

**ALICE MILLER/CANDLEBARK SCHOOLS
ANNUAL REPORT 2019**



Schools, like so many of the concrete and abstract “building blocks” that comprise Australian society, are, year by year falling increasingly under the control of politicians and bureaucrats. Australia used to be considered an iconoclastic country where a larrikin approach was commonplace. This certainly had its flaws and could at times result in disastrous outcomes. Yet the relentless and often unintelligent process of strangulation employed by politicians and bureaucrats also has its flaws, and also at times results in disastrous outcomes.

Bad outcomes can take many forms. For example, given the larrikin style of many or most schools in the 1950s or 1960s, smoking, bullying, poor teaching, cruel authoritarianism, casual vandalism were often part of the fabric of their being, part of the educational landscape. These delinquent or antisocial behaviours weren’t just limited to schools however: a good argument could be mounted to show that schools were merely reflections/extensions/microcosms of the national culture. The virtues and evils of life in those days can also be seen in the histories of many of the other cherished foundation stones: the armed services, the police force and jails, hospitals, trade unions, political parties social security provisions, big corporations, charities... the list is pretty much endless.

It is delightfully easy and strangely almost gratifying to quote horror stories from schools in those days though. For example, I remember how my school, Devonport Primary, in Tasmania, in the 1950s, had the “gardening class”: the kids who were considered uneducable, and so spent their formative years tending to the Headmaster’s garden, delivering the free milk to the classrooms, running messages for teachers. As soon as they were old enough, they left school – it was assumed that they would find jobs where skills like literacy were not needed or were viewed as an inconvenience.



Jezabel Furlong

When I was in Grade 3 we had a test every Friday, on the week's work. Anyone who got less than 7 out of 10 in the test was caned as matter of course.

A colleague in my first teaching job, the late David Weeding, a terrific person and a wonderful teacher, told me how, as a young graduate, he had been employed at Arthur Phillip High School in Parramatta, NSW. According to David, he was summoned from his classroom one day to the Headmaster's office. When he got there he found the Headmaster, along with a boy David had caned the day before. Also present now were the boy's parents. It quickly emerged that they were complaining about the savage, unjust punishment inflicted upon their son by David. David had to explain the nature of the boy's crime. I can't remember now what he had done – sworn at the teacher? Maybe he had an overdue library book.

'How many strokes of the cane did you give him, Mr Weeding?' the Headmaster asked.

'Er... three, Sir.'

'Three?! Three?! Not enough! Fetch me my cane, Mr Weeding, from the rack.'

David did as ordered, and the Headmaster thereupon caned the boy another three strokes before throwing the family out of his office.

It would be naive to suggest that each school back then was its own fiefdom, because plenty of bureaucrats and politicians, in remote offices in capital cities, were claiming that they had the system well regulated. School inspectors in those days boasted, for example, that at 9:52 AM on the second Tuesday of Term 3 every Grade 4 child in the state would be answering the questions on page 73 of a specified textbook...

The truth however was that conditions varied from school to school. And that's still true today. Some schools then and some schools now adhered/adhere to the stipulations decreed by the authorities; some found/find ways to maintain a certain autonomy. Schools that succeed in this latter course are more likely to be spirited, lively, creative and successful -- successful in ways that could be said to have real meaning -- but it's also possible that they are more likely to fail.

Other contemporary schools still have a disturbing amount in common with those of the 50s and 60s. Being obliged to write yet another annual report for Alice Miller and Candlebark does to some extent prompt such thoughts as these, but again, the truth is more complex. I have had similar thoughts throughout my teaching career, during 40 years of watching ineptitude, procrastination, dishonesty, pomposity and evasion constantly and chronically damaging education at every level, rather like the way myxomatosis affects rabbits. These traits are not just observable in politicians and bureaucrats; they are frequently found within the schools as well, among the leadership team, the teachers, the non-teaching staff, the parents of students. And the students.

So many schools, partly because they evoke such strong passions in adults, partly because they are seen as malleable targets, partly because they attract certain personality-types, are like trees that are being scorched from without by bushfires and at the same time corroded from within by termites. This makes it unsurprising that they struggle to succeed. They struggle to survive in any form other than a superficial one. They vaguely resemble Hollywood movies compared to European movies, or Zac Power books compared to those by J.M. Coetzee.



