

Statutory Annual Report 2012

STATUTORY ANNUAL REPORT 2012

“As the mother of the most reluctant cyclist I’ve ever encountered I farewelled my daughter last Monday with the deepest dread. A phone call from her on Tuesday evening seemed to confirm my fears that this was not going to be one of her high points in life although it was a huge bonus to hear she hadn’t actually come off her bike in any dramatic or violent way.

“The contrast in her attitude when she called me two evenings later was one of those defining moments of parenthood. I’d pulled off the road, in the dark, to take the call, and for ten minutes I heard my daughter more elated, more proud of herself and more excited than I have ever heard her...

“I’d like to say a huge thank-you to all the wonderful teachers and parents who patiently nurtured my daughter along the way, encouraged her, kept up her morale and got her to this point where she now realises she can do what she truly believed she couldn’t and that the rewards more than make up for the slog and angst.

“This has marked a really important turning point in my daughter’s life and a physical high point I never thought she’d reach...”

This “unsolicited testimonial” came from a parent reacting to a bike camp that we ran in 2012 for all students from grade 4 upwards – with a few ring-ins from grade 3. After quite a number of training rides, the kids covered 279 km in five days, prompting another parent to write to me

“I am sure I have already mentioned that when I saw the 279km Bike Ride proposed in the email I did think that Candlebark had lost their collective mind. And I certainly didn’t feel that it was something our daughter could do. Not sure what she thought, she seems right up for a challenge and certainly didn’t seem perturbed. But until those training rides commenced I was still a little doubtful – not that I knew what I was worried about, but nice for it to come to nothing. It was really quite a fabulous experience for our family... and great to have a glowing and proud returnee in the form of our daughter. She seemed to have gotten as much as possible out of the experience....”

I made a stirring speech to the Candlebark students the other day, and was happy that most of them seemed to stay awake for most of the time. I said that basically it is our job to make them uncomfortable. Having a nice safe comfortable school, or making sure that kids have fun at school, are not matters with which we are particularly concerned. Only by pushing students into new territory, which sometimes involves putting them through uncomfortable experiences, can we ensure that they will be enabled to explore new concepts, to confront new ideas, to gain new understandings.

The bike camp was just one of many ways in which we sought to have our students cross new frontiers into potentially uncomfortable territory in 2012. Others included a trip to France by the Year nines, a camp at Freycinet peninsula in Tasmania which our grade five and six students shared with kids from the

Cottage School in Hobart, a four-day camp in tents at Beechworth for all the primaries, and the introduction of the Canadian-inspired Learning in Depth program for the entire school.

This last one, launched after staff attended a forum with Professor Kieren Egan, requires students to become experts in topics which we allocate them, and which they research for however long they are at Candlebark. It is designed to counter the bias in schools towards superficial learning across a wide range of subjects. Learning in Depth also incorporates multimedia presentations by students to audiences of parents, teachers and students – we saw the first of these at the end of 2012, and the best of them were absolutely outstanding. (Needless to say, the worst of them were abysmal, but as Keith Johnstone says “If you haven’t done it before, why do you think you should be good at it?”)

The trip to France was a good example of young people being taken to uncomfortable places... metaphorically speaking (the actual accommodation was pretty nice!) But kids who expected the six weeks to be some kind of teenage-dream-holiday (i.e. sleeping, sitting around, watching movies, texting friends back home, sleeping some more, playing on iPads, sleeping again...) had a rude shock when they found their accompanying teachers had other agendas... agendas which were about exploring other cultures, successful communal living, self-reliance, self-discipline, and interactions with new ideas and lifestyles.

Some of them never got it, but that’s OK. Some of them did get it. Upon her return, one of the students wrote to me (again an unsolicited testimonial!) to say:

“On Tuesday the 18th of September we left on an adventure; another thing which I don’t think I’ll ever go a day without talking about. The past six weeks have been beautiful, weird, funny, French, inspiring and maturing. There have been moments where I have felt like crying, out of homesickness, shock, and awe. There have been dinners where no one could help but laugh until we felt sick. There have been terrible puns, and heart-breakingly beautiful paintings. There have been epic ping pong battles, and soft, buttery croissants. An exhausting hike up to a glacier and the exhilaration of reaching it. Enormous markets selling to-die-for crepes and macarons. We’ve met incredibly generous people, who were willing to make an omelet for a bunch of teenagers who spoke a completely foreign language. I want to thank you Shaun and Sianon for taking on the giant responsibility of guiding us through this trip, and for making it so, so wonderful... Thank you for giving us this opportunity. Thank you for the best school in the world.”

