

Randall and Michelle with students from Bulman School.



'We're keeping our CULTURE ALIVE'

STORIES OF ANCESTORS ARE SUNG AT THIS REMOTE SCHOOL

Laughter rings out across the Bulman School playground, blending in with the steady tap of clapsticks and the ancient call of the didgeridoo. It's rehearsal time, and all 60 students from the isolated primary school in Arnhem Land, in the NT's north-east corner, are polishing off their latest song inspired by a traditional Dreamtime story.

Music workshops run by non-profit, The Song Room, have helped the students compose more than a dozen songs in the

two traditional languages of the region, Dalabon and Rembarrnga. School principal Michelle Jensen says the songs help bridge a generational divide.

"Music is a huge part of their culture and a fun way to keep their language alive," Michelle tells *New Idea*.

"The students throw themselves into every part of it – singing, playing clapsticks and didgeridoos, and acting out scenes for music videos. When they see how many views [they] get online, their eyes light up."

What began as voices in a remote classroom has

now soared to some of the country's biggest stages, with the students being rewarded at the ARIA Awards and the National Indigenous Music Awards.

Helping the students is senior Rembarrnga man, Randall Campion. He is celebrated as Bulman's last traditional song man, a cultural leader whose voice carries the songs of Country through funerals, ceremonies, and gatherings.

Randall started working at Bulman School as a language teacher, but the students had other plans.

"They wanted me to sing," he says. "And singing is important for their education, cooperation and the development and continuation of language and culture."

Music has been at the heart of the school since 2018, thanks to The Song



The students take part in the music class.

Room – a program funded by the federal Communities for Children initiative and championed locally by The Smith Family in Katherine.

Along with making learning fun, Michelle says the vital program is a fantastic way to help connect to the wider community.

"Every time they record a new music video, we have a barbecue to release it," she explains.

By Megan Rowe

The songs carry the elders' stories to the children.

