

Statutory Annual Report 2013

If I were to write a template for reports by schools on themselves it would begin with euphoric statements about the wonderful, marvellous, astonishingly good year just concluded (due in no small measure, we can infer, to the leadership of the Principal writing the report), followed by a glowing description of the improvements in the VCE and NAPLAN results, then an account of some individual acts of brilliance (“Justin, in Year 10, was runner-up in the International Angry Birds Championship, held in Shanghai”), and finally a panegyric to the dedicated, selfless, hard-working teaching staff, the like of which cannot be found the length and breadth of Australia.

No mention is made of the fact that Justin was plucked out of the obscurity of Wackawacka High School, and offered a valuable Angry Birds scholarship to attend the exclusive and expensive St Dennis’, so that he could add further lustre to that glorious establishment, and help them in their quest for bragging rights over St Cedric’s and Mayfair Grammar and Mothball College and other such institutions.

Here at Candlebark we actually had a national champion in a popular sport a couple of years ago, and from our small numbers we currently have a state champion in Judo, and two students selected for Victorian representative teams, one in hockey and one in baseball. But I’m sorry to say that we as a school contributed nothing to their successes in any of those activities. On the other hand, we didn’t give them scholarships either 😊

Ah well, such is life, as Ned memorably remarked. I had better get down to business.

2013 was, like every year in the short history of Candlebark, redolent with good and bad moments, successes and failures, triumphs and disappointments. So how do I know the school is, in general, going O.K.? From the sweet smiling faces of the angelic kiddies as they run eagerly through the school gates each morning, avid for another day of learning... Well, believe it or not, sickening though that description is, there is a modicum of truth in it. Most of our students love coming to school, nearly all the time. And they’re not afraid to say so. Most of their parents are extremely enthusiastic about the school, and aren’t afraid to say so. Every second application I get comes from someone who has been told by a Candlebark parent that this is a great school. I actually wish that person would give up and accept that we don’t have any places. Boom boom.

It is also reassuring that we continue to see remarkable stories of achievements by our ex-students. One of them, Josh Thorpe, went from Candlebark to Kyneton High School and in 2013 was one of only two students in Victoria to achieve a perfect score in VCE Systems Engineering. And he was only in Year 11. How well I remember his mother remarking at a meeting of parents that Josh had done more in one term at Candlebark than in his previous seven years of schooling lumped together. So we’ll take all the credit for Josh’s success.

Oh, O.K., maybe Kyneton High contributed a bit as well.



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TEACHER MR CHRIS LE MESSURIER INITIATED A WONDERFUL ART PROJECT WITH GRADE 3 STUDENTS IN 2013, BASED ON THE WORK OF ANDY GOLDSWORTHY. THE “TRANSFORMATION” OF NATURE INTO ART, WITH MINIMAL YET CREATIVE HUMAN INTERVENTION, GAVE STUDENTS A WHOLE NEW UNDERSTANDING OF ART’S POSSIBILITIES.

I can also tender our 2013 programme-of-activities-and-events as evidence that we’re working hard to fulfil our charter, which is, amongst other things, to enable young people to have as many meaningful and helpful first-hand-experiences as possible.

“Educational” activities of course, though I’m not sure what kind of activities aren’t educational.

So (deep breath) in 2013 some or all of our students had a four-day camp at Queenscliff, went to the WOMAD music festival in Adelaide, toured the Police Helicopter Wing at Essendon, performed at two soirees, saw a performance by the Women’s Circus, went to the theatrical performances of the plays War Horse and Boxman, attended a concert by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, watched the Asanti Dance Theatre, explored the Karlsruhe Cemetery, visited the Immigration Museum, participated in the AG Ideas Conference, viewed the Monet Exhibition at the National Gallery, went to Fresh Science at Melbourne Museum, took part in “Koori Kids’ Day” at the Arts Centre, made a trip to Mt William Quarry in the company of indigenous guides, camped along the Great Ocean Road, camped at a horse stud to see foals being born, undertook a three-day excursion to the Warrnambool area, partied all night in Melbourne as they enjoyed the first White Night event held in that city, toured Red Beard Bakery at Trentham, enjoyed an urban camp in Melbourne, saw the play A Common Purpose at Kyneton Town Hall, went to the Arts Centre to see BLAK, (a dance concert by the group of indigenous Australians who comprise the Bangarra dance theatre), took part in a snow camping/skiing camp at Mt Stirling, listened to a debate at the Melbourne Town Hall on the meaning and importance of Anzac Day, watched Proximity

