

Gatirri School: A Teacher Who Lives There

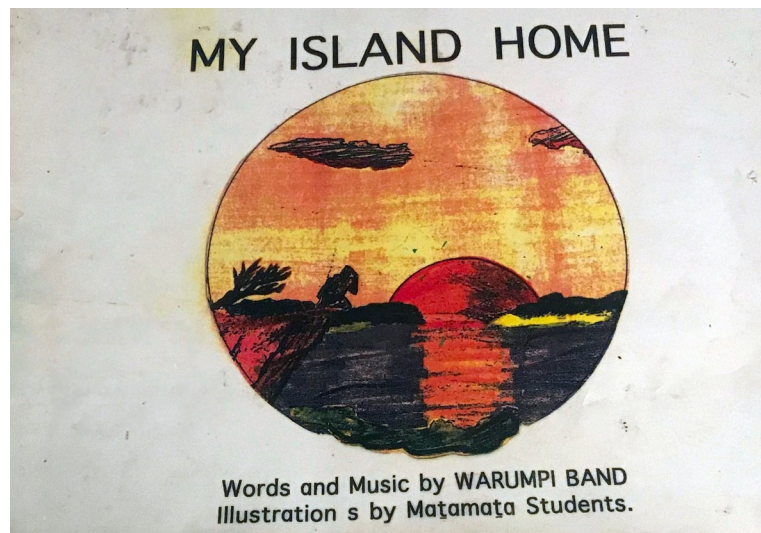
Homeland schooling at Mata Mata, north-east Arnhem Land, and the models that could sustain it

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This is a draft paper that will be continually updated with new information as it comes to hand.



Cover of the illustrated book My Island Home: "Words and Music by Warumpi Band, Illustrations by Matamata Students." Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaṇa.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this paper contains the names and images of people who have died, among them Mrs P.B. Burarrwaṇa, Gatirri Burarrwaṇa and George Rrurrambu Burarrwaṇa. Their names are used as the family has used them in published work, and with respect. If any family member would prefer a name or image not to be used, please tell the author and it will be changed.

Summary. Gatirri School is the community name of the Matamata Homeland Learning Centre, the school at Mata Mata, a Yolŋu homeland on the Arafura coast of north-east Arnhem Land. It is named after Gatirri Burarrwaja, who founded Mata Mata and was head of the clan, and it grew from the teaching of his daughter, Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja, one of the first fully trained Yolŋu teachers, who taught children in the bush and under a tree before there was a building. The building, put up in 1987, has now been fully refurbished, the school has not been closed, and children are enrolled through Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku. What Mata Mata has asked for since at least 1978, and still asks for, is a teacher who lives there. The usual homeland arrangement is a Yolŋu homeland teacher every day, with visiting teachers who fly or drive in for part of the week. That model, run well at Laynhapuy, has real strengths, and this paper sets them out fairly. But a resident teacher is what would let Gatirri School anchor a self-sustaining homeland with a good income. The aspiration of Mata Mata, and of this paper, goes further: a teacher living at Mata Mata seven days a week, ideally a Yolŋu teacher, so that Gatirri can become a real primary school in its own right, and also a secondary school and an adult learning school: a school for lifelong learning at Mata Mata. In a sense Mata Mata already is a school for lifelong learning: Yolŋu culture is learned there every day of the week, on country, from elders and family. A seven-day teacher and formal schooling would build on what already happens every day, not start from nothing. A school brings jobs, among them homeland teachers teaching Yolŋu knowledge, and cleaning and maintenance; jobs and families bring a shop; and a school and a shop bring people home to live, as Mäpuru shows. The paper follows O'Bryan and colleagues (2025), who show that homeland learning centres are denied the recurrent funding and grants that small schools receive, a classification that leaves homeland education "in a vulnerable state". It compares Gatirri with Laynhapuy, Shepherdson's homeland centres, Mäpuru, Baniyala, the Milingimbi, Ramingining and Gapuwiyak hubs, the Homeland School Company at Maningrida, Nawarddeken Academy and Dhupuma Barker, and lists the schools of the region in an appendix. It also tells the Mata Mata story of My Island Home, the song the Gatirri School children illustrated in about 1995. It is a first full draft. Where the record is thin, it says so.

This paper is a companion to Planes, Roads, Automobiles (Botsman 2026), Power: The Homelands off the Grid (Botsman 2026c) and Food: Diet and Nutrition on the Homelands (Botsman 2026d). It links to the Mata Mata campaign of the Indigenous Stock Exchange (ISX) on [isx.org.au](https://www.isx.org.au/features/planes-roads-automobiles-and-boats) (<https://www.isx.org.au/features/planes-roads-automobiles-and-boats>).

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Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja (1956–2018), telling the story of the Mata Mata school. Still from “Batumbil Mata Mata School”, Mata Mata Heritage Films, undated. Mata Mata Productions; reproduced with the permission of the author. <https://matamataproductions.vhx.tv/mata-mata-heritage-films-and-documentaries/videos/batumbil-mata-mata-school>

1. Why a school

The companion papers deal with the things a homeland needs to stay alive: transport, power, food and money. Each of them comes back, sooner or later, to the school. Families leave a homeland when there is no school for their children, and they come back when there is one. A school is also the place where a homeland meets the wider world on its own terms: where Balanda (Western) learning is brought in, and where Yolŋu knowledge is taught by the people who hold it.

This paper is about one school, Gatirri School at Mata Mata, and what it would take for it to work as Mata Mata’s people have long wanted. Its argument is simple. The usual homeland arrangement, a Yolŋu teacher every day and a visiting teacher for part of the week, has served many homelands well and deserves credit. But what Mata Mata has asked for, for nearly fifty years, is a teacher who lives there. A resident teacher, working with Yolŋu teachers, is what would let the school anchor a self-sustaining homeland, with work, income and people living on country. The aim this paper puts forward, as the author’s and the community’s aspiration, is a seven-day teacher: a teacher who lives at Mata Mata seven days a week, ideally a Yolŋu teacher, so that Gatirri becomes a real primary school in its own right rather than a learning centre served from elsewhere, and can also grow into a secondary school and an adult learning school, offering learning for all ages at Mata Mata. The rest of the paper sets out the history, the present position, the policy that holds homeland schools back, and the models, in north-east Arnhem Land and beyond, that Gatirri School can learn from.

