



CASE STUDY

ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

Examining Teach For Australia's contribution to leadership progression and school improvements at St Joseph's College

2022



Building capacity for social justice

CONTENTS

About this project	4
About Lirata.....	4
Acknowledgement of Country	5
Acknowledgements	5
Suggested Citation	5
Introduction to St Joseph’s College	6
St Joseph’s College partners with TFA	8
Improvement focus	10
Increased student numbers, reputation and capacity to hire staff	10
Developing the STEM, Maths and Science programs	11
Building the School’s reputation: Connecting with Aboriginal and Islander culture and community	14
What has been critical to success?	16
Challenges along the way	20
How have TFA teachers contributed?	22
References	27

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This is one of four case studies that have been developed as part of a research project that aims to identify the impact, at school level, when a school partners with Teach For Australia (TFA). The research will identify the range of improvements and achievements experienced in each school since partnering with TFA. There are many factors which influence change in schools, and the case study data collection will seek evidence that indicates whether TFA's work is connected with educational change, and if so, how. This research seeks to build our understanding of the factors relating to both TFA's program, and the school context, that help or hinder improvements and achievements. We specifically explore how TFA Associate and graduate teachers contribute to those improvements and achievements. The project also looks for ways in which TFA can improve its support of teachers, schools and communities facing educational disadvantage.

The findings of the research will be important to TFA and to the case study schools through providing insight into school change and impact, both as a source of evidence to inform program or educational improvement, and as useful source material for communications and advocacy at school and system level. Common themes arising from the four case studies, pathways of impact in relation to TFA's program logic, and opportunities for program improvement will be presented to TFA in a report when completed.

TFA contracted Lirata to conduct this research project.

ABOUT LIRATA

Lirata (www.lirata.com) is a small, independent not-for-profit organisation based in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. We support the work of individuals and organisations who are responding to those in need. We partner widely to develop constructive solutions to social issues.

We specialise in the health, community services, education and development sectors, within Australia and internationally. We work with all tiers of government, service providers, peak bodies, advocacy organisations, socially engaged businesses and many others to assist them to:

- Become more effective in achieving their goals
- Achieve greater sustainability
- Adopt more ethical and empowering approaches.

We operate as a social enterprise, delivering our work through consultancy, capacity building and systems advocacy. We assist our partner organisations with monitoring and evaluation, organisational and program review, strategic and operational planning, organisational development, data systems development, training and mentoring. We also develop new approaches, tools and frameworks for social justice work.

The Lirata team for this research has been led by Pam Kennedy and includes Karen Rosauer, Dr Leannda Read, Mark Planigale and Celia Clapp, with Dr Dorothy Bottrell providing expert advice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all the lands and waters throughout Australia on which our work takes place. We pay our respects to their Elders and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Lirata team would like to acknowledge and thank the Principal of St Joseph's Catholic College, Ms Sunniva Antonucci, Kerry Wadey, the Leadership Team, Sarah Bretherton, and the teachers we interviewed for their valued contribution to this case study. Their enthusiastic willingness to be involved, to share their insights, and to reflect on their school's journey enabled a powerful story of change and improvement to emerge. We wish them well as they continue to inspire, support, and engage students, teachers, leaders, and community.

SUGGESTED CITATION

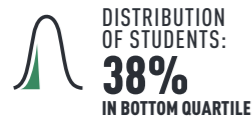
Rosauer, K., Kennedy, P. & Read, L. 2021. Case study—St Joseph's Catholic College - Katherine. Melbourne: Lirata Consulting.

INTRODUCTION TO ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

Established in 1987 as a primary school in the remote Northern Territory town of Katherine, and around three hours' drive from Darwin, St Joseph's Catholic College accomplished their vision of offering a complete educational experience through to the end of secondary school with the graduation of their first Year 12 cohort in 2014. Since that time St Joseph's Catholic College has continued to evolve as a school that confidently offers a quality education to a diverse population of students from pre-school to Year 12, with growing student numbers and enhanced community recognition. The school's partnership with Teach For Australia (TFA) since 2016 is part of the story of the school's achievements over recent years, explored in this case study.

