Board to define and strengthen our strategic vision and purpose.

The answer is both simple and complex, but at the core it's about individual growth. It's about ensuring that every young person at one of our schools leaves in a better position than when they started. And it's about radical inclusion, hope and opportunity – between our educators and young people, our staff and leaders, our schools and parents.

One of the great things about our diverse organisation is how this growth takes shape in different ways depending on the school and its unique community of young people, families, educators and Traditional Custodians.



I recently attended St Joseph's on Arrernte lands in Alice Springs, where on-Country learning and culture classes were integrated throughout the ACARA-based curriculum. Just a few weeks later, I attended the opening of one of our Special Education Schools, St Edmund's College on Ku-ring-gai lands in Sydney, and saw the incredible developments that would make sure our young people with special needs had access to the best possible facilities.



These two schools reflect the many incredible stories highlighted throughout this report and show that while every Flexi and Special School is unique, we are united by a central purpose: to provide safe, welcoming and enriching school communities that respond to the unmet learning and wellbeing needs of young people.

This approach is resonating with communities across Australia. Our enrolments are consistently growing. We now have more than 800 educators, support staff and leaders supporting more than 2,700 young people in almost every state and territory. Our percentage of Indigenous staff has increased to more than 10%.

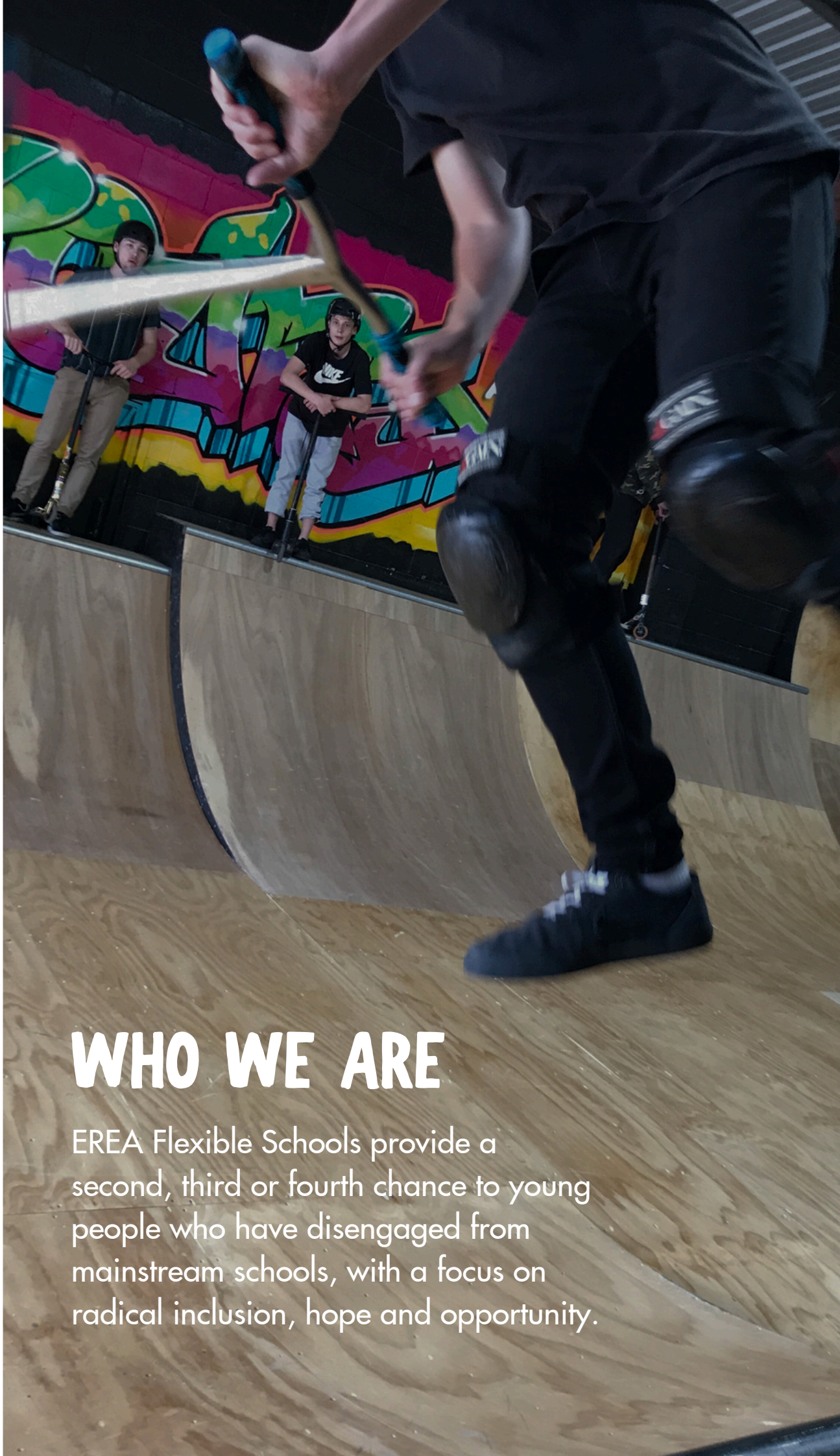
This year, we also welcomed a new Board Chair, Peter Pearce, along with other board directors, who are strengthening our capacity to respond to this growing demand and driving conversations about our long-term purpose and vision. The development of our strategic plan has been a critical part of these discussions, exploring how we can continue to deliver an authentic Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition. I look forward to sharing this plan with you in the new year.