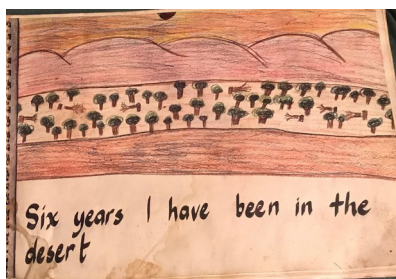
The record is uneven. Much of what follows comes from the school’s own history, kept by Shepherdson College in 2004, from the films and notes of Mata Mata Productions, from Bree Blakeman’s work, and from the author’s own knowledge of Mata Mata and its families, marked as such. The policy argument rests chiefly on the recent study by Marnie O’Bryan, Yananymul Mununggurr, Barayuwa Mununggurr and Tony Dreise, which this paper agrees with and follows.¹

2. Gatirri Burarrwaja and the founding of Mata Mata

Mata Mata is on Warramiri country, on the coast of north-east Arnhem Land facing the islands of the Arafura Sea. It was established by Gatirri Burarrwaja and his family from around 1948 into the early 1950s. Gatirri was the founder of the homeland, the great leader and head of the Burarrwaja clan, and the father of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja. The Mata Mata homelands website records that he “established a runway, a school and several houses at Mata Mata”, and the school bears his name.²³

In 1964, when his daughter was eight, Gatirri walked with her and her younger sisters along the coast from Mata Mata towards Elizabeth Bay and Cape Wilberforce, teaching them the names and stories of the places on the way. At Elizabeth Bay Gatirri and two of his brothers died. The girls were then sent to school at Galiwin’ku on Elcho Island, at the mission where Bäpa Sheppy, the Rev. Harold Shepherdson, worked. More than fifty years later Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja retraced the walk with her sisters, a journey recorded in the film *Remaking the Pathway*.⁴

In her own account, given to the Centre for Appropriate Technology, her father set the place up and told the family to look after it, and “we set up our organisation, named Marthakal.” Marthakal, based at Galiwin’ku, still supports the homelands of the region, Mata Mata among them.⁵ Gatirri’s grandson Gaypal (Terence Gaypalani Gurruwiwi) carries on the legacy at Mata Mata today.⁶



Page 2 of My Island Home: a desert country of red hills and scattered trees. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

3. Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja: the first teacher

Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja (1956–2018) was an outstanding leader of Mata Mata and one of the first fully trained Yolŋu teachers in north-east Arnhem Land. She was a pioneer of Mata Mata and of the homelands movement. Bäpa Sheppy, the Rev. Harold Shepherdson of the Elcho Island mission, was the first to note that she and her husband were teaching their children in the bush at the Gi’kal outstation. She was also a qualified Aboriginal Health Worker, the main Yolŋu person involved in setting up the Marthakal Homeland Health service, and at the end of her life the chair of Marthakal’s board.⁷

In the author’s view she was the pioneer homeland teacher of Arnhem Land. She taught many children at Mata Mata and at Gi’kal, and she divided the day: about half for Balanda education, reading, writing and numbers in English, and half for Yolŋu education, the knowledge of country, kin, language and ceremony.⁸ That division is what

the Yirrkala schools came to call “both ways”, and what Laynhapuy and Nawarddeken now call two-way or bicultural learning. At Mata Mata it began with one woman teaching her own and her family’s children, before there was a building or a salary.

Her own film about the school, *Batumbil_Mata_Mata_School*, tells how it grew from that home schooling to the present building. Her vision, in the words of Mata Mata Productions, was for Mata Mata to be “a place of deep, two-way learning”.⁹¹⁰ The rest of this paper is, in a sense, about how to make that vision last.



Page 3 of My Island Home: a night sky over a termite mound and trees, and a dreamed island in the sea. Matamata students, Gatiirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

4. From a tree to a school building

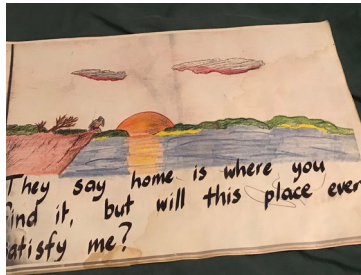
The history of the school was set down in 2004 on the homelands website of Shepherdson College, the Galiwin’ku school that supports the Marthakal homeland centres: “In the early 1970’s lessons were held under a tree, then after many years of lobbying and negotiation ... a small building was built by DEET.” The Territory’s education department funded the materials and construction of the building in 1987. The same page records that “Matamata residents have for over 25 years stated that they want a teacher permanently living in Matamata.”¹¹

That request has a date on it. Don Murray, the Mala Leader, said in 2002: “That’s what I’ve been saying since 1978.”¹² By 2004 Doris Yethun, also known as Dhambiñ, a sister of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja, had been the teacher for six years. Parents had painted the school. In May 2004 there were fifteen children enrolled, seven junior, four middle and four senior, in a population of 25 to 35. Across the Shepherdson homeland centres average attendance was about 83 per cent, high by any remote standard. Yet the same website noted that the department had no policy for homeland schooling, only a draft from 1993, and that in some places basic maintenance had not been done for twenty years.¹¹¹³¹⁴

In October 2005 the Bushlight solar system was connected to five houses and the school. An earlier solar system on the school had long since failed.¹⁵ The school had power, a building and a Yolŋu teacher. What it did not have was a teacher who lived there.

In 2008 the families of Mata Mata, through Bree Blakeman, then living at Mata Mata for her doctoral research, put their case in print. Writing “on behalf of the Gumatj clan nation, MataMata Homeland”, she warned that the government was set to close most remote schools, and that communities “like that we live in here at MataMata” were “the

cultural source of identity”.¹⁶ Blakeman, now at the Australian National University, has worked with Dhambing since about 2007, and the two have published together on Yolŋu social organisation. Her thesis, completed in 2015, is the fullest study of life at Mata Mata in those years and a key source for the school’s future work.¹⁷



Page 4 of My Island Home: sunset over the sea and a far shore. Matamata students, Gatiirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

5. My Island Home

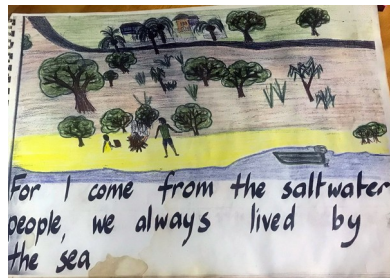
One piece of work from Gatiirri School is known around Australia, though few people know where it came from. In about 1995 Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja and the students of Gatiirri School illustrated the song *My Island Home*. The author’s 2019 account describes it as “a song that she and her nephew George had written and reflected on. It was all about their homeland and the life they led in North East Arnhem land and the islands of the Arafura sea.” The children’s book, with the words written out under their drawings, carries the credit “Words and Music by Warumpi Band, Illustrations by Matamata Students”, and is described as “the original concept, illustrated by children from George Rrurrambu Burarrwaja’s homeland”.¹⁸

George Rrurrambu Burarrwaja (1957–2007) was the singer of the Warumpi Band, a Gumatj man and a Burarrwaja clansman. By one account he was born at Matamata, in the women’s birthing place under a tree, and he was raised at Galiwin’ku. His father, Charlie Matjuwuy Burarrwaja, was a renowned ceremonial singer.¹⁹ He and Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja were close kin and close friends: he was her wäwa, her brother in the Yolŋu way of reckoning, and she was his yäpa, his sister.²⁰

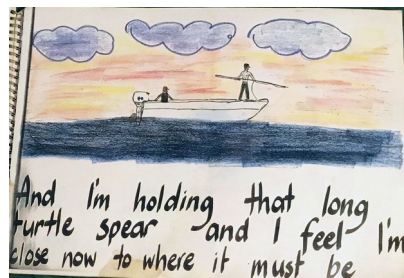
The book’s account is that Mata Mata and Galiwin’ku were the reference for George’s famous song, a song about a man far from home who dreams of the sea and of the saltwater people. The Warumpi Band recorded it in 1986. When Christine Anu, a Torres Strait Islander, recorded her own version in 1995 it became a national hit, and most people came to assume the island was in the Torres Strait. The Mata Mata link was lost.¹⁸²¹

The children’s drawings bring it back. They show their own country: the saltwater people living by the sea, the dinghy on the water, the hunter with his long turtle spear, the green island waiting. That a teacher at a one-room homeland school could take a song and make it the children’s own, in their own pictures and on their own country, is telling

evidence of the power of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja's teaching at Gatirri School. It is also what two-way learning looks like in practice.