St Joseph's Catholic College is a faith-based school which places inclusive community at its core. Committed to respect, resilience and healthy relationships, the school values their strong pastoral care program and warm welcoming atmosphere, and is proud of its academic development, especially in the areas of senior maths and science, as well as their STEM Program (a program which integrates concepts from science, technology, engineering and mathematics in an applied approach), in the lower secondary years. At the same time, the school is continuing to build their curriculum and pedagogy more broadly, and has built new facilities including a commercial kitchen and science labs.

To provide context for findings of the case study, St Joseph's Catholic College's Vision, Mission and school data are presented here.



TEACHING THE WHOLE PERSON

OUR VISION

A dynamic Christ-centred community of learners, nurturing holistic development through

RESPECT

RESILIENCE

RELATIONSHIPS

OUR MISSION

For our vision to be achieved, we will:

- Support and care for each individual who wishes to make his or her journey in our company, educating them in the values of truth, love, justice and peace and supporting them to reach out and be involved in and to serve the local parish and community;
- Encourage a style of relationship among students, staff and parents where communication is open and friendly and invites involvement;
- Promote standards of excellence and academic rigor, equality in opportunity and access, and training in leadership and responsibility;
- Respect and maintain the physical environment, care for and be proud of our history.

¹ In the Northern Territory, the preparatory year of schooling is called Transition (T). In other states of Australia, it is known as Prep (Queensland & Tasmania), Foundation (Victoria), Reception (South Australia), Pre-primary (Western Australia), or Kindergarten (ACT & New South Wales).

ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE PARTNERS WITH TFA

The partnership with TFA commenced in 2016. The college have employed four TFA Associates² and two TFA graduate teachers³ in the period 2016-2021, with two Associates currently at the college. These six TFA teachers have taught across a range of subject areas, including maths, science, STEM Program, English and humanities.

CHART 1. TFA TEACHERS AT ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Associate or Graduate ⁴	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Associate #1	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Associate #2		✓	✓	✓		
Graduate #1		✓	✓	✓		
Graduate #2			✓			
Associate #3					✓	✓
Associate #4					✓	✓
No. TFA teachers at the college each year	1	3	4	3	2	2

In 2016 the school had recently expanded to include Years 11 and 12 and was finding it extremely difficult to recruit senior level maths and science teachers. While initially cautious about the TFA model, school leadership became convinced that TFA could be a valuable resource, enabling them to recruit maths and science teachers who, despite being learning-on-the-job teachers needing support and mentoring, would bring contemporary teaching and learning, strong subject knowledge, industry experience, passion, and commitment.

In this small school, the relatively small number of TFA teachers employed at the school each year had a significant impact. The four TFA teachers employed in 2018, for example, comprised around 25 percent of the Year 7-12 teacher cohort. These teachers have impacted the culture, curriculum, and programs of the school. Having skilled senior level maths and science teachers helped the school attract other teachers in those areas, consolidating their newly fledged senior school.

² A **TFA Associate** is a teacher who is undertaking TFA's two-year teaching and leadership training course (a Master's of Teaching), which involves teaching an 80% teaching load, while studying.

³ **TFA graduates** are teachers who have completed their two-year Master's of Teaching. St Joseph's Catholic College recruited two TFA graduates who had undertaken their Associate years at another school.

⁴ Row titles show if the teacher started at the school as a TFA Associate or a graduate. Note that teachers who start at the school as Associates, become graduates after their initial two years.



IMPROVEMENT FOCUS

Over the duration of this partnership, the college has continued to develop and improve, driven and supported by a strong leadership team working collaboratively with school staff to embed a culture of growth and improvement. Their collective efforts are embodied in the achievements the school proudly shares in this case study.

A broad overview of school achievements is described here. Later sections of this case study explore factors which contributed to those achievements and the contributions of TFA teachers to the school's development.

St Joseph's achievements include:

- Significant development of the school's STEM program
- Development of a stronger pedagogy across the school
- Developing teacher practice in literacy and numeracy across the school
- Improvements in behaviour and behaviour management across the school
- Stronger use of data to inform planning
- Further development of the school's pastoral care program
- Strengthening the school's relationships with families, and partnering with the community
- Increased inclusion of Aboriginal and Islander students
- Further strengthening a positive, welcoming, and enthusiastic school culture amongst both students and teachers.

