

2017 ANNUAL REPORT – ALICE MILLER AND CANDLEBARK SCHOOLS



And so I begin again on what is arguably one of the most useless functions of my job as Principal: writing the (mandatory) annual school report. It is meaningless to the school community, because we are in constant touch with students and parents face-to-face and via emails, so they know all that is happening, from the spectacular to the humdrum.

It is also meaningless because schools that are a complete mess can easily produce annual reports that make them sound as though they are thriving – just as companies on the edge of bankruptcy can assure shareholders and the public that they are running beautifully and making record profits.

It wouldn't take much effort on my part to write a few thousand words of gobbledygook, employing the jargon that so many educators love: "I'm happy to report that Candlebark and Alice Miller continue to maintain the highest standards both academically and in terms of the personal development of students. It has been another year of high achievements, individually and collectively, and the school's atmosphere is consistently positive and productive..." blah blah blah...

Those two sentences took about ninety seconds to write!

Here's a paragraph copied and pasted from the recent annual report of a prestigious Australian private school: "At xxxx we are committed to outstanding learning practices that maximise student intellectual and personal potential. We provide an innovative, inclusive, and dynamic curriculum that promotes academic excellence and embraces life-long learning. A place where our young people emerge ready to face the world with a strong character, care for others and integrity."

That paragraph took about 60 seconds to find, online! I mean no disrespect to that particular school, which I actually think is quite a good one, because almost every school in Australia produces a report couched in similar meaningless language.



No, the only purpose of the mandatory annual report is to enable bureaucrats in the education system to maintain the fiction that they are gainfully employed and have an Important Role to play. By forcing school principals around the country to spend tens of thousands of hours writing annual reports, bureaucrats can spend thousands of hours reading them, so that they can pretend to their superiors that they are doing something useful.

This is one of the insidious diseases that corrupts education in Australia: bureaucrats invent work for themselves so that they can keep their jobs. It's noticeable for example in matters of curriculum. I've been teaching now for close to forty years, and I don't know how many state and/or national curricula I've seen come and go. Four? Five? Six? Millions of hours are spent by dedicated people all around the country, led and supported by bureaucrats, in designing new curricula. And the result? Each new curriculum has had an impact which could best be described as "of no significance". The curriculum continues to be "literacy, numeracy, creative expression, healthy living, and 'exploring the world'". I imagine it was essentially the same back in 1860. There are occasional important shifts in educational thinking: for example, the fairly recent recognition that the whole-language approach to literacy is not ideal; it is inferior to a phonics-based approach, because the latter sees fewer children slip through the net. (I should add that teachers who knew what they were doing always ignored the whole-language evangelists and continued to teach phonics, because they were well aware of its efficacy. I remember being attacked quite virulently by people at the English Teachers' Association in Carlton Victoria when I stood there looking at their posters, which advocated the whole-language and James Moffat approach to English teaching, and I dared to say that I thought they were rubbish! They were so scornful of me that I never went back!)

Anyway, I had better get on and "do my job", otherwise a squad of bureaucrats will come rumbling up the driveway in armoured vehicles and chase us all out of the school with tear gas or pineapple spray (I happen to hate pineapples).



We have two schools, or two campuses of the same school. Candlebark in 2017 catered for students from Prep to Year 8, and Alice Miller catered for students from Year 7 to Year 12.

2017 was Candlebark's twelfth year of operation and Alice Miller's second. We enrolled about 170 students at Candlebark and about 115 at Alice Miller. In 2018 we have 350 students enrolled across the two schools, which means we are in excess of our targets for that year.

2017 was a wonderful year for both campuses. (Sorry about the banality of that sentence.) I will begin with Candlebark.

CANDLEBARK

We welcomed three and a bit new teachers to Candlebark in 2017.

Glenda Earle joined us from Queensland, where she has been teaching for a number of years in the primary school system. She has an extraordinary background in learning support, especially for kids with particular needs, and her expertise and dedication have been obvious from her first day at Candlebark. She has made a major impact on a number of students who require extra help.

Peta Domm came to us from a primary school in Melbourne, and fitted in immediately, looking right at home from the first day. She is a strong and highly capable member of staff, and ready for any challenge.

Sarah Tachonelli had been here on a placement as a student teacher. We always look for teachers who have done extraordinary things in their lives, and the fact that Sarah had gone to Columbia, knowing no Spanish, had worked there as a canoeing and abseiling instructor and learnt the language so successfully that she opened her own business and ran it for two years, meant that she fitted one of our most important criteria!

