

Principal's Report on 2019 AGM - May 2020

2019 was a big year for us all. We commenced the year with focus on Registration and Accreditation and ended the year with fires threatening our homes and School. In the middle, we restructured our management model to distribute leadership amongst further staff members, thus supporting the Executive positions and enabling professional growth and development for our staff, while implementing succession planning.

Many elements aligned to define the purpose and place that Korowal holds in education, both within our community and beyond. Amidst the growing concern for our natural environment, our Strategic Plan became our map for the immediate future. Through engaging with our community and hearing our students, parents and staff align in identifying our values and purpose, we have confidently reviewed our Values and established our new Vision Statement, and our meaningful purpose.

We confidently state the following:

'Korowal inspires compassionate and discerning voices for a sustainable world'.

We do this through 'Innovating education with care.'

Our C.A.R.E Education Model has been defined, demonstrating the interlinking components of Community, Academics, Relationships and Emotional Intelligence in supporting the development of the whole person.

With this clear direction, we created our contemporary School website and began to review our 'look' or style guide. Jes Somerville has creatively excelled with these projects.

Simultaneously, Korowal has adopted the Lyrebird as our totem, forging greater connections to land and our aboriginal name, meaning "the strong one". We celebrated NAIDOC week with joy and connection to our local aboriginal community and the environment.

Teaching / learning

Due to the excellent teaching and learning programs, policies and procedures at Korowal, we were once again successful in our 5-yearly NESA compliance audit for Registration and Accreditation as a School offering education from k-12. I extend my thanks to our staff for their dedication and professionalism in realising this achievement.

Not to be daunted by the mammoth task, we also revised our delivery modes for high school, introducing aspects of project learning and thereby encouraging students' advocacy for their learning. We launched a consultancy with Oracy Cambridge to develop our Korowal Oracy Program, creating the structure and stages towards full implementation. Many students throughout primary and high are developing confidence as we place talking skills at the centre of their work and presentations. This is a further link in our chain of international and national partnerships.

For many subjects throughout the school our staff developed new programs to accommodate syllabus changes. We expanded our subject offerings by taking I.T Multimedia through to HSC, and saw one of our students shortlisted for exemplar work on his HSC Project. He was well mentored by Jason Carthew.

We increased our Tech Mandatory facilities to include a pizza oven and vege garden. Year 6 commenced their regular science classes with Andy in the senior labs. Our PE facilities and options expanded as we applied the funding attained through sporting grants, secured by Kizz Boyd.

Building on our successful introduction in 2018, we expanded the high school Learning Hub and established the primary Learning Hub in Term 4, thus providing either a little extra help, or extension work, for students as needed.

We expanded our horizons with Year 6 students visiting our Sister School in Hangzhou, an exciting and insightful cultural exchange for the children, teachers and parents who attended.

Student wellbeing

Our students, staff and families continue to be well supported by Sarah Farrell-Whelan as Wellbeing Coordinator. Sarah has been expanding her use of Open Dialogue in network meetings for students across the school. Staff have been learning further ways of being in conversation through this approach. Our senior students also benefitted from regular meetings with their teacher mentors.

All students are nourished by the care shown by our teaching assistants, admin staff and teachers across the school. This is where the quality of our relationships shines and students feel safe.

Staffing

In 2019 we welcomed Andy O'Doherty and Anna Summers to our staff. We bade farewell to Jill Day, our primary stalwart. Jill's connections to Korowal go back a long way, both as a parent and as a teachers' aide. Whether with a tool belt, a whittling knife, a paintbrush or a stick of chalk, Jill is a fine craftsman. Her love of children, level of care and skills have been a gift to us. As Jill now moves into retirement, we send our love and thanks for all that she is and all that she shared.

Alistair Symonds, our DP and HS Coordinator, left us in Term 4 to take up a position in the Tertiary sector. This precipitated the introduction of our Distributed Leadership Model, wherein we moved from having two DP's to one, with Bec Finch as our Deputy Principal of K-12. Talulah Vane moved into Primary Coordination, Louise Dugate - Projects and Research Coordination, Kim Poole-Academic Continuity Adviser and Stage 5 Advisor and Andy O'Doherty- Stage 4 Advisor. These were in addition to the whole school positions already held by Jason Carthew as Communications and Technology Adviser, and Kizz Boyd PDHPE Adviser. With this new structure we created our Leadership Team and gave it a test run in Term 4. After some review and refinement, this has continued into 2020 and provides a substantial team of voices, and shared responsibility.

