

## Chairperson Report to AGM 2006

By so many measures, the last 12 months have been very good for Korowal. The painful economic and structural decisions taken in the last few years have given us a firmer foundation. Enrolments are healthy and morale amongst teachers, students and parents is high.

Nevertheless, there are two significant challenges ahead that require confidence in ourselves and our educational mission, as well as courage and clear thinking. The first of these involves shaping an ethical response to the educational policy climate that we find ourselves in. The other involves coming to a mutually satisfactory arrangement over our long-term tenure of this site with the site owners, the Gavemer Foundation.

Let me deal first with our educational environment. To be blunt, our national and state educational policies are increasingly based on fear and envy. (And underpinning it all, an ideological fervour to turn all things into a packaged commodity.)

We fear that we are being lied to about our children's progress and therefore we ought to be comforted by constant reports of its measurement. We are not challenged to try to measure what we care about, but are supposed to care about the measurement of the trivial.

The Australian Government now requires that for each class from K to 10, we provide written reports to parents, twice a year, grading each child's performance and giving him/her a quartile ranking. We may as well measure their relative height against each other for all the good it will do. We will do everything in our power to resist this futile initiative.

When will our governments worry about how to measure the quality of the relationships that are the crucible of all successful human endeavour? I fear, not for a long, long time.

A key code word for those who thrive on stirring up envy is the word "choice". We seem to fear that we our children will not have enough "choice", either socially or educationally, and so we are supposed to find comfort in moving from one herd to another. Our politicians keep mumbling the mantra of "choice". In this paradigm, the world is nothing but a market and everything is a commodity. Like country bumpkins in a big supermarket we are meant to be dazzled by an entire aisle of breakfast cereals, most with the same excessive amounts of sugar (or in the words of a Bruce Springsteen song—*52 channels and nothing on*).

Not surprisingly, we find ourselves swimming against this tide of received wisdom. The School Council has made a considered decision to keep our school at roughly its current size, despite obvious extra demand and waiting

lists for many classes. Thankfully, we are a not-for-profit organisation, and the best interests of our children is our first and last priority.

This will never be a school of easy-come and easy-go. Love brings with it the expectation that we will do the right thing for and by each other, that we will wait for the stragglers, that we will expect the best of each other and that we will strive to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. That is not something that can be bought and sold.

Of course, these changes are not limited to education. Our national government has wrapped itself in the flag and given us a new understanding of the phrase "border control". Many parents I speak to have their own stories to tell of a harsher, more selfish and less trusting world from the spheres in which they move and work. Many more of us are now shareholders, and it seems fewer of us are citizens.

To talk of values in this environment, to require schools to raise the Australian flag at a time when so many of us are ashamed of our government, and to demand that schools produce values statements, when children have been locked up in detention centres for years, in our name—all this would bring a knowing smile from George Orwell if he were alive today.

Let me turn for a moment to our relationship with our landlord and benefactor, the Gavemer Foundation. Sadly, I have nothing further to report in relation to our negotiations with Gavemer: simply because negotiations have not yet begun. I understand that they are pre-occupied with other matters. And so we go from one yearly lease to the next. Not satisfactory for a school that involves a 13-year commitment with many of our students.

Our inability so far to resolve this issue has been the subject of much deliberation within the School Council.

We did actively explore the notion of moving to another site. This has proven to be, currently at least, too impractical and too expensive. In hindsight, this may have been an over reaction born out of frustration. And so it may not be a bad thing to go back to the negotiating table, refocused on the only important issue for ourselves and Gavemer: namely, to secure our long-term capacity to continue to provide human-centred education for our students.

We go back to the table too, with a lot of pride in our achievements so far, and in the hope of engendering a sense of mutual excitement around future possibilities.

An important part of our forward planning is to develop a master plan for the growth and development of the school on this site. I was reminded of the importance of our built environment when one of my sons commented (after recent visits to other schools) on the public squalor of a nearby state school

where the canteen could resist the launch of an RPG, and the private affluence of a school with sweeping lawns that you are not allowed to play on.

By contrast, my son describes our school as “tiny, wooden and homely”. Of course, there is no reason why every school on the planet could not be tiny, wooden and homely. Lets us keep hoping that one day the idea catches on.

Our master plan will be developed in consultation with the school community. It will be environmentally sensitive and maximise the use of northerly sun. We will take this plan to Gavemer and hope to engender a spirit of shared excitement for the school’s future.

Is it then wise or shockingly perverse to want our children to be educated in an atmosphere of love and to be challenged to be selfless and do good in a world of borders, shareholder dividends and bottom lines? Time will tell.

If there are any signs of hope for humanity in the longer term, it seems to lie in the emerging broader concerns for our natural environment and the increasing acknowledgement of how vital it is that we nurture children and, by natural extension, the families that they live in.

Korowal can and will make a difference on both those fronts.

If we have created a haven in a heartless world here, that is good, but it is not good enough. It can only be the start of giving the world back some heart.

Vittorio Cintio  
April 2006