Regional cross-country champions Henry and Lily

Before writing this report I set myself the challenge of thinking of positive contributions made to our school by politicians and/or bureaucrats. After all, I've been a principal for 14 years; it shouldn't be difficult to think of lots of tangible and intangible support that has been given to us over such a long period of time. Coming up with a list has however been an intellectual challenge for which my IQ has proved sadly inadequate. There is money, of course; that's one Good Thing: it's 'nice' to have government funding for independent schools. And yes, I suppose I do take the funding for granted, somewhat, even though it's slightly difficult to accept it whilst simultaneously being horrified by the slapdash, almost lunatic way in which it is distributed.

Beyond money, what else?

Um...

I have never known a politician or a bureaucrat to say anything nice about us, except maybe three or four passing comments over the last 14 years. I have never known a politician or a bureaucrat – except two Macedon Rangers councillors – offer us any meaningful help at an individual level. From bureaucrats in particular we get virtually nothing but carping criticism, nitpicking, pedantry and meaningless drivel.

I can't think of any piece of educational research or changes/developments in curriculum which have emanated from Australian politicians or bureaucrats and made any significant difference. A few minor amendments to curricula during my 40 years of teaching have been vaguely useful, but considering the amount of time and energy spent on this area of education, I'm afraid the results have been, at best, inconsequential. One of the problems of course is that the language used in these documents has always been, and continues to be, bland, inane, ultimately meaningless. The opening statement in the Learning Areas section of the current Australian Curriculum is this: 'The Australian Curriculum is designed to help all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.' If you go to the Drama area of the document you can read the following: 'The Australian Curriculum is designed to help all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. Presented as a developmental sequence of learning from Foundation - Year 10, the Australian Curriculum describes to teachers, parents, students and others in the wider community what is to be taught and the quality of learning expected of young people as they progress through school.'

Does anyone process in any meaningful way these empty statements? Reading them is akin to having Coco Pops for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Getting rid of corporal punishment is an obvious improvement which I've seen evolve, but I suspect this evolution was always going to happen as a result of societal progress; I doubt that politicians 'in charge of' education, or educational bureaucrats, could claim much authentic credit for it.

For me, dealing with the endless numbers of regulatory authorities, government departments, quangos and agencies who are all allowed input to the management of schools is like an endless dark comedy tinged with many moments of frustration and annoyance.

It's as though the bookseller in the old sitcom 'Black Books' is running the show, perhaps with Basil Fawlty as his partner. Quite frequently we find ourselves being accused of incompetence or other deadly sins by regulators who are themselves so incompetent that I, looking to staff my school with highly qualified, brilliant, creative professionals, would be unlikely to employ these people even to check that caps are placed on whiteboard markers after use.

I could write many thousands of words giving examples of the ineptitude of the bureaucrats, but here are a couple...

When we had to go to the local Council (Macedon Ranges Shire) a few years ago, seeking an expansion in the numbers of students allowed at Candlebark, we finally, after an endless, ludicrous process, were granted permission. One of the highlights was the Council meeting where the Big Vote of councillors had to be taken. During the debate prior to the vote, a councillor who had never visited the school was perusing the enormous pile of documents which we had been required to submit. He was delighted to find a serious omission. 'Mr Mayor!' he barked, 'there is no Emergency Management Plan!'

'Ah, I think you'll find that there is, Councillor. It's the one following the Traffic Plan,' the Mayor replied.

Huffing and puffing, the councillor did as suggested, but after a couple of minutes insisted again that there was no Emergency Management Plan.

He received further mayoral assistance, and eventually realised that he did indeed have it, in his stack of paper... immediately following the Traffic Plan.

It became evident, as this process continued, that the Councillor had not looked at the documents at all before the vote was taken. Nevertheless, he had no hesitation in voting against the proposal to allow an increase in numbers of students. This might seem like a petty matter. But was it? Here was a major planning decision, involving millions of dollars, jobs for local residents, huge lifestyle decisions for people planning to move to the area to send their children to the school -- and having made no attempt to read through the plans, visit the school, or have any discussions with us, he voted against the expansion going ahead. It's like a jury member sleeping through a trial and then voting to convict the defendant.