Of these achievements, college leadership identified four notable areas for the school: development of the STEM program in the lower secondary years; improvements in maths and science; increased capacity to recruit high performing staff; and a growing reputation for the school, leading to increased enrolments and retention.

Teaching staff also commented on the overall sense of fresh energy, positive change and leadership within the school:

"We are creating a culture where everything has a logical place, all staff participate in roles we set. Staff are excited about what they are doing as a school. Staff are really invested—I've never been in a school where staff are so invested and want to be involved in everything. All working on how to get to a desired state from existing state. What has led to this? We went back to basics—who are we and why are we here? We have an open style of leadership, so everyone has a voice. ... Whole place has lovely feel to it. Kids interacting really positively with staff as a result. Visitors comment on how welcoming the school is—see them light up."

(School staff member)

"The Catholic Education team visited last year—they commented that school had such a different feel to it now—all on same page looking for same outcomes. ... commented on walking into staff room and all the staff were so happy."

(School staff member)

The following sections outline some of these achievements in more detail.

INCREASED STUDENT NUMBERS, REPUTATION AND CAPACITY TO HIRE STAFF

Having started in 1987 as a primary school with 90 students, by 1996 there were a growing number of enquiries about extending St Joseph's into the secondary years. The middle school opened in 1999 with 28 Year 7 students and 17 Year 8 students (St Joseph's Catholic College [SJCC], 2021, n.d.). When St Joseph's Catholic College decided to offer senior years of schooling (Year 11 and 12) in 2013, this became a catalyst for significant change at the school. Given the national teacher shortages at the time (Milburn, 2011, Nuguid, 2021), and the added challenges of remote location, a key hurdle for the school was the hiring and retention of quality teachers, especially in the areas of maths and sciences at senior levels. It is relevant to note that the hiring of teachers in maths, science, and technology, remains an ongoing struggle for schools in rural and remote areas (O'Flaherty, 2021).

In 2021, St Joseph's Catholic College is in a significantly different situation. They have a strong leadership team, with expertise in the areas of maths and science, have attracted quality senior level teaching staff, and have built their curriculum and subject offerings, their pastoral care program, and connections with community. Their success is reflected in their growing reputation as a quality education provider.

Over the last 3 years, the school's overall enrolments have increased by a notable 18% (jumping from 206 students in 2018 to 244 students in 2021), and the Year 12 enrolments have increased by 50%. Staff at the school are proud that they are achieving their goal of becoming "the school of choice in Katherine" (SJCC, 2020, p.4), with an increasing number of families deciding to send their children to St Joseph's Catholic College, and also more families deciding to keep their children at the school through to Year 12. Changes within the school have also meant that more students believe that staying at school through to Year 12, rather than leaving earlier to find employment, is a possible and desirable option for them, as indicated in staff interviews.

Over the last 3 years, the school's overall enrolments have increased by a notable 18% (jumping from 206 students in 2018 to 244 students in 2021), and the Year 12 enrolments have increased by 50%. Staff at the school are proud that they are achieving their goal of becoming "the school of choice in Katherine" (SJCC, 2020, p.4), with an increasing number of families deciding to send their children to St Joseph's Catholic College, and also more families deciding to keep their children at the school through to Year 12. Changes within the school have also meant that more students believe that staying at school through to Year 12, rather than leaving earlier to find employment, is a possible and desirable option for them, as indicated in staff interviews.

DEVELOPING THE STEM, MATHS AND SCIENCE PROGRAMS

The development of St Joseph's STEM, maths and science programs has been significant over the last five years. During interviews, school staff described how the school leapt from "no STEM program" or "paying lip service to STEM" to building a popular STEM program into upper primary and lower secondary years. Crucially, the school has been able to recruit teachers with suitable expertise to continue to develop the STEM program, including specialised subjects such as robotics. The development of an engaging STEM program in the primary and lower secondary years has meant that more students now approach their senior years with enthusiasm, interest and confidence in studying maths and science subjects at higher levels.

In the senior school, St Joseph's is now able to confidently staff maths and a variety of science classes.