by the Australian Dance Theatre, participated in workshops in Kyneton with author/illustrator Mark Wilson, attended two Malthouse dance performances called 247 Days (Chunky Move) and Skeleton respectively, went to a surf camp, hiked the Lederberg Gorge (a three-day trip), paddled part of the Murray in canoes, and (for Grades Prep, 1 and 2) took off on a four day bike camp along the Goulburn River (along the banks of the river that is; they didn't attempt to pedal on water).

The whole school was involved in a spectacular musical production at Kyneton Town Hall (Doctor the Musical, a play based on Dr Who and written, orchestrated and choreographed entirely by staff and students). We are seriously lucky to have the dramatic flair and theatrical experience of Ms Donna Prince, who was primarily responsible for the production, strongly supported by Mr Taran Carter, who wrote the music and trained and conducted the musicians, Mr Basil Eliades, and choreographers Ms Sarita Ryan, and student Bayden Patterson.

Taran Carter's work Mixed Precipitation had its world premiere at Melbourne Town Hall on December 10, 2013. It was a piece of music composed for organ and six percussionists, performed by Synergy Percussion, "the most exciting percussion group in Australia", with the Melbourne Town Hall organ played by the renowned Brendan Lukin. It's very exciting to have such a highly esteemed musician as Taran on the staff, and to see the respect accorded him by the wider music community as well as within Candlebark.

Other "external activities" in 2013 included a dance piece/play which was prepared by the Year 9/10 students. They worked on this for a long period of time with Sarita Ryan, and then presented it to other schools at the Malthouse Theatre, where it was greatly acclaimed.

The Year 10 students did a 10-day course at Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, which they found very worthwhile. We commend this exceptional centre to other schools and/or families.

Older students also led hikes/camps for younger students, as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award program, which was introduced in 2013 as a result of a lot of planning and hard work by Mr Iain Murray. Exceptional outdoors leadership was again provided by the indefatigable and imperturbable Mr Sam Ford, who has inspired so many Candlebark students in his six years here.

We competed against other schools in sports including orienteering, cross-country, cricket, soccer, basketball, athletics and tennis, continuing to achieve results disproportionate to our numbers. It seems that these successes must be attributed partly at least to that elusive quality known as "spirit".

And thanks to the energy and inspiration of the legendary Mr Basil Eliades, we continued to scale new heights in chess, competing in many tournaments. In one tournament, we came second overall, out of 20 schools, and grade 5 boy Bailey Gandolfo beat 319 other competitors to become regional champion for the Macedon Ranges.

Given that he learned to play chess at Candlebark, we'll take the credit for him!

In 2013 we continued with the Learning in Depth program, pioneered by Canada's Professor Kieren Egan, but we are not yet sure of its value, and will continue to review it throughout 2014.

I believe we did well again in the infamous NAPLANS tests, although I only glanced at the results. In my view, they continue to be a waste of time, energy and money; implemented for political purposes and with no educational benefit. Anyone who's seriously interested can however find our results easily

enough on the ACARA website. Or they could go plant a tree instead.

But, coming back to my opening paragraph, are our staff really “dedicated, selfless, hard-working,” etc.? Well yes, and I can prove it, with one simple statistic. We employ the equivalent of 14 full-time teaching staff, and between them they clocked up 219 nights of sleepovers and camps in 2013. To save you doing the maths, I can tell you this averages almost exactly 17 nights per person for the year. And normally it would be more than that: every year apart from 2013 the senior students, accompanied by two teachers, undertake a six week major trip, which would have brought the total number of “sleepover” nights to more than 300. (We didn’t do such a trip in 2013, because our oldest students, the Year tens, had already done it in 2012, as Year nines.)

