

## **Korowal 34<sup>th</sup> AGM 9 May 2012**

### **Report from the Chair – Rosemary Dillon**

***I would like to acknowledge that we are here tonight on the traditional lands of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples. Korowal acknowledges this and recognises the strength, capacity and resilience of past and present Aboriginal people in this region.***

This Annual General Meeting, the 34th in the school's history, marks the achievement of yet another significant milestone for Korowal. It is our fourth AGM conducted at our new site in Hazelbrook. It is also my third report to you as Chair of the School Council. After three years in the position, I will tonight be stepping down from this role. As this is my last address as Chair I will take the opportunity to reflect on some key achievements over the last few years.

Let me begin my report by expressing the gratitude of the School Council to the Korowal School community overall – to the teachers, support staff, parents and students – for all your contributions in 2011 which have supported the ongoing success of the school. It is very much appreciated. It is now over three years since we moved into our new home at Hazelbrook and it is indeed heartening to see that with each new year, the school continues to flourish and develop from strength to strength.

In March this year we celebrated our relocation and achievements with an official School Opening Ceremony. We acknowledged that after 30 years in leased premises we now own our own school home. Our journey to get here has not been without its challenges. When times are demanding our community comes to the fore and shines. Without the enormous effort, resilience and commitment of our school community we would not be here tonight.

Korowal is a secular school governed by a democratically elected school council comprising equal numbers of parents and teachers. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the School Council over the past 12 months for their leadership in setting policy direction and working on the financial sustainability of the school. Thankyou to the parent representatives - Mick Barrett, Greg Lucas, Vittorio Cintio, Deborah Keenaham – and the teacher representatives – Yvonne Edgren, Barbara Fitzgerald, Steve Garthwin, Nancy Oosterhoff and Mark Thomas – who served on the Council over the last 12 months.

In making the shift to owning our school we have taken on the responsibility of repaying a significant mortgage. In this regard my major focus as Chair over the past three years, and a major focus of the Council, has been on improving the financial sustainability of the school into the future. While much has been achieved, much remains to be done to strengthen the financial position of the school.

In 2009, in my first year as Chair, the School Council established a Finance Committee to support its decision making on financial matters. I would like to take the opportunity to thank its current members Greg Lucas (Chair), Bev Milner and Mark Thomas for their work. Since 2009 we have implemented many initiatives to improve the financial sustainability of the school including the development of a School Business Plan and in 2011 a five year *Korowal Financial Sustainability Plan (2011-2015)*. Some of the key action areas already being implemented from this Plan include:

- Seeking grants and benefactors (since 2009 Korowal has received over \$1 million in capital grant funding to develop our buildings and school facilities and equipment)
- Building key relationships with all levels of government to support our financial sustainability
- Increasing enrolments through a concerted marketing program - with a target of achieving 260 enrolments by 2015 having been set
- Exploring enrolments from international students
- More effectively resourcing the school's financial and business management – I would like to give particular thanks to Bev Milner for her work and support in this regard

- Hiring out the schools facilities as a means of raising revenue
- Achieving savings through continuous improvement and efficiencies initiatives
- Setting financial management goals and targets
- Progressing the establishment of a Korowal Foundation for the purpose of supporting and sustaining the schools broader educational objectives
- Progressing establishment of a deductible Gift Recipient Scholarship fund
- Establishing out of hours co-curricula programs – which has become the Korowal Studios - where experienced, talented teachers offer tuition in music, singing, drama and dance both within school hours and after hours for students from Korowal and other schools. I would like to especially acknowledge the work of Barbara Fitzgerald in supporting the establishment of this initiative.
- Establishing a before and after school care service on the Korowal school campus– this has been achieved with Mountain Kidz before and after school care (previously at Lawson) operating from our school from 6.30 am and after school care until 6.30 pm.

While great effort has continued to be made to keep fee increases to a minimum, fee increases in 2011 and 2012 have been required to enable the school to meet its financial and educational responsibilities. In approving the fee increases the school Council has taken into consideration the need to meet our mortgage repayment responsibilities and fund required equipment and infrastructure for the school balanced against the ability of parents to afford increases. As we communicated to parents in October 2011, the easiest way to keep fees down is for the school to achieve its enrolment targets. The support of the school community in promoting the school to new families is always much appreciated. Our fee structure continues to support larger families. In 2011 and now in 2012 we have maintained sibling discounts with third and subsequent sibling fees being reduced per child per year.

Our new location has required significant work on buildings, grounds and facilities and many long hours especially from Mark Thomas and Annie Carment on planning approvals and Development Applications and on grant and funding applications. We have been extremely fortunate to have received considerable capital funding from the Federal Government. Since moving to Hazelbrook the school has received over 1 million dollars for capital improvements including the construction of a new hall, classroom extensions, new basketball court, oval heating systems. In 2012 capital improvements to the school will continue with a refit of the old hall for classroom use, modest extensions to the library landscaping and roadworks, implementation of an integrated security system and much needed improvements to the toilet facilities for students.

Korowal is operationally led and administered by a dedicated Executive team and I would like to acknowledge the contribution - well beyond the call of duty - of Nancy Oosterhoff our Primary School Coordinator, Barbara Fitzgerald and Steve Garthwin our High School Coordinators and Mark Thomas our School Co-ordinator.

In moving to a new site we have also had to work hard to let people know we are here. I would like to thank Annie Carment in particular, and the School's Marketing Committee, for their work in marketing and promoting the school. It is also important that we understand the priorities and views of families with children at the school. I am proud that in 2011 with the support of the School Council, our marketing committee led by Annie surveyed our school community. A total of 130 surveys were completed (from approx 150 families with children at the school). When asked the things they liked most about Korowal, the largest number of responses (57%) identified nurturing, kind and accepting qualities of the school. Other key attributes identified with included the school's sustainability focus, quality of the teaching, sense of community and holistic curriculum.

These results are not surprising given the values and principles driving our school. In my three years as Chair I have never tired of reinforcing that which makes Korowal so special: *Our educational approach is human centred and sustainable. We value quality over quantity. Korowal is a small, nurturing, integrated school where relationships are paramount and creativity is valued, where students are known by their first names, where the learning culture and the social environment is co-operative not competitive. At Korowal the whole person is valued and the aim is to develop the full potential of the child. The values of compassion, tolerance, equity, respect, empathy, commitment, resilience and critical thinking are consciously fostered.*

Over the past three years the Korowal School Council has made significant progress in reviewing and updating many of our policies and governance procedures, particularly through the work of our Human Resources Committee and the Executive team. It is important that we continue to build on this good work and in particular, strengthen the governance of our school. In this regard, it is timely that the schools Constitution developed in the late 1970's be reviewed and updated to ensure it is providing the required foundation to support the next stage of Korowal's development. This will require engaging with the school community – parents, students, teachers and support staff – to reaffirm the values, principles and vision for Korowal that we have and share.

In summary, Korowal is a unique and special school and it has been my privilege to serve the school in the capacity of Chair over the last three years and as a member of the Council since 2007. I am leaving this role proud of the progress made over the last 3 years. I have no doubt the school will continue to thrive in the coming years. I step down in the knowledge that there are others well equipped to lead the Council. I thank the school community and the Korowal Council for the support they have given me as Chair.