One of the conditions placed on us by the Council when the expansion was approved was that we could remove either one or two (the number was not certain at that stage) exotic trees at the front gate (elms, as I recall) -- but we had to plant one hundred native trees to replace them. This may seem quite reasonable to people like me, who like to see ourselves as dedicated greenies. However, did Council members notice that the school is located on a property of about 1200 acres, which is virtually all forest, and which is believed to be the largest privately owned piece of virgin bush in Victoria? (The vast majority of it has never been farmed or cleared.)

At any given moment there are tens of thousands of native trees, maybe hundreds of thousands (I've never counted) ranging in age from infancy to senility, on the place, and so it seemed somewhat fatuous to go around trying to find a space where more could be planted. We didn't bother to plant the stipulated one hundred and of course no-one ever checked that we had.

We are inspected from time to time by the regulatory authority responsible for inspecting schools. Many days are spent by the bureaucrats who descend upon us for these Visitations (as they call them). The first major inspection we had was so utterly inept that I wrote 'a report on the report', pointing out how incompetently the process had been managed. The person in charge of the regulatory authority did not have the courtesy to answer my letter to her, but her Deputy was sent out to the school to apologise on behalf of the authority for their failings. Not only did the Deputy apologise, but she promised me that they were setting up a task force to change the way they communicated with schools in future, and they would like me to serve on that task force. I graciously accepted the invitation. I never heard from them again.

We had a tedious dispute with a government authority this year, which I won't detail here, because it exposes us to the risk of further harassment, but it involved more examples of mindlessness. For example, a young undergraduate told me what action was going to be taken against the school by the government authority about a week and a half before the government authority told us what action was going to be taken against the school.

How did the young undergraduate get this important but confidential information? The person was told in an official phone call from one of the bureaucrats in the government authority.

Ah well, it was nice to get advance knowledge of our fate from a 21 year-old.



Alice Miller Year 9s in Czechia

We were subjected to some sort of official-reprimand-process by a regulatory authority in 2019, where a senior official from the authority travelled to the school to meet with us to tell us where we had gone wrong and explain how important it was that we avoid such dreadful transgressions in future. The meeting lasted for an hour and a quarter of meandering small talk until I tactfully said 'My next appointment is due; have you anything more that you need to tell us?'

'No, no, I think that wraps it up,' the senior official replied.

The senior official left, and to this day I have no idea what we were supposed to have learned from the visit.

Still, it was a pleasant conversation.



One of the reasons for the paralysis induced in schools by politicians and bureaucrats is the devout belief (often an unconscious one) of these remote figures that schools and the professionals who run schools and work in them on a daily basis (at the chalkface, or whiteboardmarkerface to be pedantic and to attempt humour) are incompetent idiots who need to be closely monitored in every possible way, because without this close supervision there would be mayhem in the schools of Australia.

It is certainly true that some of the people working in schools are not competent but there are no guarantees that the bureaucrats and politicians are any better. In other words, many of the people doing the supervision/monitoring are not able to carry out their tasks competently. Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? Who monitors the monitors?

Writing these annual reports are, as I have suggested in previous years, a good example of the inanity of so many bureaucratic processes which are inflicted upon schools. What is the purpose of them? What is their value? What do they achieve?

The answer to these last three questions is easy: (A) they are purposeless. (B) they have no value. (C) they achieve nothing.

Sorry, my answer to (C) is not completely correct. They do achieve something: they help bureaucrats convince politicians and their other overlords that they are doing... something.

The truth is that of course the thousands of words of waffle produced by each school each year say nothing about the true nature of the school, because the words are always chosen carefully to project a "good image". The reports are as valid and valuable as a TV advertisement for online gambling, or a policy speech by a leader of a political party.



I will now proceed with thousands of words of waffle, to project a good image of Alice Miller and Candlebark for 2019.

This was Candlebark's fourteenth year and Alice Miller's fourth. New teachers were needed at Alice Miller as a result of increased enrolments, and to replace departing staff members, and Amy Naivasha (Amy is taking a year's leave in 2020.) New teachers appointed were Dr Karyn Lehner, Nadia Baker, Victoria Stasey, and Adrian Wood. We also welcomed back Ben Cobham, to run a 9+10 elective in theatre production techniques, and art teacher, Basil Eliades, who spent last year on leave. During 2019 we welcomed and/or welcomed back to the teaching staff psychology teacher Mark Johnstone and maths teacher Rob McCarthy.