Page 5 of My Island Home: the saltwater people, with trees, a camp and a dinghy by the shore. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.



Page 10 of My Island Home: a hunter standing in a dinghy with a long turtle spear. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

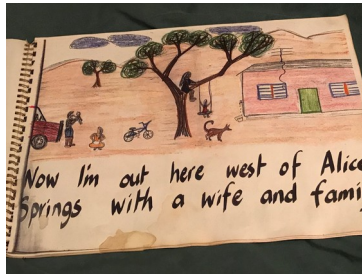
6. The school today

Gatirri School is, officially, the Matamata Homeland Learning Centre, a public homeland learning centre run from Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku. The Territory listed it in 2006 among the eight homeland centres the college supported, and it is still listed under Shepherdson.²²

After Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja died at the end of 2018, Mata Mata went through hard years. For much of the time few people lived there, and the school worked on and off. It has not been formally closed. A Mata Mata Productions note on her film says that "because of Northern Territory Government policy the school is empty and children who want to attend school must move to a regional town or centre such as Nhulunbuy, Galiwinku or another centre."²³ The companion paper on Gove's money described the building as standing empty.²⁴

That has changed. The ISX Mata Mata Homelands project page asked for the school to be refurbished and repaired so that children had a place to learn, costing the front verandah, floorboards and structure at \$100,000, and called for teachers committed to two-way learning.²⁵ That money has since been raised and spent, through the Department of Education rather than the ISX. Shepherdson College paid for and completed a full refurbishment, and the building is now in good condition. Children are enrolled through the college.²³

The staffing is the familiar homeland arrangement. In September 2022, after a meeting at Mata Mata with the Shepherdson College principal, the author wrote that the college looked likely to employ Dhambiṅ five days a week and “fly in teacher for a couple of days a week”. In 2024 he put the aim in one line: “The goal is a permanent Yolngu teacher at Gatirri school.”²⁶ Dhambiṅ is leading the revival, with Bree Blakeman, and it is around her and the families now returning to Mata Mata that any future for the school will be built.¹³



Page 6 of My Island Home: a desert camp west of Alice Springs, with a house, a car, a bicycle and a family. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

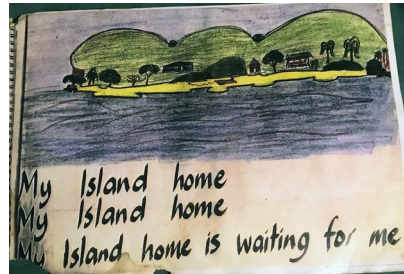
7. The forgotten schools

Gatirri School’s position is not peculiar to Mata Mata. It follows from the way the Territory classifies homeland schools. O’Bryan and her colleagues, writing in *The Australian Educational Researcher* in 2025, studied the Laynhapuy homelands near Yirrkala, drawing on a housing and infrastructure study commissioned by the Laynha board. Two of the authors, Yananymul and Barayuwa Mununggurr, are Yolngu leaders of that board; Marnie O’Bryan is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.¹

Their central finding is about classification. Homeland schools in the Territory are designated Homeland Learning Centres, not schools. That designation, they write, “precludes HLCs from benefitting from either recurrent funding entitlements or special purpose grant opportunities”, and teacher entitlements are reduced. When a centre leaves the hub-and-spoke system and becomes a small stand-alone school, “generous funding and resource entitlements follow”. A review of homelands education led by Yananymul Mununggurr in 2018 had already found that “the classification of ‘Learning Centres’ appears to leave Homeland education in a vulnerable state”.²⁷

They are not alone. A special investigation by journalists at *The Australian* in 2023 called the homeland centres the “forgotten schools”, and the lack of support for them “a human rights violation”. About 400 students were then being taught in 31 homeland learning centres across the Territory.²⁸ The history of bilingual education points the same way. In 1998 the government announced that bilingual education would be “progressively withdrawn”, and in 2008 it required the first four hours of every school day to be taught in English, ending structured bilingual programs in eight remote schools. The rule was later dropped, but the lesson for a homeland is that policy can change suddenly, and without asking.²⁹

There is now an opening. The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034 commits governments to encouraging and supporting the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. O’Bryan and her colleagues see it as the chance to correct the funding of small schools, homeland learning centres included.³⁰ For Gatirri School the point is direct. As a learning centre it sits at the bottom of the funding order, dependent on a hub school with many other calls on it. Any case for a resident teacher has to be made inside that classification, or by changing it.



Page 7 of My Island Home: the green island across the water. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

8. Fly-in, fly-out, or a teacher who lives there

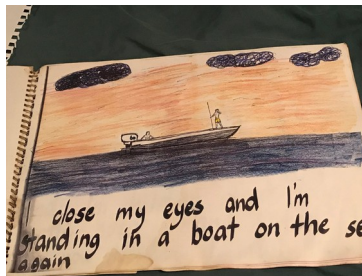
The standard homeland model is best seen at Laynhapuy. Its Homeland Centre Teachers are community members who live on the homelands, have studied or are studying teaching, and teach five days a week. Its Visiting Teachers are mostly non-local, fully accredited teachers who live in Yirrkala and fly or drive in during the week to support planning, teaching and assessment. The relationship is meant to be reciprocal: the visiting teacher helps the homeland teacher build skills, and the homeland teacher orients the visitor to the community. A former principal put it plainly: “It is their classroom, it is their school, it is a community school.” A former teacher said the homeland teachers “hold the fort ... they’re face-to-face Monday to Friday.”³¹ Mission Aviation Fellowship flights carry the visiting teachers out to the homeland schools.³²

The model has real strengths. It keeps the classroom in Yolŋu hands. It puts accredited teaching, planning and assessment within reach of very small schools. It shares scarce specialist teachers across many sites, which no single small homeland could afford. The author has seen Laynhapuy’s visiting teachers, among them Nathan Roberts, do this work well.³³ And it has a record: Laynhapuy celebrated fifty years of homelands education in 2025, with 150 students across nine sites and Year 12 graduates.³⁴

But the model has limits, and Mata Mata has felt them. A visiting teacher who comes for two or three days a week depends on a plane, the weather, the airstrip and the budget. When any of these fails, the visit does not happen. The visiting teacher’s house, colleagues and life are elsewhere. At Yilpara, the Morphys found schooling by visiting teachers three days a week and that “the desire for full-time residential teachers ... was also slow to be satisfied”.³⁵ And the homeland teachers carry the school every day without the housing that visiting teachers receive.¹

A teacher who lives at Mata Mata is something different. A resident teacher is there when the plane does not come. She or he works alongside Dhambin and the other Yolŋu teachers every day, not twice a week, and comes to know the country, the families and the language. A resident teacher makes it possible for families to stay on the homeland through the school year, rather than moving to Galiwin'ku or Nhulunbuy. And a resident teacher needs a house, power, water and supplies, so the teacher's presence is itself a reason to keep the homeland's services working. This is what Mata Mata residents meant in 2004 when they said they wanted "a teacher permanently living in Matamata", and what Don Murray had been saying since 1978.¹¹¹² The fullest form of that wish is a seven-day teacher: someone who lives at Mata Mata through the week and the weekend, is part of the community's life, and is ideally a Yolŋu teacher, trained and qualified, teaching on their own country. That is the aspiration this paper puts forward: a seven-day teacher who would let Gatirri become a primary school in its own right, and also a secondary school and an adult learning school. That teacher would not be starting from nothing: Yolŋu culture is already learned at Mata Mata every day of the week, on country, from elders and family, and formal schooling would build on it.

