

## **Chronology of Aboriginal children's education at Nulla Creek 1885–1974**

### **Nulla Creek Aboriginal School (also known as Bellbrook Reserve School)**

Based on archival records, this chronology investigates changes over time in Aboriginal children's education at Nulla Creek Aboriginal Creek Reserve on the Macleay River, 30 km inland from Kempsey on the north coast of NSW. The chronology provides a closer examination of the local and personal implications of some of the policies, prejudices and politics mentioned in the main timeline.

Dhungutti and Gumbangarri people had lived and worked in the area for generations, and attended local schools until the reserve school was opened in 1903. As an independent farming community they resented the imposition of a manager on the reserve in the 1930s, and the increasing intervention in their lives by the Aborigines Protection Board (later the Aborigines Welfare Board). The insistence on compulsory schooling by the ABP after the Aboriginal Protection Act (1909) made it difficult for women and children to do seasonal work and move around their country.

School files at State Records reveal the difficulties faced by Aboriginal people in seeking quality education for their children in this isolated area, especially after manager-teachers were appointed by the APB in the 1930s. Teaching was often regarded as a less important priority than station management by resident managers – who were untrained in any case.

Parents of students repeatedly appealed to authorities when they felt poor teaching and racism compromised their children's education. Parents' letters and the oral history of reserve resident Minnie Quinlan show community determination to secure basic education in literacy and numeracy for their children, and the devastating effects of family members being taken away to 'training homes' such as nearby Kinchela.

In 1948 the first qualified teacher was employed to teach at Nulla Creek Aboriginal school after years of often half-hearted attempts at teaching by station managers. In the 1960s period of 'assimilation', older students in particular started to attend Kempsey High and other local schools with non-Aboriginal students.

Further oral histories with students, ex-students and staff of Nulla Creek Aboriginal school would enrich this case study. Oral memory is central to Indigenous culture and teaching, and can provide crucial information and alternative narratives to those in documents.

## Chronology

### 1885

#### Nulla Creek Reserve declared at site of Aboriginal farms

The Nulla Creek Reserve was established at the request of local Dhungutti people (Neil 1972, p88). Goodall has documented how Aboriginal people such as the people of Bellbrook demanded land and/or reoccupied their country with the aim of self-sufficiency. These lands often became reserves. (Goodall,1990)

There was no manager at the reserve at this point and people lived there independently growing corn on their farms for sale in the city. (Morris 1989, p36; Harrison, p97).



Image 1: Section of NSW Department of Lands Nulla Creek Aboriginal Parish Map (1901) Dudley County, PMapTE02 [10537901](#), showing the reserve where the school was located – light green area by creek.

APB reports of 1885 noted that 10 men and their families were established on Bellbrook. They had built themselves homes and were working on clearing the reserve. Morris points out this was but a fraction of the land they had managed pre-invasion. (Morris,1989 p58)

### 1890s

#### Mixed schooling in the upper Macleay region

Aboriginal children attended Pee Dee school with other children (Bellbrook Public 1983. p27; Berzins 1996, p90)

An oral history of Minnie Quinlan, whose father established Bellbrook before it became a station, noted that her mother attended a local school with non-Aboriginal children:

‘...White people didn’t mix with our people, only in the school. They didn’t stop our mother and father going to school; they’d even bring lunch for them, my mother used to say. My mother could read and write, she learned from them, they wasn’t that bad. It’s only a few white people that were no good.’  
(Eckerman & Quinlan 1983, p15)

Quinlan recalled the process involved in establishing the school as a community initiative:

‘My father wanted us to have an education... In those days only my family lived on Bellbrook and to get a bit of schooling my mother used to have to get other kiddies and look after them. You had to have 9 or 10 to get a teacher...’  
(Eckerman & Quinlan 1983, p13-14)

## **1892**

### **Reserve growth**

Reserve expanded from 40 to 65 acres. (Morris 1989, p233)

## **May 1903**

### **Separate Aboriginal Reserve School proposed**

Schools Inspector Byrne recommended that an Aboriginal school be established on Nulla Creek Aboriginal Reserve as approximately 19 children of school age were on the reserve.