If you can find a school anywhere in Australia which can beat that figure, I suggest you enrol your kids there quick smart.

We applauded the decision by Mr Shaun Dennis to become an Australian citizen during the year. He immeasurably enriched our population by doing so! Shaun is a dedicated, adventurous and exciting science teacher, who puts his hand up for everything from opera to ska band to AGIdeas to bus driving.

Many major and minor works of improvement and repair/renovation/restoration were undertaken by our much-loved Property Manager Mr Bob Mitchell, and his cheerful assistant Mr John O’Rourke. These projects included the repair of the charming “lady with the umbrella” statue/ fountain, near the school gates, which was, not for the first time in her life, felled and badly damaged by a falling branch. It took a great deal of skill to bring her back to excellent condition. Bob and John also constructed a stone wall at the entrance gates, which beautifully matched the existing walls, and restored symmetry to that area.

In this report I also particularly want to thank our Business Manager, Ms Michelle Mitchell, whose tireless work and extraordinary range of skills continue to ensure the school’s efficient management.

Visitors to the school in 2013 included the Italian baroque violin virtuoso, Davide Monti, a camera crew from the Today show, many visiting teachers from schools all around Australia and overseas, mothers of younger students for a Mother’s Day luncheon, poet Myron Lysenko, international chess star Leonid Sandler, a group of wheelchair athletes, visiting theatre companies performing the plays Hachiko, In a Shoebox, and Tragic Magic, charismatic samba exponent Carlos Ferreira, teachers and students from Heskett Primary School, and ex-Candlebark-teacher Scott Hatcher and a group of students from Western Autistic School.

We were delighted that outstanding Australian animator, Tim Westhaven, who has worked on a number of major Hollywood productions, and who has a son at Candlebark, was able to visit several times. He gave a great presentation about his work and ran a workshop with kids.

A popular regular visitor was Mr Peter Yencken, who made bows and arrows with the Grade 5 students. He also worked on traditional fire-lighting skills with Year seven students, and on the making of leatherwork bags with the Grade four children.

We had an Arts & Artists’ Week, where students chose one activity from a range offered – metal sculpture, art, print-making, bush-skills, musical theatre, sculpture, circus skills, drama, gizmos and gadgets, photography, and Theatre: creating a space. At the end of the week a variety of performances

and exhibitions reinforced the value of the workshops in developing individual skills, concentration, creativity and social growth (see, I can use meaningless educational jargon when I have to :))

We also had another Writing Week in 2013, where students in vertically integrated groups tried a wonderful variety of writing activities.

Thanks to the good people at Cobaw Community Health, we were able to offer parents and teachers a Youth Mental Health First Aid Course, which ran for six weeks, one night a week. This was so successful that we repeated it later in the year. The course was booked out both times.

One of the huge range of wonderful ideas initiated by teacher Ms Wendy Powell in 2013 was a grade one Father's Day bush walk/treasure hunt/dinner/footy game/coffee/catch-up and gift-giving session. One father who attended wrote to say "I told (my son) it was one of the best evenings I've had. And I meant it. To be made to feel special like that means an awful lot, in what in many ways has been a tough year for us. I won't forget the little bloke's smile as I turned up to the car park for the event. He probably won't forget my face when I saw what I had to walk across to get our treasure! It was wonderful being taken out of my comfort zone. Thanks Wendy – I know it's an awful lot of extra work and effort from you to organise and run this. I know from talking to the other dads that we all appreciated it."