In many ways I felt 2012 was a bit of a triumph really. If we were going to start softening on our initial commitment to first-hand experiences for our students, if we were going to show signs of staleness, 2012, our seventh year, might well be when it started to happen. Verily, verily did CS Lewis write “The safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without hills, without milestones, without challenge.”

But I don’t think we went anywhere near that insidious comfortable path towards hell, thanks to the creativity, daring and initiative of our teaching staff: Taran Carter, Wendy Powell, Sam Ford, Sianon Daley, Donna Prince, Basil Eliades, Joanne Croke, Michelle Ferris, Charles Robinson, Kris Rielly, Brent Tonkin, Shaun Dennis, Lizanne Richards, Iain Murray, and Tom Allen. We were very sad to say goodbye to Charles, Lizanne and Tom at the end of the year, and Michelle Ferris during the year, but Charles was looking for a full-time placement, Tom and his wife wanted to return to England, and Michelle and Lizanne left to have their first babies.

We were indeed fortunate that previous Candlebark teachers Wendy Wright and Sarita Ryan both indicated their desire to rejoin us in 2013.

Among other adventures in 2012, for some or all students, were a paddling camp along the Murray River, (for four days, passing through the largest River Red Gum forest in the world, and the fascinating Barmah Lakes wetland area), a trip to WOMAD in South Australia, an excursion to the Preston Mosque and to a Buddhist temple, workshops with a stand-up comedian (Josh Earls), a session with writer Isobelle Carmody, a hike to Mt Feathertop, a trip to the Ancient Rome exhibition, a night at "Top Acts" at the Palais Theatre, participation in the AgIdeas conference, a workshop with the Tasdance dance company, a visit to the Wallace and Gromit exhibition at Scienceworks, an excursion to the Melbourne Immigration Museum, a camp in the snow at Mt Stirling, participation in the Melbourne Writers' Festival, a camp at Lake Eppalock, an entry in the RACV challenge at Maryborough, an outing to a show at the National Institute of Circus Arts, a visit to the Little Big Shots Film Festival, and attendance at a performance of Romeo and Juliet by the Bell Shakespeare Company.

For many kids, the highlight of the Beechworth trip was the visit to the Beechworth Lolly Shop, which they enjoyed, despite the attitude of some of the shop staff, who seemed to believe that children were the last people who should be allowed in lolly shops. However, more memorable for our staff was the torrential rain and flooding on the last night, which tested the spirits of even the most resilient. It was great to see how even our five-year-olds coped with floodwaters lapping at their mattresses in the middle of the night 😊

Back at school, one of the features of the year was a series of morning meetings where various parents spoke to the students about their lives and their jobs. These included a mother who runs a company which helps architects enhance their 2-D plans and drawings, a nutritionist, a teacher of creative dance, an advocate for disabled people, a police officer who trains other police officers in the use of firearms, a doula, a corporate consultant, an entrepreneur who helps start-up businesses, a specialist in corporate strategy and verbal communication, a manager of ABC's Radio Australia, a vet, an ornithologist, a designer of websites, and a forensic investigator into aircraft crashes.

These wonderful presentations, representing such a diversity of personal interests and careers, helped give our students a better sense of the vastness of the world and the many opportunities available to them.

Among other visitors who talked to or ran workshops with our students in 2012 were TV producer Liz Re and her partner, "The Barefoot Investor", Malaysian educators Redzuan Aziz and Engku Zakiah, Paula Kelly from the State Library of Victoria with Dutch literary expert Henk Kraima, Director of Dromkeen John Oldmeadow, a group from Land for Wildlife, a British archaeologist, a young African entrepreneur who sells coffee at Melbourne Airport so he can send money back to his impoverished village in Africa, Canadian Kyla Tremblay who ran workshops on taxidermy and making prosthetic body parts for horror movies, and Norwegian Synnove Ryum, who is a photographer and graduate in Theatre studies.

We also had a terrific concert and series of workshops from European quartet The String Contingent.

