



Principal's Report 2013 AGM

At the closure of each year we reflect on the year that had passed and acknowledge our achievements and learning. For many reasons, 2013 was a year to remember. It marked our fifth year in Hazelbrook and with that came some major changes. It was a time of review and renewal, as having settled into our new home, we were able to bring our focus to our school's vision and mission, and look to the future. The school council and the executive worked together to finalise our Mission and Vision statements and to draw up the draft of our strategic plan. The teachers were immersed in reviewing the documents in preparation for the new Australian NSW curriculum, which began stage one of implementation in 2014. In addition to this we held a 360 review of the school bringing focus to governance, management, the student experience and community. Most significantly we had a change in school leadership, with Mark Thomas stepping aside after 12 years as School Coordinator. This saw an internal restructure of roles and responsibilities, with changes made to the executive and administration of the school.

A significant time for all of us in the mountains was the bushfire period. While we were fortunate that no family in our school lost their home in the October bushfires, we remember those whose circumstances were not as fortunate as ours. It was a time of forging deeper connections for our community, and I wish to thank Blue Mountains Grammar School for hosting our Maths students for their HSC examination. For the families and students involved in the HSC in 2013 there were many disruptions, yet they came through with determination to proceed regardless. As a result of the love and support they received from family and friends they have developed greater resilience. Our HSC results for 2013 were exceptional.

The past year at Korowal was a time of review and renewal. In 2013 we began to look at who we are in today's forum. Education requires partnerships in learning. At Korowal we prepare our young people for a rapidly changing world and therefore we brought our focus

to providing supportive structures for students to get to know themselves in order to know others, to become creative and independent thinkers, to be resilient, mindful, engaged and gracious; to be aware of the privileges we have.

Last year we asked the questions: What is of core value? and What is open to change? We began reviewing our teaching programs to accommodate the changes to the curriculum and also to look at how and where we can create inspiring educational experiences for our students. We examined the primary class structures and implemented a restructure for 2014. In the high school we engaged in dialogue as to how to create learning partnerships with students to engage them in establishing and reviewing individual learning goals.

In Australia, Education is a popular subject, and there is much discussion on the need to improve the quality of teaching in our schools. We can celebrate that we have teachers of the finest calibre, with passion and commitment to investigating the changing learning environment.

We began holding educational leadership, rather than educational management, as the key. The year commenced with a strong focus on three main areas. The first was 'The Culture of Learning at Korowal' and this involved many new initiatives for us, including philosophy, mindfulness and thinking skills, and Mind Matters, to name a few. The second area was 'Community'. We were keen to create an inclusive learning community so we increased the number of community events and gatherings. To further engage parents, we began our PEP talks with a session on Brain Compatible Learning, where we introduced the parents to the program now running in the high school. The third area involved a review of 'The Leadership Model', and we re-defined the roles of the leadership group. Consequently, the head of school now has the title of Principal. This was a major change for our school and has taken some getting used to. In 2014 we continue to look at how we can implement a distributed leadership model, thus providing greater opportunities for teacher leadership and succession planning. Little did we know when we began this process that there was to be a major change in leadership.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that for twelve years Mark was in the position of School Coordinator and led the restructuring and development that Korowal underwent during this time. On behalf of us all I wish to thank Mark for rescuing the school several

times and leading us to safer grounds. It is wonderful to have Mark back in the classroom with the students, who now enjoy him as a teacher of Maths and Science.

In 2013, as part of our desire to understand the difference between the perception and reality of life at Korowal, we engaged Jayne Ansin to undertake a 360 review of the school, to highlight our strengths and reveal our shadows. This provided the structure for us to listen to our community. Possibly the greatest praise for the school came from the feedback expressed by our current students and our alumni. There was a strong desire from the alumni for us to find a place for them, and a way to give back. This feedback, along with all received by Jayne, has informed our planning for 2014.

Other initiatives in 2013 include a review of Information, Communication and Technology. The school operations system was overhauled for the introduction of 'bring your own device' in 2014, plus we prepared to move onto Google cloud and Quickbooks cloud.