Zoe Barry joined the instrumental music staff, to teach cello, and Natania (Nat) Hollingsworth joined Veronica to assist in the café.

During 2019 we farewelled French teacher Carla Kankindji, music teacher Anna van Veldhuisen, maths teacher Nadia Baker, and, at the end of the year, science teacher Brennan Garcia. We lost Sam Ford into South America for six months for a cycling trip with his family and we lost Wendy Wright to North, Central and South America for six months, but we were delighted to have them back when they returned from these latest adventures.

In other staff news, we appointed two teachers to new areas of responsibility this year. Kat Widderington-Oliver managed Careers and Pathways, and we were grateful that Emily Raubenheimer, who replaced Basil to teach art last year, stayed on in an administrative role to manage enrolments and staff development.



Year 9s in Slovakia

In exciting news for those who love technology, late in 2019 we signed up both schools, Candlebark and Alice Miller, with a mob called Compass, putting our faith in them as our parent portal and school management system. This enabled the beginning of a rollout which allows parents to access children's reports and ongoing academic progress, enter absences for children, and obtain information regarding upcoming events and news. Students are able to access their own personal timetable via their Compass portal. A huge amount of work went into setting up this system, but it also offers new opportunities for staff to communicate with each other and with parents and students. .

As always we shoved students out of the gates as fast as they arrived in the mornings, to such an extent that we felt we were once again running a travel agency. As part of their educational journeys, groups this year travelled to Poland, Germany, Czechia, Hobart, Adelaide, New Zealand, Canberra, the Murray River, Bright, Bendigo, Mildura, the Mornington Peninsula, Wilson's Prom, the Great Ocean Walk, the Grampians, Mt Stirling, Ballarat and Melbourne. All of these trips, undertaken because they are an integral part of how we understand the word 'education', were organised and run by the school – we do not employ outside agencies for these vital parts of school life. (Pause for applause from bureaucrats perusing this prose.)

We had visitors to the school, many coming for a week or more... even a politician got in this year, despite my best efforts to keep them well away. Other visitors included percussionist Matt Stonehouse, who performed at the school as part of the Woodend Winter Arts Festival, French chef Fabien Laville, and Josh Griffiths of the Platypus Project, who worked with our VCE Environmental Science students on a conservation project.

Academically, we set a high standard. This is achieved in many ways, but I'll mention two which are vital – firstly, we have teachers who are extraordinary in their skills, and who have extraordinary knowledge of their subjects. Secondly, we try our best to cultivate an atmosphere in which academic work is at best welcomed and at worst well-tolerated by our students. We do this by encouraging good relationships between staff and students, so that students do not want to 'give teachers a hard time', but instead regard them as trustworthy and trusted, as fair and friendly, and as unusually knowledgeable. We also achieve it by doing all we can to make sure students are well fed, active, courteous and awake.

The level of informal physical activity – whether it be games of tag, riding bikes and ripsticks, informal games of soccer or basketball, cross-country runs – means that our students are not torpid, alienated, uninterested in life. Instead, they are mostly alert and lively, and their concentration and involvement in class is generally at a high level.

We also try to be adventurous in the way we regard classroom learning and timetables. For example, we again in 2019 suspended 'normal' lessons frequently, in favour of variations. At Alice Miller, we had an Arts Week, where brilliant artists and craftspeople like author Alice Pung, trumpeter Ian Dixon, interdisciplinary artist Lauren Simmonds, costume designer Brigit Heller, theatre makers Ken Russell and Rebecca Evans, percussionist Kaylee Melville,

illustrator Freya Pitt, dancer and choreographer Alex Harrison, theatre maker Ben Landau, visual artist Elizabeth Barnett, composer Kelly Ryall and comedian Daniel Burt each worked intensively with a group of students for a full week. At Candlebark, we had a Circus Skills Intensive, where an amazing group of circus artists each worked with a particular group of students during Term 3 – including whole days of work.

This was coordinated by Alexandra Harrison and culminated in an evening performance by all the Candlebark students, held outside at twilight, and incorporating not just circus skills but dance, acting, storytelling and technology. The sophistication and brilliance of this presentation was at a level I don't think I've seen achieved by students of this age in the past.



