A big heart at Fraser Park

Fraser Park is a school with a big heart and significant challenges. Russell Gilbert, school counsellor, says that the students come from complex backgrounds. Many are from single parent and/or low income families, and almost half of all students are identified as special needs. These challenges need teachers to have understanding and empathy.

“Sometimes students have issues with self-regulation or emotional regulation. Our goal is to support students by teaching the skills of ‘cooling down’ and making cool choices regarding their behaviours. Staff are focused on developing powerful learners who are not only achieving well in literacy and numeracy but also have the skills for dealing with adversity and complexity in their lives.”

RUSSELL GILBERT, SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

The school works with occupational therapists around sensory needs for children with trauma issues. Simple but effective things like door ‘snakes’ that sit on the shoulders as a sort of therapeutic weight, air-filled cushions and differently textured carpets are provided for students.

Being a co-located preschool and school has benefits for transition and the students’ sense of security. The Reception (first year of school) class [Wanyi] meets with the Preschool [Pulyeri] class twice a week, once in the school and once in the Preschool. All programs from Preschool to Year 7, include literacy and numeracy which provide a continuity for learners.

‘Play is the Way’ program

‘Play is the Way’ (www.playistheway.com.au) is a program designed by now West Australian Wilson McCaskill, who developed this practical methodology for teaching social and emotional learning.

The school began implementing ‘Play is the Way’ in 2013.

Russell Gilbert calls himself ‘an advocate’ of outdoor learning and Physical Education, as well as circle times for problem-solving and creating a positive classroom culture.
This program has been embedded at Fraser Park for several years. It uses games to trigger emotions and simulate situations where issues — for example, social exclusion — can be mimicked and workshopped. The games teach inclusion and empathy. Russell is pleased that ‘Play is the Way’ gives staff and students a shared language.

‘Quite often for staff, a shift in culture just requires a shift in language and mindset,’ he says.

Play is the Way helps create positive peer pressure. The main concept is about students doing the right things for the right reasons because they want to. Treating others how you want to be treated, thinking before you do things — those sorts of concepts, are explored and provoked through games.”

RUSSELL GILBERT,
SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

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A Family Centre with an Aboriginal Family Support Worker and chaplain on site

Fraser Park has an Aboriginal Family Partnership Group. There is a dedicated space at the school, Yanun Pulgi (Family Centre). Families and other community members can access telephones, computers and online services. Outside service providers meet community members, and families can use the space if they arrive at school early. Yanun Pulgi is regarded as a family centre and supports effective learning conversations and families feel comfortable there.

An Aboriginal Family Agreement was facilitated through ‘WhatWorks’ (whatworks.edu.au). It details the expectations of the school, families, and students. The Agreement is reviewed every two years. It has led to meetings held twice a term at Yanun Pulgi that involve capacity and relationship-building activities. These include: drumming, digital literacy, scrapbooking, techniques to help children with their reading, dental care and other pursuits.

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Fraser Park became a KidsMatter school in 2013

Russell says the school is in the early stages of the KidsMatter journey. He believes that the biggest advantage, so far, is the way it has helped the school reflect on, and assess, ‘the programs we do on social skills, what we think works and what we want to improve. Working through KidsMatter has made us look more closely at our practice, and that is very valuable.’

While Fraser Park remains a challenging place to work, Russell values the relationship-building within the school. ‘It is a great chance to develop relationships with the community, work with different people, and the whole aspect of working with families is very rewarding.’

www.kidsmatter.edu.au