The two models are not opposites. The best arrangement for Gatirri School would keep what Laynhapuy does well, the Yolŋu homeland teacher in charge of the classroom and the support of a hub, and add a qualified teacher who lives at Mata Mata. That is the central proposal of this paper.



Page 9 of My Island Home: a man standing in a boat on the sea at sunset. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

9. Models for Gatirri School

Gatirri School is not the first homeland school to face these questions. The models below come from north-east Arnhem Land and, in two cases, from west Arnhem Land. Names and hub schools are given as the sources give them; Appendix A lists the schools of the region.

9.1 Laynhapuy Homelands School

Laynhapuy Homelands School, formerly the Yirrkala Homeland School, is based at Yirrkala and is the only government school in the Territory whose only job is to run and resource its homeland centres. It supports nine homeland learning centres, with between six and about 35 students each, and runs secondary schooling through the weekly boarding Makarraṯa program at Garrthalala. The Garrthalala dormitory was built in 2007

by volunteers from the Geelong Central Rotary Club, with money parents saved from their isolated children's allowances, after four years of teachers and students sleeping in classrooms. In 2008 the Human Rights Commission found that its secondary program ran with "no secure operational funding".³¹³⁶ Its principal in 2025 was Abigail White.³⁴ It is the closest model to what Gatirri School could become, and its weak points, funding for the centres and support for local teachers, are the same as Gatirri's.

9.2 Shepherdson College and its homeland centres

Gatirri School already belongs to a network. Shepherdson College at Galiwin'ku supports homeland centres across the Marthakal region, among them Djurranalpi, Donydji, Matamata and Mirrnatja, and in 2006 also Ban'thula, Barrkira, Rorruwuy and Mäpuru. In 2004 participation at the homeland centres was high compared with the Galiwin'ku campus.²²³⁷¹⁴ Gäwa, an island homeland, left the network in 2004 to become Gäwa Christian School, and Ban'thula merged with it in 2008.³⁸ The network gives Gatirri a hub, a principal and a record; Gäwa shows that a homeland can also take its own path.

9.3 Mäpuru: Mapuru Yirralka College

Mäpuru, on the Napier Peninsula, is the clearest example of a homeland building its own school. Its elders wrote to the education department asking for a school in 1976, and asked for a homeland learning centre in 1982. For a trial to be approved, families provided a shelter and a volunteer teacher from the family, and after the trial was approved in 1983 they pooled their money and built the first school room themselves. In 2010 it was registered as Mapuru Christian School, and in 2018 it became Mapuru Yirralka College, a locally governed school whose vision is "Self-determined lives of dignity on ancestral estates". Mäpuru is now a small town of about 100 people.³⁹ Arnhem Weavers runs paid workshops there in weaving, string-making and bush medicine, so that visitors come as learners and pay to do so.⁴⁰

In the author's account the chain at Mäpuru is plain: the school came first, then a shop, and then people came to live there.⁴¹ The risks of independence are plain too: recruiting a principal, and keeping enough people to run a board.

9.4 Baniyala Garrangali School (Yilpara)

Baniyala, also called Yilpara, on Blue Mud Bay, was a homeland centre of the Yirrkala hub from 1974 and was upgraded in 2010 to Baniyala Garrangali School, one of the few homeland centres to become a school in its own right.³⁸ Before that, as the Morphys record, it had waited a long time for the full-time residential teachers the community wanted.³⁵ It shows that the step from learning centre to school can be taken.

9.5 Milingimbi, Ramingining and Gapuwiyak

The larger community schools of the region also run homeland centres. Milingimbi School is the hub for homeland centres in the Crocodile Islands, among them Langarra, Mooronga, Bodia, Bayagida, Gama-Guyurra and Murrunga. Ramingining School is listed as the hub for Gatji, and Gapuwiyak School for Raymangirr and Yalukun.³⁷ For these schools the homeland centres are one task among many, the situation O'Bryan and her colleagues contrast with Laynhapuy's single focus.³¹

9.6 The Homeland School Company, Maningrida

In west Arnhem Land, the Homeland School Company, based at Maningrida in the Djelk Indigenous Protected Area, is registering three independent homeland schools, at Gamardi, Buluh Kaduru and Gochan Jiny Jirra. It notes that across the 6,700 square kilometres of the protected area, home to 102 clan estates and more than 4,000 people, there is only one full-time public school. Dale Pascoe, its chair, is quoted on its site: “They stopped bi-lingual education, but they cannot cut our tongues.” Its CEO is Nic Sharah.⁴² It is the newest attempt to take homeland centres out of the learning-centre classification by registering them as schools.

9.7 Nawarddeken Academy

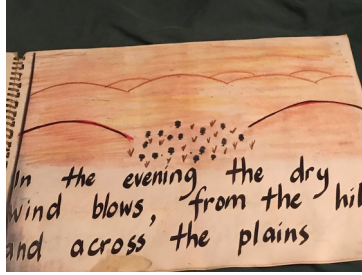
Nawarddeken Academy, in the stone country of west Arnhem Land, grew out of a ranger program. Rangers and Traditional Owners lobbied for full-time schooling on country, so that families would not have to choose between their homeland and their children’s education. In 2015, with the Karrkad Kanjdji Trust and Gunbalanya School, the first campus opened at Kabulwarnamyo in a bush classroom of native cypress poles and a tarpaulin. It gained independent registration in January 2019, and campuses at Manmoyi and Mamadawerre followed in 2021. Its curriculum is built on the Kuwarddewardde Malkno, the stone-country seasonal calendar.⁴³ It shows that a homeland school with rangers, elders and teachers on country can meet the national standards and stay on country.

9.8 Yirrkala both ways, Learning on Country and Dhupuma Barker

Yirrkala’s bilingual, both-ways curriculum, with Garma Maths, which links Yolŋu kinship to mathematics, and with Mandawuy Yunupijū as principal from 1990, is the Yolŋu curriculum tradition on which bush learning and an annual lecture at Gatiirri could build.⁴⁴ Learning on Country, begun as a pilot in 2013 at Maningrida, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy and Galiwin’ku, brings rangers, elders and teachers together on country, and its evaluations found better attendance and completions.⁴⁵ Galiwin’ku is already a site. Dhupuma Barker, a partnership with Barker College, opened at Gunyangara in 2021 in temporary classrooms and moved into a new campus at the end of 2025, described as restoring “a dream that began in 1972 for two-way education for Yolngu children”.⁴⁶

