School context statement
Thalgarrah Environmental Education Centre is one of 25 Environmental Education and Zoo Education Centres supported by the NSW Department of Education and Communities.

The centre is located on the site of the former Thalgarrah School, 18km north east of Armidale.

We are bordered by the Gara River to the west and adjacent to a forested area: “Swallowfield Wildlife Refuge.” This natural setting allows the centre to offer a variety of fieldwork and environmental and sustainability education programs across a range of key learning areas.

We service a large catchment of K-12 schools across north-west NSW. Programs are conducted on site at Thalgarrah and surrounding properties or at other sites such as national parks or in school grounds.

Thalgarrah EEC also offers Sleepover experiences utilising our Sleeping Lodges and Kitchen / Dining Hall facilities.

Principal’s Report
In 2014 Thalgarrah EEC continued to deliver quality teaching and learning programs to schools in the North-west / New England area.
During 2014 the centre continued to develop innovative new environmental education programs and resources. These programs have a strong focus on science and technology, literacy, and visual arts and many of our new programs are utilising mobile technology in pursuit of 21st century skill development and high-quality learning.
We have also continued our effective partnerships with other organisations to develop and deliver programs that contribute to engaging experiences for all students in the outdoors.
I certify that the information in this report is the result of a rigorous school self-evaluation process and is a balanced and genuine account of the school’s achievements and areas for development.
Matt McKenzie
Principal

Student information
This centre caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 12. We also run programs for pre-school groups, university students, and adult groups including other school staff.

In 2014, Thalgarrah assisted 4668 students with environmental education programs.
Visitors by Stage

In 2014 students visiting the centre were from predominately from Primary schools. We ran a number of Year 11 Biology programs, and in 2014 developed new program for Junior High School Science classes. Groups from University of New England also visited the centre.

Where we worked with them

This year most programs continued to be conducted on site at Thalgarrah EEC and surrounding properties, however 2014 saw an increase in the number of programs that occurred off-site such as in National Parks or in the grounds of client schools. We also used Video Conferencing facilities to connect with clients, particularly for school staff.

When they visited

In 2014 we had a much more even spread of visitation across the terms than in previous years. Term 4 continued to be the term with the biggest numbers of students due to programs that included larger groups including the kindergarten program “Teddy Bears’ Picnic”, the Schools Orienteering Challenge, and the Youth Environmental Summit (YES) in Sydney. Numbers of students in Term 1 this year were bolstered by the

In 2014, we had a further increase in the number of 1 night camps, although slightly less for longer stays of 2 and 3 nights.

We have invested heavily over the past few years to make Thalgarrah a more comfortable place for a Sleepover with new bunk beds, updated kitchen and dining facilities and offering catering services.
Workforce information

It is a requirement that the reporting of information for all staff must be consistent with privacy and personal information policies.

The Thalgarrah EEC team consists of a Senior Administrative Manager (SAM), a part time General Assistant (GA), a full time teaching Principal and a number of highly qualified casual staff.

Principal: Matthew McKenzie
Senior Administrative Manager: Maree Moloney (Temporary)
General Assistant/s: Lucy Adams, Joe Russell, Andrew Simpson and Andy Berryman all had a term each as the G.A. at Thalgarrah this year to replace Robert McClennaghan who had so much Long Service Leave owing to him he was able to take the year off.
Casual Teachers: Julie Kennelly, Nicci Hilton, Nina Drydale, Geoff Tomlins, and Belinda McGregor.
Casual SASS Staff: Kerrie Lockeridge, Ruth McKay, Chris Riley, Geoff Tomlins, and Chris Moloney.

Additional SASS staff were called upon in 2014 due to the increase in requests for catering services from groups having a Sleepover. We provided catering services on 33 days in 2014. We also had extra help in grounds improvement and maintenance.

In 2014 Thalgarrah enlisted the help of casual teachers on 80 days and casual SASS staff on 27 days.

Workforce composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher(s)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrative &amp; Support Staff</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Australian Education Regulation, 2014 requires schools to report on Aboriginal composition of their workforce.

In 2014 there were no Aboriginal people on the centre workforce.