"Definitely [TFA] has allowed us to put in place good science and maths programs, delivered by teachers who have content knowledge—using proper STEM teachers, an area we had previously found difficult to recruit to. Now we are able to recruit more teachers who are STEM specialists, for example teachers who can teach math methods and specialist maths, physics, chemistry, robotics programs. Now more students wanting to do these programs, and also to be able recruit the extra teachers to do this. Teachers often want to come and teach upper school, not just middle school. Getting teachers with more experience and ability to teach more highly skilled subjects—so now we have three teachers who can teach up to those specialist levels. Teachers are not keen to just teach Yr 7-10—that can be soul destroying. Happy to come here because they have those chances."

(School staff member)

The following stories offer two examples of the development of STEM at the school.



THE SINK HOLE PRESERVATION PROJECT

Initiated by a TFA teacher in 2018, the sink hole preservation project brought together science, environmental preservation, and hands-on outdoor education, and helped the school forge stronger connections with the Katherine community. Engaging students in learning with daily scientific expeditions, the project led to discoveries of new sinkholes, and identification of unique plant species.

"The sinkholes have been an opportunity to integrate the biology, chemistry, and geology curriculum into a real life, outdoors situation. It is also a great opportunity to educate students about the environment, water security and endemic Katherine flora and fauna." (Fitzgerald, 2018a)

The project received a grant award (Danhers Facility Management, 2018), raised significant community funds through a movie night and student led tours of the sinkholes, and was extensively reported in local and territory news. The sink hole preservation project was subsequently expanded to involve the broader Katherine community. Students undertook other advocacy work to build community understanding and support for the project, including getting one of the sink holes re-fenced, and initiatives to find out more about its history. In the words of the TFA teacher, as reported in The Katherine Times:

"It really is something we should be valuing and protecting ... The sinkholes have provided the school with an engaging learning tool which has students excited about science. And now, the young scientists will be taking on leadership roles and proving they can make a difference. We want the students to see that if they make enough noise adults will listen, and that if they want to make significant impacts to creating environmental change, they can." (Fitzgerald 2018b)

STAR GAZING

In 2019 a TFA teacher brought noted astrophysicist Brad Tucker to the school, involving students and community (Australian National University, n.d.). Through connections to NASA, the TFA teacher also had two telescopes donated to the school.

"... there's an astronomer who is on the ABC news ... He comes to the Northern Territory, and the next thing he is at the school running these astronomy nights. And again, it had been run and led by TFA people. You've got the whole town turn out. I think we had 300 people from the town there on this night, star gazing with this professor of Astronomy from ANU. ... that's a TFA initiative and it's based on what they are doing at school and in astronomy and in science."

(School staff member)

Using the telescopes continues to be a feature of the school's Night of Excellence each year.

BUILDING THE SCHOOL'S REPUTATION: CONNECTING WITH ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Over the last few years, St Joseph's Catholic College has been building connections with the community and enhancing their reputation in Katherine, in diverse ways. The sink hole preservation project and the star gazing event described in the previous section, are two of many examples. Another significant way the school has increased its connections with community, is through a series of initiatives which have built understanding and connection between the school, Aboriginal and Islander students, and their communities and cultures. Initially driven by a TFA teacher, and then by school leadership, these initiatives are thought to have led to an increased retention of Aboriginal and Islander students into the senior years.

"She [a TFA Associate] was hell bent on getting the students, the Indigenous students, through to Year 12, and completing Year 12, and getting a qualification. And we had not had great success. She went off and met with elders. She took a group of teachers out to Ngukurr, which is a remote community, where they learned Kriol⁵. They came back to school. They had the children learning informally Kriol, in lunchtimes, and other times like that. She then learned a little bit of language herself. She had some Indigenous people who were supporting her in that and translating. So, when she was teaching biology, for example, she would be teaching biology using concepts and resources from Kriol, to engage these kids, and to support them getting through their Year 11 and 12 biology courses. ... that was high impact stuff.

"And of course, then families realised that there's teachers at this school that were recognising our culture, and were sitting with us, and meeting with us. And she would be doing late afternoon classes, and holiday catch up programs. And she would be taking these children home, back to their communities on the edges of the town. And connecting with the families. And getting to know them. And so, the families could see the value in what she was trying to achieve, and they could see the value in western education, because of the way she was approaching it. It was pretty profound."