Another interesting exercise for us in 2012 was Topophilia Week. "Topophilia" is a name that I always believed was coined by Chinese-American academic Yi-Fu Tuan in his book of the same name (published by Prentice-Hall in 1974). But it was art teacher Joanne Croke who made me aware that British poet John

Betjeman may have been the first person to use the word. It means literally “love of place”, but is defined by Yi-Fu Tuan as “the affective bond between people and place or setting”.

I’ll quote the opening to Chapter 2 from his book as an example of the way he understands the term:

“The Earth’s surface is highly varied. Even a casual acquaintance with its physical geography and its teeming lifeforms tells us as much. But the ways in which people perceive and evaluate that surface are far more varied. No two persons see the same reality. No two social groups make precisely the same evaluation of the environment. The scientific view itself is culture-bound – one possible perspective among many. As we proceed in this study, the bewildering wealth of viewpoints on both individual and group levels becomes increasingly evident; and we risk losing sight of the fact that however diverse our perceptions of environment, as members of the same species we are constrained to see things in a certain way. All human beings share common perceptions, a common world, by virtue of possessing similar organs. The uniqueness of the human perspective should be evident when we pause to ask how the human reality must differ from that of other animals. Contrary to appearances, a person cannot enter imaginatively into the life of his dog: canine sense organs diverge too far from our own for us to leap into the dog’s world of smells, sounds, and sights. But with goodwill one person can enter into the world of another despite differences in age, temperament, and culture...”

At Candlebark in 2012 we set out to get a richer and more imaginative understanding of our immediate environment by holding “Topophilia Week”, in which teachers offered various projects to students, including a study of habitats on the Candlebark campus (using, among other things, a motion sensor camera and hair tubes); a soundscape project aimed at listening to and “capturing” natural and artificial sounds on the property and in nearby towns; the use of local people, local histories, and the resources of the State Library to build up a collection of stories about the district and to relate those stories to the places where they actually occurred; a study of the relationship between this area and the indigenous people who have lived here for thousands of years; the construction of an innovative “family tree” using information from, among other places, the Lancefield Cemetery; a comprehensive study of birdlife on the Tye estate; and an art/mapping project designed to “capture” the property visually, in 2-D and 3-D.

The week was a stunning success, as vertically integrated groups took to these projects with enthusiasm and diligence, culminating in a memorable presentation of their findings on the last day.

Another adventure in 2012 was the introduction of fencing as an elective. Maestro Joseph D’Onofrio, who has been fencing for 65 years, told our parents at the end-of-term-two soiree that after just six months of learning fencing, the Candlebark students were about eight months ahead of where they should be. Fencing demands grace, athleticism, skill and absolute focus, making it an ideal Candlebark activity.

Chess continued to be highly successful. We brought in chess master and teacher Bill Jordan at regular intervals to work with the students, and after victories in a number of tournaments made the State finals once again. For a small school this is quite an achievement, and our results in the State finals were a tribute to the inspiration and work of Basil Eliades, who has guided chess with such a sure and dedicated touch for so many years now.

We also took part in a number of sporting fixtures, including orienteering, cross-country, and a variety of team sports. One of our most remarkable achievements was making the State finals in T-ball, where our kids played wonderfully, demonstrating great skills, but more importantly, terrific spirit and cooperation.

Sianon Daley continued the equestrian program which had started in 2011 under Jess Liston, and which has proved itself time and again as a highly effective way of helping selected students develop in empathy and awareness. Also in 2012, Kris Rielly coordinated a group of volunteer mothers and staff members for a neurological impress programme, working one-on-one with students who have reading difficulties.

The organic garden continued to flourish literally and metaphorically under the loving care of Brent Tonkin. It is such an important part of Candlebark life for so many students. The experience of working with earth, planting seeds and seedlings, watching them grow, nurturing them, and harvesting flowers, fruit and vegetables is irreplaceable.

The rich musical life of Candlebark continued in 2012, thanks to Taran Carter and visiting teachers Edwina Cordingley, John Payne, Lizanne Richards, Jorge Rodrigues, Caitlin Williams and Heather Cummins. More than half the students here choose to learn to play musical instruments, and our soirées this year were a delight. The Christmas concert featured an extraordinary range of performances, unveiled some new stars, and concluded with a mini musical which involved the whole school and ended the year in spectacular style.

