



Chairperson's Report Korowal Council AGM 2005

In one important way this is a sad year for us, as it marks the death of our founder, Garry Richardson. It was due solely to his vision and determination that Korowal exists today. I believe that his death marks the passing of a great Australian, and we ought to be commemorating this in a significant fashion. However it was Garry's wish that his death be observed with as little fuss as possible. Out of respect for this we are negotiating with the executor of his estate to find a mutually acceptable way of celebrating his life and his achievements. We hope to be able to tell you more about this in the near future

This is the time of year when the School Council reports back to you. The Council plays an important "behind the scenes" role in the affairs of the school. It is the body that bears the final legal responsibility for all the schools' actions. Its task is essentially to make sure that everything that is done, is done properly and is consistent with the school's underlying philosophy. The style of the current Council is therefore one of setting the broad parameters of what is required and empowering the school co-ordinator and executive to carry them through.

We have an executive and Co-ordinator of high quality. This flows through to having quality processes and quality results.

It is pleasing to be able to report that we have again achieved a modest cash surplus in line with our plans.

However, we have two important challenges ahead. We need to continually ensure that we are remaining true to our educational philosophy. We must build this in to our culture so that all members of the school community are inducted easily. Our practical interpretation must remain relevant to our particular circumstances, whilst also keeping faith with the fundamentals.

This means having a strong teacher appraisal program, better ways of engaging and involving parents and clear expectations of our children. The incoming Council must not lose sight of these objectives.

The second challenge is to physically secure the future of the school. For the school to continue to thrive we need to build more spaces for assembly, performance and indoor recreation. Independent schools usually fund such ventures by long term borrowing, using as security the land that they own or occupy on long term lease. Many building projects also attract generous government subsidies.

This option is currently not open to us. To explain why I need to give a short history of our relationship with our landlord, the Gavemer Foundation.

When Garry Richardson set up the school, he put the ownership of the land and buildings into a body that he controlled called the Gavemer Foundation.

The ownership and management of the school itself as an operating concern was instituted as a separate company, appropriately registered in NSW. The articles of association of the company required that it be governed by two councils, (essentially a teacher and a parent council).

When Garry moved to Canberra some years ago and stepped down from being a member of either council, there ceased to be any formal relationship between Gavemer and Korowal beyond that of landlord and tenant. In practical terms however, every time the school has needed to expand or manage financial difficulties it has relied on the generosity of the Gavemer Foundation and Gavemer directors have continued to take a strong informal interest in the school.

When Garry moved to Canberra he officially wished us well, but unofficially there has often been some tension between key people at Gavemer and our teaching staff about the practical interpretation of our educational philosophy.

Because of this tension the Gavemer Foundation have consistently denied us a long term lease, despite our repeated requests. The most frustrating aspect of this situation has been our inability to ascertain from Gavemer exactly what changes are required for the granting of a longer lease.

It is important to remember that all the responsibility for the operation of the school and the interpretation of the educational philosophy rests with the School Council. The School Council members are the company directors and as such, take the final legal responsibility for all Council decisions as well as being personally liable for any failure of due diligence.

You will remember too, that we had a major restructure some years ago to merge the parent and teacher councils into a more cohesive and democratic whole. The Gavemer foundation was fully involved in this restructure, and the vote on the change of rules was virtually unanimous. Garry Richardson himself congratulated us on the smooth transition.

Gavemer were clearly confident that our new processes were democratic but declined our invitation to have a Gavemer observer member on the Council.

I am a firm believer that good processes lead to good results and the evidence for this is all around us. Morale is the highest it has ever been and our current and past students are a credit to the community.

However our continuing viability as a school relies on making long term capital investments to build the facilities that our students need.

Consequently after much consideration, the Council took an in principle decision that unless something changed, we would need to relocate to secure the long term future of the school. If this does eventuate it will obviously take some years. In the meantime we are completely beholden to Gavemer to continue short term leasing on this site.

We have engaged a consultant to assist with this and are exploring options. There are however constraining factors. These include the availability of suitable sites within an acceptable radius of Leura and an upper limit to our borrowing to ensure that fees are not raised.

Having to move, is, in many ways our least desirable option. It is a lose/lose situation. These buildings are clearly designed to be a school and would have limited alternative uses. For the Gavemer Foundation to set up another school on this site defies logic. Neither we, nor they, would be financially viable, directly competing in such a limited market.

It is not clear to us yet whether the Gavemer Foundation would like to be more than just a landlord. If it does, we need to look for a way to include the Foundation that is acceptable to the broad school community, as well as being ethical, legal and democratic.

Logic dictates that we keep all lines of communication and all options open- and this is exactly what we are doing.

The executor of Garry's estate and director of Gavemer has agreed to our request for a meeting on her return from overseas. In our negotiations we will continue to be guided by our commitment to Garry's educational philosophy and the best interests of our current and future students.

I would like to thank the outgoing Council, particularly those retiring members. Despite the enormous challenges, the Council always operates with a sense of fun, mutual respect and a spirit of consensus.

I would like to especially mention Mark Carey (a retiring director who has served many years on our Council) for his patience, wisdom and willingness to say the difficult things that needed saying.

(Mark is also responsible for what I believe is the best school web site in the country.)

I also look forward to serving another term on the Council. It is a continuing pleasure to be able to contribute something to this delightful community.

Vittorio Cintio

18/5/2005