(School staff member)

Since 2016, at least 8 Aboriginal and Islander students have completed Year 12. However, the numbers do not tell the whole story:

"One year we might have had three, one year we had four Indigenous students completed their

⁵ Australian Kriol is a language widely spoken in the Northern Territory, particularly in the Katherine area. The actions of European settlers, including stealing of Aboriginal and Islander land and forced resettlement, led to Aboriginal and Islander people from many language groups living together in communities. Kriol became a connecting language.

Year 12. You know it's interesting data, it's not bad, but it's not revolutionary, earth-shattering stuff. But in the context of Katherine, where these kids have been, and what they've achieved up until that point, it was ground-breaking. When I think about our first 4 Indigenous graduates from Year 12, it was very special. It was a big deal. And the photographs show it ... there's the data, you know. You look at the mums and dads and the pride of what's happened, and what they've gone on to do."

(School staff member)

Taking a group of Aboriginal and Islander students to the Indigenous Literacy Foundation in Sydney (Morris, 2018), was another powerful TFA teacher-led initiative, which had a deep impact that extended beyond the project itself.

"... So that week in Sydney was profound. ... They were part of the publication of a book, that has become a resource that they now use in the classroom. That was very significant for those Indigenous students. It gave them the confidence to become more part of the school culture too."

(School staff member)

In the year following the visit to the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, the school decided that Aboriginal and Islander symbols would be included in updated versions of each of the school's house logos. This decision reflected a developing momentum around the inclusion of Aboriginal and Islander students and cultures in the school.

"[When] we were developing symbols and logos for our houses, it was those same children that sat down as a group collectively and painted the images to go with the theme for our school. So, they became part of the identity and the symbols of the school.

What it was doing was building Indigenous culture within a school that had not traditionally been viewed as a school where you went if you wanted Indigenous cultural experiences. It had quite a history of being a whites only school. It's only 30 years old. To have symbols and icons that were Indigenous, and certainly put together, designed by Indigenous kids, is quite a step forward. So, the mastheads, the logos and symbols that come with the houses now, are embedded with Indigenous symbols."

(School staff member)



Chevalier's new House Symbol. The Maltese cross eight points represent the eight beatitudes or blessings upholding the philosophy of Jules Chevalier's work with the poor and disfranchised. The Kookaburra is linked to happiness and positive energy. The Kookaburra totem is a powerful one with fire and water like the Holy Spirit at the heart of its spirit. The Kookaburra is a healer of the past helping to close and open new doors in our lives. (SJCC 2021)

WHAT HAS BEEN CRITICAL TO SUCCESS?

EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

Leadership and staff of St Joseph's Catholic College identified a number of factors that were significant in enabling improvements and achievements over the last few years. Key among these factors, mentioned by all interviewees, was having excellent leadership and staff. The following interview extract explains how the employment of a senior level leader with expertise in maths and science, along with the TFA teachers and further recruitment acted in concert to create a wave of change:

"She came in as the secondary science teacher. That was her background, mathematics and science. Prior to that our deputy principals, and the principals, had all been primary based, so didn't really have a strong understanding of secondary programs and courses etc. So, by having [her] arrive at the school, you then had a science-based deputy principal who could mentor, not just the science teachers, but the English teachers and the maths teachers, and could be a mentor, and provide this academic rigour, if you like, that was missing in previous years. So, the combination of having a deputy principal with secondary background, high achieving, aspirational, and the [TFA] associates. The other teachers then came on board. So, you had quite a wave of quality teaching taking place, that hadn't been there previously. So TFA had an impact ... it impacted on the service delivery of quality teaching, in combination with those other factors: the arrival of the secondary deputy principal, plus the recruitment. I think it just all rolled together."

Insights into the impact of leadership and staff were offered by many interviewees in response to the question, 'What factors have enabled these improvements or achievements to happen?'

"Staff. Because if you've got really good staff who communicate well and are into the kids, and are genuinely there for the kids, that transfers across too. Both TFA and other staff."

(School staff member)

"We have the right mix with right leadership in the right time and in the right environment. You don't get that very often."