To move on to more concrete matters: we started the year on a bright note, by finishing the alterations to the bunkhouse in January 2012. This meant that we had a huge new science lab and two beautiful classrooms, as well as an extended pantry, an extended laundry, and a vast shower-equipped disabled toilet.... That is to say, a toilet for disabled people: the toilet seems fully abled.

This meant that we have now finished lengthening and/or widening every building in the school over a period not much in excess of two years, not to mention the addition of a totally new building: the library/fire shelter.

In August 2012, our library won six Australian Timber Design Awards, for the Best Public or Commercial Building in Australia, the Best in the Southern Region of Australia, the Best Use of Engineered Timber Products, the Geoffrey Sanderson Perpetual Trophy, the People's Choice Award, and finally, the Overall Winner as the best new timber building in the whole of Australia. The presentations, in Sydney, were a triumph for our architect Paul Haar, and builders Thoroughbred Constructions.

We also started the year with a dozen new computers, as a result of a Federal government initiative. Excitingly, early in the year we were successful in establishing a new Internet connection to the school. Surrounded as we are by hills, rocks and trees, our Internet connection was dependent upon a satellite which had limited bandwidth available to us. After many enquiries over many years we at last found a company from Geelong, DuxTel, who had a feasible idea for connecting us to Romsey via a series of aerials. Unfortunately, things did not go smoothly. It took months of work by DuxTel, and our property manager Bob Mitchell, before the installation of an aerial on the Midhill Winery in Romsey, another aerial on a farm near the school, and an aerial at the school itself led to the magic moment when we were able to watch film clips on you-Tube at normal speed, jump from website to website without long waits, and watch e-mails pouring into our inboxes like water over Victoria Falls.

The integrity of DuxTel, their commitment to honouring their original undertaking, and their stamina in seeing this difficult task through to its conclusion filled us with respect for them and the ethical way in which they do business.

We were also successful, after interminable (and all too often ridiculous) hearings at VCAT, in getting permission to increase the cap on our student numbers from 100 to 196. Our barrister, Matthew Townsend, and town planning consultant, Chris Banon, were instrumental in bringing about this important outcome, and once again their integrity and assiduity was inspirational.

Politically, running a school continues to be very difficult. It was made more difficult when, in late 2012, the State government suddenly announced the end of the conveyance allowance, the cessation of which would have meant an enormous financial burden for Candlebark. Surprisingly, but to our relief, Victorian Education Minister Martin Dixon was open-minded enough to review and reverse the decision; or at least the part of it which would have so unfairly affected us.

The politicising of education at a Federal level has led, amongst other things, to the abysmal NAPLANS testing system. It is difficult to estimate the damage NAPLANS, or more specifically the publication of NAPLANS results on the myschool website, has done to Australian education. But these tests, often poorly compiled – there have been plenty of times when I haven't been able to answer all the questions in the grade 3 and grade 5 comprehension papers – administered with sloppy security procedures – couriers frequently deliver the question papers late-afternoon, and dump them on the veranda outside the office, where they sit all night, and of course if kids are away from school they can sit the tests a few days later – administered to the wrong age groups and at the wrong time of year – how ludicrous to test Year 7 students, who, in most schools, have barely been at the school a term and a half – and marked, in the case of the writing tasks at least, by people who have apparently no appreciation of irony and little sense of style, can make or break schools, without regard to the infinite number of variables which can affect a school's performance.

Let me give one example of how NAPLANS has changed Australian education. For the first few years of these tests, students were asked to do a piece of creative writing. Suddenly, with little warning and no apparent consultation, the task was changed to one of persuasive writing. The reason? If you read the fine print, you can work out the reason. The change has been made to stop students cheating. Apparently there was evidence of students learning pieces of creative writing by heart, going into the exam room, and writing out their learned pieces, presumably after making some tenuous connection in the first sentence between the given topic and the piece that had been learned.

In one fell swoop creative writing has been dramatically downgraded in Australian schools. Instead of nine-year-olds writing about pirates and magic kingdoms and dinosaurs and enchanted forests they now write about the desirability of everybody having cooking lessons. A few years ago the topic was "That was fantastic!"; that has now been replaced by "Too much money is spent on toys and games".

Schools are so terrified by NAPLANS that they no longer allocate much time for students to do creative writing. Persuasive writing is the new priority in Australian English curricula.