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TEACHER/PHOTOGRAPHER MR CHRIS LE MESSURIER CAPTURED THIS IMAGE OF AIDAN (GRADE 1)

Food is a vital part of life at Candlebark. The way in which staff and students enjoy morning tea and lunch together, choosing from the same range of foods, is a strong factor in the fostering of community spirit. We are exceptionally fortunate to have Ms Fiona Halpin as the Catering Manager. Tireless, patient,

modest, good-humoured and attentive to every detail, Fiona serves up three or four hot meals a week, as well as providing dozens of other options every day – which includes catering to vegetarians, vegans, diabetics, people who are glucose intolerant and people who are lactose intolerant. And people who just don't like cucumber (blush).

In 2013 the kitchen garden got vaster and vaster, faster and faster, (sorry, couldn't resist that), and under the loving care of Mr Brent Tonkin became an even more important part of school life. We joined the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Foundation, and a large number of students learned to cook delicious meals (pasta and pasta?) from fresh and healthy ingredients which they grew and picked themselves.

One of the functions catered by Brent and the grade 4/5's was a farewell luncheon for the man who initiated fencing at Candlebark, Maestro Joseph D'Onofrio. Maestro's long and distinguished teaching career was brought to an end by a medical diagnosis, but the respect and affection in which he is held by the fencing boys was evident in the way they spoke about him at the luncheon.

He was kind enough to seek out a new fencing teacher for us, Mr Aleksey Danilov, who has successfully built upon the foundations established by Maestro. It's very pleasing to see fencing continue to flourish at Candlebark.

2013 was the first full year for our new library, about three quarters of which was paid for by the Commonwealth government, under the Rudd/Gillard school-buildings-initiative. For us, this program was an absolute winner, enabling us to construct a library of magnificent proportions, great value and aesthetic splendour 😊

Teacher Ms Jo Croke worked creatively and tirelessly to give the library a stronger sense of identity, and to help it take its valued place in Candlebark's everyday life.

Joining the staff in 2013 was the irrepressible M. Steve Pollet, from Lille, who teaches French. For the first time we included Metalwork and Woodwork in the curriculum, adding Mr Terry Willis to our "dedicated, selfless, hard-working teaching staff, the like of which cannot be found the length and breadth of Australia". We've been able to develop an excellent workshop area for these lessons. During 2013 Terry put together a stunning collection of photos of school life, curating them for an exhibition which became part of the Ballarat Foto (sic) Expo.

Half-way through 2013 we were delighted to welcome back Ms Jess Liston, after a couple of years spent in Germany. Jess replaced Ms Sianon Daley, who contributed so much to the school, but eventually made the difficult decision to head back north. One of Sianon's initiatives was to tutor five Year 7 kids to represent the school at the Rostrum Public Speaking awards at Ballarat. They acquitted themselves with distinction. Although they were competing against Year nine and ten students from other schools, Maya Tran made the semifinals. A parent who attended the event wrote to me to say that our students "blew me away with their individuality, energy, confidence and passion for what they were doing. The Candlebark students were a breath of fresh air to listen to and watch. One of the Adjudicators commented to me that there was no going to sleep during any of the speeches from the Candlebark students."

This was the first time we had entered any competition like this, so it was an auspicious beginning.

Jess Liston has continued the equestrian program, which she started, then handed over to Sianon Daley. This program has been of such benefit to so many students.

At the end of the year we said good-bye for the second time to Ms Sarita Ryan, and for the first time to Mr Iain Murray. Sarita is off to the UK to do a Masters, after a stint in Timor Leste, and Iain is exploring a number of interests, especially film-making... and... um... taxidermy. They were awesome contributors to Candlebark, and when they visited in early 2014 were received like pop-stars 😊

Another first in 2013 was the introduction of Year 10, making Candlebark a P-10 school. We decided to take this step because we thought it would be of more benefit to our students if they were to go to their next school in Year 11, rather than Year 10. At many schools, Year 11 students are treated with much greater courtesy by teachers, illogical though that may be. It's also, for most students, the start of VCE studies, which makes it a natural transition point.