(School staff member)

"We all agreed we would not walk past bad behaviour. Good process for addressing poor behaviour. And that is result of [the school principal's] leadership."

(School staff member)

"... staff with the knowledge, and with the passion. I think ... kids pick up very easy if the teacher doesn't have the passion. And I think we've been very blessed in that we've have teachers with the knowledge, whether they are TFAs or whether they are teachers with experience."

(School staff member)

Parent feedback quoted in the school's recent annual reports, echoes the comments of staff.

"It would be hard to keep the email down to one line. There are so many positive things I could say about St Joseph's staff in all departments. ... We have four children at St Joseph's, and I have the greatest respect and admiration for the teaching and office staff and as a whole. Thank you to all St Joseph staff for the exceptional job you all do."

(SJCC, 2020)

"The best teachers, great support."

(SJCC, 2020)

Two further areas were identified as important in the school's achievements, data informed practitioners and the development of a range of pathways to year 12 completion.

DATA INFORMED PRACTITIONERS

For a few years, St Joseph's Catholic College were funded to employ data-informed practitioners. This led to an ongoing commitment to data informed practice.

"Have had funded data positions – data informed practitioners. ... funding for these specialised positions has stopped [but the school still] has a commitment to data informed practice ... Can see the growth the students have been making, in a very visual display ... Definitely has made a difference."

(School staff member)

PATHWAYS TO YEAR 12

The development of alternative pathways to achieving Year 12 has also been mentioned as an important factor in more young people achieving their Year 12 certificate. This has included having a Vocational Education and Training (VET) program which allows students to obtain a Year 12 certificate "without necessarily being in mainstream classes" (school staff member). Another factor that was mentioned as contributing to the school's success in enabling a broad range of students to achieve their Year 12 certificate is the compulsory Certificate III in Christian Ministry and Theology, which starts in Year 10. This certificate, completed largely in class over three years, provides students with a significant component of the minimum requirements for a Year 12 certificate.



CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

To fully understand the achievements of St Joseph's Catholic College, it is necessary to understand the context in which the school operates, and the unique challenges posed by that context.

LOCATION

While the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) classifies St Joseph's Catholic College as a remote school on their My School website (ACARA, 2021), the Northern Territory Department of Education classifies the town of Katherine as urban. The classification of Katherine as urban by the NT Department of Education is significant, because it means that teachers relocating to Katherine are not eligible for a variety of NT government subsidies available to teachers in regions classified as remote. For example, teachers working in Katherine do not receive any relocation, rent, health or travel assistance, even though rents can be expensive, health care very difficult to access, and travel to visit family or friends in other parts of Australia, costly and time consuming.

These factors, along with the challenges of living in a remote tropical location, make the hiring and retention of quality teaching staff an ongoing challenge. To illustrate this challenge for the town of Katherine, a quick scan of the Northern Territory's teacher vacancy website on May 26th, 2021 (Northern Territory Government Australia, n.d.), reveals ten teacher vacancies in the town of Katherine, five of them with an immediate start date. As a comparison, the much larger city of Darwin, has twelve teacher vacancies listed, with only two of them having an immediate start date.

DIVERSE AND TRANSIENT POPULATION

Around a third of the students at St Joseph's Catholic College come from Aboriginal and Islander communities close to, or within, the town of Katherine (population 6,000), with some coming from more distant locations within the Northern Territory. The Aboriginal and Islander students come from a wide range of language groups and, for many, English is their second, third or even fourth language.

Around 15% of the students at St Joseph's Catholic College have a parent working at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Tindal, situated 15 kilometres from the town of Katherine. These families typically stay two to three years and have usually planned to relocate to a less remote location for their child's senior years of schooling or send their child to a boarding school. However, it is not just RAAF families who come in and out of Katherine and its schools. There tends to be a regular turnover over of both teachers and students, with new students arriving and departing regularly throughout the school year.

"The turnover of students through this school was, and remains, at about 30% every year ... it is a very very transient town ... So that presents the lack of security as far as the normalcy of a school, where a student begins in Year 7, or in our case, because St Joseph's went from first year primary, right through to the end of secondary. You had just this incredible turn over all the time. So, there was that lack of stability. ... they don't all arrive in January or December. They'll arrive in February and be gone in June, July, and someone else will arrive. That was typical of the context of the town."