Sarah is also one of Victoria's best-known rock climbers... and she impressed us greatly when she did her placement here.

We were also delighted to have Natalie Banks teaching at Candlebark for one day a week. Natalie has previously taught at Fitzroy Community School and the Maharishi school in Melbourne. We are even more delighted that she is able to teach three days a week at Candlebark in 2018.

Late in the year, Michael Sheppard, who has children enrolled at Candlebark and Alice Miller, accepted the position of Property Manager for Candlebark. This has enabled Bob Mitchell, who has been looking after both schools for two years, to continue to oversee both, but to concentrate more on Alice Miller. Michael is another person of vast experience, having run his own landscaping business in the UK for 20 years.

Bob Mitchell has been well supported by a terrific team, including of course Michael. John O'Rourke has had a terrible struggle with illness, but his strength of character has kept him going, and he is "looking good" for 2018. Sadly, our remarkable gardener, Martin, who did a wonderful job maintaining and enhancing the gullies, gardens, lawns, nooks and crannies, finally called it a day: he has so many different business interests that he no longer was able to continue to work here, but we will long remember and always appreciate his fidelity, modesty and hard work.

We also had three younger people on the maintenance staff in 2017, all ex-students of Candlebark: Mitchell Gandolfo, Luke Mitchell and Oliver Tautkus. They have brightened up both schools with their cheerful, lively, positive and willing contributions.

Candlebark's commitment to an adventurous education for young people has never wavered in our twelve years of operation. We strongly believe that the school campus and its buildings should be viewed as a base from which children and adolescents can explore the wide world. We mean this both literally and metaphorically. I couldn't be bothered doing the usual exhaustive list of all the excursions, camps, hikes, sleepovers etc. that we undertook in 2017 – if you read the annual reports from 2006 to 2016 inclusive you will get a good idea! But they included a four-day camp for almost the entire school at Bright, a week in Canberra for the Year sevens, a seven-day hike through the glorious Victorian Alps for the older kids, a hike from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair in Tasmania, a rafting trip down the Mitchell River, a canoe trip along the Murray River, participation in the RACV environmentally-friendly vehicle competition at Maryborough, a Prep camp at Riddells Creek, a hike through Wilsons Promontory, a hike through the Grampians, a hike along the Goldfields Track, a hike through Lerderderg Gorge, a 40 Hour Famine Campout (surviving on the contents of your backpack), the Great Ocean Walk, a hike to Mount Feathertop, a hike around the Mount Macedon district, and

a huge month-long commitment to the NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) Challenge (where students try to write huge amounts of continuous prose)... and many others.



Some of these trips were made available to students from both campuses, which proved to be a great way of helping kids to get to know each other.

Of course these adventures often involve unexpected occurrences – otherwise they would not be adventures. After the Tasmanian hike, I received an unsolicited email, from which this is extracted:

I'd like to reach out to the Candlebark School community to simply say thank you.

Back on March 20-24th, my wife and I attempted to do the Overland Track (OT) for the second time. Half way along the track, on day three, I had a freak fall and ruptured my ACL, along with numerous other MCL / PCL ligament tears and bone bruising.

We didn't know at the time, but from that point onwards, there was no way I was going to be physically able to walk out from the OT in my condition, three days walk in either direction (I will be undergoing surgery in the coming weeks).

But it was at this point, that your school group (number 1) came upon me laying in the mud.

Kate, Sam & the other teacher/guides (plus some random doctors also walking the OT) immediately sprang in to action with medical assistance. Getting me in to a position where I could walk the remaining 3 km's to the nearest campsite hut. All the kids also pitched in to help shuffle my hiking pack contents to this hut.

Putting their own holiday / hiking adventure on hold, for a complete stranger.

This assistance was invaluable. As without this help, it would have almost certainly have meant our PLB was going to be activated, and a subsequent helicopter evacuation, at night, in difficult dangerous terrain.

The emotional support was just as important as the physical support. I am a fairly stubborn stoic character, but my wife is quite an emotional "over-reactor" when things go astray, so these events were a lot for her to handle. Having Kate, Sam and even the school kids coming to check on me and the simple act of conversation was of enormous benefit to both of us.