There has been much change over the past two years, as we have become a new entity and worked to embed a new structure. Despite these changes, our schools, staff and educators have continued to do what they do best – to walk, learn and work together with young people on Common Ground, making sure young people feel safe, welcome and empowered to succeed.

Thank you for all that you do for our organisation, for our young people and for the future of flexible and special education in Australia. I hope you all enjoy a well-deserved holiday break and a wonderful start to the new year.

Dr Matt Hawkins
CEO, EREA Flexible Schools

“One of the great things about our diverse organisation is how this growth takes shape in different ways depending on the school and its unique community of young people, families, educators and Traditional Custodians. ”



WHO WE ARE

EREA Flexible Schools provide a second, third or fourth chance to young people who have disengaged from mainstream schools, with a focus on radical inclusion, hope and opportunity.

At Flexis, we do things differently. We walk, learn and work together with young people on Common Ground; we build relationships, and every member of the community commits to doing their best to work within our four principles of Respect, Participation, Honesty, and Safe and Legal.

Across our 21 Flexi schools and two Special Schools in almost every state and territory in Australia, we support young people with strengths-based, trauma-aware learning. Most of our schools employ as many youth workers as teachers, and everyone has voice and agency in decision-making.

Often young people come to our Flexis thinking they cannot learn – we show them they can. We make sure young people feel safe, welcome and empowered to succeed. We provide young people with the opportunity to define what will work best for them, with services to adapt to their needs.



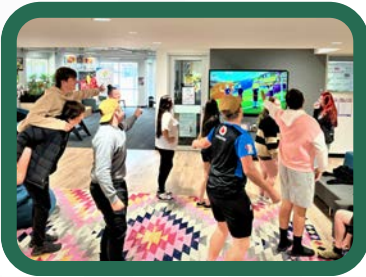
WHAT MAKES FLEXIS UNIQUE

For nearly 40 years, Flexis has approached education differently to build trust with young people, re-engage them in their education journey and transform their idea of what it means to learn. Here's how.



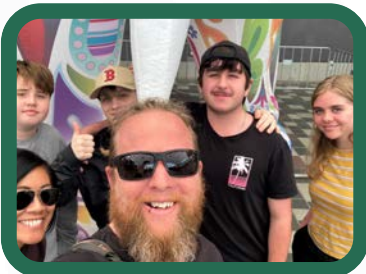
We don't have school rules.

We do not have a long list of school rules that we wait for young people to inevitably break. Instead, young people and adults agree to work, walk and learn together within our four principles of Respect, Honesty, Participation, and Safe & Legal.



Exclusion is never an option.

Irrespective of the behaviour of young people, they are always welcome. If on any day our young people find it hard to work within our four principles, we try again the next day.



Power is shared.

We work on Common Ground, where power is shared and everyone has a voice and agency in decision-making. Through Collaborative Problem Solving, we work together to engage and motivate young people in their learning journey, making sure that young people have agency in what and how they learn.



We deliver trauma-aware education.

