

**Korowal 2007 AGM
Chair's Report**

31 May 2007

It is pleasing to see such a good attendance in this pivotal year of our history. The AGM is the principal instrument of our accountability when the council reports back to the membership on our stewardship of the school.

Maintaining our integrity as a school has been a key theme of the past 12 months.

We have been through a major exercise in examining and affirming our values.

We have responded ethically to the challenges of state-mandated mandatory reporting. You will recall that 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. In the face of this, the council reaffirmed our own grading policy, and Mark Thomas will tell you more about how the school executive ensured that we could remain true to our principles.

We are evolving into a school where both environmental and social sustainability will be the core of our future identity. Rebecca Gilling from our sustainability committee will share with you these developments.

The initiative that has naturally occupied much of both the council and executive activity is our relocation. You will hear more about this from Annie Carment on our relocation committee.

Many of you will want to help with this, and we will discuss with you how. Some of this will involve fundraising, but also, just as importantly, contributions in kind. Barbara from our fundraising committee will tell you more about this.

Although it is something to which most of us pay no attention, the absolute bedrock of our integrity is the school constitution. Some of you may know or remember that the school went through some very difficult times just a few years ago. A key factor in helping us survive was the change in our constitution. The school was governed by two separate councils: a teacher and a parent council that did not communicate well with each other. The councils were merged to form one democratic body and the rules changed so that neither group could dominate with a simple majority. A culture of consensus has grown—a culture that is also open, inclusive and enquiring—and it is a delight to work with this community and this group of people.

Since the time of the restructure, we have seen an unprecedented harmony in the school governance, a highly improved financial position, high morale and the healthiest waiting lists in the school's history.

The school community has been fortunate in having a very able and talented leadership group. The senior teachers (both those on council and not) have an enormous depth of experience in human-centred education. The parent members of council bring a great wealth of experience from their working lives. We all have senior management roles in the human-service industries, managing both substantial budgets and staff in challenging environments.

Let me introduce the current council.

Vittorio Cintio

- school parent since 1988
- 3 of my children, Talulah, Carl and Rosie completed HSC at Korowal
- currently Luciano in Year 9 and Johnson in Class 2
Director of Social Work, Western Cluster, Sydney West Area Health

Scott Turner

- school parent since 2000
- currently Ruby in Class 7 and Violet in Class 2
- Service Manager, Richmond Fellowship of NSW: a not-for-profit, non-religious, non-government organisation providing rehabilitation and supported-accommodation services to people with serious mental illness.

Nick Mansfield

- school parent since 1992
- currently Oskar in Year 9 and Mathilde in Class 2
- Associate Professor, Head, Department of Critical and Cultural Studies, Division of Society, Culture, Media and Philosophy, Macquarie University

Rosemary Dillon

- school parent since 1997
- currently David in Year 10 and Joshua in Class 5
- Manager, Corporate Planning, Community & Corporate Group, Blue Mountains City Council

Mark Thomas

- school parent since 1991
- Korowal graduates, Janis and Maija
- currently Imants in Pathways
- Korowal School Co-ordinator for the past 6 years
- 23 years teaching experience
- Currently studying for a Masters of Educational Leadership, Macquarie University

Nancy Oosterhoff

- school parent from 1990 to 2005
- Korowal graduates Ian and Guy

- Primary School Co-ordinator for the past 5 years
- 34 years teaching experience
- Korowal teacher since 1993
- pivotal in primary-school multiple-age initiative

Barbara Fitzgerald

- school parent since 1999
- currently Olivia in Year 8 and Eamon in Class 4
- current Senior-Studies Co-ordinator
- Drama Teacher 16 years teaching experience
- Producer, scriptwriter, director extraordinaire!

Kath Veel

- school parent since 1994
- currently Kit in Pathways
- Korowal High-School Co-ordinator for the past 5 years
- 30 years teaching experience

I would like to thank the directors who have retired during the past year: Mick Fell, Catherine Dignam and Caroline Summerfield.

There has, however, been one shadow hanging over us. We have never, in the school's history, been able to gain our long-term physical security. In regard to this, I am limited in what I can say about our lease negotiations. We have been requested by the Gavemer Foundation not to refer to it or its directors without their consent. In accordance with our lawyer's advice, we will respect this request at this time and advise that participants at this meeting similarly refrain from mentioning the foundation or its directors.

We have lived on annual leases since 2005. You will appreciate that it is not tenable for a school to really plan properly without long-term tenure. Every time a child enrolls in our Kindergarten, we are anticipating a relationship that will last 13 years and carry forward in the memories of a lifetime.

Without security, we have not been able to build or make any substantial improvements, or be eligible for government building funds. We clearly have little prospect of enjoying the long-term benefits of maintenance and improvement investments. (In the past 10 years, we have spent \$644,000 on maintenance and improvements.)

Because of this, we first began exploring relocation in 2004. We now know, however, that our tenure will not be renewed after 2008. And so we have an urgent imperative to relocate by 2009. This is a very short time frame. As soon as we learnt of this, Mark our School Co-ordinator and Cindy our Bursar moved into high gear. We now have financial consultants and architects working with us on the relocation effort. You will later this evening hear more about these plans.

Relocating physically has prompted the School Council to give more thought about where we locate ourselves in our educational practice. A quick glance at the World Wide Web tells us that human-centred education is a term used in many countries to describe practices similar in spirit, but also with a rich diversity in keeping with their local cultures. Our own practice is evolving to reflect the following:

Human-Centred Education

- has at its heart the quality of relationships between students, teachers and parents
- promotes multiple-aged learning
- provides a holistic interdisciplinary curriculum
- values compassion, equity and respect
- is democratic and participatory
- enables meaningful community
- allows students and teachers to be known and valued as individuals

Sustainable Education

- is socially and environmentally sustainable
- is life-centred
- requires a school community of a human scale
- promotes a lifelong love of learning.

It really is about time we connected with like-minded practitioners. It really is about time to start sharing the secrets of our educational practice with the broader community. To this end, the council will be exploring ways and means of promoting the principles and practice of sustainable, human-centred education beyond the boundaries of Korowal School, by:

- defining and supporting its practice
- connecting with theorists and practitioners in Australia and internationally
- assisting in the practice and development of democratic school-governance and management
- promoting and supporting the establishment of other sustainable schools
- documenting and developing curriculum resources for practitioners
- facilitating forums and dialogue
- sustaining an evolutionary, human-scale model for schooling.

One of my children once described Korowal as “tiny, wooden and homely”. There is no good reason why every school on the planet could not be tiny wooden and homely.

I will end on the same note that I did in my report 12 months ago: If Korowal has created a haven in a heartless world, that is good. But it is not good enough. It can only be the start of giving the world back some heart.