We follow the Victorian Curriculum. Our Naplan results were as usual fine, but, also as usual, essentially meaningless. We assess students in ways that have much more meaning. We do this by using tests and assignments which are thorough and well-validated, and also by informal assessments, which are more easily managed in schools with small class-sizes. Our VCE results were also fine – 2019 was our third year of VCE, and again our students were few in number, but there were some brilliant achievements. The Year 12 group stood out as a wonderful group of individuals. Although they were markedly different in all kinds of important and interesting ways, they got on incredibly well with each other, and were a delight for the staff to work with, except of course when it came to getting work done by the due dates.... a perennial problem in schools and in the wider world.

Like any good school we work extremely hard at the emotional and social problems of students and their families. The relatively sudden evolution of schools into community health centres and virtual psychiatric day care clinics has created a new world of problems for schools and teachers. It seems that the role of schools as de facto services with huge responsibilities in these areas has come about because of the failure of society to devise and set up structures and systems which are capable of taking care of people who are not managing difficulties in their lives.

Among the many factors contributing to such a situation are the rapid demise in many areas of extended family networks, the consequent growth of very small family units which are more likely to lack support, the associated diminution in the number of 'villages' – or, to be more accurate, the modern equivalent of villages – involved in the communal care of children, the rigid, sloppy and/or unsympathetic approach taken by many agencies, and the personalities of many of the people attracted to work in such agencies.



By default, schools have been – almost slyly – handed the responsibility for what can loosely be called ‘pastoral care’.

We deal with this in many ways, one of which is that we look to appoint teachers who are emotionally mature and can be authentically supportive of students and their families. It does mean an increased workload for teachers because it involves responding to frequent occurrences, in adolescents in particular, of such phenomena as sexual assault, suicidal ideations, self-harming, eating disorders, the impact of the breakdowns of marriages and other relationships, emotional abuse and parental neglect.

We also work extremely hard to help the academic and social progress of students with diagnoses of autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia and other behavioural and/or learning disorders, and we have a terrific staff of teachers who give many of these students one-on-one assistance. As well, social changes mean that gender transitioning and same-sex attraction are among the issues concerning which modern teenagers are much more open and proactive, but we have to put a lot of energy into doing our best to ensure the life journeys of such students are as untroubled as possible. We are happy to undertake this work, because attitudes in previous generations were often damaging and even destructive, and we welcome the greater enlightenment that seems to be evident in recent years -- but there is still quite a way to go.

Moving on to sport: in 2019, we continued to participate in everything that was available, with success that seems inexplicable for a small ‘alternative’ school which supposedly minimises the concept of Strenuous and Ferocious Striving for Victory that seems to underlie nearly all sports in western society.



Chess continues to be cherished by Candlebark students, and by Alice Miller students to a lesser extent. The Candlebark kids are very lucky to have two teachers who are incredibly dedicated to their progress in chess. One result of this is that chess permeates the whole school, from Prep upwards. We have one period of class time a week dedicated to chess, but anyone who visits the school, on any day, at recess or lunchtime, will see numerous games of chess being played indoors and outdoors, between students and students, students and teachers, students and other adults. We had a big chess tournament at Alice Miller in 2019, to which many schools sent teams, and as well our own teams progressed to the State finals again – and again achieved delightful results.