All Flexi school staff are trained in trauma-aware education. We understand how trauma can impact young people and their capacity to learn; we recognise the lasting impacts of intergenerational trauma, and we create learning experiences with this in mind.



We know young people want to learn.

We know that young people want to do well and behave well, and if they are not able to, it is simply a lack of skill rather than a lack of desire. At our schools, teaching and learning is characterised by small class sizes, a flexible curriculum that draws on individual interest and needs, and a democratic pedagogical approach that encourages learner empowerment and autonomy.

OUR SCHOOLS

Across our 21 Flexible Schools and two Special Schools in all states and territories except the ACT and Victoria, we work on Common Ground where power is shared and everyone has voice and agency in decision making



New South Wales

1. ERSes St Edmund's College, Wahroonga **Ku-ring-gai Country**
2. ERSes St Gabriel's School, Castle Hill **Dharug Country**
3. St Mary's Flexible School, St Mary's **Dharug Country**
4. Wollongong Flexible School, Towradgi **Dharawal Country**
5. Pambula Beach Flexible School, Pambula **Yuin Country**
6. St Laurence Flexible Learning Centre, Newcastle **Awabakal & Worimi Country**

Tasmania

7. St Francis Flexible School, West Moonah **Palawa Country**

Western Australia

8. Geraldton Flexible School, Geraldton **Yamatji Country**

Northern Territory

9. St Joseph's Catholic Flexible School, Alice Springs **Arrernte Country**

South Australia

10. Edmund Rice Flexi School, Elizabeth and Davoren Park **Kaurna Country**
11. FAME (Flexible Accredited Meaningful Engagement), Christie Downs **Kaurna Country**

Queensland

12. The Centre Education Programme, Kingston **Jagera Country**
13. Deception Bay Flexible School, Deception Bay **Gubbi Gubbi Country**
14. Gympie Flexible School, Gympie **Gubbi Gubbi Country**
15. Hemmant Flexible School, Hemmant **Turrbul Country**
16. Noosa Flexible School, Sunshine Beach **Gubbi Gubbi Country**
17. Albert Park Flexible School, Milton **Jagera & Turrbul Country**
18. Mount Isa Flexible School, Sunset **Kalkadoon Country - disputed**
19. Townsville Flexible School, Bowen Flexible School and Burdekin Education Program, Townsville **Bindal, Wulgurukaba, Giya & Yuru Country**
20. Southport Flexible School, Southport **Yugambah Country**
21. Ipswich Flexible School, Ipswich **Jagera, Yuggera, & Ugarapul Country**
22. Inala Flexible School, Inala **Turrbul Country**
23. Rockhampton Flexible School, Rockhampton **Darumbal Country**

YOUNG PEOPLE AT FLEXIS: 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout 2024, Flexi schools and educators have helped to re-engage more than 2,700 young people in their education journey. These are young people who have worked hard to overcome hurdles, aim high and realise their full potential, and we are proud to share a few standout stories in this report.



CAMERON'S JOURNEY TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

In just four years, Cameron has transformed from a shy and withdrawn 13 year old to a confident school leader.

Before his time at Edmund Rice Flexi School, Cameron found it difficult to focus in the classroom. He felt as though he was different and struggled making friends. But, after seeing his older sister thrive at Flexis, Cameron made the decision to enrol and hasn't looked back.

"I found out that I am not different to other students, there are lots of kids just like me. I have been able to attend school more often and engage in my learning, which I found difficult before attending Flexis."

"I have become much more social and feel way more confident in myself and who I am. I have also made lots of good friends who have been really positive role models for me," he said.

Not long after joining Flexis, Cameron signed up to the Ice Factor program, joining the Flexi Chiefs. The Ice Factor program helps at risk young people stay engaged in school through practical elements of Ice Hockey, as well as learning what it means to be part of a team. Cameron has loved the training sessions, learning new skills and making friends.



"With the Flexi Chiefs, it's more than just a program with other students, it's like we are a family."

Following his years of dedication, Cameron has now stepped up as captain of the Flexi Chiefs and has become a notable leader both on and off the ice. Recently, he won the Sami Mantere Perpetual Trophy, which is awarded to only one of the 300 participants in the Ice Factor program for their commitment and leadership throughout the program.

