

Coordinators Report AGM 2012 - 15th May 2013

Unfortunately Mark is not able to be here tonight as he is recovering from illness. On behalf of all of us, we look forward to Mark's full return to work. I find myself in the privileged position of recounting the events of 2012 and offering expressions of thanks to all concerned.

By the start of 2012 we had become quite comfortable and established in our Hazelbrook home which meant that we were able to bring our minds to positioning ourselves for the future. 2012 saw the establishment of the foundations of exciting new programs as we defined the educational initiatives for teachers and staff for implementation in 2013.

There are some who say that education is really only about about literacy and numeracy, which all schools do equally well, so why choose Korowal?

The importance of education for all children in Australia has been both on the political agenda and at the heart of many family conversations for a few years now, as Australian students test results are compared to both 'like' schools on the Myschools website, and neighbouring countries in the international arena. As parents, we all want the best possible educational experience for our children and so the agenda can be both personal and political. We have been reflecting upon these two significant questions: What makes Korowal unique in this changing landscape? What is of core value and what is open to change?

Our families who have chosen Korowal for their children's education have made a considered choice. The debate about funding for private schools and the implementation of Gonski's recommendations is very much alive at a time when the economy is feeling pressured. So why and how do we survive this undulation?

The answers are the same as they have always been; because we place relationships between students and staff at the centre of our thinking, because we foster a love of learning and inquiry, because we take the time to learn about ourselves as well as others, because we educate the whole person and not just teach particular skill sets, because we are small in scale and huge in creativity, because we have an extra-ordinary staff and committed community, because we are truly independent and have significant input from parents and staff at the school council level, because we are secular and inclusive.

It is with deep gratitude that we announce that our school Coordinator, Mark Thomas, secured funding under the Empowering Local Schools Program for us to scrutinise our mechanisms and review and renew structures and procedures. This funding will enable us to employ a consultant to conduct a 360 Profile on the school, with particular attention being brought to governance, management, a staff professional review and professional development program, and community engagement mechanisms. We will be employing Jayne Ansin of Pivotal Consulting to conduct this review. We are keen for Jayne to explore the relationship between community perceptions and reality.

In 2012 we finalised a staff Professional Review model which will be implemented on a trial basis early in 2013. This will accompany a comprehensive Staff Development Program called the Appretio, with a focus being brought to goal setting and opportunities for each

staff member to nominate areas for professional development. Currently three of our staff are undertaking their Masters degrees in Education and/or Leadership, and a fourth is finalising her Doctorate.

We see our measures of success in the playground, in the classroom, at the Korowal fair, in the inter-schools sporting events which our students attend, in music and drama performances, in the relationships between students and staff, as well as students and students, in their willingness to cooperate, in their academic endeavours and achievements, in their mindfulness and kindness, in their HSC results. We see our success in the generosity of spirit shown by staff and the reciprocation of appreciation expressed by students. We also see our success through the support and interest shown by ex-students and ex-families in attending Korowal events. We take great pride in our students capacity to look us in the eye and give an honest and considered opinion.

In 2012 the school community was busy with several major events. On the 10th March we were honoured to have Aunty Carol Cooper and Senator Doug Cameron officially open Korowal at Hazelbrook. We also had our school fair later that year. In a community service fundraising project initiated by a year 10 student, Anna, we had the opportunity for our students to perform at the Clarendon in Katoomba. We were overwhelmed by their desire to participate and the support shown by their families. The performances took 4 hours! Drama and music were alive through out 2012, with several class concerts and the Year 6 graduation performance. The Years 9 and 10 Drama elective students performed 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' for the primary school, Pathways Drama performed 'A Midsummers Nights Dream', and then stunned us with their HSC monologues, scripts, designs and group performances. At HSC level the Drama results were outstanding with 6 students receiving top band marks. Senior students again willingly performed at the Lawson Festival and the 'Carols in The Park' Christmas event at Hazelbrook. They represent us so well! We are privileged to have Cairo Gawne in Drama and Kim Poole as our resident musician/Music teacher.

