

Korowal 42nd AGM

13th May 2020

Report from the Chair – Greg Lucas B.Comm., MBA (Dist.), CFP.

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.

It is my pleasure to deliver the Chair's report for Korowal School Limited for the year ended 31 December 2019, which is our 42nd Annual General Meeting and my eighth report as Chair.

To garnish an understanding of the School's complete achievements during 2019, it is necessary to read my report in conjunction with our Principal's report and the full report pack.

Board

Directors in office at the date of this report are Chris Lee (Co-Chair), Louise Dungate, Eleanor Phelan, Nathan McLellan & Talulah Vane. Melanie Williams continues in her role as Company Secretary.

Each director serves in an honorary capacity and I am incredibly grateful for the commitment, rigour, passion and selflessness that they continually display. It is an honour to serve Korowal and the Korowal community alongside such fine people.

Tonight, I announce the resignation of Nathan McLellan from our Board. Nathan has served since 2016. When Nathan raised with me his resignation from the Board, in a reflection of his commitment to the School, he indicated his willingness to be available as an adviser to the Board. It is a comfort to the School knowing that his intellectual acuity, meticulous analytical skills and ability to synthesise complex matters are not lost to us. On a personal note, I have always appreciated his ability to have a laugh at himself as well as holding the School to the highest corporate governance standards.

I am incredibly appreciative of the support provided to me by my Co-Chair, Chris Lee. But more than that, his focus on improving the governance of the school and stream-lining our board operations has been greatly appreciated by all board members. As I write this report in May of 2020 whilst being in COVID-19 induced social isolation, I feel the School's governance is extremely robust. The board, the executive and the staff respond to all that comes our way with clarity, with compassion and true to our values.

Governance

Throughout 2019, the Board continued its strong focus on the Governance of the School. As I look back at the year, our main achievements in this regard were:

- a) Supporting the School Executive through our Registration and Accreditation with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

Whilst this required that the Board review the governance policies that fall within its direct domain of responsibility, it was particularly pleasing that our Executive received commendation from the inspector on the quality and thoroughness of our processes and policies.

- b) Working jointly with the School Executive and, indeed the entire school community, in the renewal of our values and purpose statement. These discussions were expertly facilitated by Jennifer Davies of the Association of Independent Schools NSW. Following the determination of these, our Principal Barb Fitzgerald with support from Jes Somerville, Jo Tovia and Rosie Wheeler created a most compelling and highly-polished Strategic Plan brochure to share with our various stakeholders. Thanks to all those involved from the entire Board.
- c) Early in the 2019 year, the Board formed a new, temporary sub-committee called the Enrolments Sub-Committee to review and determine the (then) apparent disconnect between our reputation as an innovative school of choice and our enrolment numbers.

The members of this sub-committee were: Barb Fitzgerald, Melanie Williams, Louise Dungate, Talulah Vane, Andy O'Doherty and Julia Westley and Jo Tovia. The professionalism, enthusiasm, focus and diligence with which this sub-committee operated was truly inspiring. Thank you to each of those involved.

The sub-committee delivered its report to the Board with a set of detailed, fully costed and reasoned proposals. After appropriate deliberation the board unanimously voted to accept all recommendations (with minor amendments to a few – all for the better). Barb and I had the pleasure of announcing these to our community in the middle of the year at a much-anticipated meeting in the school's hall.

At the heart of the recommendations was a reduction to our school fees, subject to reaching an enrolment target. Our families supported this initiative – in fact, so much so, that we were able to announce adoption of the lower fees from 2020 far earlier than we had anticipated.

To those in our community who actively supported this, thank you. Not only is the end result a reduction in fees across almost all years and a more diverse family community – but the concept of an independent school taking such an action gained interest from the local and national media, and I have been contacted by other schools wanting to learn from our experience.

Finances

Highlights of our key financial achievements for 2019 are:

- Our finance team continued their sound management of our finances and we met our obligation to reduce our loan principal by \$180,000.
- We made payments of interest and fees to ANZ of \$110,789.
- We continued our incentive program for parents wishing to pay their fees in advance, and the funds received were helpful in supporting our cash flow.
- The finance team, led by Melanie Williams continued to reduce our uncollected fees at the end of the year to a current level of 4.8% of total fees invoiced.

- Fee discounts and concessions were held at 13% of our total school fees income reflecting our philosophy to provide support to those in need, whilst also recognising the financial realities we face.
- The ability to meet our obligation to provide staff with a 2.5% pay increase.
- It is necessary to single out the performance of our Business Manager, Melanie Williams. Our budgets are tight, and this makes discipline and prudent management of the school's finances absolutely crucial. Mel provides this, but does so with an ever-present good grace and focus on ensuring that our values are reflected in the financial operations of the school.

Thanks

I would also like to single out a few key personnel at the AIS NSW for special thanks: Geoff Newcombe; Michael Carr, Leoni Degenhardt; Jennifer Davies; Jenni-Lee Williams; Wendy Godden; and Robyn Yates – your support is greatly appreciated and helps us make a difference, thank you.

We have seen throughout 2019, many instances where our community has fully supported the School. We have also seen many instances where the School has fully supported the community. This does not occur by chance. It is a reflection of trust. Trust that is placed in one person. And that person is our Principal Barb Fitzgerald. Whilst it is undeniable that the trust in Barb is well-placed, I ask all members of our community (parents, executive, teachers, staff) to say thanks to Barb for her unfailing dedication and commitment to Korowal, to our values and to challenging all to be the best they can be.

Outlook

Our values of Community, Academics, Relationships and Emotional Intelligence in supporting the development of the whole person are not just a summary of how we do what we do; but they also resonate with the wider community.

As our Strategic Plan details, we are at the forefront of many exciting educational initiatives and I have no doubt that these will further enhance the wonderful education that Korowal offers.

As we respond to the impacts of COVID19, these strengths have allowed the school to be able to continue to provide education that upholds our values in very constrained circumstances. As we slowly return to normal schooling we look forward to continuing to seeing these initiatives developed and implemented.