Wanting to build on this experience, Cameron joined Indigenous ice hockey team the Kaurua Boomerangs, and has since had the opportunity to travel to Darwin to compete with young people from across the country.

Cameron's story is reflection of his hard work and what is possible when young people are supported by a flexible educational experience defined by radical inclusion.

"I am very proud of how far I have come. I am very grateful for the opportunities that have been given to me and am looking forward to my continued growth, both in the program and school," said Cameron.

OVERCOMING ANXIETY TO WALK THROUGH THE SCHOOL GATES

Mia Dederer's journey has been nothing short of remarkable. On her first day at St Laurence Flexible Learning Centre, she struggled to get out of the car due to anxiety. But now, with the support of the Flexi community, she has developed into a confident school leader.

During the first few weeks at St Laurence, our educators met Mia at her car and took the time to talk and connect with her. Understanding that Mia's anxiety was coming from a place of uncertainty rather than a reluctance to participate, our team worked with her towards the goal of walking inside the school gate.

Over time, Mia gained the confidence to walk through the school gates herself.

At the beginning, Mia would stay for one or two lessons, but was determined to move forward. Two years on, we now see a completely different Mia at St Laurence. She is now a House Leader, leads our community circle, reads out the Acknowledgement of Country and is a confident, clear communicator in class. In reflecting on her journey, Mia explains,

"At Flexis, the community is a lot more accepting and inclusive. The space is smaller allowing for young people to manoeuvre their way around calmly, while also making strong connections with staff and classmates."

Every step Mia has taken, whether it's speaking up in class, participating in group activities, or simply taking time for self-care, demonstrates not only her progress, but also her strength.

"Mia's determination to push through discomfort and seek support when needed reflects a deep commitment to her personal growth," said Shaun Snider, Associate Head of Campus at St Laurence. "She has shown remarkable resilience in facing situations that were once overwhelming. Her courage to confront her challenges head-on is truly inspiring."

Mia continues to excel in her academic and personal achievements and consistently demonstrates respect towards peers, staff and the school environment. Her incredible story shows what is possible when we meet young people where they are. We know Mia will continue to grow and we can't wait to see what else she will achieve in her future!



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES THROUGH MUSIC

Meet Lawry Mooka-Neliman, a Townsville Flexi graduate who's not just chasing dreams, he's making them a reality by diving headfirst into the world of music.

Growing up in a very musical family with strong Torres Strait Islander culture, Lawry has been committed to music from the age of 12. He has regularly played music for community and cultural events, and has performed with his dad as a duo for the past 14 years.

After graduating from Townsville Flexi School, Lawry has taken his love of music and culture to the next level and has completed a Foundation year at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music at the University of Adelaide. His main focus is on studio recording, producing, writing and performing popular music. Lawry says:

"It is a really big deal for me to use my music to express my culture and values. I feel lucky to witness all the greatness that is around me – not just at Flexi, but in my family and community."

"My people are in the limelight at the moment and what the media are reporting often misses what is going on behind the veil in terms of all the good things," he adds.



Lawry is committed to changing mindsets and perspectives that are negatively shaped by the media, and is determined to support and inspire other young people in his community by giving them opportunities to develop their musical talents. Lawry was recently awarded a scholarship to continue his studies at Adelaide University in 2025.

As Lawry continues to make strides in his creative endeavours, we are reminded of the far-reaching impacts of a Flexi education on our communities. We look forward to seeing more of Lawry's journey — we know it'll be inspiring!

To experience Lawry's musical talent firsthand, you can listen to his recently released original composition, A4P, on YouTube using the QR code.



2024 IN NUMBERS

Take a look at our growing community of educators, support staff, young people and leaders across each of our 21 Flexible Schools and two Special Schools.

23



Schools across
Australia

810



Staff Members

2,727



Young people

246



Youth Workers, Teacher
Aides & Health Support Staff

4



Major Building Renovations Unveiled

FAME, Geraldton FS and ERSES schools,
St Gabriel's School & St Edmund's College



100%

of young people
are offered
transport to and
from school



100%

of Flexi schools
provided meals
for all young
people & staff



100%

of Flexi schools
offered student-led
initiatives to help
young people thrive
after Year 12



ON COMMON GROUND: 2024 SCHOOL STORIES

There's something special about Flexi schools and the different ways they make young people feel safe, welcome and empowered to succeed. Our schools provide young people with the opportunity to define what works best for them, with services to adapt to their needs – and this is reflected in many of our school's journeys in 2024.