In a memo to the Chief Inspector, Byrne noted that 60 people lived on the reserve permanently while others worked up and down the Macleay River. State Records NSW, Department of Education, Schools Files 1869-1979, NRS 3829 Nulla Nulla, 1876-1939, Administrative [5/17188.3] f10). [\[For an explanation of State records references see website.\]](#)

Families who were listed as wanting to attend the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School included the Callagans, Scotts, Kellys, Vales, Hollows, Hills, Thompsons, Mackays, McKenzies, Murrays and Ducaps.(SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17188.3] f11)

## **Sept 1903**

### **Nulla Creek Aboriginal school established**

A provisional school for Aboriginal children was established at Nulla Creek Reserve. The APB built the school and the Department of Education supplied a teacher. Teachers at Aboriginal schools were not required to be qualified. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17188.3], f.1)

## **1911**

### **Effects of compulsory schooling on families**

The APB enforced compulsory schooling, making it more difficult for Aboriginal mothers to work and travel with their husbands to nearby properties like Kunderang on the upper Macleay. Mothers and children began to stay at Bellbrook for longer periods of time, while men were working at other properties. This had the effect of increasing children’s vulnerability to removal by the APB. (Harrison, 2004, p99)

## **1913**

### **APB representation of school conditions**

The APB presented a rosy picture of education at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School:  
‘The school building is spotlessly clean, brightened by vases of flowers and pictures; the pupils cleanly dressed, courteous and obedient, and interested in their work. Writing and handwork are satisfactory subjects. The girls showed some creditable sewing. (APB 1913).

## **April 1914**

### **Teacher eventually appointed**

The school was without a teacher from the beginning of 1914 until April, undercutting the impression given in the APB reports of a commitment to education (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17188.3], f5)

## **1914**

### **Reserve growth**

Nulla Creek Reserve expanded from 65 to 90 acres. (Morris, 1989, p233)

## **8 Feb 1915**

### **Proposed school merging**

Police Constable Jago suggested the amalgamation of Oudin subsidised school with Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, but the Chairman of the APB Board said the Oudin parents (non-Aboriginal) must consent first. (State Records NSW, Department of Education, Schools Files, 1869-1979 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, NRS 3939, Administrative, Pre 1939 [5/17187.4] f45)

## **3 Feb 1915**

### **Education Department wary of mixed schooling proposal**

The Chief Inspector of Public Education sided against the proposal for a merged school, fearing negative reactions from local non-Aboriginal parents (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f47)

## **20 February 1915**

### **Segregated schooling**

The local constable informed the APB that Miss Wicks declined the position of teacher at the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School as she was moving further away, and her subsidised school was closing. He noted her support for separatism at a personal and educational level:

‘She is not prepared to accept the Aborigines as the majority of her pupils belong to their own family.’ (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f44)

## **30 April 1915**

### **Standard of applicants for teaching at the Nulla Creek Aboriginal school**

Local (Kempsey) Inspector, Department of Public Instruction, W J Harvey recommended against the appointment of the APB’s suggested teachers to the Aboriginal school. He claimed one of the applicants was part of ‘a roving band of religious fanatics who play upon the emotional nature of the blacks’. The other teacher was married and unqualified. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f39)

## **1915**

### **Children removed**

Dawn raids on Aboriginal families in the area occurred to remove children parents had previously hidden from authorities (Morris 1989, p118) Quinlan's family experienced the effects of this policy:

'They took my sister and cousin away... they kept them in Sydney for 5 years. Worked them. Made them Aboriginal wards... they'd be about 16 I suppose and they kept them. My mother couldn't get them back. My father used to try and get them out of that place...' (Eckerman and Quinlan 1983, p15)

## **August 1916**

### **Missionary teacher appointed**

Miss Higgins, who had studied teaching at a missionary college, was employed as the teacher for Nulla Creek Aboriginal school. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f24)

## **25 Sept 1918**

### **Students receive less than minimum schooling**

Students were receiving less time in sewing lessons than the Department of Education considered a minimum. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f88)

## **May 1919**

### **Illness queries**

The teacher wrote to the Department of Public Instruction about refusing students ill with ringworm to the school. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f98)

Morris argues that illness and racialised ideas of pollution helped to create and reinforce a discriminatory view of Aboriginal people among non-Aboriginal people especially in hospitals, councils and schools (Morris 1989 p114). Similar 'moral panics' around consumption are evident in the [Gulargambone](#) study.

