

Siti Chongkin, registrar at Cocos Islands DHS, and Christine Petrides, school officer at Connolly PS, are winners of this year's outstanding administrative officer awards presented by the WA State School Registrars' Association in partnership with the Department. Maria D'Agostino reports.

# Siti spans two cultures

LINKS between school and community have never been stronger than on Cocos Island where the role of registrar spans two languages, two cultures and two islands.

The Cocos Keeling Islands, situated in the Indian Ocean 2500km from Perth, consist of 27 small islands around a coral atoll. Cocos Islands DHS is a split-campus school with a campus on each of the only two inhabited islands, separated by an 8km lagoon.

Travel between the islands is by a ferry which operates a number of times a day. The West Island campus caters for western students Kindergarten to Year 6 and Year 7 to 10 western but predominantly Cocos Malay students. The Home Island campus caters entirely for Kindergarten to Year 6 Cocos Malay students.

The population of 450 on Home Island includes Cocos Malay residents who have their own language, strong cultural traditions and follow the Muslim faith. The West Island population of 80 includes Australian expatriots.

Siti Chongkin, who has been at Cocos Islands DHS since 1993, travels from her home on Home Island by ferry every morning to get to the main school campus on West Island. She is in the unique position of living in one cultural context and working in a different cultural context.

"I like the challenge, it's the best part about my job," she said.

"I feel strongly about education and my job allows me to be part of educating students on Cocos. I really like being a part of the team where we can share ideas and I really enjoy helping people."

Siti's professionalism has seen her considered a leader in the small community and she is the first person local Cocos Malays on Home Island contact for school matters.

Teachers rely heavily on Siti for guidance in regard to the Cocos Malay language, culture and religion as well as the day to day role of a school registrar.

Siti has developed innovative solutions to keep up to date with the latest policies by developing strong networks with the closest school, Christmas Island DHS. She attends professional development in Perth once a year, which means leaving her family for 10 days due to flight schedules.



Principal Heather Prance said Siti was a remarkable school registrar who was highly respected by school administration, teaching and non teaching staff as well as the wider Home Island and West Island communities.

"She is courteous and helpful to all regardless of the pressure she may be under," she said.