

Trouble forgotten as indigenous school puts uni in sight of kids

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FOR the first time in the 11-year history of Djarragun College, the indigenous school has students eligible for Overall Position scores -- the pre-requisite for direct university entry in Queensland.

And it won't be just one student, but five of the 30-strong Year 12 class at the far north Queensland independent institution.

The success comes less than one year after Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson overhauled Djarragun's administration and appointed a new principal.

Veteran educator Don Anderson, who delayed retirement to take the role, said the private school would also have more students awarded high school certificates than ever before.

“(The college) has continually strived to improve academic outcomes and steady improvement has resulted,” he said. “This year, we are seeing the reward for this long-term ongoing commitment backed by a specific focus.

“We expect this number (of OP-eligible) students to continue to increase each year. We are not celebrating it as an outcome, but as an indicator that we remain on track to becoming an academic school.”

The five OP-eligible students come from Cairns and the Torres Strait, with three keen to study law. Students have not been eligible for OPs before because the necessary subjects were not offered at Djarragun, which has two campuses near Cairns.

Only four students have gone on to university education -- after a bridging course -- since the school opened in 2001, including two last year.

The school also offers vocational courses, such as hairdressing and hospitality.

According to the My School website, of the 67 Djarragun students who completed Year 12 in 2010, three were awarded a high school certificate.

Mr Anderson said students from Prep to Year 10 were taught using the Direct Instruction teaching method, which involved up to four hours of literacy and numeracy daily. “(It) helps rapidly catch up students who were previously

struggling," he said.

``Twenty-eight students aged in middle primary school started the year at a kindergarten level of reading. In one term of the Direct Instruction program, these students have progressed 1 1/2 years academically."

The teaching method, founded in the US in the 1960s, involves explicit instruction and was introduced to Djarragun last year after being trialled in Cape York.

The school's academic success comes after a scandal-filled year. In March last year, the school's former principal, Jean Illingworth, was stood down, amid allegations the institution had exaggerated enrolment figures. Ms Illingworth denies any wrongdoing.

Police are investigating after an audit found millions in taxpayers' funds had been wrongly claimed for 250 students over three years. The alleged wrongdoing occurred before Mr Pearson, the director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, launched his bid to take over the school from the Anglican Church.