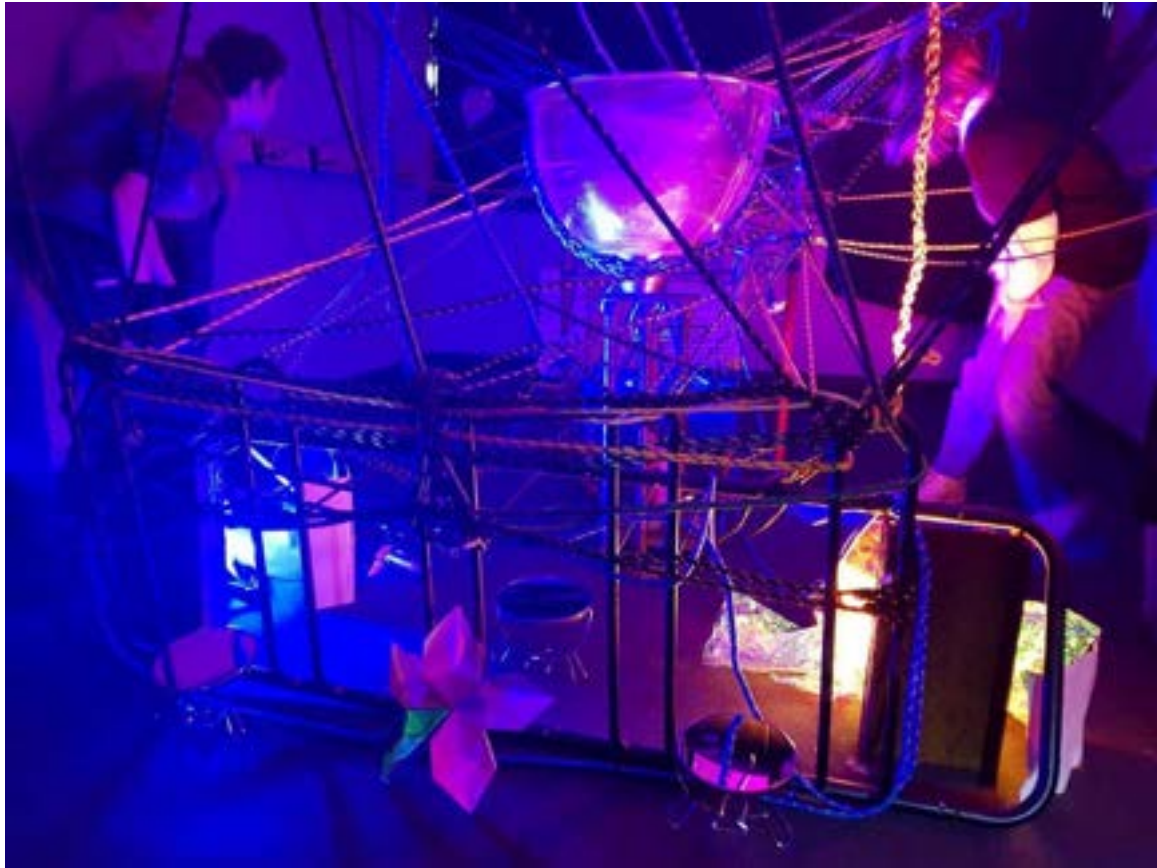
Other highlights of 2019 were a brilliant performance of *Noises Off* at Alice Miller, directed by Donna Prince and made possible by the extraordinary set constructed by Bob Mitchell. Anne Browning directed a stunning production of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*, where again a terrific cast was helped by a professional-standard set. And at the start of the year, we had another inventive and outstanding production with *Ebony Black*, written and directed by Scott Hatcher, and featuring an 'in-the-round' set designed by Alice Miller parent and sculptor Mike Jones.

At Candlebark, teacher Andrew Blizzard worked with visiting artist Scott Wright, Artistic Director of Erth Visual and Physical Inc. Scott's company is developing a new touring puppet theatre show called Arc (Ark), to premiere at the Sydney Festival 2021 and so he involved our students in some ground-breaking creative work as he tried out possibilities for the Sydney Festival. He and Andrew Blizzard helped students compose a theatrical presentation which involved audiences in a unique way and required them to move continuously through a landscape that was at times outdoors and at other times indoors. As one of those audience members, I can only say that it was an utterly memorable afternoon for me.

Compared to previous years, Candlebark had a different end to 2019, with an evening picnic and the communal singing of Christmas songs to music played beautifully by our combined music teachers as well as our students. Alice Miller had its inaugural Alicepalooza Festival in the amphitheatre, featuring young Alice Miller musicians and songwriters.

As directed by bureaucracy, we carried out a survey of parents in 2019, asking probing questions about the operations of the school.

It's another exercise that takes time and trouble and means nothing. These days if I stay in a hotel, checking in at, say, 9 pm and out at 8 am I'm likely to get three emails during the next month or so asking me to go online to fill out a survey about my experience.



Obviously a relationship with a school tends to last longer and be more profound than a night in a Best Western, but there are problems with the kind of surveys we are required to undertake. One is that they are anonymous, so we have no way of assessing the credentials of the people filling them in. Another is that quite a number of parents seem to be reacting to or are unduly influenced by whatever has happened most recently to their child—so the responses are not exactly 'global' in their perspective. Another is that a school afraid of criticism can frame the questions in a way which will influence and even determine the outcomes.