Teacher qualifications

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>% of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree or Diploma</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional learning and teacher accreditation

- Annual EZEC Conference in Sydney;
- Annual EZEC Principals’ Conference in Sydney;
- Adobe Connect sessions on the new K-10 Science syllabus;
- Western EZEC Conference at Red Hill EEC in Gulgong;
- 8 Ways Aboriginal Pedagogy Course in Dubbo;
- Armidale Community of Schools meetings;
- Syllabus PLUS K-6 Science and Technology;
- Small Schools Conference in Inverell;
- “Plugging Into Nature” TPL course utilising mobile technology in Environmental Education.

No Beginning Teachers were employed at Thalgarrah EEC in 2014.
Financial summary

This summary covers funds for operating costs and does not involve expenditure areas such as permanent salaries, building and major maintenance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of financial summary</th>
<th>30/11/2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance brought forward</td>
<td>157,074.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global funds</td>
<td>28,479.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tied funds</td>
<td>24,214.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School &amp; community sources</td>
<td>36,753.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>3,854.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust receipts</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td>250,377.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Expenditure**           |            |
| Teaching & learning       |            |
| Key learning areas        | 12,378.12  |
| Excursions                | 0.00       |
| Extracurricular dissections| 0.00     |
| Library                   | 295.16     |
| Training & development    | 2,436.45   |
| Tied funds                | 35,872.95  |
| Casual relief teachers    | 0.00       |
| Administration & office   | 12993.55   |
| School-operated canteen   | 0.00       |
| Utilities                 | 7988.51    |
| Maintenance               | 14,849.64  |
| Trust accounts            | 0.00       |
| Capital programs          | 5,059.95   |
| **Total expenditure**     | 91,874.33  |
| **Balance carried forward**| 158,502.90|

A full copy of the school’s 2014 financial statement is tabled at the annual general meetings of the School Council and/or the parent body. Further details concerning the statement can be obtained by contacting the school.

School Performance 2014

Significant programs and initiatives

Taronga Zoomobile

This year we continued the centre’s partnership with Taronga Zoo and offered school visits to schools in the region. Schools involved in 2014 were Martin’s Gully PS, Newling PS, Black Mountain PS, Kingstown PS, Chandler PS, Kelly’s Plains PS, and Armidale City PS.

eGATS

Thalgarrah was heavily involved with the eGATS program in 2014. Gifted and Talented students of the region’s primary schools were invited to be part of this project which included a web-based provision of extension material for students in Maths, English, Multimedia, and Science throughout Term 3. Thalgarrah EEC staff managed the Science group. The program included a 2 day Camp for the students at the beginning as well as a Celebration Day at Thalgarrah EEC during Term 4.

Pre-service teacher visits

As part of their studies in Primary Science, we had 3rd Year University of New England students attend the centre to learn more about environmental education and the support available from Environmental Education Centres.
“Colour the Earth” Art Camp

“Colour the Earth” is a Visual Arts Camp for Stage 3 students. We have run this for the past few years using local artists and professional art facilitators as the Artists in Residence for the 2 days of camp.

In 2014 we decided to do something different by employing two RAW Art staff as our Artists in Residence.

In consultation with the RAW Art coordinator we chose 4 art activities that incorporated or drew inspiration from the natural environment.

We looked at the work of Fred Williams and painted a landscape using tools and methods that were new to most students.

We used plants from the local environment to create a chemograph – an art piece using photographic paper, sunlight, photographic chemicals and inks.

Scratch Foam and a eucalyptus leaf were used to create a reduction print.

The fourth RAW Art activity involved watercolour paints to learn about the symmetry, structure and patterns of beetles.

In the evening Thalgarrah staff conducted an art lesson in the forest at night where students had viewfinders to find interesting shapes in the forest and paint them in the shades of grey.

Frog Dreaming

In 2014 Thalgarrah EEC was again involved in the Kids Teaching Kids conference: Frog Dreaming, which was held over 2 days on a rural property near Kentucky. Kids taught other kids about environmentally friendly things they were doing in their schools and worked together to develop a story through dance and drama to be presented around the campfire. On the second day students were led on a round robin of activities led by local experts.