Enrolments and changes

A major concern for us in 2019 was the decrease in student numbers at a time when we assessed that our educational offerings were finer than ever. Through researching possible reasons for this, we established that our fee structure was prohibiting many families who would otherwise want their children to attend Korowal. Our Co-Chair of the KSB, Greg Lucas, set the pace for a radical review of our fee structures. An enrolment subcommittee was established with parent and staff input, and, after much research and review, we proudly announced that we could reduce fees for 2020 if we were able to guarantee that we would start 2020 with 235 students. We called on community support to achieve this and were inundated with enrolment calls and emails, which led to us achieving our goal. Our School community spread the word and we are all richer for the additional families that have joined our School.

Facilities

Works continued under our building grant as we increased the covered areas and facilities. Our Science labs were refitted and a storeroom built as Alex's talents extended beyond maintenance into complete renovations as well. This included the creation of further maker space and Steam resources in primary.

Storms swept through our campus and that, combined with the drought, meant that we lost many established trees. We bring our natural environment into focus with our plans for 2020. Our Year 10 students began the elementary research for going solar in 2020.

Partnerships

As Korowal matures, we continue to forge significant links that enrich our experiences for our students and staff. We also share our achievements with other educational institutions.

In 2019 we maintained links with John Marsden's schools, forged a new connection with The Nature School in Port Macquarie, visited our Sister School in Hangzhou and welcomed Chinese students to visit us. We continued our friendship as our Japanese Sister school Genkai Mirai, when students, staff and the Mayor of Genkai visited Korowal and the Blue Mountains. We hosted workshops for students, teachers, Principals and Bureau Heads from China. With our tertiary partnerships we worked closely with Oracy Cambridge and Sydney University's Centre for Family-Based Mental Health Care (Open Dialogue).

In 2019 Bec Finch also completed the AIS Flagship Program, a great achievement and qualification in 'Leadership' which she immediately applied to her new role as Deputy Principal K-12.

Governance

The Korowal School Board consists of parents and teachers committed to ensuring that we uphold our Values and Ethics, that we act with transparency, and that we manage risk and remain compliant. In 2019 the KSB was Co-chaired by Greg Lucas and Chris Lee and I extend my thanks to them, and the other directors, on behalf of our community. All of our directors have brought their individual strengths to the table, acting with great integrity. We undertook major reviews of our fee structure, our School's Vision and Mission and our public image. Through rigorous discussion and specialised sub-committees we arrived at what we can proudly state is a true representation of Korowal today. I extend a special thanks to Greg Lucas for his bravery and insight in leading the fee restructure consultations and modelling, along with Mel Williams, our Business Manager.

Staff

Special thanks are also extended to Bec and Mel for their executive management of our school and for continually rising to every new challenge. They have masterful skills and do a great job in both leading and responding. They have the confidence of our entire staff and Board.

To all of our staff, our bus drivers, admin workers, teachers, teachers' aides, maintenance and gardening personnel, we are so fortunate to have your share passion, intelligence, commitment and care with us all. You are our greatest asset. Thank you. As the first point of contact for our families, Caroline, Deb and Michelle continued to hold our centre on a daily basis.

To our students and parents, thank you all for participating within our school community. Neill Duncan gave us the beautiful gift of his jazz band as a highlight for the years end. It was a joyous celebration of a successful year. Thank you Neill and the musos.

In summary,

It was a year of significant developments!

We were looking forward to a well-deserved Summer break after such an eventful calendar. However, as we all know, the fires were on our doorsteps as we ended the year, and for many, that meant being on high alert. As I write this, we are in the midst of COVID-19.

There has never been a more salient time for remaining strong and capable of standing alone, of being 'Korowal'. Together, as we echo kindness, hope and love, our community's voice and support are imperative. Our achievements in 2019 have been significant.

These new challenges we face in 2020 will reveal even greater potential in us individually and collectively, as we continue to mirror our core values.

As Principal, leading Korowal is a profound experience. I wish to thank you all for your ongoing trust and support.

Barb Fitzgerald

Principal

12.5.2020