A BIG YEAR AT ST EDMUND'S COLLEGE, WAHROONGA

Eddie's News

This year, St Edmund's College enjoyed the first edition of our student-written and edited newsletter, Eddie's News! Crafted with passion and creativity by James P (11P), this publication aims to bring our students' perspectives on the pulse of our school community to the fore, with diverse perspectives on school life, current events, and student interests. We hope this newsletter becomes a cherished platform for student voices and a window into the vibrant world of our school community!



New Build

This year, St Edmund's were delighted by the completion of the major refurbishment of their college. An existing building was transformed into a new library with administration and general learning area facilities, as well as an undercover area for student drop-offs and pick-ups. This was followed by the construction of a new car park, sports field, basketball court, student hall, and learning areas that will be used for science, music and art. Finally, the heritage-listed Midhope building was renovated for use as an administration building, returning the federation mansion where Eddie's first began to its former glory!



Wandana

The Eddie's students enjoyed an exciting return to Term 4, with an Aboriginal Cultural Immersion Program. Led by our friends at Wandana, young people eagerly explored Indigenous histories, cultures, art and music. Our students and staff assembled for an Acknowledgement to Country, received traditional ochre paint on their hands or faces, and participated in a Sweeping Ceremony where local gum leaves gently washed away negative energy and invited in fresh, new energy.

The highlight of the day was when the Eddie's community worked alongside Gabby Collins, a proud Birpai woman, to create a modern, contemporary Aboriginal painting that pays homage to the local Darug Aboriginal people and the rich history of the College. Each St Edmund's student and staff member were proud to contribute to the painting, which will be displayed prominently at St Edmund's.

MOUNTAIN BIKING DRIVES ATTENDANCE AT ST FRANCIS

Tasmania is famous for its world class mountain bike trails, so it made sense that our young people from St Francis Flexible School wanted to find a way to embrace it.

Four years ago, a group of our young people requested a mountain bike riding program and staff jumped at the idea. The St Francis staff have been working behind the scenes to obtain their qualifications in preparation for the program, and in 2024 we took our first young people out on the trails.

This year, as young people excelled through the program, the school added longer trails to its agenda and has been able to provide new bikes and helmets to allow for further skill progression.



As a direct result of the mountain biking program, the school has seen an increase in attendance overall, but especially on allocated trail days. One of the young people involved said they loved the opportunity to take part in safe risk-taking behaviour, while another agreed mountain bike riding was a huge incentive to come to school.

The school's PE Teacher Romy Anderson said he loved to see how passionate the young people had become.

"They are enthusiastic and they are passionate. It's been great to see their progress and to see their leadership qualities develop in the newer younger riders."

The young people are now hard at work, preparing three days a week to become eligible for an end-of-year camp, where they will ride the premier mountain bike track in Derby.





MASTERPIECES AT GERALDTON

Creativity is alive and thriving at Geraldton Flexi School, with the afternoon art elective becoming the favourite class for our young people!

Teachers, Dee and Pavi, have been guiding the young people to develop their skills in drawing, colour-mixing, graffiti name designs and canvas painting. The young people have loved channeling their passion and self-expression into their creations, and have made remarkable progress in a short time, building on their artistic techniques and confidence.

Taking their passion outside the classroom, the young people have also visited local galleries and museums to learn from local artists. These excursions have been a wonderful source of inspiration for the young people and have helped strengthen their understanding of different art mediums.

But this is just the beginning — the young people hope to build this into an enterprise project in future where they will create card packs for the community. There are even talks of holding an art camp down the track!

It's been great to see all the masterpieces that have already come from the class. Who knows, Geraldton Flexi might have the next Picasso or Frida Kahlo on their hands!

