

Coordinators Report AGM 2011 - 9th May 2012

A school year passes in a flash. In fact an entire school education seems to pass in a flash. I have worked in this school for long enough to follow the journey of so many children who enter in Kindergarten and finally graduate at the end of Year 12. Their time with us often seems so fleeting. I meet up with ex-students in their 30's (some are now in their 40's) who I recall in all their adolescent glory as if it was yesterday.

For our students however, especially the younger ones, I imagine school can seem to last forever.

In their relative lifetime as students what I perceive as time passing in a flash is, I hope for them, is a profound journey of learning and self discovery.

My experience, in reality, reflects the intensity of my work, the incredible busyness, the sense that there is so much to do and so little time to do it in, so many new initiatives, improvements and developments that I know it will be someone else, long after my leaving, who gets to fully realise an idea that is just only being formed now. We are working now to consolidate what will continue to flourish in this school's future.

However, for our students, as I often observe in classroom situations, there is a holding of time, a calm and measured atmosphere where the necessary time is made available by teachers for the new learning experiences to be understood and integrated.

Central to my observation is that in their everyday learning our students experience abundant opportunities to build their skills, deepen their understanding and develop the sense of who they are and what they can achieve.

In the last year there has been a discernible cultural shift in the student population in terms of their willingness to engage and ability to reciprocate, to give back to the school, a measure of the gift they have received from their education. My evidence is their increased generosity of spirit, their support for each other, their honesty and capacity for self reflection and their everyday involvement in the cultural life of the school. Our students want to represent the school, they are proud of their school, and we get so much delightful and positive feedback about our students' conduct and behaviour from the wider community.

Some key events come to mind.

The remarkable mural painted under the railway underpass at Hazelbrook was an event that our High School students participated in. The mural artist was amazed at the way our students engaged in the whole activity.

High School students for the first time in many years put on a performance of cabaret highlights at the Winter Magic and later the Lawson Festival, and expanded their repertoire for the local Hazelbrook Christmas carols. Each of these events was strongly and willingly sustained by our students (with many thanks to Barbara Fitzgerald and Kim Poole)

Our Primary students, through interaction with our local Aboriginal community,

participated in a Reconciliation arts program and produced a collective artwork (thank you also Paula Martin), hung with pride in the school office, that was awarded a first prize from the committee. A small group of students travelled to the Australian Museum to receive their award. Their work, in the eyes of the judges, displayed not only a graphic quality but an artistic reflection of the integrity of the reconciliation process.

Our Hall was finally completed this year and this has allowed us, through the remarkable endeavours of Barbara Fitzgerald, to finally launch the Korowal Studios. This concept is designed to increase the extra curricular options available to our students, to satiate their ever growing need for more creative endeavours, to enable families to have an extra moment at home instead of driving up and down the highway to tuition, to create employment for our parents, and to engage the wider community by providing accessible services on this site. It is our hope that soon we will be able to provide some further group activities to students which is funded from the income generated by the Korowal Studios hire.

We are delighted to welcome Mountain Kidz Out of School Hours care to our school providing additional care services for the community.

The school received further funds to complete the final components of our relocation plan, including renovation of our antiquated sewerage/drainage system, a security system, new access ramps to the science labs, a small extension to the library, an irrigation system to help manage the complex hydrology of our site (there are lots of natural springs), an operable (openable) wall in the old school hall and finally some decent outside lighting.

Our enrolments remained stable throughout the year and we reached our increased enrolment target of 245 students at the beginning of 2012. On matters of principal we have engaged the debate, for example on Naplan, and also in regard to the preparation of students for the HSC, for which I was interviewed for the ABC Lateline program.

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 impact of the national curriculum. This is due to commence in 2014, but will require considerable preparation from 2012.

We continue to actively seek enrolments from students in the Asian region as part of our relationship building with our regional neighbours.

A challenge for all independent schools is to develop mechanisms for ensuring continuity of educational processes and practices as new staff enter and older staff leave or retire from the school.

As part of our sustainability consciousness we will commence an appraisal/mentoring process in 2012 with all staff where we hope to engage people at a deeper level. We have been here for 3 years now, and this year we bring focus to sustaining the people that brought us here as well as those who have joined us to strengthen our working community. With the help of Bronwyn Williams we have been developing a system which will enable structured goal setting and feedback. We encourage proposals from the staff for new initiatives and are beginning discussions with a few interested parents on how to further

engage our parent community.

Last year we recruited new teachers, Lisa Harding, Greg Brooks and Maria Bubna-Litic in the High School and Kizz Boyd, Bec Wilkinson and Sarah McGowan in the Primary School. They have settled in wonderfully and we hope, through our new engagement with these teachers, and other longer term staff, to establish the foundation for Korowal's long term sustainability.

My colleagues, both teaching and support staff, do a remarkable job. The goodwill expressed through their conduct and dedication is the sustaining force of the school. I also find that my interactions with parents, and of course, the children, reinforce that my dedication to the school is worthwhile.

There are some people who need specific acknowledgement.

Firstly, Annie Carment. Annie's role in the school is legendary and she has continued this year with her dedication to the school's marketing, including producing the newsletter, arranging all our media advertising, managing the website and ensuring all our good news is communicated as far and wide as possible. This year Annie produced a short advertising video which was run at the Edge Cinema (and still was last week) and at Penrith Cinema.

Secondly, the Executive team of Nancy Oosterhoff, Barbara Fitzgerald and Steve Garthwin who have taken on an increasing range of tasks and responsibilities to enable me to take on new roles. Their consistent awareness of the needs of the staff and students, and their follow up with parents is of the highest order. I also wish to acknowledge their role in covering my (brief) Long Service leave in April.

Trish Fitzgerald's operation of our canteen attracted lots of praise and acknowledgement from the whole community, but sadly she was unable to continue. Towards the end of the year we gratefully welcomed Amber Gaston and Paula Harvison as our new canteen managers.

Next to last my thanks to Hilary Wale, Susan Pearce, Cath Walker who have held fort in the office and demonstrated remarkable resilience and flexibility. I also wish to thank Bev Milner, our Bursar, who provides invaluable financial and business operations guidance.

Sadly David Clucas resigned late last year after an extended period of leave. At his farewell, David expressed a deep affection for the students and gratitude to the school for the experience of working at Korowal. We also remember Kathi Beck who passed away after a long battle with cancer.

To all our parents, students, ex-parents and ex-students, thank you for your support and contribution either of love, labour, donations or goodwill. The success of this school and the ongoing story of Korowal belongs to all of us.

My acknowledgement also to members of the School Council for their support.

Mark Thomas
School Coordinator
May 9, 2012