## **18 Sept 1920**

### **Neglect of facilities for the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School**

The Schools Inspector rejected the Department of Public Education medical officers' recommendation of a urinal at the school. A lower standard of equipment and facilities seems to have been accepted for Aboriginal schools by the department, and was stated bluntly:

'This is an Aborigines' school. A urinal is not required.' (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f124)

## **24 April 1920**

### **Parents not consulted over decisions affecting their children's schooling**

The hours for classes at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School were altered, with a clear lack of respect shown by the Inspector of Public Education for the parents of the students involved:

'This is an Aborigines' school, and the usual reference to parents in regard to the question of changing routine may be dispensed with.' (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f130)

## **20 September 1920**

### **Conditions at the school**

Students at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School were expected to use pit toilets and lime. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f14)

## **1922**

### **Student experience of Nulla Creek Aboriginal reserve, school and work**

Bill Cohen, a Gumbungarri drover, boxer, soldier and railway worker recalled in his autobiography that Donaldson of the APB took away 'orphaned' children, whom his father's sister's family were raising, from their home at Lower Creek.

He attended Nulla Creek Aboriginal School for a week. (Cohen, 1987 p12–13) Most of his school years were spent at Armidale, where his memories centre on sports and schoolyard fights. After he turned 14, he left school and learnt droving and bush knowledge, working with his father and male relatives. (ibid, p19-20)

Minnie Quinlan attended a local school (possibly Nulla Creek Aboriginal school), in the 1920s, from the ages of 7 to 14. She recalled positive experiences, with the school teacher making an extra effort to develop her interest in reading:

‘After I left school she used to bring me books and things, I used to read in the evenings because I couldn't study much at school... So I really didn't get that much schooling, only what I learned myself.’ (Eckerman and Quinlan 1983, p14)

## **1925**

### **Political opposition to the APB expressed**

The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) held a meeting at Kempsey showground, to protest against removal of Aboriginal farm land on Pelican and Fattorini Islands. Though Dhungutti people had successfully cleared, worked and cared for this land, it was taken by the Lands Department and sold to non-Aboriginal people. James Linwood spoke in Dhungutti to his people arguing against their eviction from these lands and the APB's treatment of Aboriginal people. (Morris, 1989 p117)

## **21 August 1926**

### **Lack of attention to Nulla Creek Aboriginal School**

The Kempsey School Inspector excused himself from inspecting the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School. He noted the schoolteacher was away for a month, and that since police claimed the buildings were satisfactory he recommended against an inspection – due to small attendance and distance. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] (f178)

## **16 Nov 1927**

### **Teacher reports illnesses among students**

Nulla Creek schoolteacher Alice Higgins, reported cases of eye blight (ophthalima) among several children attending the school. The teacher did not want to speak to parents about preventative strategies, stating dismissively: ‘I am by no means sure it would be effective...’

Circulars were sent to parents by the Department of Education.

### **16 January 1928**

#### **School in need of expansion and attention**

The Under-Secretary forwarded the School Inspector's report to the APB. It argued that Nulla Creek School was too small for the number of students attending – up to 34 students, though attendance varied. He also stated that the toilets were insufficient. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f202)

### **3 Dec 1929**

#### **School in need of repairs**

According to the School Inspector, the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School water tank stand was damaged, the tank needed repairs and windows were broken. The teacher needed a desk and chair too, suggesting the APB's continuing lack of attention to facilities at the school and reserve. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f218)

### **3 Dec 1930**

#### **Teacher reveals her difficulties coping with teaching at Nulla Creek Aboriginal**

The teacher at Nulla Creek Aboriginal school, Miss Higgins wrote a self-critical letter to the Chief Inspector, stating that she was frequently late, unprepared for class, that she punished the children too much, had lost her temper and been on bad terms with parents at times. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f247)

### **Feb 1931**

#### **Teacher depressed**

A Department Medical examination of Miss Higgins found she was experiencing depression, exacerbated by the isolation of Nulla Creek. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f2410)

### **11 March 1931 –22 April 1931**

#### **Teacher dismissed and moved**

APB Secretary recommended Miss Higgins be terminated as teacher at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School.