Teddy Bears’ Picnic

In 2014 we ran the Teddy Bears’ Picnic program with 10 classes from Pre-school & Early Stage 1. Through hands-on activities students learnt about the needs of living things, spend time exploring a natural area and, of course, had a picnic in the forest!
Year 12 Earth & Environmental Science

In 2014 Thalgarrah hosted Year 12 students from Coffs Harbour and guided them around the many interesting management strategies in the Armidale area as part of their Earth & Environmental Science studies. We visited examples of sustainable management of soils, compared water quality in different areas, looked at the state of the art “City 2 Soil” program and the way the Armidale Dumaresq Council manages the city’s sewerage. Students learnt about the management of pest species and were involved in some hands-on bush regeneration.

Animals in the Classroom

In 2014 Thalgarrah’s collection of captive animals featured in many of the educational programs. Students got to watch the Spiny Leaf Insects munch through leaves in science lessons. Visiting students in Stage 1 got to feel the difference between a tree frog and a bearded dragon during Wet & Dry Environment Studies. Stage 3 students set up scientific investigations using yabbies. Yamba, the centre’s large carpet python came out to visit many of our visitors as well.

Science in Small Schools

During National Science Week 2013, Thalgarrah staff, travelled to present Science workshops to clusters of small school. After exciting science demonstrations to begin the day which demonstrated the scientific process using rockets, students broke off into stage groups.

Early Stage 1 & Stage 1 took part in “Kitchen Chemistry” investigations, Stage 2 students explored flying and set up investigations to look at the variables that affect flight, while Stage 3 students explored electrical circuits and looked at alternative ways to generate electricity.

Over the 2 days of workshops we worked with 83 students from 5 small schools including Gum Flat, Woolbrook, Nowendoc, Yarrowitch, and Niangala Public Schools.

Youth Environmental Summit

In 2014 Thalgarrah EEC was, once again, invited to present at the YES (Youth Environmental Summit) at Homebush Bay.

This year we conducted workshops on building nestboxes for use by Australian native animals.

We also presented at the Namoi Sustainable Living Expo in Tamworth.
University of New England Science Teacher Professional Learning event.

Each year UNE’s G.R.A.S.S. (Growing Regional Agriculture & Science Students) program runs a 2 day TPL event for Science and Agriculture teachers. This year Thalgarrah were asked to present a session on how Environmental Education Centres can assist secondary science teachers through delivering fieldwork experiences related to Biology units.

We had 28 teachers visit the centre and several of these teachers followed up the workshop with booking groups in for 2015.

University of New England Science Investigation Awards.

In Term 3 of 2014, Thalgarrah staff were asked to be involved with UNE’s G.R.A.S.S. (Growing Regional Agriculture & Science Students) Science Investigation Awards. The Thalgarrah principal was asked to judge the entries into the category “Environmental & Sustainability” together with scientists from the university. It was a great day for all students, staff and scientists and we look forward to being involved with next year’s event.

Year 11 Biology

Fieldwork around the Year 11 Biology course “Local Ecosystem Study” continued to one of our most popular programs in 2014 with 12 different classes from different schools being involved. While at Thalgarrah Year 11 students study the woodland forest surrounding the centre and take a variety of measurements to determine the nature of the woodland ecosystem and the abiotic components that provide an important basis for the biotic components. Students also study adaptations and relationships between different living things in the forest.

Shrimp Investigations for Stage 5

In Term 2 of 2014 we trialled our new Stage 5 Science day focusing on how abiotic variables affect populations of living things. With the help of Dr. Glenn Wilson from UNE we designed an investigation around freshwater shrimps. Students were asked to research appropriate baits and think of different abiotic variables that could be tested in the Gara River.

On the day the students pulled in traps, counted freshwater shrimp and measure the abiotic variables in the position of the traps. Next time we will try it at a warmer time to see if we can catch some more shrimp!
Kids vs Wild

This is a new program originally designed for a school who wanted to do a Boys Ed Day. We now offer it to any Stage 3 class.

Students are involved in working out bush challenges in small groups. Challenges include navigating through the forest with a map, building a shelter and cooking their own lunch. The program is designed to give students a chance to develop and hone social and emotional capabilities, including Persistence, Organisation, Getting Along, and Resilience.

The role National Parks

In 2014, Thalgarrah was asked to assist stage 2 classes in their study of National Parks. As Thalgarrah is not in or near a gazetted National Park we met student groups at The Oxley Wild Rivers National Park or the New England National Park for the day of exploration. Through a long bush walk and a photographic scavenger hunt, students learnt about why we have national parks and how they are managed. In 2014 we worked with 12 different classes on the National Parks program.