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AT MOUNT ISA

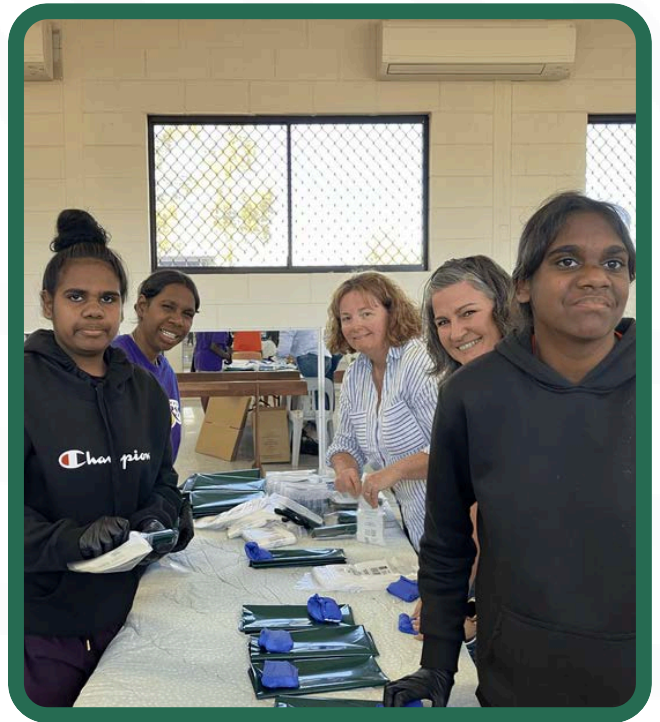
Mount Isa Flexi doesn't just talk about making a difference, they make it happen.

Recently, the young people at Mount Isa have stepped up to serve as volunteers for various initiatives helping those in need and building connections with the local community.

The all-girls Emu Mob class have joined forces with local not-for-profit, the Zonta Club of Mount Isa, which supports a range of women's health services. Recently, the girls spent the day assembling 600 birthing kits to be sent to developing countries around the world to ensure women have access to safe, healthy and hygienic childbirth support.

Meanwhile, the Mt Isa boys have been working just as hard, with the Dingo class volunteering their time at the Catholic Parish Gungawala Community Kitchen. The boys spent hours preparing bread and fruit for local families in need. They enjoyed it so much they are hoping to make it a monthly event.

Through volunteering, Mt Isa's young people are not only discovering their ability to make a difference but are also becoming compassionate leaders who will strengthen their communities. Well done to the young people of Mt Isa Flexi!





CELEBRATING FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

Since the very beginning, we have walked in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, advocating for change and promoting reconciliation – 2024 was no different. This year, we have worked to strengthen the cultural capacity of our workforce and we've continued to celebrate First Nations cultures and histories in all that we do.

CREATING A UNIFIED VISION

In October, First Nations Flexi staff representatives from across the nation came together for the inaugural EREA Flexible Schools First Nations Gathering.

We emphasised the importance of our shared identity, voice and strength as we explored key priorities including:

- **Developing a national First Nations' footprint.**
- **Harnessing feedback and strengths through listening to the voices and experience of on-the-ground practitioners.**
- **Strategising to achieve a shared understanding and shared goals for improving life and learning outcomes for our young people.**

This event was integral to creating a solid foundation and unified vision, and enabling actions for long-term and sustainable solutions. We welcomed this important opportunity for First Nations staff to meet face-to-face, build relationships, share ideas and be resourced by our organisation to create more equitable futures for our young people, staff and families.

Achieving improved life outcomes for First Nations young people is everybody's business. In our organisation this means working collaboratively with leaders and allies, with high expectations relationships and strengths-based approaches.



CELEBRATING CULTURE & COMMUNITY: NAIDOC DAY AT DECEPTION BAY FLEXI

NAIDOC Week is an important time for the Flexi community. This year was no different.

Deception Bay Flexible School was one of the many Flexi schools that joined in on NAIDOC Week activities. They held an enriching event where young people, staff and special guests got together to learn about culture, build connections and grow the Deception Bay Flexi community.

The day started with a yarn around the fire led by Elders Uncle Roy and Uncle Mick, followed by a heartfelt Welcome to Country by Gubbi Gubbi, Kullali & Wakka Wakka man, Leaf Bennett. After the welcome formalities, the school community watched a performance by rapper Stay True God and the Waawidgiemah Warei dance group and then tucked into a spread of dishes prepared with bush tucker ingredients. The lemon myrtle 'Keep the Fire Burning' cake certainly took the prize as fan favourite!

Later in the day, young people participated in a range of cultural activities, including yarnning circles, face painting, beading and crafting dance sticks.

