

Expansion marks three decades of education

The Yipirinya School in Alice Springs has celebrated its 30th anniversary by opening \$1.6 million worth of capital works in its grounds.

A computer laboratory and multi-purpose hall have been built at the school and its administration building has been renovated and expanded.

The works mark a new era of confidence held by authorities in the school.

"Six years ago the government was at the point of closing this school," school principal Ken Langford Smith said during the celebrations.

"They stopped all work on this building and froze all the school funds," he said.

"Since then however we have turned the situation around, regained the confidence of the government, dramatically boosted our enrolments, achieved very pleasing academic results and completed a five-year plan of building developments, which has included a modern kitchen and dining room, a new staff room, new language classrooms as well as the developments you see today.

"Davie Inkamala (school council chairman) and the school council can be really proud of what has been achieved," Mr Langford said.

Aboriginal academic and former teacher Marcia Langton said the Yipirinya School should be held as an example of success-

ful Indigenous education programs to governments.

"Yipirinya should be a model for governments and policy makers in addressing the health, education and chances of Aboriginal children," Ms Langton said.

Aboriginal elders, traditional owners and parents faced a fight with authorities through the courts to make the Yipirinya school a reality.

"There were many other obstacles but the school's founders never faltered," Ms Langton said. "Their tenacity and determination was inspirational and now complex buildings and facilities is cause for pride and joy."

"The goal of teaching children in a bilingual and bicultural curriculum has recently been the subject of negative government policy in the Northern Territory.

"I found it astonishing that a government with such a poor track record with all of its majority monolingual programs and resulting statistical failure to provide an adequate education to Aboriginal children should blame multilingual and bilingual schools, which are in the minority for its failures, especially given that bilingual schools in the Northern Territory are successful," she said.

Right: Yipirinya students



Warlpiri and Utopia women at Tullamarine, en route to the World Indigenous Peoples Conference (Education) left to right: Jenny Taylor, Jeannie Pwerl Mills, Gail Woods, Katie Kemarr Morton (seated), Dorothy Kemarr Kunoth, Rosie Pwerl, Noranda Ngwarray Loy, Pansy Petyarr McLeod, Patsy Kemarr Long, Lena Pwerl, Margaret Carew. Their presentation was called: Rlterkan Mwerr: art, language and bush medicine at Utopia