

Turtleford Transition School Celebrates Their First Graduation

June 15, 2010

The Turtleford Transition School, founded three years ago, held its first graduation ceremony this past week at Brightsand Lake. Seven students, many of whom had been with the programme since its inception, proudly received their diplomas from Principal Fred Helgeton.

Established in 2007 to meet the needs of students who, by reason of circumstances, were struggling to succeed in a regular school programme, the school currently serves around twenty students from the communities of Turtleford, the Thunderchild First Nation, Paradise Hill and St. Walburg. It is the second school of its kind in the division, along with the Transition Place Education Centre in Meadow Lake.

“Every student in our school is unique,” said Principal Fred Helgeton, “and this requires us to be very flexible in the way we deliver curriculum. We found that cutting back the length of the school day was one of the keys to success – the students become very involved and very hard-working over those three periods and it’s paid off.”

When asked about the student’s future plans Fred said that “the grad students’ plans for the future involve a variety of career options: from electricians and truck drivers through to mechanics, tattoo artists and social workers.”

“It has also been very motivating for us,” he commented, “to play a part helping students to come closer to the realization of their dreams. It makes Cal (teacher Callam Olver) and I feel that what we’re doing is worthwhile.”

“Part of what makes us successful is that everyone, from the School Board and the Senior Administration all the way down the line to the local principals, allows us to do what we feel is best, and what we think is right, and they are entirely supportive and helpful. We are not being constrained in any way. They know that we need to do things a little differently because of the nature of the program: we can do things that we wouldn’t be able to do in a regular school and we like that.”

When asked for his opinion on the program and its success student Matthew Vacheresse was effusive in his praise. “It’s the best school program I’ve experienced in my school career. The teachers make such a difference. Mr. H. and Mr. Olver have a method of teaching that is remarkably easy to understand – and every student gets the amount of attention that they need. I just love it.”

Student Chris Martell agreed: “It’s a great programme – the teachers know how to deal with the students and the freedom that the programme gives us really helps. It makes a huge difference because we can make our own schedule with regard to the handing in of assignments, and that in turn makes us work harder and faster.”

“It’s a great programme for students who don’t fit into a regular programme,” the boys noted. “It makes a huge academic difference.”

“There are basically two reasons that the school experience has been so great,” they continued. “The first is the freedom and the flexibility of the teachers to deal with individual differences, and the second is that as students we’re a group of like-minded, sympathetic and understanding people who help each other out.”

“It’s very important that this programme was started,” commented former Transition School principal and keynote speaker, Blain Hilbig. “ It definitely met the needs of the students, the teachers and the parents. Just to have that second opportunity to graduate has been huge.”

Turtleford principal, Darrell Newton, agreed. “These kids all passed their English Departmental examination in January, and now they’re graduating: this is wonderful in itself, and also because it gives hope to the others. It demonstrates that school does not have to be the same for every student.”

During the formal program Northwest School Division board member, David Wooff, thanked the students for their support of the programme, and remarked that the board was very proud of the students, and that they and their parents had every reason in the world to be proud as well. He further encouraged the grads to speak to other students who might be finding it difficult to fit into a regular programme and let them know that there is another place that might meet their needs.

