

Closing the gap in class

Natasha Emeck

HERBERTON teachers aiming to "close the gap" with indigenous Australians are starting in the classroom.

With an 80 per cent indigenous student body, "closing the gap" is an important issue for teachers at Mount St Bernard College.

Maths teacher and pastoral carer Ben Smith said the Herberton school is tackling the problem head-on in the classroom.

"My personal belief is that the front line of action for closing the gap is where we see the most impact for individuals — and we're seeing that in our classes," he said.

"We have a lot of students coming from remote indigenous communities, so we have a transition program that's helpful for kids who may have missed out on some schooling.

"We focus on their numeracy, literacy and code-switching (in language and thinking between home and school). It ensures they don't get left behind because we're working at their level and after a while you really see their confidence build up.

"Most students who don't behave in class are usually trying to hide something, either their ability or their fear.

"By putting a positive spin



CHANGES THAT COUNT: Maths programs at Mount St Bernard College are helping to "close the gap" with students from remote indigenous communities. Pictured are Janasie Bami, 12, and Elaine Lowatta, 17.

Picture: Natasha Emeck

on subjects like maths, which can be quite daunting for some kids, we can shift the way they feel about coming to class as a challenge rather than scary."

He said so far the program has produced some great results.

"We've had a student come to us in year seven with year

one maths ability and go up to a grade four standard in less than a year," he said.

"But our teachers certainly don't have all the answers, which is why we're inviting teachers, specialists and lecturers from around the country to discuss different strategies that aim to help close the gap."

The Positive Mathematics for Indigenous Students Conference will be held at the school on March 2-3.

Organised with James Cook University, information, strategies and skills explored will have wide-ranging benefits for all maths students.

Presenters and participants

will come from a variety of education sectors across Australia including keynote speakers Professor Robyn Jorgensen (University of Canberra) and Emeritus Professor Philip Clarkson. For attendance and registration details visit: <http://maths446.wixsite.com/pm4is-2017>

Teen dies in utility accident

Grace Mason

CLOSE mates of a man who died after being trapped under an overturned utility on a Tablelands property were forced to lift it off him in a desperate bid to save his life.

Kewarra Beach teen Ben McDougall-Wall, 19, had been riding in the tray of the Toyota LandCruiser about 11.30pm on Saturday night, when it rolled and pinned him underneath.

Friends used a second car to free him and started CPR until emergency services arrived.

Police are investigating the incident amid allegations a vehicle was seen performing "doughnuts" around a tree in a rural paddock leading up to the horror crash.

Two other men, aged 19 and 20, were injured after being thrown out of the ute's tray.

The 20-year-old remains in a stable condition in Cairns Hospital after suffering a broken pelvis, while the 19-year-old was treated at Atherton Hospital for minor injuries and later released. It is believed the group of former school friends had been staying at the Jerome Rd property near Lake Barrine over the weekend.

Five men had been in the vehicle at the time of the crash while another four people were at the nearby homestead.

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