9.9 Family-led learning: Nyinyikay, Buymarr and Bawaka

Three nearby family homelands welcome visitors as learners. Nyinyikay, in Arnhem Bay, offered cultural immersion through Lirrwi Yolngu Tourism until Lirrwi stopped operating in January 2023; its family had hoped tourism would fund a two-way homeland school. Buymarr, set up in 1985 by Gatjil Djerrkura, is run by his family as a getaway. Bawaka, near Port Bradshaw, runs its own education and corporate programs and works with university geographers through the Bawaka Collective.⁴⁷ None runs an annual lecture, and only Gatiirri has a government school. Nyinyikay’s experience is a warning not to depend on a single middleman. Visitors to any of them need a Northern Land Council permit with Traditional Owner consent.⁴⁸



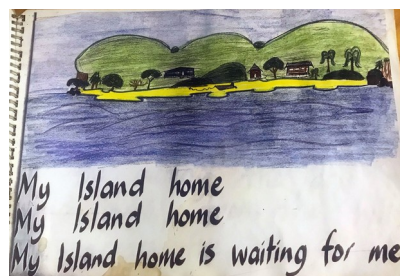
Page 8 of My Island Home: an evening wind over hills and plains. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

10. A school that keeps a homeland alive

The vision for Gatirri School is not a school on its own but a self-sustaining homeland with a good income, with the school at its centre. O'Bryan and her colleagues note that homelands education is a pathway to adult education and employment, and that schools and ranger groups are the largest employers on the homelands.⁴⁹ At Mata Mata a full school would bring paid work: homeland teachers teaching Yolŋu knowledge, language and country alongside the resident teacher; assistant teachers; cleaning, grounds and building maintenance; and the cooking, supply and transport that a school and a resident teacher need.

Mäpuru shows the chain. The school came first, a shop followed, and people came home to live.⁴¹ Mata Mata already has much of what is needed. It has solar power, brought there at the initiative of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja. It has good food from the sea and the bush, little crime, and it is a good place for children to grow up.⁵⁰ What it lacks are the steady jobs and services that keep families there through the year. A school with a resident teacher would bring both.

There is also a wider question. Rio Tinto expects the last bauxite at Gove to be mined in 2029.⁵¹ What north-east Arnhem Land's economy will be after the mine is one of the questions behind all of these papers. Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka, the art centre at Yirrkala, founded in 1976 and now known around the world, shows one answer: Yolŋu knowledge and culture, kept and taught by Yolŋu, can be the basis of good income, including, through the Mulka Project, "income streams for Homeland communities".⁵² A homeland school that teaches both ways is part of that answer.



Page 11 of My Island Home: the island home waiting across the water. Matamata students, Gatirri School, c.1995, courtesy Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja.

11. A place of higher learning

The first step is for Gattirri to become a real primary school in its own right, with a seven-day teacher, ideally Yolŋu, living at Mata Mata, and then also a secondary school and an adult learning school, so that people of all ages can learn at Mata Mata. In a sense Mata Mata already is a school for lifelong learning, because Yolŋu culture is learned there every day of the week, on country, from elders and family; formal schooling would build on that. Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja's dream went beyond a primary school. She wanted Gattirri School to be a place of higher learning all the time, where learning about Australia, traditional culture and knowledge of the land could be tied together. Mata Mata is first of all a homeland, and there has long been a wish to hold an annual lecture on traditional culture there, tied to that homeland identity. The author's film trilogy, *Remaking the Pathway*, *Bäpurru* and *Ijānarr Gurtha* (*The Tongue of Fire*), is meant to show Mata Mata as a place to learn about culture, not just somewhere tourists visit.¹⁰

The models show the pieces. Garrthalala has a bush university link with Macquarie University. Bawaka works with university geographers. Bree Blakeman of the Australian National University has worked with Dhambij for nearly twenty years. Learning on Country is evaluated by the ANU's Centre for Indigenous Policy Research.⁴⁷¹⁷⁴⁵ An annual lecture at Mata Mata, and learning journeys for school and university groups, as the ISX project page proposes, would add visitor income on top of government funding, not in place of it.²⁵

12. What would help

The sources and the models point to a few practical steps:

- A qualified teacher living at Mata Mata seven days a week, ideally a Yolŋu teacher, housed and supported, working with Dhambij and the Yolŋu homeland teachers, so that Gattirri can become a real primary school in its own right, and also a secondary school and an adult learning school, within the Shepherdson College network or a successor arrangement.
- Proper pay, training and housing for the Yolŋu homeland teachers, who carry the school every day.¹
- A fair funding classification for homeland learning centres under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, or, if the families choose, the path Mäpuru, Gäwa and Baniyala took to becoming schools in their own right.³⁰³⁸
- Links with Learning on Country, the ANU and other universities, on the Garrthalala and Bawaka pattern.⁴⁵
- A small, community-run program of visitor learning and an annual lecture, with Northern Land Council permits and more than one partner.⁴⁸
- Evidence and support on the record early, from the families and from researchers, since homeland education policy can change suddenly.²⁹

Which of these come first, and how, is for the families of Mata Mata, Shepherdson College and Marthakal to decide.

13. Conclusion

Gatirri School began with a founder who built a runway, a school and houses, and a daughter who taught children under a tree, half the day in Balanda learning and half in Yolŋu. It has a building again, in good order, a Yolŋu teacher leading its revival, and families coming home. Its children once took a famous song and made it their own. What it has asked for since 1978 is a teacher who lives there.

The policy record, set out by O'Bryan and her colleagues, explains why that has been so hard: homeland learning centres are classed below schools and funded below them. The models show that it can be done, from Mäpuru's families building a school room with their own money to Nawarddeken's bush classroom of cypress poles. A seven-day teacher at Gatirri School, living at Mata Mata and ideally Yolŋu, working with the Yolŋu homeland teachers, is the step that would make Gatirri a real primary school in its own right, and also a secondary school and an adult learning school, a school for lifelong learning at Mata Mata, let it anchor a self-sustaining homeland, and carry on the vision of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja. It would build on what Mata Mata already is, a place where Yolŋu culture is learned every day of the week, on country, from elders and family.

Appendix A. Schools of north-east Arnhem Land

Listed from the sources cited. Hub schools for homeland learning centres are as given in the Wikipedia list and its sources (NT Legislative Assembly answers and Services Australia lists); which centres are open in any year varies with population. Laynhapuy Homelands School is the former Yirrkala Homeland School, and some centres listed under Yirrkala School are now in its network. Not every centre was checked for current status.³⁷

School	Place	Type	Notes
Shepherdson College	Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island)	NT government; hub	HLCs: Djurranalpi, Donydji, Matamata (Gatirri School), Mirrnatja; in 2006 also Ban'thula, Barrkira, Rorruwuy, Mäpuru
Gäwa Christian School	Gäwa, Elcho Island	Independent (NT Christian Schools)	Former HLC; school from 2004
Mapuru Yirrkala College	Mäpuru	Independent, locally governed	HLC 1983; Mapuru Christian School 2010; Yirrkala 2018
Laynhapuy Homelands School	Yirrkala (hub)	NT government; homelands only	Nine HLCs; Makarraṯa secondary boarding at Garrthalala
Laynha-region HLCs	Birany Birany, Dhalinybuy, Dhuruputjpi, Gan Gan, Garrthalala, Gurumuru, Gutjangan, Rorruwuy, Ruwakpuy, Rurrangala, Wandawuy	Homeland Learning Centres	Hub listed as Yirrkala School or Laynhapuy Homelands School
Yirrkala School	Yirrkala	NT government	Both-ways bilingual school
Baniyala Garrangali School	Baniyala (Yilpara), Blue Mud Bay	NT government	Former HLC; upgraded 2010
Milingimbi School	Milingimbi	NT government; hub	HLCs: Bayagida, Bodia, Gama-Guyurra, Langarra, Mooronga, Murrunga
Ramingining School	Ramingining	NT government; hub	HLC: Gatji
Gapuwiyak School	Gapuwiyak	NT government; hub	HLCs: Raymangirr, Yalukun
Dhupuma Barker	Gunyangara	Independent (Barker College)	Opened 2021; new campus December 2025
Nhulunbuy Primary School	Nhulunbuy	NT government	Town school; not researched further
Nhulunbuy High School	Nhulunbuy	NT government, with boarding	40-bed boarding complex opened 2017; facility's current name not confirmed

