

Statutory Annual Report 2010

Candlebark's fifth year seemed to go pretty well. My sense was that the school had a more settled and secure feeling. This alarmed me on the one hand – truly it is said that 'the wanderer's danger is to find comfort' – but on the other hand it made for a pleasant atmosphere. The families who attend Candlebark tend I think to fall into two groups: those who come because they believe in the school's philosophy/ideology, and those who come because other schools or systems haven't worked for their children, and they hope this one will, even though they don't know much about it.

Increasingly now the balance is in favour of the first group, who tend to sign up for the long-term, whereas members of the second group are often inclined to quit easily when something goes against them.

Evidence of the shift in balance can be found in the fact that we now have a pretty low turnover of students.

I'll cheat a little and suspend for a paragraph the pretence that I'm writing this at the end of 2010, instead of in the middle of 2011, because I want to refer to a tabloid TV show that ran a program about Candlebark in April 2011. Asking if Candlebark was the best school in Australia (sadly the question was left unanswered) the show described us as a school "without rules, without boundaries, without bullying". This hyperbole made for a dramatic increase in enrolment enquiries, but was a pretty silly statement. Anyone who believes we are a school without rules or boundaries has profoundly misunderstood us, and as for the idea that we have no bullying.... Well, for a start, I as Principal am subjected to bullying all the time, from the Australian Government, from the Victorian Government, from ACARA and the VRQA and the VIT (I won't bore you with the details, but they're all acronyms for government departments that administer various aspects of education – and I'm using the word "education" loosely). When politicians stop bullying each other, when politicians and bureaucrats stop bullying us, when adults make a serious attempt to reduce bullying in the workplaces and in relationships, then we will see the most significant reduction in school bullying since Flashman was expelled from Rugby for barbequing Tom Brown.

I'm bullied by others too, including those parents who try to force courses of action on me that they believe will benefit their children, even if other children's rights are trampled on or ignored in the process. But I'm happy to report that there was less of that in 2010, and I attribute that reduction to the increased sense of stability that I mentioned in the first paragraph – and which I suppose is really all about people having learned to trust the school more as the years go by.

Anyway, time to get down to specifics. As usual, for this scintillating exercise I'm required to report on a number of particular topics, even though only an idiot would regard them as having any relevance to whether we are a successful school or not.

(a) contextual information about the school, including the characteristics of the student body: once again we enrolled our maximum of 100 students, and we continue to have a healthy waiting list. The students are spread relatively evenly from Grades Prep through 9. Class sizes in 2010 ranged from 8 to 14. Most

students come from Woodend and Gisborne, but there are others from Daylesford, Kyneton, Sunbury, Melbourne, Wallan, Castlemaine, Romsey, Newham and Lancefield.

(b) teacher standards and qualifications (as mandated in the relevant jurisdiction): in 2010 we had 9 full-time teachers, 3 part-time, and 3 visiting music teachers. They are all qualified and registered, and free of infectious diseases; it would be illegal for us to employ them otherwise.

(c) workforce composition, including indigenous composition: I don't know what this means. As well as the teaching staff, we employ a Business Manager, a Property Manager, a groundsman, a part-time cleaner, a chef/kitchen manager, and two part-time bus drivers. I haven't asked any of the staff whether they are "indigenous".

(d) student attendance at school, including:

(i) the rates of attendance for the whole school and for each year level; and

(ii) a description of how non-attendance is managed by the school:

Attendance rates were as follows:

Prep	96.12%
1	92.84
2	96.09
3	89.89
4	95.20
5	96.72
6	88.99
7	89.73
8	99.04
9	94.54

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It should be noted that these figures were distorted by the absence overseas by two students for a prolonged length of time, and the long-term illness of another student.