Parents who have something to say to us do so every day, either face-to-face or by email or by phone. Surveys fill up space but achieve nothing. I've given up complaining about them to bureaucrats though, because their answer is always the same: 'Yes, there's a lot in what you say, but the surveys are still required under the regulations you know, so you have to do them.'

Makes me wonder from what mystical source these regulations derive.

Anyway, the good news is that the number of responses received to the 2019 survey were too few to have statistical significance, and although we very much appreciated the glowing comments no changes were made in the structure or operations of the schools as a result of the survey.



Official Stuff that we are required to include, whether meaningful or not:

Naplan Results:

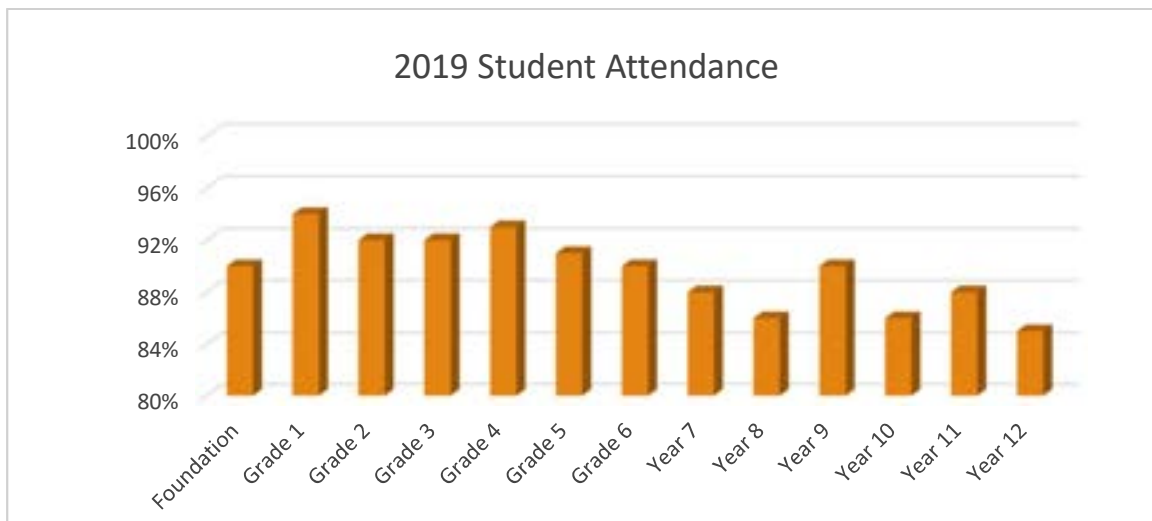
YEAR 9 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2019					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	82%	58%	63%	74%	75%
2018					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	96%	88%	88%	96%	100%
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	43%	86%	71%	100%
YEAR 7 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2019					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark)	100%	67%	67%	89%	80%
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	92%	58%	75%	92%	100%
2018					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	100%	100%	100%	
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark)	100%	84%	100%	84%	100%
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 5 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2019					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	93%	100%	93%	93%
2018					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	90%	100%	86%	100%
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	92%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 3 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2019					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2018					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	88%	100%	100%	88%	100%
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	93%	100%	100%	93%	100%

As I think I've said every year since my first annual report, a good deal of caution needs to be used in assessing NAPLAN results. The tests themselves are sadly deficient in so many ways that they cannot be given much weight. See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/09/bizarre-naplan-writing-test-measures-all-the-wrong-things-us-expert-says> and the statement by the previous federal education minister Senator Simon Birmingham, responding to criticisms of the test by a well-known authority on education from Finland, that "NAPLAN is an important assessment tool but it shouldn't be considered the be all and end all."

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/naplan-useful-but-not-the-be-all-and-end-all-says-education-minister-simon-birmingham-20180123-h0mkme.html>

The number of students sitting for NAPLAN at our schools is very small, so generalisations about academic performance cannot be made about different grades by using NAPLAN. One student with a significant learning difficulty can have a powerful impact on the results of the group, when such small numbers are involved.