Aboriginal education

An important part of the reconciliation process is an understanding of the cultural diversity and of the deep connection indigenous people such as the Anaiwan have for their country.

Thalgarrah EEC has significant Aboriginal sites in the surrounding woodland. These sites form the basis of our Aboriginal Studies programs which aims to highlight the manner in which the Anaiwan managed their tribal lands in a sustainable way through hundreds of generations.

Multicultural education

All programs are developed to be suitable for students from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Thalgarrah EEC promotes a racism free learning and working environment.
School planning and evaluation

School evaluation processes

NSW public schools conduct evaluations to support the effective implementation of the school plan.

In 2014 we carried out evaluations of our “Colour the Earth” program.

Background

“Colour the Earth” is a Visual Arts Camp for Stage 3 students. We have run this for the past couple of years using local artists and professional art facilitators as the Artists in Residence for the 2 days of camp.

In 2014 we decided to do something different due to a chance meeting with a RAW Art staff member.

RAW Art is a private company that has, for 20 years, travelled from school to school in NSW and Queensland running fun, educational, creative workshops with students giving them a wide range of art experiences and learning about the work of a variety of famous artists.

We employed two RAW Art facilitators for Colour the Earth 2014 and they each conducted 2 different art sessions with the 43 students from the region that attended.

In consultation with the RAW Art coordinator we chose 4 art activities that incorporated or were inspired by the natural environment.

In the evening Thalgarrah staff conducted an art lesson in the forest at night where students had viewfinders to find interesting shapes in the forest and paint them in shades of grey.

At the conclusion of the camp the 43 students in attendance were asked to fill in an evaluation form about the art experiences they had had, what it was like to work with art experts, and what they thought of the format of camp where students from 12 different schools visited.

Students responded very favourably to the questions in the evaluation. All 5 art activities were very much enjoyed by the students with the least popular activity still receiving a vote of 4 or 5 out of 5 from 84% of students. Being out at night painting in the forest was the most popular activity with all but one student giving it a 4 or 5.

A highlight of the camp for most students was meeting students from other schools and staying overnight.

When asked for a suggestion on how the art camp could be improved 28% said nothing needed to change: “You can’t make it better – its awesome as it is!” 33% of students suggested a longer camp: “Even if students have to pay more, I think the Camp should go for a bit longer.” Other suggestions were more free time, air conditioning, get more students involved, clay work, and an earlier bedtime.
School planning 2012-2014:

School priority 1
Increase the use of interactive technologies for learning and teaching.

Outcomes from 2012–2014
To improve student engagement and learning outcomes through creative use of digital technology and mobile devices.

Evidence of achievement of outcomes in 2014:

• In 2014 the centre’s Thalgarrah enlisted the help of the Quality Teaching consultant to develop videos of fieldwork techniques for our very popular Year 11 Biology program – A Local Ecosystem Study.

The videos were placed into an iTunesU course which Year 11 science students can access on the day of fieldwork program through the centre’s ipads.

This has not only increased student engagement but has also meant the students are learning things at the time they need it and at their own pace.

School priority 2
Centre teaching programs align with Quality Teaching Framework.

Outcomes from 2012–2014
To ensure centre teaching and learning programs align with updated syllabus and the Quality Teaching Framework.

Evidence of achievement of outcomes in 2014:

• In 2014, teaching units in Stages 3, 4 & 5 were reviewed and updated. With the introduction of the new Science syllabus for NSW most of our efforts this year were around what we offer to support new Science units in Stage 3 & 5.

Future Directions
2015-2017 School Plan

NSW DEC is implementing a new school planning process for 2015-17. The new plan will be published on the school’s website from the beginning of Term 2 2015.

Our Strategic Directions for 2015 are:

• Empowering Learners
• Building Teacher Capacity
• Strong and Sustainable Partnerships.

About this report

In preparing this report, the self-evaluation committee has gathered information from evaluations conducted during the year and analysed other information about the school’s practices and student learning outcomes. The self-evaluation committee and school planning committee have determined targets for the school’s future development.

Matthew McKenzie, Principal
Julie Kennelly, Teacher
Maree Moloney, School Administrative Manager

School contact information
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