In 2013 we had many events and they are all well documented. For the first time we have a Jazz ensemble, led by Neill Duncan, and they have been welcomed at many local gigs. Thank you Neill. I wish to highlight the privilege we had in co-hosting the African Children's Choir from Uganda and hope that this will be repeated. We were also kept busy with participating in the Trek for East Timor, The Corroboree Indigenous Cultural Festival (Syd), The Reconciliation Art challenge (Lawson), Jigsaw Story Production (the Joan, Penrith) The Korowal Cabaret, The Paul Kelly Tribute (BM Cultural Centre), the Winter Magic Festival, Carols in The Park (Hazelbrook), and The Masked Ball. All of these events required support from students, parents and friends and we appreciate the goodwill which was brought to each. We launched the Rowen Wkeng Appeal at the end of 2013.

At the end of 2013 there were some sad farewells. Annie Carment had worked tirelessly on a voluntary basis in advertising and marketing, as well as project management. She has taken us through times of great change and we have possibly worn her out. Thank you Annie. After 20 years teaching Visual Arts at Korowal, Kath Veel retired, Yvonne Edgren left our primary after 11 years, and Alison Winn, who had taught Maths in the high school for the year, also said farewell. I also wish to acknowledge Vaughan Johnston who was our train supervisor for 4 years. We thank them for their warmth and talents, and wish them all well for the next chapter.

Korowal's strength lies in the people who are a part of the community. At the centre of this are the students, and I wish to thank them for their humour, playfulness, integrity and focus. They are supported by a robust group of teachers, whose skill, dedication, collegiality, intelligence and professionalism is outstanding, and distinctive to Korowal. The front office staff, Susan and Cath and Mel, wipe the brows and dress the wounds, as well as drive the communications between families and teachers. They do a remarkable job. Keith, Carmo and Emma transport our students with care and we are well fed by Ross and his crew, with thanks to all. Then the Executive team are underpinning them all. Nancy Oosterhoff, Kim Poole and Bev Milner provide exceptional leadership and engender trust from everyone. In 2013 each of them needed to step into new areas and take on new roles, and they have done so with grace and exceptional skill. They are also a huge support to me.

The Korowal School Council also has undergone many changes this year as we reviewed our governance model, and we have seen changes to directors, as mentioned by Greg. The council have operated as a support for the whole school and therefore, community. The directors bring a diverse range of skills and qualities to every discussion, every decision. They gave us a lot of time last year, especially with the development of the strategic plan. At the helm of this stellar cast is Greg Lucas, who has led us along quite a nuggety pathway at times, with clarity and direction. I wish to thank you all for the time, care, genuine concern and commitment to excellence that you bring to your role.

However without the parents who support the school and entrust us with your children, we would not have been able to achieve the things we have spoken of in 2013. Many, many thanks to you.

Finally, there have been a few others outside of the Korowal staff and KSC whom I wish to thank. I have been privileged to have had support and mentoring in my new role from Kem Bray, a retired principal, Leoni Degenhardt at the AIS Leadership Centre, and Bruce Corlett, as introduced to you by Greg. Both Kem and Leoni have been significant mentors in educational leadership. Bruce Corlett has been significant in introducing me to the world of business and finance, and I am eternally grateful for his support. Then there is my family, Mark, Eamon and Olivia plus many siblings. They are always behind me.

In 2013 we consciously placed the students at the centre of every decision the school made. We looked within to reflect on who we are, and we looked outside for a reflection of who we thought we were. We listened to what others had to say about us and contemplated on our existence. We asked: Do others perceive us as we perceive ourselves? Is there a difference between perception and reality? With the feedback received we are now perfectly placed to begin the process of alignment and improvement, to marry our mission with our vision.

In the words of Nelson Mandela:

“There is no passion to be found in playing small- in settling for a life that is less than one you are capable of living.”

Thank you for the opportunity to lead us all on this journey.

Barb Fitzgerald