At Flexis, we have long walked in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, advocating for change and promoting reconciliation. And we love that each young person walked away from this experience with a stronger knowledge and appreciation for local First Nations cultures and knowledges.





BEDROOM RHYMES TO AWARD-WINNING FILM AT GYMPIE FLEXI

What started as a rap written in a bedroom has led to an award-winning short film for young people at Gympie Flexible School.

The Gympie Flexi Media Group recently created a short documentary called "The Lyrical Life of King Mish Raps". The film follows Misho Gubecka, an Indigenous rapper and young person at Gympie Flexi who flips the script on his disabilities and uses music to express himself. He shares his personal journey and the struggles of being treated differently, explaining how producing Aussie rap has become a source of strength for him.

Misho said the film encouraged others with disabilities to view their conditions not as a limitation but as an ability.

"Music is meaningful to me because I used to get picked on for my disability," he said. "Music is what helps me. I believe it made me stronger because every time I would get pissed off, I would write raps in my room. You just got to do some things that make you better."

The group were so proud of the film they decided to enter it into the Heart of Gold International Film Festival. The festival's theme this year was 'resilience', a quality that the group knew the story emulated - and they were right. The film wowed the judges, winning them Best Local Student Film!

We are so proud of all young people involved in this project, which not only gave them a chance to develop their teamwork skills, but also hone in on professional skills like directing, lighting, editing, interviewing, producing and camera operating.

This award goes to show the impact that the Flexi community plays in supporting young people to explore their creative journeys. The Lyrical Life of King Mish Raps is a celebration of Gympie Flexi Media Group's passion and dedication, and demonstrates their ability to spark meaningful conversations that encourage others to embrace their unique paths.

Watch the documentary here.





WHAT'S NEXT FOR FLEXIS?

Over the past two years, we've focused on developing and embedding a new structure to help our schools, educators, staff and young people thrive. And now, it's time to look forward. The development of our first strategic plan is a critical part of this process, and will help us to sharpen our focus on creating a future where young people are empowered to live full and hope-filled lives.

At the heart of this process is strengthening our capacity to respond to the unmet educational needs of young people.

We know that many young people come to Flexi thinking they cannot learn, having faced significant barriers in their own personal and education journeys. Over the coming year, we will be laser-focused on creating the most engaging, responsive learning experiences to ensure young people feel empowered to take ownership of their education journey. Personalised learning programs, student-led initiatives and on-Country learning will be central to this.

We will also look to strengthen our national identity, with the creation of a shared purpose across all levels of our organisation, from the classroom to leadership. A core part of this will be the continuation of our First Nations Gatherings, and ensuring that that we are taking meaningful, tangible steps to create the most culturally-inclusive working and learning environment possible. Another key focus will be on continuing to co-create a sustainable, responsive organisation. This means ensuring that we have the systems, structures and support in place to operate effectively, and creating an environment that makes Flexi an employer of choice, attracting skilled and passionate individuals who are committed to our vision.

As we prepare to respond to the growing demand for Flexi schools across the country, our focus on making sure young people feel safe, welcome and empowered to succeed will remain unchanged. We all benefit from a society where young people, no matter their personal circumstances, are supported to realise their potential, and we look forward to working with our network to make this a reality.



SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS!

When you support Flexi schools, you're supporting vital resources – personalised programs, robust social support systems and innovative technology – that empower young people to reimagine the potential of education and how it can help them pursue their dreams. Use the QR code below to find out how you can support our schools.



FIND OUT MORE HERE



Our Team



Dr Matt Hawkins
Chief Executive Officer

With nearly 20 years in senior leadership across EREA, Matt advocates for inclusive education, co-founding Edmund Rice Advocacy for Change. His doctoral work explored inclusivity in Catholic education, contributing fresh perspectives on educational inclusion in Australia.



Anna Thompson
Chief Financial Officer

Anna has over 16 years in financial leadership, directing financial strategy and capital projects for EREA Flexible Schools. Her commitment to supporting young people drives her work, which began in tax and evolved into financial roles in both corporate and educational sectors.



Kellie Stemp
Director of
Learning and Pedagogy

Kellie has championed education for social justice since 1998, empowering young people to drive positive change. Her work focuses on equipping educators to support students' aspirations and foster resilience, building on her experience in flexible education programs.