'It appears that for some time Miss Higgins has been peculiar in her manner and that her District School Inspector, Mr Griffiths, is also doubtful as to the wisdom of allowing her to remain in charge of the school. The aborigines (sic) have also apparently noticed her actions...' (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f239)

### **1932**

#### **Manager's powers increased on the reserve**

An increase in the manager's powers at Bellbrook occurred through amendments to the APB act. The manager of the previously independent reserve now checked and influenced who entered the reserve, and invasions of privacy such as random home inspections by the Matron of the Reserve were conducted (Morris, 1989 p130–1). It also affected the education of the children as Quinlan explains:

'Managers used to be the teacher too, right 'til my youngest daughters went to school. Manager used to look after the teaching and the people.' (Eckerman & Quinlan 1983, p17)



Image 2: Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, 1932, SRNSW: Department of Education Photographic collection, NRS 15051 [25]

### **1936**

#### **APB aims to move people away from reserve**

The APB proposed to move Bellbrook people further upstream on the Macleay River (Goodall 1996, p222).

Quinlan noted that many people had already been made to move to Bellbrook or went there to ensure their children were educated:

‘They only came to Bellbrook when the manager came. They just got dogged about, put there. Most of them people in Bellbrook are all strays, you know just come there from somewhere. School, they put a big school up, and they came to send their children to school. Only when the manager came.’ (Eckerman & Quinlan 1983 p19)

### **2 Feb 1937**

#### **Nulla Creek Aboriginal School destroyed**

R Martin, teacher and manager at Nulla Creek Reserve reported the school building was destroyed by a storm.(SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f284)

### **June 1937**

#### **APB moves people from Bellbrook to Burnt Bridge Station**

APB moves some Bellbrook families to Burnt Bridge – where there was little water, no sanitation, and little work. (Goodall,1996 p223) Many Aboriginal people were working on properties around Bellbrook, rabbiting, clearing, mustering, and doing other station work (Harrison, 2004 p90).

### **1938**

#### **APB tries to move more Nulla Creek reserve residents to Burnt Bridge**

The APB proposed ‘moving’ the Aboriginal people of Bellbrook to Burnt Bridge (near Forster). Bellbrook people’s firm opposition to removal from their home meant the plan was abandoned (Berzins,1996, p31). In an Aboriginal-run newspaper, the *Abo Call*, writers commented that Bellbrook people

‘... do not want to be moved from the district in which they were born... instead of being moved from our own place, we want conditions improved here, on the spot.’ (Abo Call June 1938, p2, cited in Goodall 1996 p243)

Goodall argued that the paper noted how the existence of segregated schools made it easier for the APB to threaten families with removal of their children if they did not cooperate with the board (Goodall 1996, p244).

#### **24 May 1939**

##### **Residents of Nulla Creek reserve send petition to elected member**

A report from the Superintendent of Aboriginal Welfare (APB), copied to the Undersecretary Department of Education, mentioned that Mr Vincent [MLA, Country Party and former APB member until 1937] had forwarded a petition received from the Bellbrook Aboriginal people regarding the treatment of them by the manager, Mr Dalley. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f401)

#### **2 August 1939**

##### **Bellbrook Station manager’s ill treatment of residents reported by APB**

The Superintendent of Aborigines Welfare (APB) recommended the dismissal of Dalley as station manager and teacher.

The report noted that Dalley allegedly insulted Bellbrook Aboriginal people by referring to them as ‘low despicable animals’ and ‘booze artists’. Among other insults, he mocked one of the women for being unmarried with children. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f402).