(School staff member)

HOW HAVE TFA TEACHERS CONTRIBUTED?

Each of the teachers and leadership staff interviewed for this case study explained (often with great enthusiasm) ways in which TFA teachers have brought energy, passion, care, genuine engagement with students, and commitment to excellence to bear in introducing a broad range of programs and activities. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned that the capability of TFA teachers was underpinned by deep content knowledge and contemporary research-based approaches to teaching and learning.

The TFA teacher impact has strengthened the way the school has engaged students, built connections with Aboriginal and Islander communities and the broader community, and energised and excited other teaching staff.

"I mean when I think back to a couple of those associates—just the time they invested in these kids, and their passion for improving and supporting them. And the evidence was there with them, sitting with them at lunchtime under the tree, or taking them into a classroom, or just simply sitting with them and working with them, beyond the scope of the bells that rang, you know. That was the stuff that makes the difference. It was profound."

(School staff member)

"TFAs have kudos with the kids because they have real life experience in their fields ... They can deal with social emotional stuff. For schools in remote places, it's quite demanding. Hard to recruit good staff, which has [a] flow on effect where parents want to send kids elsewhere/boarding school, to get that higher level expertise."

(School staff member)

"Starting off clubs, contagious passion. Getting kids interested in following different subject and career paths. The passion really does extend the school."

(School staff member)

"Their improvements have been embedded in the way school culture and practice continues beyond the time that the TFA is at the school. Built into school culture and expectations. It's not just about what they are doing, it's the expectations that we have, the programs we can offer. It becomes part of our identity."

(School staff member)

Staff and leadership interviewed for this case-study all felt that TFA teachers played a part, along with other teachers and leadership, in shifting the culture, energy and teaching in the school. School leaders explained that, along with the contributions each of the TFA teachers made, an important impact of the TFA teachers in the initial years was that having teachers with energy, commitment and expertise in their subject area at a senior level, in particular in maths and science, made it more attractive for other teachers to join and stay in the school.

"I think what was happening then ... you were then able to recruit and hold other teachers who were of a similar ilk who weren't necessarily trained through the TFA program. But you could see a cultural change happening in the secondary classroom environment, or the staffroom environment."

(School staff member)

In addition to the improvement initiatives described earlier, TFA teachers have made significant contributions in other ways, for example, providing leadership in:

- Developing networks with other mathematics teachers across the Northern Territory and taking students to Litchfield National Park on a maths camp
- Building new collaborative partnerships with teachers at Katherine High School, the state government secondary school in Katherine
- Developing the STEM program for the middle years at St Joseph's Catholic College
- Strengthening the incorporation of student data and feedback in teaching
- Involving students in the Duke of Edinburgh program and awards
- Hosting the Tournament of Minds at St Joseph's Catholic College.

A TWO-WAY PARTNERSHIP

TFA Associates have the potential to contribute to schools and communities in significant ways, as this case study illustrates. The provision of adequate support for TFA Associates is critical to enabling those contributions.

Beginning teachers typically face a range of challenges in their first few years of classroom teaching. TFA Associates face the additional hurdle of combining an 80% classroom teaching load with their university studies. For those coming to Katherine, there are also the challenges connected with the remote location, and the challenges of differentiation in classes where students' reading might vary by over 20 levels, compared with a more common 6-8 levels. Several staff reinforced the need for the school to provide solid support for TFA Associates, including a firm commitment to TFA Associates' development, in-school mentoring, and strong internal support networks. "You need staff onsite, positive and supportive ... having that commitment by everyone to go with it and follow it through," explained one staff member.

"It is important that TFAs [TFA Associates] come into a school environment where they can be mentored well ... they come with great knowledge and enthusiasm, but they can drown if you don't mentor them. Need someone from their speciality area to help them grow and prosper, otherwise they are more likely to get burn out. They need to be grounded in the reality of life, making things happen and what they can do ... They are very enthusiastic to enact change, but you can only survive [in schools] if you have the other skills."

(School staff member)

This internal support complements the external support for TFA Associates from the TFA program itself and its Teaching and Leadership Advisers, and from informal support networks of TFA Associates and alumni from this and other schools.

