



EDUCATION DECEMBER 7 2017

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Road maps for the future

Kristie Kellahan

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Dan van Velthuisen was determined to increase the "occupational aspirations" of students at Warialda Public School and he did just that.

Last year van Velthuisen, principal of the school, created the Middle Years Initiative: Wider than Gwydir, to show the students some real-life examples of grown-ups with great jobs. The program invites successful men and women to speak to students via video link-up about their careers and professional pathways.

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Dan Van Velthuisen (right) with Rebecca Langdon, director of Public Schools NSW. Photo: Supplied



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"Having taught for over a decade at Moree Public School, I had seen so many students at the school who were from families where education wasn't necessarily a priority," van Velthuizen says.

"Students didn't have role models showcasing an extensive range of career options. Similarly, I had graduated from Nudgee College in Brisbane with a limited view of what career options were available to me."

Speakers have included Peter Baines OAM, founder of charity Hands Across the Water, Lewis Holland, an Australian Rugby Union 7s representative player, and entomologist Kirsty Abbott.

"The concept hasn't been simply to encourage or push students in a particular direction but rather to provide a platform upon which they can see the incredible opportunities that are available to them beyond their school years," van Velthuizen says.



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The concept for the speakers' program developed from data highlighting the importance of the middle years (years 5 to 8) in terms of engaging students and enabling them to realise the relevance of their schooling opportunities.

Warialda Public School is located between Moree and Inverell, in a prime agricultural region of North West NSW. Van Velthuizen says that before the program began, 92 per cent of students at the school were interested in jobs that required no further education. Now, aspirations have broadened from an expectation of working as roo shooters and farm hands, to a diverse range of professions.

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Students listen via fortnightly videoconferences to the stories of the guest speakers who are asked to outline their own time at school, what they wanted to be growing up, where they grew up and how they went at school. They then talk about how they got to where they are today. Speakers are asked to offer

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words of advice and to leave the audience with some messages about what they think is important.

"This project has and will continue to be an outstanding success," van Velthuizen says. "Students are being consistently exposed to an extensive variety of careers that they might not typically engage with on a day-to-day basis."

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