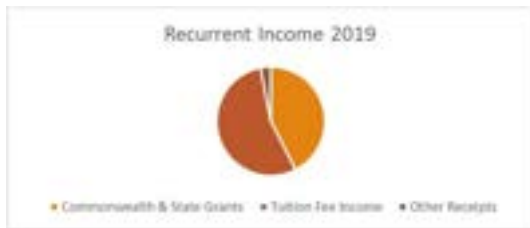
Student Attendance:



We are very keen to have minimal student absences and a strong adherence to punctuality. Given the natural sequence which so many learning programs follow, it is important for students to be at school consistently, unless of course illness occurs, or some other serious matter requires the student to be elsewhere. If there appears to be a need for a student to be absent for reasons other than these, parents are required to seek permission for absence from the Principal. Student attendance is recorded at the beginning of the day and again after lunch, and any absences are followed up immediately with parents. In our view there is however a continuing escalation of the anxiety pandemic in our society, and it can be an ongoing problem with certain families to get students to school each day. In these situations the school makes every effort to encourage parents to be more positive and assertive with their children, but occasionally formal referrals to appropriate authorities have to be made.



Income and Expenditure:



Senior secondary outcomes:

2019 saw our third cohort of Year twelve students graduate. Our graduating class comprised 20 students, all of whom were successful in obtaining their VCEs.

Our median study score for VCE end of year exam candidates was 31 (out of a possible 50). To take a couple of random schools for comparison, the median study score for Bacchus Marsh Grammar was 31, Bendigo Senior Secondary College was 26, and for Geelong Grammar, 30.

11.8% of the students received an ATAR over 90.

Among our results were a student who performed in the top 2% of the state for Art, with a study score of 47. This student's work was later selected for the prestigious Top Arts exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. Other notable results include four students achieving results within the top 9% of the state for Further Mathematics (with study scores of 44, 43, 41 and 40). One student performed in the top 9% of the state for Outdoor and Environmental Studies with a study score of 40, and another achieved a score of 40 in French. One of our Year 10 students performed in the top 9% of the state for Music Performance, with a study score of 41, indicating that our VCE acceleration program can help our younger students achieve outstanding results. Numerous other students performed in the top 26 percentile in their subjects, with Study Scores of 35 and above.

Assessment:

Apart from NAPLAN and VCE, other assessment tools we use are:

1. The Observation Survey for students grade 2 and below. We use TORCH for testing reading comprehension for students above grade 2.
2. Peters dictation for picking up spelling weaknesses, usually for middle and upper grades.
3. The South Australian Spelling Test (SAST) with students above grade one.
4. Neale Analysis for spelling and reading.
5. Ongoing literacy assessments provided as part of the Fitzroy reading Program, which is used throughout the junior grades
6. EOI to assess English skills for students between Prep and Grade 2 (and Diagnostic Assessment Tools in English for follow-up, for students from Prep to Grade 6.
7. MOI to assess maths skills for students between Prep and Grade 2.

Contextual information about the school, including the characteristics of the student body:

Much of this is included in the body of the report and of course is available on the schools' websites. The schools are both coeducational day schools with no religious affiliation. They are both in forest settings; Candlebark on about 1200 acres and Alice Miller on about 80 acres. We continue to have a healthy waiting list for most grades. Class sizes in 2019 ranged from 13 to 22, but some elective subjects at Alice Miller had classes as small as three. The typical student body lives in Gisborne or Woodend, and is transported to school by the student bus. However there are other student bodies scattered in a wide area from Trentham through Daylesford, Kyneton, Sunbury, Melbourne, Riddells Creek, Wallan, Castlemaine, Romsey, Newham and Lancefield.

Staffing:

In 2019 Alice Miller employed 19 VIT registered teachers, and Candlebark employed 18 VIT registered teachers. All are qualified and registered -- it would be illegal for us to employ them otherwise, because no one without a university degree and a diploma of education – or similar – could possibly teach young people. (On the other hand, anyone with a university degree and a diploma in education – or similar – is obviously wonderful at teaching young people.)

Registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) has made all the difference to the quality of education in this state....

Workforce composition, including indigenous composition:

I've never known what this means, and I'm not rude enough to ask people about their 'indigenous composition'. However, as well as the teaching staff, we employ a Business Manager, two registrars, two Property Managers, four maintenance staff, a part-time cleaner, three chefs, two kitchen hands, and three part-time bus drivers.

Distribution of this report:

This report is distributed by email to all members of the school community, including parents, (currently all school parents have access to email), and the VRQA, and is posted on the websites of Alice Miller School and Candlebark School.

Here endeth the 2019 Annual Report.

John Marsden
(Principal)

