

# Independent Perspective

*Independent schools reflect on what makes their school distinctive*



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS  
COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA



**Andrew Manning**  
Principal

**School:**  
Marrara Christian  
College

**Location:**  
Marrara  
Darwin, NT

**Year Range:**  
ELC to Year 12

**Enrolments:**  
600

**Teaching Staff:**  
55

**School Website:**  
[mcc.nt.edu.au](http://mcc.nt.edu.au)

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## Building school spirit and community in the Top End

*Catering for around 600 students, Marrara Christian College in Darwin is structured into Early Learning, Primary, Middle and Secondary School. The College has approximately 160 Indigenous students, 100 of which are remote Indigenous boarders.*

### **Can you tell us how Marrara Christian College came about?**

The concept for Marrara started over 40 years ago when a group of parents got together and decided that they wanted to have a school that delivered Christian education for their kids. The school opened 39 years ago and we’ve been serving the Darwin community ever since. Marrara remains a Christian school and we’re very serious about integrating faith and education. Not all our kids come from Christian families, but our whole community is committed to educating students really well, caring for them really well, and in a Christian context.



### **What are your school’s greatest strengths?**

I think our greatest strength is that we’ve been able to balance the need to rigorously help kids grow and develop academically, while enveloping that in a really caring, supportive and relational environment. We don’t think it’s necessary to sacrifice one for the other... I think we get the balance right and do it well.

What I love about Marrara is that it’s very family orientated. It’s a community that celebrates the diversity of families and wants to support families in the education of their kids. And it’s refreshing to work in a place that encourages parents to be actively involved in their child’s education, which we find improves how students learn and the quality of their results. It takes a village to raise a child, and by actively encouraging that village model, we see not just good results but also great kids of high character that are ready to go out, take on and change the world.

### **What challenges has the school faced?**

Darwin has a highly transient demographic, with a big defence and mining population. Many families move up for a limited period, but it’s not a forever home for them. Whether they are boarders or day students the average stay is about 4 years. So, while we do have some students that stay with us from Transition to Year 12, we don’t have that wonderful luxury of seeing most of our Year 12s graduate after having known each other for 13 odd years.



So, the challenge is, how do we maintain culture and school spirit and form strong relationships when we don't have long periods of time in which to build them? Even supporting our alumni is difficult because they leave town. So we operate in a really different cultural environment than a lot of schools down south. It makes it really interesting and challenging to build those relationships that I think some schools tend to take for granted.

***What are some of the misconceptions you think people have about Independent schools?***



We struggle with the big misconception that Independent schools have lots of money to throw around. We've got an amazing group of kids and families, who are good old-fashioned Aussie battlers in the main. They're normal families, they're not high-end earners. They desperately want good quality education for their kids and they choose us to do that. But the perception that we have lots of money to throw around is, I think, one of the biggest myths that we're finding ourselves having to bust. We steward our finances well to support and care for kids but we're not one of the small percentage of high end Independent schools.

***Where do you see Marrara in five years' time?***

We see ourselves about the same size, not bigger, and doing much of what we do now. It's about continuing to shape what we do well to better service students and families. But there's a tremendous amount of work to do in boarding, particularly in and around the funding and making sure our program is sustainable to serve students well into the future.

***Can you share a recent school achievement that you are particularly proud of?***

There are so many!

Our most recent celebration has been around our Year 12s and the graduating groups from our Trade Training Centre... which has been very encouraging and exciting.

Also, watching another very strong cohort of Indigenous students graduate and move into a whole range of work and training opportunities post-school. That's been a tremendous high that we've enjoyed getting to see the fruits of.

One of our broader highlights has been the introduction of what's called the "Rite Journey", which is a middle school program about stronger kids and stronger relationships, and helping them understand what it is to be a growing and maturing young person into adulthood.

***What is an initiative you would like to implement in your school?***



We're implementing a program called "Eight People", which is a tool we've brought in from New Zealand that looks at teacher practice. It's all about improving learning. It's about taking good teachers and helping them reflect on their practice with the ultimate goal of ensuring that learning is maximised in their classrooms and interactions with students are absolutely the best they can be.