We make a point of advising parents of their legal right to withdraw children from NAPLANS testing, and I'm pleased to say that a number of parents exercise that right.

I'm required in this report to give "a description and analysis of student learning outcomes in statewide tests and examinations for the current year and for the last two years...". The only test or examination to which this can refer, for us, is NAPLANS, but the meaning of the phrase "student learning outcomes" in this context eludes me. I can only assume it is bureaucrat-speak for "marks" or "grades". A description

or analysis of these is pretty much meaningless for us, not just because of the inadequacies of NAPLANS, but because our numbers do not allow any useful generalisations to be made. For example, in reading, 16% of our year seven students were in the sixth band or lower in 2012 (compared to 42% for Australia as a whole) but 16% of our year seven students equals... two kids.

10% of our year nine students tested in the sixth band or lower (compared to 25% for Australia as a whole) but 10% of our year nine students equals... one person.

The actual results can be found on the myschool website but there are only two remarks I can make about them which are of any significance. Firstly, the trajectory of students who have been at the school for two or more NAPLANS tests, has, where it can be measured, been very positive. Secondly, our spelling results are never as good as we would like, but we have always been aware that many of our younger students, whilst they have good phonic awareness, take a while to develop a comparable sight vocabulary. However most students have reached good spelling standards by the time they complete Year nine, and we are increasing the emphasis on spelling in the junior years.

The other great creation of the two laypeople who have taken charge of Australian education in recent years – Julia Gillard and Peter Garrett – is the national curriculum. A couple of years ago John Hattie said to me that 90% of the things we talk about in education are of no importance. For me, the national curriculum is in that 90%. I've been teaching for 33 years now. I've seen a lot of curricula come and go. I've ignored all of them. I look at the people who have been running around Australia so busily for the last couple of years devising the national curriculum, and feel sorry that they have wasted so much time and energy. There are only two subjects in primary school and lower secondary where a sequential curriculum is required, and they are maths and LOTE. In English, humanities, science, music, art it doesn't much matter where we roam, what we investigate, as long as we are exploring the world and the universe, as long as we are learning to understand ourselves and others and our relationships, as long as we are learning about life and death. In the thirteen years they spend at school, so long as students are exposed to a wide range of teachers, ideas and experiences, they will be well educated. If this was the case when I first started teaching, and I believe it was, then it is even more the case now, where there is no longer an argument for a set body of knowledge that needs to be acquired (except in maths and LOTE), because all information is available from Google. In five to ten seconds I can find out anything, from how to treat a sick chook, how many moons are believed to be orbiting Jupiter, the meaning and origin of the word peripatetic, and the producers of Charlie Chaplin's early movies.

Putting amateurs like Gillard and Garrett in charge of education is typical of the way education is regarded in Australia. We might as well put tow truck drivers in charge of neurology departments in hospitals, have dentists sit on the High Court, or have winemakers determine the engineering standards for freeways and bridges.

Anyway... this report is turning into a marathon. It's over 4000 words, which is ridiculous. So, I'll finish as I started, with an e-mail sent to me by a parent. I finished the 2011 Annual Report the same way: it's great having someone else do so much of the work for me.

So, halfway through 2012, I received this e-mail from a parent describing a conversation she had had with her son. I'll change the names, just in case anyone is still reading this document:

'Hi John/Wendy,

For your collection! A conversation with Morris last week:

“Quentin and I are going to cut off John Marsden’s head...”

“Why?”

“So Quentin can be principal. We want to change the school rules...”

“Why?”

“We’re going to change the school rules to have school on weekends and in the holidays...”

... Seriously though, some end of Term 2 prep feedback. Morris is absolutely loving Candlebark & the diverse regular timetable means he’s constantly engaged (although exhausted). His current favourites are chess, maths, English, activities day, clarinet in music group with Taran, French... Then there’s his animated descriptions about what he does in Brent’s garden clean up or in biodiversity & his detailed accounts about visiting cemetery, museum, ‘old fashioned houses’ & circus last week, His delight in choosing/doing different activities – from Sam’s campfire cooking, to Iain’s Lego, Shaun’s electronics, lantern making etc to Tom’s football etc. Tonight he asked ‘how many more years until year 9?’ He was happy when he counted that he had had $9 + 1 = 10$ more years at Candlebark...

So a big thank you to the whole Candlebark gang...’

