**Transcript of video: Cultural inclusion in schools**

Interviewee: Dr Georgia Birch, Cultural Consultant

*Note: The views expressed are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the VCAA.*

I became involved in mentoring programs when I was asked by a principal of a western suburb school to come and help with some of the Somali, Sudanese students that were having challenges at school. A lot of resources were being taken up by the school system on a small population of students. They really had a disconnect, and so the principal had known about my previous research into African–Australians and so had asked me to come to the school and create a program that was including everybody.

I think students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds need guidance because they’re often living in two different worlds. They have a heritage behind them which is often from another country and yet they’re living in a dominant Australian society. I think to navigate those two is quite difficult, and to have mentors within schools allows them to have that support and encouragement of someone who understands them.

I think staff make a huge difference. The culture of the school makes a difference, and I think that comes from the staff, so if you have staff that is reflective of the students that are at the school. If you have diverse students, it’s great to have diverse staff as well. But also if you have students of a minority, I think it’s always good to have that minority on staff just so that you can have those role models. You can have that relationship of understanding between teachers and students, but I also think staff get to experience difference within themselves, and I think then that’s reflected back into the curriculum and back to the students.

I think the most positive attitude I’ve seen is between the mentors at the school and the students. I can see the amount of comfort they receive and the amount of feeling themselves with a mentor that you don’t see with other teachers or staff and that relaxed attitude. To see them within a school doing that, but then if you see them on the weekends and you accidentally run into a student, you can just see that bond. I think that’s what is keeping this child in education, this particular bond. It’s carried not just throughout school but also throughout the community.

I think the Intercultural curriculum really focuses on looking at different perspectives and addressing those issues around difference within the classroom and how we can use the curriculum to educate people about difference, to experience difference, and to understand difference and to see how wonderful that can be for everybody’s education.