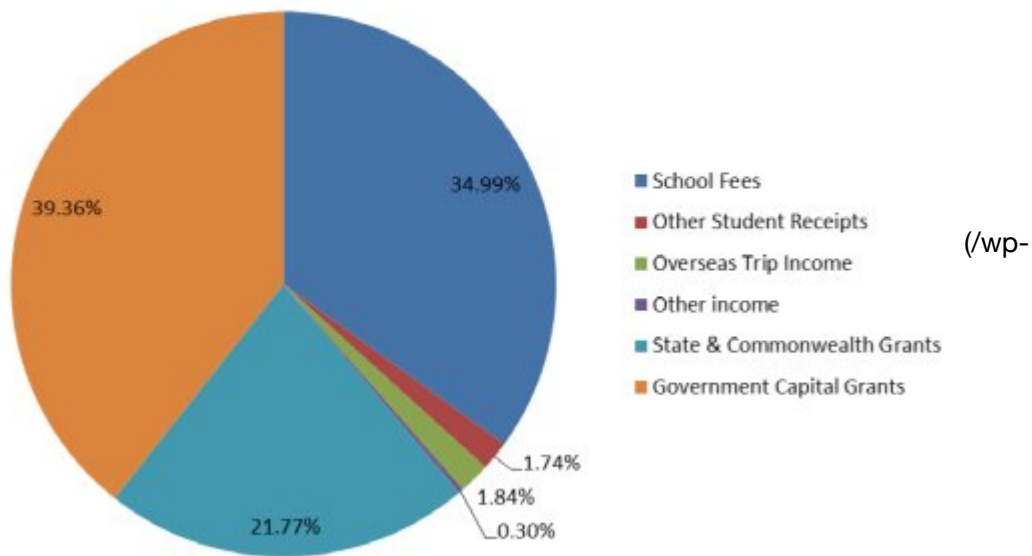
When students are away for any reason, parents are expected to contact the school by phone, e-mail or any other method that is reasonably efficient. In the case of unexplained absences, we contact the parents by phone or text. Absenteeism or truancy are not problems for us.

(f) student outcomes in standardised national literacy and numeracy testing: we do our best to minimize the interference to education caused by the NAPLAN tests each year. Despite our largely ignoring them our students do well in them, although the small numbers of students we have sitting the tests make any generalization about the results largely meaningless. Detailed results are publicly available on the infamous "my schools" website, for anyone who finds that time is hanging heavily on their hands, and who has not yet discovered "Plants vs Zombies".

(g) parent, student and teacher satisfaction with the school: we are in constant contact with parents, who are quick to report any concerns. However they regularly express, both verbally and in writing, satisfaction with the education their children are receiving. Turnover of students, as I have said, has become minimal; equally, turnover of staff has become minimal – no teaching staff left during or at the end of 2010. Students express a happiness in coming to school that is evident even at the bus stops, when they run eagerly to board the bus. All three groups are keen advocates of the school in the wider community – we get applications daily from people who have been told about the school by current or past parents, students or staff.

(i) school income broken down by funding source.

SOURCES OF INCOME 2010



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Highlights of 2010 again included many camps, sleepovers, trips and excursions, including another trip to Adelaide for WOMAD by the Year nine group, a day in Bendigo at the Art Gallery and Aquatics Centre for everyone, the screening of kids' films at Kyneton from the Little Big Shots Film Festival, Waiting for Godot, with Ian McClelland and some other guy (but without Godot), which some students loved and other students slept through, Melbourne for the grade 5/6 kids, Canberra for the grade 6/7 kids, and Bright for four days for everyone from prep through grade 6. Grade 7 and eight went on a bike camp to the Grampians, Year nines also went to Apollo Bay for a horse riding camp, did a four-day hike from Trentham to school, went to Latrobe University for three days for a science program, and spent six weeks in China and Mongolia.

Coming to visit us and/or perform or talk to the students in 2010 were World War II RAAF bomber pilot Colin Griffin, now in his 90s, the Koehne string quartet from Vienna, Pete the Plumber with a range of poly pipes and other musical instruments, Martial Funk (a very energised blend of movement and music), journalist Catherine Deveny talking about her personal struggle – triumphantly resolved – with dyslexia, TV producer Margot McDonald (“Dead Gorgeous”), the cheerful and friendly staff and students from Fitzroy Community School, a group of lovely high school kids and their teachers from Manor Lakes, and a terrific bunch of wwoofers, including Stefan (Germany), Holly, Guy (England), David and Elise (France).