Kate advised that the second school group was due to pass through the following day, with a satellite phone. So making it to New Pelion hut allowed my wife and I precious time to think and calmly consider our options, without panic, knowing we had options available to us with a satellite phone (while waiting for a Parks Ranger who we heard was on the way).

The following day, Amy and the second group of kids were just as amazing as the first group. Just as helpful, friendly and welcoming.

We had to make the decision to call 000 that night and ask for help. So for being granted access to use your phone, thank you.

That set off a chain of events which lead to our subsequent evacuation by the Westpac Helicopter the next day. Even the Rescue crew were pleased with how this panned out – knowing that I was safe at the hut, with satellite phone access, with other teacher / guides / doctors around. They didn't have to rush for an urgent evacuation.

I think the kids from the second group enjoyed the arrival and take-off of the helicopter! It is quite a sight to behold when you are in the middle of the Tasmanian wilderness. Even more so, when you are sitting inside one of these machines, emotionally and physically broken!!

The actions, compassion & assistance of all your teachers and kids is a real reflection on your school – as in, I cannot speak highly enough of them all. Awesome people, one and all.

If only all schools were like Candlebark!

Ah yes, indeed. If only all schools were like Candlebark! The world would be a very different place.

The chess program continued to be a highlight of life at Candlebark. Whenever kids have spare time you can see many of them playing chess with each other or with teachers. We go to many tournaments, led by the two intrepid teachers (Andrew Moffat and Cameron Kerr) who inspire the passion for chess which is almost universal at the school. In 2017 we won many of these tournaments, despite the hundreds of kilometres that we often have to travel to get to and from them. We again qualified for the national titles – a remarkable achievement for a school of this size – and did extremely well at them.

Another of our firsts in 2017 was to enter a team in the Australian Youth Rocketry Challenge. The team was required to try to fire a rocket 300 metres into the air with a payload of a raw egg and have it land with the egg unscathed. I'm happy to say that our students took first and second places in this competition!

We entered quite a number of sports days in which we compete with most primary schools in the Macedon Ranges. These sports included cross-country, athletics, soccer, cricket, basketball. We again did remarkably well, regularly beating much bigger schools, but the most heartening thing about these competitions is the generous spirit our students (usually) display, and the enjoyment with which they participate.

We saw two evening soirées in 2017, in which Candlebark students, individually and in other configurations, performed musical (and some dramatic) pieces for large audiences. The second of these was split between two venues within the school grounds, so that we could accommodate the number of students who wanted to take part. The result was four and a half hours of music, of wonderful quality, which I think I can modestly say is a good effort for a school of only 170 students.

Not for the first time in the school's history, we suspended classes for a week so that we could have an "Arts and Artists week", where invited craftspeople and artists each took a group for five days, so that vertically integrated groups of students could work intensively on creative pursuits. Workshops on offer this year were jewellery making, sculpture, bush carpentry, mediaeval weapon making, photography, Strange Gardens, weaving, city creations, ceramics, myths and legends, outdoor murals, felt making, filmmaking, painting, circus and dance. Once again the commitment of students and the dramatic improvement in their standards was a strong reminder of the value of approaching education in this creative way.

We try to take a creative approach all year round, with a program introduced in 2016. Each term, selected students from Grades 3 and 4 are withdrawn from all their regular classes to work on a special educational project with teacher Andrew Blizzard. They form what is essentially a new community, like a small village, where they are together all the time, exploring complex issues in considerable depth, and at the same time learning to manage the social issues that invariably arise. By the end of the year all Grades 3 and 4 students – except very new ones – have had this thoroughly worthwhile experience.

Teacher Jessica Liston continued to run the equine therapy program in 2017, using our mob of horses, which we keep on the property for this purpose. Jessica works with a number of students, one-on-one or in small groups, helping them to achieve new understandings by working with horses: those powerful, highly responsive, sensitive creatures. Over the years this program has been tremendously beneficial for many children and adolescents.

The other thing we did a lot of in 2017 was teaching. You know, classroom teaching, quite didactic much of the time, covering subjects like Science, Art, Music, French, Technology, Humanities, English, Maths, PE. It seems to be expected of schools that they will do this, and fair enough too. One of the great delights of teaching is to see students progress from illiteracy to literacy: to see children who cannot recognise their own names when they arrive in Prep become avid readers as they move through the school, and leave here with their noses buried in 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire'.



