



\$25,000 for unfair dismissal

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THE former assistant principal of Djarragun College has been awarded more than \$25,000 for harsh and unfair dismissal.

Matthew Curtis worked at the indigenous school for 18 months before he was made redundant in November last year. At the time, the college claimed Mr Curtis's job, as senior school and VET head, had been scrapped and the role wasn't filled again after he left.

But the tribunal received statements from five other Djarragun staff members who said Mr Curtis was replaced by two new teachers. The college argued Mr Curtis's job had been split into two "lower level" jobs and that his redundancy was genuine.

But Fair Work Australia ruled in Mr Curtis's favour, agreeing that his redundancy was not genuine if two new staff members were hired to do the work he was already doing.

"The termination of the applicant's employment did not relate to a genuine redundancy but was a harsh and unfair dismissal of the applicant," the Fair Work Australia decision stated.

Mr Curtis originally sought to be rehired at Djarragun, but the school said it couldn't take him back because it had incurred debts of more than \$4 million to the State and Federal governments. He then sought \$45,000 compensation, but the tribunal decided on \$25,090 - equal to 15 weeks' pay.

In deciding a figure, the tribunal ruled that long-term employment at Djarragun might not have been realistic for Mr Curtis, given the school's dire financial straits.