Supporting them, the Korowal Studios have been very successful in providing fine teaching and tutoring to our students. At the end of 2012 we converted a garage into a new Studio with money raised by the Studios. We will continue to expand the offerings to students through funds raised. The Studio teachers support all of the musical events in the school, and several teachers and students provided the entertainment for the Korowal Fair. As tribute to the ongoing generosity given by Neill, our resident drums, sax and clarinet teacher, our final event for the year was a fundraising evening for Neil Duncan and his family. This evening captured all that is wonderful about Korowal. People gathered to have fun, gave generously, danced happily and enjoyed the sense of community.

We did not apply for any special projects funding in 2012 as we are continuing to manage the projects for which we have existing funding. 2012 was a time of settling into what we have, the new hall and classroom extensions completed in 2012.

Our enrolments started the year stronger than we finished, and this appears to be the pattern in the private schools sector. On reflection, we have felt the impact of down sizing in the government employment sector. We also believe that parents are making considered decisions about investing in education for the duration of their child's education. Again we ask, why Korowal? How are we unique? Our response to these questions has seen the galvanising of commitment to the educational initiatives we are now implementing.

We are looking to our strengths and bringing further resources to these areas. In staff Professional Development sessions we have embraced the Philosophy in Schools Program, and the whole staff are being trained by Professor Phil Cam in integrating philosophy into our teaching. We have begun a program in the high school called 'Brain Compatible Learning', presented by David Harris, which draws upon the latest understandings from neuroscience of how our brain works. The students are being taught how to identify the style of learner they are and take further responsibility for their own learning through collaboration with their teachers. Staff, students and parents are being offered the opportunity to skill ourselves with the same language of learning through workshops and PEP Talks.

We need to let the greater Blue Mountains community know what happens at Korowal now, in 2013. The way we have approached education at Korowal since 1978 gives us a depth of experience and knowledge that could become a part of the greater educational picture. We want the world to know we exist and that school communities can create their own visions of sustainability and endurance. The year ahead will be interesting in seeing how we develop relationships with the wider national and international education community. Also of interest will be the opportunities provided by the national curriculum which is due to commence in 2014, but has required considerable preparation from 2012.

We continue to actively seek enrolments from students in the Asian region as part of our relationship building commitment with our regional neighbours. Last year we had visiting students from Chile and Japan. This year we welcome Yuya from Japan, and we will have exchange student Judith Henschell from Germany in Term 3.

We are managing the challenge for all independent schools as we develop mechanisms for ensuring continuity of educational processes and practices as new staff enter and older staff leave or retire from the school.

Last year we farewelled two longstanding members of our high school staff. Shoba Kalos and Simon O'Brien. Shoba had taught English for over 12 years and had recently been a Pathways Coordinator. Shoba is now exploring Aboriginal Education and was, until recently, working in Alice Springs. Simon has taught Maths at Korowal for 7 years and decided to accept a 12 month leave position in a school in Bathurst. Both the students and staff are enormously grateful to Shoba and Simon for their commitment to us, their passionate teaching and professionalism. In their place for this year we have welcomed Kelly Scott and Alison Winn. Fortunately for us also, Barbara Hall has returned for Junior History and Ancient History. At the end of 2011, Hilary Wale resigned from her position as Office Administrator. This was a sad farewell as Hilary had been a long standing support for us all. Susan and Cath carried the load for us until we were able to find suitable replacements. Fortunately for us, we did, and so we welcomed Mel as our Finance Officer and Bree as our office trainee.

At the end of 2012 Steve Garthwin stepped down from high school coordination in order to focus on teaching, in particular his HSC Science classes. Steve brought a great stability, consideration and focus to this role. Coordination requires strategic thinking, adaptability, compassion, understanding, organization, resilience and humour - all the qualities that Steve has in abundance. It is hard to hold boundaries between work and home in this role. We thank him enormously for giving his life to the school during that time, and hope that he is

again finding time to enjoy his much loved bush walks.