So... how else do I know that things are reasonably OK at Candlebark? Well, on the last morning of term two, just before the morning meeting started, someone turned on the CD player that had been used at the soiree the night before, and the voices of the Bee Gees filled the building. Within moments a spontaneous disco began, with kids of all ages and both genders – and not a few staff as well – dancing happily and uninhibitedly. Boringly, I didn't participate, but watched as the music changed to an Abba song and the dancing continued. Even more boringly, I eventually brought it to an end, so we could have the morning meeting.

But I did think as I watched the disco that these things can only happen in a school which is in fundamentally good shape.

Perhaps though I should offer some more substantive evidence that we're going okay. For example, a pair of visiting teachers, from Victoria, came here at the instigation of one of our ex-students. Afterwards I received an email from one of them, which I've shortened slightly by taking out some comments which are irrelevant to Candlebark. I've also concealed the identity of the two ex-Candlebark students:

"As the dust settles on the second last week of term and all the correction and report writing that this time of year entails, I can finally sit down to write a note thanking you for having us at Candlebark on Wednesday. It was a fantastic experience that thoroughly reinvigorated me; I feel like I will walk across the end of term finish line rather than inching over it with my usual hand over fist crawl. You and all the people that you have at Candlebark have created a very inspiring school.

"I've been wanting to visit for a long time – I first met A very early in 2012 at the interviews our College holds to introduce the students to their VCE experience. She spoke so fondly of her time at Candlebark that the school came back on my radar...

"Aside from A being a really lovely girl, as we got in to the swing of the semester she stood out because she is my very favourite thing in a student; a thinker who holds me to task. She asked 'why' more than almost every other student. 'Why was it that way?' 'Why look with that perspective?' 'Why believe what Thucydides says is true?' And I loved it. This year I am lucky enough to be teaching her again in Philosophy and I also met B in Classical Societies. B as you know is another exceptional student.

"Having sung their praises I want to clarify; I am not saying that either of them always get everything right or that they are perfect. But both of them are actively involved in their education and take responsibility for when things go right and things go wrong. They think about it and engage with it rather than opening their mouths and waiting for me to spoon feed it to them.

“And as I walked around Candlebark I saw my truest belief about education realized – a school that not only encourages every single student but insists that they are responsible for their thinking and their learning. I absolutely loved that you were honest about what the school is and what it is not.

“Candlebark is the most natural type of education there is – one that values all learning no matter the subject whilst insisting on academic rigor across all of them, that fosters curiosity and creativity by allowing students to feel that their interests and passions have worth and value. It also – a point of significant envy as I had twenty nine students in one of my classes this semester – invests in an environment that recognizes a community is built by getting to know the people in it. Keeping things small is a priority because building relationships with students is what makes any of it meaningful.

“Candlebark is not an education that is about the image it projects. It is not an educational production line, nor is it about a brand. It does not insist on an organic, carbon neutral, politically correct approach that turns each child into a confused accessory that has never – travesty – eaten a Freddo Frog.

“Thank you so much for having me. I really hope that when my daughter is old enough we are in a position (geographically and financially) to put her on the waiting list. You offer the type of education I value so much – as a parent and a teacher. It was an absolute pleasure.”

As you can imagine, I would happily settle for that as a summary of the school's health.

This from a parent of a student in one of the secondary classes, a girl who started at Candlebark in 2013 (again the identity is concealed): *“From dropping my daughter off at her last school and wondering whether she would actually go in I have watched my Celia transform into a happy, flourishing kid who now has friendships (hurrah) and loves going to school. Candlebark has changed her life... I just wanted you to know I am a very grateful parent.”*