When I take prospective parents on a school tour, I smugly tell them before we start that no matter what room we go into, they will not see discourteous or disruptive behaviour: instead they will see every student engaged with the class, engaged with the lesson, engaged with the teacher. No doubt things will go horribly wrong one day, and we will enter a room just in time to see a student throw his books through the window in a fit of rage, or put her feet up on the desk and start eating a large custard pie, or attack the teacher with a chainsaw. So far, none of these things have happened, although we do “fail” with students occasionally – depending upon your definition of the word “fail”. My belief, based upon no scientific evidence or research, is that we have only seen the behaviour of four students deteriorate in their time at Candlebark, and (naturally enough) I would say that ineffectual parenting was the root cause in all four cases. A school can do a good deal to ameliorate the terrible difficulties caused by weak or toxic parenting, but we cannot effect a total “cure”. When the parenting is seriously damaging, our task is of course made all the more difficult.

The standard of the classroom teaching at Candlebark, and at Alice Miller, is always a highlight for me. It is motivating, thorough, varied and often connected with activities, incursions, excursions and/or “discovery learning”. Although we don’t waste valuable time on preparing kids for NAPLAN tests, which have hijacked the curriculum/program in so many Australian schools, it is nice to notice the dramatic improvement in NAPLAN results by our students over the years –when I bother to look at the results, that is. By every measure our students do extremely well academically – as a result of the creative and dedicated work by their classroom teachers.

2017 culminated in a major musical, which told the story of the life and travels of Marco Polo. Like every end of year production since the school began, this was written by a Candlebark staff member. Music teacher Taran Carter composed the stirring music. In 2017 we chose a different format for this production: we had eight simultaneous stagings in different venues around the school, so that we could give maximum exposure to our students. Cast members and audiences then converged on a central point, where the whole school performed in a Grand Finale. It was a good finish to a memorable year.



So, that's enough about Candlebark; time now to discuss Alice Miller. The section of the report is written by the Head of Campus at Alice Miller, Sarita Ryan.

ALICE MILLER

2017 has been a tremendous year for us at Alice Miller. We welcomed eight new teachers. John has already written about Glenda Earle, who has also been working at Alice Miller. Her extraordinary background in learning support, especially for kids with particular needs, has made a major impact on a number of students who require extra help. Cathy Snowdon, from Candlebark, also a learning support specialist, now shares her time between the two campuses, and she and Glenda make an impressive team.

Dr Christine Mathieu, originally from France, is an anthropologist and scholar, and one of the world's leading experts on the Chinese ethnic minority, the Naxi. Prior to, and in conjunction with, teaching at Alice, she taught at secondary schools and universities around the world including in Spain, the US, China and Australia. Christine also runs a private tutoring business, Alice & Co, from Kyneton. Teaching anthropology, Chinese language, and academic writing, Christine contributed massively to the academic rigour and intellectual curiosity of our students.

Dave Vertigan joined us part-time teaching Motion Media, which was so popular that he will be teaching the course full time in 2018. Under Dave's tuition, the Motion Media class produced some astonishing films, earned \$1,000 for the department by recording presentations and interviews of the National Excellence in

Teaching Awards, and was involved in the construction and documentation of The Village Festival in Edinburgh Gardens, Melbourne. Dave will also be teaching VCE Media in 2018.

Tom Martin increased his role from instrumental guitar teacher to the leader of the fabulous elective, Guitarkestra. As a guitarist, Tom has performed at festivals and venues across the world including Glastonbury, WOMAD, the Woodford Folk Festival, and the Kennedy Centre in Washington DC. He's a member of Melbourne's much-loved Bollywood/psychedelic/surf outfit, The Bombay Royale, and has played with artists such as Hiatus Kaiyote's Nai Palm, The Congos (Jamaica), The Abyssinians (Jamaica), and Miguel Atwood-Fergusson (USA).

Guitarkestra will rock on in 2018.

Pauline Wilson also joined the staff, bringing 28 years of secondary science teaching experience to the team. Pauline's subjects, Chemistry, Physics and CSI Science, have been hugely popular amongst our Year 8-10 students, and have helped to create a strong science culture in the school. Pauline and her husband, Bob, took some time off mid-year to explore Victoria and NSW atop a tractor.

Daniel Park came to us as a new graduate, having completed a Biomedicine degree at Melbourne University, majoring in microbiology and immunology, and a Masters of Teaching at Monash University. Daniel taught VCE Biology, Biology to Years 8-10, Year 8 Maths and PE. Daniel's Biology classes established fauna cameras on the campus, which were used to contribute to biodiversity knowledge in the Macedon Ranges.

