

## **Rachel McKenzie**

*Longreach State High School, QLD*



By the end of her first day at Longreach State High School as a 21-year-old graduate teacher, Rachel knew that without a presence in the lives of her students, teaching in the rural and remote centre would be exceptionally challenging.

Two-and-a-half years later, with the inroads Rachel has made with the families and parents of her students, her classroom has transformed into a much more peaceful environment.

It all started when Rachel took on the challenge of data manager to track data related to wellbeing and behaviour. The school had an exceptional volume of disengaged parents, with approximately 10% of parents attending parent-teacher interviews. She found that while the school averaged 9.5 incidents of poor behaviour a day, parental contact remained at 0.2 a day. School morale was low for various reasons.

She knew that she had to become more innovative in asserting the school's presence within the lives of her students and their families. She helped the school implement the idea of communicating with families through school postcards that celebrated learners who made positive classroom choices.

The postcards would be sent to a student who helped a struggling peer or to someone who was committed to challenging classwork. Within the first week of dispatch, students began asking whether they will be getting a postcard and what they need to show to get it. As a result, the school saw 90% of students become included in the list of students who met expectations, daily behavioural incidents coming down to 2 and parents who were once 'screen callers' starting to have positive interactions with their students' teachers fostering a respectful relationship between home and school.

Staff morale improved as many staff members received complimentary emails or verbal exchanges from parents and students.

What kept Rachel going when the odds were high was the belief that the creation of partnerships allow young, early career educators such as herself to become innovative within their practice and cement the relationships which will see them succeed within the classroom.