Sources: the notes to this appendix and to sections 6 and 9.⁴⁶⁵³³⁹³⁴

Notes

1. O'Bryan, M., Mununggurr, Y., Mununggurr, B. and Dreise, T. (2025), "Where self-determination and equity meet: homelands education systems and the forgotten schools", *The Australian Educational Researcher* 52: 2917-2940, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-025-00803-x> ; open access, https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/619186015/593574706_Published_article.pdf . Marnie O'Bryan is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Batchelor Institute and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne.
2. Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026: Gatiirri Burarrwaja founded Mata Mata, was head of the Burarrwaja clan, father of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja and grandfather of Gaypal (Terence Gaypalani Gurruwiwi). Bushlight, Case Study 28, Mata Mata (Centre for Appropriate Technology, February 2009), names the school after her father, <https://www.cfat.org.au/s/Bushlight-Case-Study-28-Mata-Mata.pdf> . Mata Mata Homelands website, About page: "Gatiirri Burarrwanga established a runway, a school and several houses at Mata Mata", <https://matamatahomelands.com/about> .
3. On founding around 1948 to the early 1950s: Botsman, Peter (2019), Mata Mata Creative Trust prospectus, pp. 6-8, as cited in Botsman (2026), Planes, Roads, Automobiles; Shepherdson College homelands site (2004), via Cultural Survival, "early fifties", https://culturalsurvival.org.au/2004_2way_HLCs/Matamata.html .
4. Mata Mata Productions, "Dhukarr Yäkhun (Remaking the Pathway)", programme notes, matamataproductions.vhx.tv, seen 8 October 2026 (the 1964 walk with her father towards Elizabeth Bay; the deaths of Gatiirri and two of his brothers there; schooling at Galiwin'ku). Botsman, Peter (2024), "Dhanu dhuka (Making the way)", workingpapers.com.au, 1 July 2024.
5. Centre for Appropriate Technology, "A Mata Mata voice to empower my people," edited interview with Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja: Warramiri country; her father established Mata Mata; "we set up our organisation, named Marthakal." <https://www.cfat.org.au/a-mata-mata-voice-to-empower-my-people>
6. Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026 (Gaypal carrying on the legacy at Mata Mata).
7. Standard note on Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja (1956-2018). Mata Mata Productions, "Bäpurru" (programme note): "one of the first fully trained yolŋu teachers in North East Arnhem land"; "a highly esteemed djuŋgayi for Matamata", <https://matamataproductions.vhx.tv/bapurru> . Bäpa Sheppy and Gi'kal: Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026; the author heard the name as "Pappa Sheppy"; the published form is "Bäpa Sheppy" (Gwenda Baker, *A Legendary Partnership: Yolŋu, Bäpa Sheppy and Ŋäŋdi Ella*, Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 2018). No published Shepherdson source for the Gi'kal observation has been found. Health service: R. Trudgen, "Dry dead leaves," *Why Warriors*, August 2020, <https://whywarriors.com.au/2020/08/phyllis-b-burarrwanga-dry-leaves-story/> . Marthakal chair: Peter Botsman, personal knowledge. Dates: Mata Mata Productions gives 1 February 1956 - 19 December 2018.
8. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026: Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja taught many children at Mata Mata and at Gi'kal, giving about half the day to Balandä (Western) education and half to Yolŋu education. The description of her as the pioneer homeland teacher of Arnhem Land is the author's.
9. Mata Mata Productions, "Batumbil Mata Mata School", 6 min, programme note, seen 8 October 2026: Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja's account of how the school grew from home schooling to the present building; "currently because of Northern Territory Government policy the school is empty and children who want to attend school must move to a regional town or centre such as Nhulunbuy, Galiwinku or another centre." The note is undated. <https://matamataproductions.vhx.tv/mata-mata-heritage-films-and-documentaries/videos/batumbil-mata-mata-school>
10. Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026: Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja's dream of Gatiirri School as a place of higher learning; Mata Mata first of all a homeland; the long-held wish for an annual lecture on traditional culture; the film trilogy *Remaking the Pathway*, *Bäpurru* and *Ŋäŋarr Gurtha* (The Tongue of Fire) as showing Mata Mata as a place to learn about culture. Mata Mata Productions: her vision of "a place of deep, two-way learning".
11. Shepherdson College CEC homelands site (2004), Gatiirri School (Matamata HLC) page, via Cultural Survival: "In the early 1970's lessons were held under a tree, then after many years of lobbying and negotiation ... a small building was built by DEET"; "This school building was constructed in 1987, NT DEET funded the materials and construction of the building"; "Matamata residents have for over 25 years stated that they want a teacher permanently living in Matamata"; Doris Yethun teacher for six years by 2004; 15 enrolments in May 2004 (seven junior, four middle, four senior); population 25 to 35. https://culturalsurvival.org.au/2004_2way_HLCs/Matamata.html

