As the Geckos/Aboriginal Studies Coordinator for St Patrick's School, I have been very lucky to witness staff and students coming together to acknowledge two significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events: National Sorry Day and NAIDOC Week. These events incorporated the acknowledgement of the Farmer Family who served in World War I, Noongar Language lessons and the renewal of the Aboriginal Garden.

**Aboriginal Studies**

“The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority provides the opportunity for all young Australians to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, deep knowledge traditions and holistic world views. This knowledge and understanding will enrich all learners’ ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia through a deepening knowledge and connection with the world’s oldest continuous living cultures.” (ACARA, 2014)

“Our school community acknowledges the Noongar people’s prior custodianship of this region, and values the heritage and culture of the Noongar people. We provide justice and equity for all.” (St Patrick’s School, Aboriginal Education Policy, 2014)

**Aboriginal Garden**

The Aboriginal garden is a project the Aboriginal students have worked hard to resurrect. With the help of our gardener, Joy and volunteer Don Richardson, the Indigenous students have planned and gardened to restore it to its original form. Our next step is to get the babbling brook running, install the solar panels and finish displaying the Mosaics depicting the Noongar Seasons which were made by Year Seven students under the guidance of Mrs Tania Merrey. If you have a moment, wander through and have a look.
National Sorry Day

We warmly welcomed a group of students from the Katanning Senior High School’s “Follow The Dream” Program to work with all our students, drawing and painting ‘hands’, to assist us in preparation for our National Sorry Day paraliturgy. A ‘Welcome to Country’ was said by a High School student to start the workshop.

The students also got to have time with the High School students at recess playing on the oval. This was especially enjoyed by all students, who couldn’t wait for the boys and girls to come and kick a football, and play with them.
Our National Sorry Day Paraliturgy the following week was led admirably by our Indigenous students in the School Hall. The service was done with reverence and pride. It concluded with each student from the school taking a hand they had made at the workshop, and planted them in the lawn at the front of the Library to form a “Sea of Hands”, in acknowledgment of Reconciliation Week. The Aboriginal flag was then raised with the Australian flag.
Noongar Language

Also in preparation for our NAIDOC WEEK ACTIVITY, we welcomed Iris Woods to the school to start teaching the Indigenous students “Welcome to Country” and the song “We Are Australian” in Noongar Language. These workshops were a great success, with the students enjoying learning their Noongar Language. The school is very grateful to Iris for giving her time to teach and reach out to the students about their culture.

NAIDOC Week theme

The NAIDOC theme for 2014 was Serving Country: Centenary & Beyond. This enabled us as a school to honour and focus on the many Aboriginal men and women who have served in the armed forces. It was also a time to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and achievements. To align with the theme, a display was arranged in the School Library, featuring the Farmer Family who served in WWI along with books and many elements of Aboriginal culture. Photos were kindly loaned from the Farmer Family and the Katanning Historical Society.
**NAIDOC Day**
*A whole school celebration*

On Thursday 19th June, Mitchella, her mum Vivien and daughter Majinda from the Waldan Aboriginal Cultural Centre visited our school for a whole day of celebrations for NAIDOC Week. The costs of this visit were assisted through successful funding we received through the PALS Program (Partnership Acceptance Learning Sharing).

What a fantastic day the staff and students had to celebrate NAIDOC. What an amazing group of people who had a wonderful way of sending the message to all about acceptance of one another. They were truly inspiring!

With some Noongar language having been taught by Iris Woods, the indigenous students commenced the day saying "Welcome to Country" in Noongar in front of the whole school for the first time. It was a very proud moment for them and their families who were able to attend.

The whole day of activities involved groups of students moving around participating in body and face painting, rope making, dancing, tasting damper and berries, bracelet making and students trying to rub sticks together to make a fire! One student said he even saw smoke! There was always a vast display of tools, books and clothing which Mitchella spoke to the students about. This was great as the students were able to be hands on with all the display. They even saw a picture of the Queen’s visit with her.

As a thankyou to Mitchella, Vivien and Majinda, the whole sang 'We are Australian'; with the indigenous students singing each chorus in Aboriginal language after all our students sang it in English.

Invited guests, Iris Woods and the Farmer family were there to support the students throughout the day and stayed for morning tea and lunch with the staff.
The teachers also took the students up to the Library where the NAIDOC display was in remembrance of the Farmer Family who served in World War I. There were Aboriginal stories to read and the Aboriginal garden to view. The day finished with a whole corroboree, which was enjoyed by all, with lots of fun and laughter!

The day has certainly inspired us, and we aim to focus on Reconciliation within our Catholic school through the cross Australian Curricular priority of Aboriginal studies in all classes.

(Photos St Patrick’s School, Feedback-Year Two Class)