#### **20 August 1939**

##### **Parent’s complaint about the reserve manager’s treatment of the residents and his teaching**

Mrs Scott wrote a letter of complaint about the teaching her children were receiving at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, showing a keen interest in her children acquiring literacy skills.

‘My children do not get their full teaching here on this mission station, I have 5 children going to the school. The manager here Mr Dalley come over to the mission station about 12 o’clock every day instead of teaching the children he’s hunting people out of their endowment homes doging people away from one home to another. Mr Dalley locks the children in school all day... I have children turning 14 years of age and can’t read or write yet. We want our children to have a little education.’ (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f305)

Scott enquired whether Dalley could stop them from taking their children to another school. Aboriginal parents sometimes moved to towns where educational opportunities were better for their children.

The number of people on the reserve had increased from 89 people in 1901 to 213 in the late 1930s. (Morris, 1989, p35-36)

## **Sept 1939**

### **Manager dismissed**

Mr Dalley's role as teacher/manager at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School was terminated. The APB stated this was because he was of retirement age, but also because of his conduct. His termination letter referred to '... the unfortunate state of your relationship with the Aborigines under your control.' (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f307)

He had previously been manager at Cabbage Tree Island and Brewarrina, so his influence had not been confined to Bellbrook station. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f400)

## **December 1939**

### **Sewing taught to girls at the school**

Nulla Creek Aboriginal School teacher Mr Lupino was appointed in October and his wife taught sewing to 20 girls at the school. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f291)

Children taught included girls from the Quinlan, Dunn, Miller, Murray, Hilton, Scott, Holten, Cook, Kelly, Parry and Thaidy families. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [5/17187.4] f294)

## **24 October 1940**

### **Inspector's report**

The Department of Education Inspector noted a lack of lesson planning, and the absence of a library at the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School. He argued that the teacher needed to 'insist on individual answering, and suppress collective answering' – a strategy which might have clashed with Aboriginal cultural ideas of sharing and assisting each other rather than competitiveness.

Visual methods of teaching and storytelling were encouraged as devices the teacher could use to make classes more interesting for students. (SRNSW: NRS 3931 Observation Book [1/8665])

## **20 October 1944**

### **Poor teaching noted by Inspector**

The School Inspector's report on Nulla Creek Aboriginal school noted:

'School in such an unsatisfactory state that a special report was forwarded to head office.' (SRNSW: NRS 3931 [1/8665])

## **13 March 1945**

### **Poor teaching continues**

The Inspector reported that six months after his report, teaching at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School was still inadequate:

'No improvements noted. Demonstration given on training in sounds, writing, words. There was no programme, no time table, no progress.' (SRNSW: NRS 3931 [1/8665])

## **10 October 1946**

The School Inspector's report pointed out that numerous temporary teachers coming and going at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School had been disruptive to the student's

education. Some teachers were absent for long periods of time during which no school was held at all. (SRNSW, Department of Education Schools Files 1869-1979, NRS 3829 Nulla Nulla, Post 1939, Administrative [14/7760])

### **26 November 1946**

#### **Parents' complaints about teaching standard at the school**

Nulla Creek station residents complained to the inspector about the standard of teaching their children were receiving from the untrained teacher:

We can do without a Manager teaching our children, they can't spell their own name. Mr Kennedy can't teach, all he is good for is singing and telling stories the children said they are tired of it... Mr Kennedy only teaches in the morning the other half he has the children cleaning the school or picking rubbish up.'

In this letter they also expressed their resentment towards the Matron who inspected their homes, yet expected Aboriginal women to clean her home. They were also frustrated at the unhelpfulness of the Manager, Mr Kennedy, who refused to let them use the station's horses though women had to walk two miles to town to get food for their families, and who neglected to fix pumps and other equipment. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [14/7760])

### **7 January 1947**

#### **Inspector's frustration at inaction at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School**

District Inspector Mr Fairbairn outlined problems with the standard of teaching at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, and argued that since 1944 scathing reports had been delivered on APB manager-teachers by the Department, but had not been acted upon:

'In three years of knowledge one man only of the seven who have been in charge has given effective service. The others have not even been remotely successful, attentive to teaching duties, earnest or active in a major way in their function as teachers probably because they regarded themselves as managers first... they certainly have not been selected for their teaching skill nor does it seem to have entered into the picture.' (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [14/7760])

He considered the letter from station residents to be a response to the employment of a qualified teacher and assistants at Burnt Bridge.