In primary school, Denise resigned at end of 2011, after 7 years teaching Italian to PS students. She is a wonderfully calm, efficient and professional person whose skills were highly valued. As we were unable to find a teacher with the required skills and qualities to replace Denise, the teachers nominated an alternative program for teaching of language and culture which entailed focusing on a different culture and its language each term. This involved Cate Dudley: Italian, Yvonne :Nordic, Louise: Japanese, and Julie: Spanish. At beginning of year welcomed Talulah back from maternity leave, job sharing on Class 6 with Yvonne, then we farewelled her again at end of term 3. Thankfully Louise stepped in to replace her.

All who work at Korowal, whether in teaching, management or as support staff, do a remarkable job. Their role modelling for our students is second to none. They are the sustaining force of the school. We are keenly aware that we have a remarkable community and that we are yet to really create a significant place for our parents. We hope that 2013 sees the seeding of ideas for this to blossom in the future.

There are some people who need specific acknowledgement.

Annie Carment continues to dedicate her time and energy to us in marketing and communications. She is always available and this is a great support to us in getting the message out. Thank you for being so easy to work with and for your direct voice and efficiency Annie. Tracey Barrett again led the Korowal Fair efforts and sustenance for our Open Day. Amber Gaston and Paula Harvison continued to provide healthy food and smiling faces to us all in the canteen. Dawn Laurendet has been her bubbly self in the library and canteen. Cath Walker and Susan Pearce are the welcoming faces of reception. They took Bree and Mel under their wings. Bev Milner provided mentoring for Mel and continued to provide remarkable financial services to the school. Then there are the many volunteers who assist in the canteen, in the gardens at working bees, in the organisation of the Korowal fair. We wish to thank you all for giving so much to Korowal and for enriching the students' experience of school.

Secondly, the school executive. Mark Thomas has been School Coordinator for 12 years this year and has seen us through a remarkable period of change. Without his commitment to the Korowal community and belief in this system of education, we would not be where we are today. A school which is small in scale still has the same number of tasks to be completed and compliances to be met as a large school. It has fewer people to share the load however, and therefore relies on the goodwill of the staff. Mark is totally committed to Korowal, and sets a challenging pace. We are also able to announce that we have reached the first 5 year goal in our financing of the school purchase agreement and have been able to renegotiate a revised loan agreement. This was achieved through very careful management, led by Mark! We hope that his recovery is speedy and look forward to his return to the new position of Principal of Korowal. Nancy Oosterhoff has again led the primary school through a number of significant developments with grace and good humour. Nancy also brings a keen intellect and extraordinary commitment to the whole school picture in her role on the executive. She is always willing to embrace tasks and challenges as they arise. To both Mark and Nancy we offer undying thanks.

And now, to the teaching staff. As the educational landscape shifts it requires us all to remain light on our feet and open to change. The most significant attribute which all of our

staff hold is their willingness to embrace change, and this keeps us in good stead for the future. We have a talented, intelligent, professional, compassionate, willing group of people in whose hands our children are held and nourished. We are eternally grateful to our teachers.

Finally, to the Korowal School Council. It is not only the educational matters that are in a state of flux, but also governance of schools. We have needed to call on a lot of time from our directors in the past 12 months as the global issues impact on enrolments. We offer a huge thank you to Greg Lucas, our chair, for his time and leadership. We also thank our parent directors, Mick Barrett, Vittorio Cintio, Rosemary Dillon, and teacher directors Steve Garthwin, Louise Dungate, Yvonne Edgren, Nancy Oosterhoff and Mark Thomas for their ongoing support.

It is a remarkable story that we have survived the past few years and that we are now in a position to flourish. This success is down to all of our parents, students, staff, alumni, and friends. Thank you for your support, your belief in us, and contributions. For as long as we can hold the balance between the heart and the mind we will make a difference in education.

Barbara Fitzgerald
Acting School Coordinator