To support the school in their mentoring of TFA Associates, TFA provides professional development programs for the teacher mentors. Mentors from St Joseph's Catholic College found the professional learning courses provided by TFA worthwhile and voiced their appreciation.

"Support from TFA was really good. Training up in Darwin about being a mentor was really beneficial. Anyone who has gone through the mentoring role, would develop themselves, with the support of the TFA as well. In that it was a professional development for the staff as well, to take on the mentoring role. And if you are upskilling staff, it is another benefit for the school on a long-term basis."

(School staff member)

The leadership team saw the value in supporting and encouraging TFA teachers in their early years of teaching. This support enabled TFA teachers to contribute to the school in a variety of ways, including through helping to develop the school's STEM Program and their senior level maths and science courses, and making significant contributions to inclusion of Aboriginal and Islander students.

IN SUMMARY

Strong leadership has been crucial to the changes at St Joseph's Catholic College over the last few years, along with the decision to bring in external expertise and passion through partnering with TFA. Both factors led to an ongoing snow-balling effect of bringing in more and more high calibre teachers and increasing both student retention and enrolments. As the narratives in the case study illustrate, TFA was a critical component of these changes and has helped to create self-sustaining positive change.

The partnership with TFA has helped the school to meet its goal of having a sound senior years program, and enhancing its reputation as a school of choice, for its many and diverse populations groups, across all year levels.

"...definitely the school has really benefited, across maths, sciences, humanities, ...it's been great."

(School staff member)

"I think it's a really good program. For us to be able to get the expertise of staff to a remote area, we wouldn't have been able to get that, and the spin offs have been great."

(School staff member)





REFERENCES

- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2021). *St Joseph's Catholic College, Katherine, NT: School profile*. My School. Retrieved November 25th, 2021, from <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/40351>
- Australian National University (n.d.). *The Universe and the future of space – Katherine, NT*. <https://www.anu.edu.au/events/the-universe-and-the-future-of-space-katherine-nt>
- Danihers facility management (2018, August 28). *Recipients of Danihers Grant Awards*. <https://www.danihers.com.au/general/recipients-of-danihers-grant-awards/>
- Fitzgerald, R. (2018a, June 18). Student sinkhole discovery. *Katherine Times*. <https://www.katherinetimes.com.au/story/5474342/student-sinkhole-discoveries/>
- Fitzgerald, R. (2018b, August 28). Sinkholes at St Joseph's will be on show next month for the first time. *Katherine Times*. <https://www.katherinetimes.com.au/story/5612229/sinkholes-on-tour/>
- Milburn, C. (2011, March 17). More teachers, but fewer staying the course. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/education/more-teachers-but-fewer-staying-the-course-20110304-1bhuv.html>
- Morris, L. (2018, September 4). Molly the Weet-Bix pig drives Indigenous reading campaign. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/molly-the-weet-bix-pig-drives-indigenous-reading-campaign-20180831-p500wl.html>
- Northern Territory Government Australia. (n.d.) *Classroom Teacher vacancies*. Teach in the Territory. Retrieved May 26, 2021, from (<https://www.teachintheterritory.nt.gov.au/classroom-teacher-vacancies>)
- Nuguid, A. (2021, May 8). *School workforce report spot-on about math teacher shortages*. Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute [AMSI]. <https://amsi.org.au/2012/05/08/school-workforce-report-spot-maths-teacher-shortages/>
- O'Flaherty, A. (2021, June 15). 'Worrying' STEM teacher shortage with pressure felt in rural and remote schools. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-15/school-principals-dont-have-enough-maths-science-teachers/100214738>
- St Joseph's Catholic College, Katherine. (n.d.) *Home: About*. Facebook. Retrieved December 2nd, 2021, from <https://www.facebook.com/StJosephsCatholicCollege/about>
- St Joseph's Catholic College. (2018). *Annual Principal's Report*.
- St Joseph's Catholic College. (2021). *We are St Joseph's*. <https://www.stjoeys.college/we-are-sj>

RESEARCH COMMISSIONED BY



RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY



CASE STUDY: ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

PUBLISHED JUNE 2022. RESEARCH CONDUCTED NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2020.