

# Inclusion at top of new principal's priority list

■ Phoebe Pin

O'Connor Education Support Centre has this term welcomed new principal Cassie Bender, pictured, and the Kalgoorlie-Boulder local is eager to improve education outcomes for children with a disability in the region.

Ms Bender was employed as a teacher at OESC for three years before she was appointed principal after a period of maternity leave.

Although not originally interested in being an educator in the disability sector, Ms Bender said she fell in love with the area after lower-than-expected high school scores forced her to take an alternative route into qualifying as a teacher.

"I was devastated, absolutely gutted that I didn't get into teaching but my mum tried to find a few different channels and she put forward this Certificate IV of Disability Studies on the table so I did it and absolutely loved it," she said.

"Now I am very passionate about Kalgoorlie and the Goldfields and what that means and looks like for people and families with disabilities."

The Education Support Centre is run separate from O'Connor Primary School but Ms Bender hopes to encourage an environment of inclusion between students at both schools.

"The whole point of an education support centre on a mainstream site is to promote inclusion," she said.

Ms Bender also hopes to increase collaboration with the Eastern Goldfields Education Support Centre for high school students with a disability, saying it was important for the two schools to work together to best support local families.

"We are the only schools specifically for children with disabilities so it's really important that we align together and show families that it is really a very cohesive and collaborative approach," she said.

"One of the things already in the pipeline is a choir that we are going to run across the schools... we can't wait to do that and it's also inviting our staff to be really involved with the project."

School council chairman Robert Hicks said Ms Bender was "absolutely ideal" for the role as OESC principal.

"My role as chair has been quite deliberate and that is to elevate the school in the community, because it is doing some wonderful work," he said.

"I see it as a privilege to be able to chair the school council and I'm so pleased that Cassie has agreed to take on the principalship."



Picture: Tori O'Connor

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