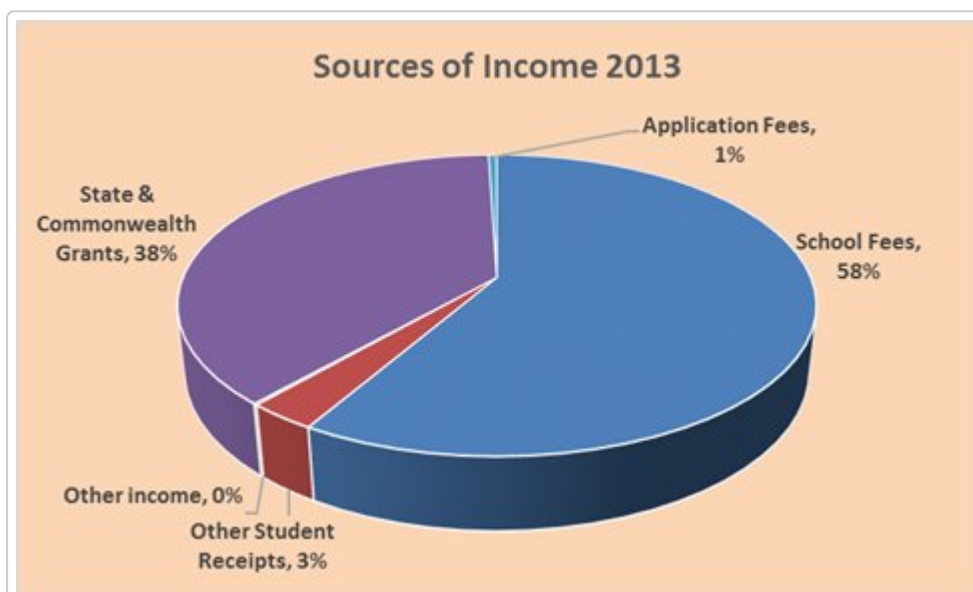
When the students in grades 6 through 10 came back to school after seeing the Barrangarra Dance Theatre, I listened to their comments and was delighted by the evidence of their keen appreciation and enjoyment of what they had seen. Teacher Sarita Ryan remarked on the sophistication of our kids as an audience: she felt they were connecting with the performance on a very different level to the majority of students present from other schools. Not half an hour later I had a quick conversation with a visiting dance teacher, who was taking a ballet class after school here one day a week. She told me that in all her years of teaching dance she had never worked with a group possessed of such spirit and energy as the Candlebark students.

Just before that, I'd had an interview with the father of one of our recent graduates. He told me how at his child's new school the teachers at the Parent-Teacher interviews told him that his son, just six months out of Candlebark, was the most mature boy in Year 10. It was also gratifying to hear that this boy who had come to us in Grade 3 with exceptionally severe learning difficulties, had recently scored 86% in a science exam. I remember him hiding under his desk in grade 3 whenever I looked for a student to answer a question.

Then came a note from ex-Candlebark parents, with news of their son, who was “in at the start” of Candlebark, in 2006. They wrote: “D. is at Melb Uni and is enrolled in a Bachelor of Environments degree. His interest at this point is in a geo/political major with a view to post grad Law. He has an interest in working in developing nations, partly informed by a social justice/ medical support trip to a remote community in PNG as a Year 11 student.”