12. Don Murray, Mala Leader, 2002, quoted on the 2004 Gatiirri School page (as above): "That's what I've been saying since 1978."
13. Doris Yethun, also known as Dhambiṅ (Dumbing, Dhambing): Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026 (sister of Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja; teacher at the school 2002–04; leading the revival). Her chapter "Keeping YSL Alive" gives "Doris Yethun Burarrwaja", <https://thestacks.liba.ac.de/bitstreams/f3bec4d4-1c9d-40d8-aa13-09118718f0ec/download> . That Dhambiṅ and Doris Yethun are the same person rests on family knowledge.
14. Shepherdson College homelands site (2004), Attendance patterns: about 83 per cent average attendance across the Shepherdson homeland centres; "DEET does not have a policy for homeland schooling, (there is a draft 1993 policy)", https://culturalsurvival.org.au/2004_2way_HLCs/AttendancePatterns.html ; Resourcing: "In some cases basic maintenance work has not been carried out for twenty years," https://culturalsurvival.org.au/2004_2way_HLCs/Resourcing.html
15. Bushlight, Case Study 28, Mata Mata (2009): renewable-energy system installed October 2005 and connected to five houses and the school; earlier solar on the school had long stopped working. <https://www.cfat.org.au/s/Bushlight-Case-Study-28-Mata-Mata.pdf> ; Botsman (2026c), Power: The Homelands off the Grid.
16. Blakeman, Bree (Djawulanganing), "Defend our homelands!", Green Left 773, 2008, written "on behalf of the Gumatj clan nation, MataMata Homeland". <https://www.greenleft.org.au/2008/773/analysis/defend-our-homelands>
17. Blakeman, B. (2015), An ethnography of emotion and morality: toward a local Indigenous theory of value and social exchange on the Yolngu Homelands in remote North-East Arnhem Land, PhD thesis, Australian National University, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/items/c2ffdedc-cbda-49d5-ac49-b7d63d9f306b> ; Blakeman, B. and Burarrwaja, D. (2023), "Yolkala Gumurrili? With Whom Towards the Chest? A Relational Portrait of Yolṁu Social Organisation", Journal of Intercultural Studies 44(5): 678–696, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2023.2198202> (the authors have worked together since about 2007).
18. Botsman, Peter (2019), "My Island Home – the origins", workingpapers.com.au, 27 September 2019: "In 1995 Mrs. P. B. Burarrwaja and the students of Gatiirri School, Mata Mata illustrated a song that she and her nephew George had written and reflected on. It was all about their homeland and the life they led in North East Arnhem land and the islands of the Arafura sea." <https://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/my-island-home-origins> . The illustrated book: "My Island Home", words and music by Warumpi Band, illustrations by Matamata students, Adobe Express: "The original concept, illustrated by children from George Rrurrambu Burarrwaja's homeland. Courtesy Mrs. P.B. Burarrwaja and Gatiirri School, Mata Mata, circa 1995." <https://express.adobe.com/page/AzteMQMvjmdB4/>
19. Wikipedia, "George Rrurrambu Burarrwanga" (1957 – 10 June 2007): born at the homeland of Matamata in the ceremonial women's birthing area under a tree, raised at Galiwin'ku; his father, Charlie Matjuwuy Burarrwanga, a renowned ceremonial singer. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Rrurrambu_Burarrwanga . The Sydney Morning Herald report of his death, 11 June 2007, says he died at Elcho Island and gives no birthplace, <https://www.smh.com.au/news/music/lead-singer-of-warumpi-band-dies/2007/06/11/1181414193910.html> . Other accounts give Galiwin'ku as his birthplace.
20. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026: George was her wāwa (brother; here a classificatory older brother) and she was his yāpa (sister); they were close. The author's 2019 page calls George "her nephew". Yolṁu kinship is classificatory, and the exact relationship is for the family to state.
21. The published record credits the song to Neil Murray, who wrote it for the band's singer, George Rrurrambu Burarrwaja, about his island home at Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island). Murray has said it came to him in June 1985 after a week camped with George's family on the island. Recorded by Warumpi Band in 1986, released on Go Bush! in 1987; Christine Anu's version ("Island Home", 1995) won APRA Song of the Year. Wikipedia, "My Island Home", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Island_Home , citing Neil Murray's own website.
22. School in Australia, "Matamata Homeland Learning Centre" (c/- Shepherdson College CEC, PMB 74, Winnellie NT 0820), <https://schoolinaustralia.com/ratings/matamata-homeland-learning-centre/> ; Wikipedia, "List of Homeland Learning Centres" (Matamata, hub Shepherdson College), citing NT Government, Community profile – Galiwin'ku and Marthakal Homelands, 2 August 2006, p. 73 ("Banthula, Djurranalpi, Barrkira, Mata Mata, Rorruwuy, Mapuru, Donydji, Mirrngatja"), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Homeland_Learning_Centres
23. Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026: for much of the five years after Mrs P.B. Burarrwaja died, few people lived at Mata Mata and the school worked on and off; it has not been formally closed; Shepherdson College paid for and completed a full refurbishment and the building is in good condition; the \$100,000 sought for the school has been raised and spent through the Department of Education, not through the ISX; children are enrolled through Shepherdson College. The date and cost of the refurbishment are not yet recorded.

24. Botsman (2026b), Where Gove's money went, which records the building as standing empty; that is now out of date on the building's condition.
25. Indigenous Stock Exchange (ISX), Mata Mata Homelands project page: "the Mata Mata school needs to be refurbished and repaired so that children have a place to learn"; front verandah, floorboards and structure costed at \$100,000 within a Mata Mata Foundation Fund; recruiting teachers committed to two-way learning; learning journeys. The page predates the refurbishment. <https://www.isx.org.au/projects/mata-mata-homelands>
26. Peter Botsman, email to Bree Blakeman, "Mata Mata" thread, 6 September 2022, 7:41 pm AEST: "Good meeting today at Mata Mata with Shep College principal looks like they'll employ Dhambing five days a week from next week and fly in teacher for a couple of days a week." Peter Botsman, email of 31 May 2024: "The goal is a permanent Yolngu teacher at Gatriri school."
27. O'Bryan et al. (2025), p. 2923, quoting Mununggurr et al. (2018), p. 37: "the classification of 'Learning Centres' appears to leave Homeland education in a vulnerable state"; designation as Learning Centres "precludes HLCs from benefitting from either recurrent funding entitlements or special purpose grant opportunities", whereas a centre that converts to a small school gains "generous funding and resource entitlements".
28. O'Bryan et al. (2025), conclusion, citing Graham, C., Colling, T. and Stevenson, K. (2023), "NT schools in crisis: How Homeland Learning Centres are failing Indigenous children", *The Australian: the "forgotten schools" and "a human rights violation"*. In 2023 an estimated 400 students were in 31 HLCs across the Territory (Graham et al., 2023, as cited).
29. Friends of Bilingual Learning, "Bilingual education in the NT until October 14 2008", <https://fobl.net.au/index.php/history/67-bilingual-education-in-the-nt-until-october-14-2008> (the 1998 announcement that bilingual education would be "progressively withdrawn"; the 2008 four-hours-of-English rule). The later dropping of the rule: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/HER-06-2019-068/full/html> (exact date not confirmed).
30. O'Bryan et al. (2025): the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034 commits the parties to encouraging and supporting the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities; the authors see it as an opportunity to correct the funding of small schools, including HLCs.
31. O'Bryan et al. (2025), case study: Laynhapuy Homeland School (formerly Yirrkala Homeland School), based in Yirrkala, is the only NT government school whose only role is to run and resource its HLCs; nine HLCs with six to about 35 students each; secondary schooling through the weekly boarding Makarrata program at Garrthalala; Homeland Centre Teachers live on the homelands and teach five days a week, Visiting Teachers mostly live in Yirrkala and fly or drive in; a former principal: "It is their classroom, it is their school, it is a community school." A former teacher: Homeland Centre Teachers "hold the fort ... they're face-to-face Monday to Friday."
32. ABC News, Laynhapuy Homelands School teaching on country, 14 December 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-14/laynhapuy-homelands-school-teaching-on-country/105888546> ; MAF Arnhem Land, "Bringing quality education closer to remote communities" (2024), <https://arnhemland.mafint.org/news/2024-bringing-quality-education-closer-remote-communities> ; <https://arnhemland.mafint.org/news/2024-school-bus-teachers>
33. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026, on the visiting-teacher model at Laynhapuy and on Nathan Roberts as one of its visiting teachers. Not checked against a published source.
34. Rowe, Peter (2025), "50 years of two-way learning celebrated at Laynhapuy Homelands", *First Nations News*, 18 September 2025: nine homeland sites, 150 students, the largest site 20 students and the smallest five; celebration at Garrthalala; an additional \$739,000 in the past year (Minister Jo Hersey); four Year 12 NTCET completions in 2024; principal Abigail White. <https://firstnationsnews.com.au/50-years-of-two-way-learning-celebrated-at-laynhapuy-homelands/>
35. Morphy, Frances and Howard Morphy (2016), "Thwarted aspirations: The political economy of a Yolngu outstation, 1972 to the present", in N. Peterson and F. Myers (eds), *Experiments in Self-Determination*, ANU Press, chapter 15: at Yilpara schooling was by visiting teachers three days a week, and "the desire for full-time residential teachers ... was also slow to be satisfied." <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p331981/html/ch15.xhtml>
36. O'Bryan et al. (2025), pp. 2930–31: at Garrthalala, parents saved money from Assistance for Isolated Children payments for a dormitory built by volunteers of the Geelong Central Rotary Club in 2007, after four years of teachers and students sleeping in classrooms; the Human Rights Commission's 2008 Social Justice Report found the secondary program had "no secure operational funding"; the boarding house now holds 28–30 students.
37. Wikipedia, "List of Homeland Learning Centres" (hub schools as listed): Milingimbi School (Bayagida, Bodja, Gama-Guyurra, Langarra, Mooronga, Murrunga); Ramingining School (Gatji); Gapuwiyak School (Raymangirr, Yalukun); Shepherdson College (Djurranalpi, Donydji, Matamata, Mirrngatja); Yirrkala School or Laynhapuy Homelands School (Birany Birany, Dhalinybuy, Dhuruputjpi, Gan Gan, Garrthalala, Gurumuru, Gutjangan, Rorruwuy, Ruwakpuy, Rurrangala, Wandawuy). Sources there include NT