And a big thank you from me too,

John (not yet decapitated) Marsden

Attendance is generally satisfactory, but in 2012 was affected by some long-term illness, seasonal illnesses (flu), and absences of some students on long family trips. 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.

The school’s financial situation is strong, with debt well-controlled, and buildings and plant in excellent condition. A small trading surplus was recorded in 2012.

It’s required of us, to maintain our registration as a school, that we “support and promote the principles and practice of Australian democracy, including a commitment to elected government, the rule of law, equal rights for all before the law, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and association, and the values of openness and tolerance.”

We do support and promote the principles and practice of Australian democracy, but note that glib and superficial statements are not helpful in developing the kind of sophisticated and complex thinking that we expect from our students. We would not see a list of slogans, like the one above, as particularly helpful or meaningful in encouraging understanding of the workings of Australian democracy.

For example, according to the Australian government's own website: "Australia's Head of State is the Queen of Australia, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Under the Australian Constitution, the executive power of the Commonwealth is vested in the Queen and is exercised by the Governor-General as the Queen's representative."

Her Majesty, our Head of State, is not of course part of an elected government, deriving her powers from her position as an hereditary monarch.

According to Wikipedia, the Governor General, as the Queen's representatives, holds the following reserve powers:

- *The power to dissolve (or refuse to dissolve) the House of Representatives. (Section 5 of the Constitution)*
- *The power to dissolve Parliament on the occasion of a deadlock. (Section 57)*
- *The power to withhold assent to Bills. (Section 58)*
- *The power to appoint (or dismiss) Ministers. (Section 64)*

These powers are generally and routinely exercised on Ministerial advice, but the Governor-General retains the ability to act independently in certain circumstances, as governed by convention. It is generally held that the Governor-General may use their powers without ministerial advice in the following situations:

- *if an election results in a Parliament in which no party has a majority, the Governor-General may select the Prime Minister*
- *if a Prime Minister loses the support of the House of Representatives, the Governor-General may appoint a new Prime Minister*
- *if a Prime Minister advises a dissolution of the House of Representatives, the Governor-General may refuse that request, or request further reasons why it should be granted. It is worth noting that convention does not give the Governor-General the ability to dissolve either the House of Representatives or the Senate without advice.*

The use of the reserve powers may arise in the following circumstances:

- *if a Prime Minister advises a dissolution of Parliament on the occasion of a deadlock between the Houses, the Governor-General may refuse that request*
- *if the Governor-General is not satisfied with a legislative Bill presented to him, he or she may refuse Royal Assent*
- *if a Prime Minister resigns after losing a vote of confidence, the Governor-General may select a new replacement contrary to the advice of the outgoing Prime Minister*
- *if a Prime Minister is unable to obtain Supply and refuses to resign or advise a dissolution, the Governor-General may dismiss him or her and appoint a new Prime Minister.*

In 1975, the Governor General, did famously and controversially dissolve the elected Senate and House of Representatives, relying upon section 57 of the Constitution, without reference to ministerial advice or to convention!

We note also many examples of departure from the rule of law in Australia, by the Australian government itself, and that these departures can seriously impact the concept of equal rights for all before the law – for example, the violation of international treaties to which Australia is a party concerning the rights and

treatment of refugees.

Referring again to the list of principles to which schools must adhere, we note that although freedom of religion is more or less enshrined in the Australian Constitution (section 116), freedom of association is not. It is however specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966). Australia is a signatory to the latter and Australians can complain to the United Nations Human Rights Committee if they believe their rights to freedom of association have been violated, and they have been unable to obtain redress from Australian courts.

Although many people would see the “values of openness and tolerance” specified in the list as desirable, within a liberal democracy people are free to hold beliefs which others might view as narrow-minded and intolerant. Many of the policies and practices of successive Australian governments – for example, the limiting of “marriage” to heterosexual couples, and the fencing of refugee camps with electric wire – are viewed by many Australians as narrow-minded and intolerant. The paradoxical nature of liberal western democracies like Australia is such that they are expected to be broadminded enough to tolerate and even accommodate ignorance and bigotry.

It is hoped that the preceding helps to give a sense of the depth of thinking that is encouraged and respected at Candlebark: a way of looking at the world which we believe to be of greater value than essentially meaningless statements about extremely complex matters.