We also had for the first time a week where visiting artists/tutors worked with our kids, in fields as diverse as drawing and printmaking, filmmaking, circus skills, pottery and dance/drama. But the two blokes teaching bush carpentry without the assistance of power tools probably stole the show, and many an intrigued spectator enjoyed inspecting the stools, wooden spoons, and other creations from the Candlebark participants.

Younger children spent the Arts week exploring the world of dinosaurs and creating their own wonderful dinosaur kingdom in and around Cecilia cottage.

Another first was our participation in the RACV energy challenge, at Maryborough. Grades 5 and 6 went, and rather stole the show themselves, doing outrageously well for a school which had never entered before, and winning the presentation award.

The generosity of one of our parents made possible a particular highlight of 2010, the opportunity for many children to spend a day sailing in a training catamaran on Port Phillip Bay, and for Grade 8, an overnight sailing trip to Queenscliff.

In 2010, we were much more involved in sport with other schools, including an enjoyable trip by the high school kids to Macedon Grammar. The primary schoolers participated in quite a lot of sports days, where Candlebark consistently performed at a surprisingly high level, given our numbers, in terms of both skills and, even more noticeably, teamwork. In chess, we also batted well above our weight (I know that's a mixed metaphor, but "boxed" sounds a bit aggressive). From more than 300 schools that participated in the 2010 Victorian chess championships, Candlebark was ranked 12th among secondary schools and 37th among primaries.

But often the most fun were the games and other stuff we made up for ourselves, including another season of European handball, and Tackle Frisbee on the top oval. We had a chess evening, hosted by Basil, where parents and kids got to learn a bit, and to compete in different games. The fete was a highlight again this year, and well supported by the adult members of the school community, so that we were able to send a good cheque off to the Pakistan flood relief appeal. Budding entrepreneurs were encouraged by their success at our garage sale day, which, like the fete was run entirely by students.

In 2010, a string ensemble was a wonderful addition to the music program, and it was lovely to see parents and teachers as well as students involved. Jorge Rodrigues joined our music staff to teach guitar, and quickly built up a good "book" of students.

Excitingly, the film Rory (Grade 4) has been making over a period of two years was released to the Candlebark public in 2010! 'Cataclysm' may have depicted a cataclysmic world in which zombies preyed on innocent passers-by, but the film's reception was anything but cataclysmic. The crowd loved it, and asked for more. Rory got great support from his classmates in making 'Cataclysm', so as well as it being a terrific creative venture, it was also an outstanding exercise in collaborative work.

We had a couple of really memorable soirées and we finished the year with the epic performance of a musical called "H2O". This was written by teacher Scott Hatcher and set to music by another teacher, Taran Carter. Their talents are awesome individually, and together, dazzling. And when those talents are combined with their huge commitment of time and energy, and supported by a dedicated team of staff members and the vivid and imaginative choreography of dance teacher Claire Rosenhain, the results

were wonderful. It was a big thrill this year to see the choreographic skills of year nine student Rosie Leverton again 'on display' ... her assistance with the 2010 production was again at an adult level – and to be corny for a moment, that is the kind of journey Candlebark is all about.

A major feature of 2010 was the commencement of works that will by the end of 2011 mean that every school building has been lengthened or widened, and as well, a sparkling new library constructed. A complex process involving two different building companies saw work of the highest professional quality carried out by the aptly named Thoroughbred Constructions on the library, and an unprofessional attitude by the second building company causing frustrating delays on three other buildings.

By the end of 2010 however the main classroom block was almost ready for occupancy, as was the library, two new classrooms attached to Cecilia cottage, and the new 'enlightened' art room. All of these were designed by Melbourne architect Paul Haar, who has given us buildings that are stunningly beautiful, economically constructed, environmentally exemplary, and delightful to visit. The highlight is the library, which has been built underground so that it can be used as a shelter from bushfire, in the unlikely event that such protection is needed. A building full of surprises, the library satisfies all the senses, and will undoubtedly be a Candlebark icon for years to come.