### **26 February 1947**

#### **Parents request a school teacher**

W Layton and J Quinlan on behalf of the residents at Bellbrook wrote to Mr Vincent MLA, seeking a schoolteacher for the Nulla Creek Aboriginal School and remarking that school education at the station had been in a 'sad state' past and present. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [14/7760])

Quinlan recalled the situation with teaching, and the efforts of parents to access education for their children:

'If we got a good school teacher it'd be all right. All them managers used to teach too. But it was only in the later years we'd get good ones. The first lot they'd loaf on it, used to really waste our kiddies education... we used to report

them – we just went on till we got a good one. They'd always take notice down below and they'd always put them off if they weren't any good. My brother there he's a self-taught fella, but he can write so they didn't have their own way with our kiddies. Wasn't that they were cruel to them, they'd have got a good hiding... but they wasted our kiddies time. (Eckerman & Quinlan, 1983 p17)

Her analysis indicates lost years and opportunities for the education of young people at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, and the cumulative effects of this on the community. Some people resorted to self-education or returned to study later in life.

### **12 December 1947**

#### **Teacher admits he cannot teach effectively**

In a letter to the Schools Inspector, Nulla Creek station manager-teacher Kennedy admitted he had difficulty combining the roles of teacher and manager, and that he was untrained. He recommended the appointment of a local untrained teacher until another was appointed. The Education Department declined this option and insisted that a qualified teacher be employed. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [14/7760])

### **9 January 1948**

#### **First Trained teacher at Nulla Creek School**

A full-time trained teacher, R C Dennis, was employed at Nulla Creek Aboriginal School. (APB report, 1948 p3; SRNSW: NRS 3829 [14/7760])

### **18 October 1949**

#### **Disputes in parliament over closure of Nulla Creek reserve and school**

Mr Vincent [MLA, Country Party] argued in NSW parliament against the AWB decision to force Aboriginal people of Bellbrook to move to Burnt Bridge station, closer to Kempsey. The APB was shutting down 15 missions across NSW at the time. He pointed out the Nulla Creek people did not want to move or leave their homes.

'The minister is correct when he says they are entitled to a home, and they have a home in Bellbrook where they wish to remain. They have been there since their infancy, and their fathers and grandfathers lived there before them. They are happy there but the Minister wishes to root them all out... uprooting these people from their home ground.' (NSW Legislative Assembly 1949, p4204-5)

Matthews [MLA, Labor minister] stated they were being moved with the purpose of assimilation in Kempsey, and to improve their living conditions. Vincent pointed out they were being moved to another station, not into town, and that it was against their wishes and interests since many of the men worked on properties near Bellbrook. (NSW Legislative Assembly 1949, p4204-5)

### **29 October 1951**

#### **AWB attitude to teachers**

The AWB informed the Department of Education that it would be withdrawing the manager-teacher from Bellbrook, but offered an allowance to a Department teacher to perform many aspects of AWB management – such as medical treatment and intrusive inspections of homes. (SRNSW: NRS 3829 [14/7760])

## 1953

### Students continue education at Kempsey

AWB records show a university-qualified teacher was employed and that three ex-pupils of Nulla Creek Aboriginal School attended Kempsey High. Quinlan sent her daughters to high school in Kempsey. While this meant a long daily bus trip, they accessed better educational opportunities than were available at Nulla Creek. (Eckerman & Quinlan, 1983 p18)

Parents of the P& C Association held fundraisers for school equipment and to send students to the Combined School Sports competition in Willawarrin. (*Dawn*, 1953, 1 Sept p18). The students had won numerous prizes at the competition in 1952. (*Dawn*, 1952, 10, p1)