Ben Ebert
Director of
Practice and Identity

With 15 years at EREA, Ben leads initiatives to embody the Edmund Rice charism. His role involves shaping the Flexis' Practice Framework and reengaging youth in education, supporting them to take charge of their learning and future.



Laura McKenzie
Director of
Safeguarding

Laura, with a background in psychology and social work, has dedicated 18 years to protecting young lives within Edmund Rice Education. As Director of Safeguarding, she leads trauma-informed, innovative child protection practices across Flexible Schools.



Bec Bray
Director of
Risk and Compliance

With 25 years in risk management across sectors, Bec ensures safety and compliance at EREA Flexible Schools. Her commitment to creating supportive environments for vulnerable youth is grounded in her education, including an MBA and CPA credentials.



Kathleen Jones
Director of
HR

Kathleen, with extensive HR and industrial relations experience, is committed to supporting education professionals who empower youth. Her work focuses on fostering engagement and retention to create positive educational experiences for marginalised students.



Michael Farrell
Regional Director
NSW & TAS

Michael has over 20 years in educational leadership, including roles at St Edmund's and St Gabriel's. His commitment to safeguarding and educational innovation is recognised by the NSW Quality Teaching Award and his work as a certified child protection investigator.



Adam Richter
Regional Director
QLD & NT

Adam supports new Flexi schools in Australia, with experience across multiple states and a focus on amplifying youth voices. Prior to EREA, he held leadership roles in Northern Territory and Victorian Government schools, committed to fostering inclusive education.



Paula Bacchiella
Regional Director
SA & WA

From a Research Chemist to Flexis' Regional Director, Paula brings diverse leadership experience. Her community-centred approach prioritises student advocacy and First Nations cultures, driven by her commitment to redefine success for young Australians.

Our Team



Darren Harbinson
Director of Information
Technology

With 10 years' experience leading ICT transformation in education, Darren has redefined digital strategy for schools and systems across Australia. A former consultant, Darren combines education and business insights to driving impactful solutions for staff and young people.



Peter Pearce
Board Chair

With 40 years in not-for-profit governance, Peter brings deep community dedication. His leadership with Common Ground Queensland and other organisations underscores his commitment to supporting disenfranchised youth and changing lives through education.



Chris Veraa
Deputy Chair
of the Board

Chris, Deputy Chair and Safeguarding Committee member, brings leadership experience in education and media. Passionate about empowering vulnerable youth, he supports transformative educational initiatives and values education's power to shape lives.



Toni-Leigh Banfield
Non-Executive
Director

Founder of an educational consultancy, Toni-Leigh is dedicated to supporting students with disabilities and wellbeing. As part-time Principal Project Officer at QCAA, she champions practical learning applications and adherence to regulatory standards.



Robert Feeney
Non-Executive
Director

A partner at Ernst & Young and Professor of Practice at Monash Business School, Rob has a passion for education. His experience spans industries, focusing on strategic challenges and supporting Flexis' mission to empower young people.



Ciaran Handy
Non-Executive
Director

Ciaran, a leader at Scape Australia, uses his background in tourism and real estate to support EREA Flexible Schools' vision. He finds satisfaction in visiting schools and witnessing the impact of education on disadvantaged youth.



John O'Connor
Non-Executive
Director

John has driven improvements across Catholic schools in rural, regional and metropolitan communities for more than 25 years. Passionate about advancing opportunities for vulnerable young people, John sees the Flexis mission as central to his vocation.



Debra Sayce
Non-Executive
Director

With 30 years' experience in Catholic education, Debra has long committed herself to helping young people flourish, most recently at CEWA in Western Australia. Known for her Christ-centered, child-focused approach, Debra champions inclusive education and decision making.



Helen Spain
Non-Executive
Director

A lawyer, business leader and advocate for social justice, Helen has more than 35 years of experience in legal practice and governance across education, aged care and community sectors. Helen is committed to addressing inequality and improving outcomes for marginalised communities.



Anna Katter
Company Secretary

With 20 years of governance experience and a passion for the not-for-profit sector, Anna is dedicated to embedding strong governance practices into EREA Flexible Schools. Anna is passionate about the power of education, offering young people agency and the opportunity of choice through learning.



[Flexi.edu.au](https://flexi.edu.au)