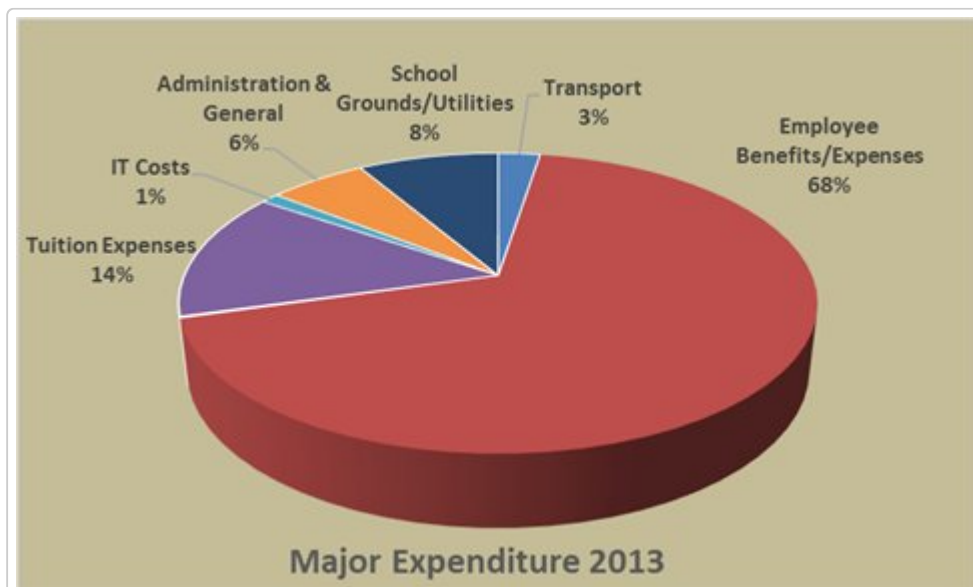
Parents of another ex-student wrote: “You’d be interested to know that E. is doing well at her school and is excited about doing her deb ball there this year. She’s again in the production (minor part) as part of Theatre Studies for the Pajama Game. She’s also doing costume design, and some props work with her artistic skills. She’s also the ‘drama captain’ of the production. Last year she topped her class with her VCE English result, although she was only in year 10.”

About halfway through term three 2013 I took my first substantial break from Candlebark since the school opened. I had been invited to the Edinburgh Literary Festival, and my wife Kris and I made the trip, with our boys, and then went on to France. During our absence, Sarita Ryan took charge of the school, which she did to great effect, assisted by the multitalented Ms Donna Prince and Mr Brent Tonkin. It’s always great to know that a school can continue on its merry way, without missing a beat, while the Principal is gallivanting around Europe, and Candlebark certainly did. I’m very grateful to all the staff for making sure that nobody even noticed I was gone...



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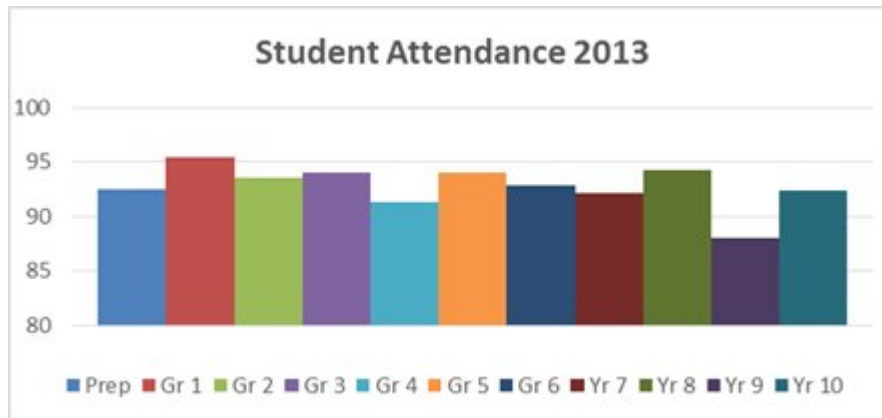
BEAUTIFUL COLOURFUL GRAPHS WHICH SHOW IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND SHOULD BE TAKEN VERY VERY SERIOUSLY



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BEAUTIFUL COLOURFUL GRAPHS WHICH SHOW IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND SHOULD BE TAKEN VERY VERY SERIOUSLY

We made a surplus of about \$3,050 for the year, which was about right.



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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.

For 2013, Year 9 attendances appear to be quite low, mainly attributable to one student travelling in Europe for an extended period of time, and two students with significant health issues.

HARD FACTS THAT WE ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT:

We finished 2013 with 128 students, including two indigenous students.

Teachers 2013:

12 full time teachers

4 part time teachers

4 visiting music teachers

3 part time Aides

All teachers are VIT registered.

Other staff:

Business Manager

Property Manager

Grounds Staff

Bus driver

Cook/kitchen manager

Class sizes ranged from 8 to 17.

And that's the Candlebark annual report for 2013!

John Marsden

(Principal)

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