- Legislative Assembly Written Question 606 (2023) and Services Australia lists of limited program schools. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Homeland_Learning_Centres
38. Wikipedia, "List of Homeland Learning Centres", upgraded HLCs: Gawa (Gäwa), hub Shepherdson College, HLC 1991–2004, upgraded to Gawa Christian School; Banthula (Ban'thula) merged with Gäwa Christian School in 2008; Baniyala, hub Yirrkala School, HLC 1974–2010, upgraded to Baniyala Garrangali School; Mapuru upgraded 2010. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Homeland_Learning_Centres
 39. Mapuru Yirrkala College, History, <https://www.yirrkala.nt.edu.au/history.php> : first Western-built infrastructure 1968; elders wrote to the NT Education Department for a school in 1976 and asked for an HLC in 1982; families supplied a shelter and a volunteer family teacher, and after the 1983 trial pooled funds to build the first room; Mapuru Christian School registered under NT Christian Schools in 2010; Yirrkala Education formed 2016; locally governed school from 2018; vision "Self-determined lives of dignity on ancestral estates"; Mapuru now about 100 people.
 40. Arnhem Weavers, tours, <https://www.arnhemweavers.com.au/tours.php> ; <https://www.arnhemweavers.com.au/tours-2025.php> (paid 8–10 day workshops in weaving, string, bush medicine and men's on-country trips).
 41. Peter Botsman, personal communication, October 2026: at Mäpuru the school came first, a shop followed, and people came to live there. The sequence is the author's account; the history of the shop was not checked for this draft.
 42. Homeland School Company, <https://homelandschoolcompany.org.au> : based at Maningrida, in the Djelk Indigenous Protected Area; registering three independent schools at Gamardi, Buluh Kaduru and Gochan Jiny Jirra; only one full-time public school across the 6,700 sq km IPA, home to 102 clan estates and more than 4,000 people; Dale Pascoe quoted; CEO Nic Sharah. Dale Pascoe as chair and Olga Scholes (Nawarddeken Academy) as a director were advised to the author and not checked on the company's site for this draft.
 43. Nawarddeken Academy, Our Story, <https://nawarddeken.org.au/our-story/> ; Karrkad Kanjdji Trust, "Ten-year anniversary of the Nawarddeken Academy", <https://kkt.org.au/news/ten-year-anniversary-of-the-nawarddeken-academy> : rangers and Traditional Owners lobbied for full-time schooling on country; first campus at Kabulwarnamyo in 2015 with the Karrkad Kanjdji Trust and Gunbalanya School, in a bush classroom of native cypress poles and a tarpaulin; independent registration January 2019; Manmoyi and Mamadawerre campuses registered late 2021; Kuwarddewardde Malkno (stone country seasonal calendar) curriculum from 2021.
 44. Inside Story, "Learning in both worlds", <https://insidestory.org.au/learning-in-both-worlds/> ; ABC News, 11 July 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-11/nt-bilingual-school-arnhem-land-aboriginal-learning/100272960> ; Wikipedia, "Mandawuy Yunupingu", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandawuy_Yunupingu
 45. Learning on Country, Yirrkala profile, <https://learningoncountry.com/profile/yirrkala/> ; NIAA, Learning on Country, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/learning-country> ; ANU CIPR evaluation, <https://cipr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/learning-country-program-progress-evaluation-report-20> (pilot from 2013 at Maningrida, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy Homelands and Galiwin'ku; better attendance and completions; problems with the funding model and data).
 46. Barker College, Dhupuma Barker, <https://barker.college/about-barker/indigenous-education/dhupuma-barker/> ; "New Dhupuma Barker school prepares to open", <https://www.barker.college/news-events/new-dhupuma-barker-school-prepares-to-open/> (opened at Gunyangara at Easter 2021 in temporary classrooms; new campus soft-opened 10 December 2025; "a dream that began in 1972 for two-way education for Yolngu children").
 47. Nyinyikay: <https://www.visiteastarnhem.com.au/places-to-go/homelands/nyinyikay> ; <https://www.isx.org.au/nyinyikay-dha-wuba> ; Lirrwi Yolngu Tourism Aboriginal Corporation (ceased 12 January 2023), <https://www.isx.org.au/lirrwi-yolngu-tourism-aboriginal-corporation> ; 2006 article on the hoped-for two-way school, <https://cpcabrisbane.org/Kasama/2006/V20n4/YolnguClan.htm> . Buymarr: <https://www.isx.org.au/projects/buymarr-getaways> . Bawaka: <https://bawakayolnguexperience.com.au/about/> ; <https://bawakacollective.com/about-us/>
 48. Northern Land Council, Permits, <https://www.nlc.org.au/permits>
 49. O'Bryan et al. (2025): "Homelands education provides an important pathway to adult education and employment. Schools and ranger groups are the largest employers in the homelands."
 50. Peter Botsman, personal communication, 2026: Mata Mata as a sustainable community and good place to live, with solar power, healthy living, little crime, and a good place for children to grow up. On power, Botsman (2026c); on food, Botsman (2026d).
 51. Rio Tinto, Gove operations page: last bauxite expected to be mined in 2029. <https://www.riotinto.com/en/operations/anz/gove> ; Botsman (2026b), Where Gove's money went.
 52. Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, <https://yirrkala.com/buku-larrnggay-mulka/> ; History, <https://yirrkala.com/history/> ; The Mulka Project, <https://yirrkala.com/about-the-mulka-project/> (founded 1976; the Mulka Project since 2007, creating "income streams for Homeland communities").
 53. ABC News, "Nhulunbuy High School's multi-million-dollar boarding complex for remote education opens", 24 May 2017: a \$20 million, 40-bed complex beside the high school. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-24>

[24/nhulunbuy-high-schools-boarding-complex-opens/8555770](#) . Its present name and operator were not confirmed for this draft.

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