Image 3: Nulla Creek Aboriginal School students with their prizes from the inter school sports competition held at Willawarrin

*Dawn*, 1952 October, vol 10, issue 1, p9

A full list of names of students in the photo is available at <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/docs/v01/s10/11.pdf>

## 1960s

### Visits to Nulla Creek School

Professor Elkin (vice-chair of the AWB) visited, as well as dental services and a school counsellor. (SRNSW, Department of Education School Records 1881+, NRS 3931 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School 1949-1972 Visitors' Book [1/8666])

## 1961

### Teachers Federation survey on Nulla Creek Aboriginal School

The school's teacher, Harrahy sent a response to the NSW Teachers Federation survey of Aboriginal education.

Harrahy noted 26 children attended the school at this time, including his own children. He reported on student's home conditions and its impact on homework, initiatives

such as the formation of a mixed scout group and its effects on interaction among children, and the lack of employment opportunities available.

He argued that some people in the Bellbrook community were opposed to school learning as a 'white fella thing', a contrast to the evidence of Quinlan, Scott and others. He thought preparation was necessary before children were sent to integrated schools, including better housing, clothing and support. (Fletcher, 1989b, p233-4 citing R Harrahy, Teacher Nulla Creek Aboriginal School to Teachers Federation, Teachers Federation files)

## 1964

### **Examples of examination material from Nulla Creek Aboriginal School**

Students were tested on reading, writing composition and arithmetic. Christian passages were given to children to read and basic geography and maths were taught with reference to local rivers and industries. (State Records NSW, Department of Education Schools Records 1881+, NRS 3931 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, 1964-1969 Half-yearly Exam Book [1/3619] )



Image 4: Students in the classroom, Nulla Creek Aboriginal school, 1965.  
*Dawn*, Nov 1965, p2

## 1972–74

### **Students move to local integrated schools**

In 1972, children of the Quinlan, Stockwell, Holten, Kelley, Murray and Ahoy families were attending Nulla Creek Aboriginal Creek School.

The register of admissions shows that children gradually left Nulla Creek Aboriginal School. Fifteen went to Bellbrook Primary School, nine to South Kempsey Primary, seven to Kinchela Creek, five to Armidale, two to Grafton and two to the Seventh Day Adventist Mirriwinni Gardens School. (Mirriwinni Gardens became an Aboriginal-operated school in the late 1970s.)

(State Records NSW, Department of Education School Records 1881+, NRS 3931 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School 1964–1975 Admission Register [1/8664]

## **Conclusion**

Themes mentioned in the timeline can be seen in greater depth in this case study, including racism in education, the poor standard of teaching at reserve schools and the role of the APB in Aboriginal education.

Both written and oral histories attest to parents' active interest in the children's education and their efforts to secure competent and qualified teachers.

The written records suggest that one source of ongoing disadvantage and difficulties in schooling has been the fact that generations of students have received sub-standard education.

As a community which farmed and worked on their own land, the Dhungutti and Gumbangarri people of Nulla Creek had a keen sense of their entitlement – to their land, to their livelihoods and to shape their own destinies. Their struggle for access to reasonable standards of education, enjoyed by other Australians, was part of this effort to claim what they saw as rightfully theirs.

## **Reference List**

### **Archival Records**

State Records NSW, Sydney. Some access points have been set up around the state for remote users – check State Records website for details):

SRNSW, Department of Education, Schools Files, 1869-1979 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, NRS 3939, Administrative, Pre 1939 [5/17187.4]

SRNSW, Department of Education Schools Files 1869-1979, NRS 3829 Nulla Nulla, Post 1939, Administrative [14/7760]

SRNSW, Department of Education, Schools Files 1869-1979, NRS 3829 Nulla Nulla, 1876-1939, Administrative [5/17188.3]

SRNSW, Department of Education Schools Records 1881+, NRS 3931 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School, 1964-1969 Half-yearly Exam Book [1/3619]

SRNSW, Department of Education School Records 1881+, NRS 3931 Nulla Creek Aboriginal School 1949-1972 Visitors' Book [1/8666]

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