Donna Prince now shares her time between Alice Miller and Candlebark. She ran all the Drama classes for Years 7-10 in 2017. A highlight of the Drama program was The Village Festival in Edinburgh Gardens, Melbourne, where the Drama students constructed sets and performed back-to-back shows over the weekend-long festival. The Drama classes have been invited back to The Village Festival in 2018, with the festival directors commenting on the young people's tremendous and positive energy.

Scott Hatcher joined the English department in 2017, teaching Year 11 English, Year 12 Literature, Year 9 English and Year 7 Humanities. Scott had taught at Xavier, Candlebark and the Western Autistic School before coming to Alice. He made an immediate impact on students and staff with his strong intellect, integrity, creativity and humour.

Kate Fagan further strengthened the science program as our new laboratory technician. Kate brought many years of lab technician experience to the school, along with a terrific energy. Kate is also a keen bushwalker and camper.

The increased enrolments last year meant many more mouths to feed. Kitty Schembri joined Veronica in the café, contributing to the warmth, kindness and sense of fun that makes the café the true heart of the school.

We started the year on the water, with the VCE OES students, and later the Year 7 class, canoeing down the Murray River. Interestingly, we ended it somewhat in the water too, in a flooded campsite in Bright! In Term 1 alone, our Year 9s went to WOMAD, where they saw music from all over the world, and ate their weight in organic doughnuts. Many students returned radiant and inspired by the Overland Hike in Tasmania. Students participated in the Class Clowns competition. The entire school became proficient in First Aid, acquiring some of the most important knowledge possible. The VCASS day involved music students from Alice Miller and the Victorian College of the Arts working together, with the VCASS teachers commenting on the huge improvement in the students and program in the twelve months since they last visited.

Numerous soirees were held throughout the year -- watching the leaps in improvement between performances was thrilling. We've also seen an emerging interest in composition, with two self-devised pieces performed at the Term 4 soiree, and strong entries in the 2017 Composition Award. We held an ensemble night for Drama, Music and Theatre Studies at the end of Term 2, which involved several weekend and after-hours rehearsals to help the students perfect their pieces. The VCE Music Ensemble rocked out to a packed crowd at the Holgate Pub later in the year.

We held a combined Alice Miller and Candlebark Year 7 sleepover, in which the students painted the entire ceiling of the meeting room gold. I'm sure many parents were still finding glitter in their children's hair, months later. We held a disco, ate bread and butter pudding every Friday, and Skyped Dr Karl Kruttszelnicki, who was

in New Zealand at the time, and who told several of our students that they should become politicians in order to address environmental concerns.

The café was developed further, becoming the true heart of the campus. It has been wonderful to wander in at any time of day and see students enjoying food, laughing, relaxing, or deeply focused on their work. We envisaged that this school would incorporate aspects of home life, and aspects of university life, and the café truly helps in the creation of this atmosphere.

We put on another astonishing show, *The Man From Mukinupin*, under the masterful direction of Anne Browning, with expert guidance from Anna van Veldhuisen, Donna Prince and Gav Barbey. While many schools claim that their productions are the most spectacular, the most inventive, the highest quality, I am willing to wrestle any Head of Campus to prove that ours are, in fact, exactly that. The choice of script speaks volumes about the shows at Alice Miller - there is nothing banal or saccharine about them. They are challenging, sophisticated, brave, and they extend the students in all sorts of ways. The students performed like professionals during the run, and were taught just what it was like to prepare like professionals too. The cast and crew gave up a week of their holidays over the mid-year year break for rehearsals, along with many weekends and sleepovers.



The Man From Mukinupin was the show where the technical crew really hit its strides as well. Jip Vaskess of Year 9 designed, coordinated and constructed the set and lighting design, and many more students were involved in designing costumes, dressing and building the set, and teching and stage managing the production over the three-night run. Special thanks also to Alice Miller parents Stu and Suzanne Vaskess for their generosity with equipment.

Several students participated in the Future Environmental Leaders Program, held over a number of Fridays and weekends in Melbourne, in which projects were devised which were designed to benefit students' local communities.

Our Year 7s visited Canberra in Term 3; among the highlights of the trip were visits to the CSIRO, the National War Memorial, the Australian Institute of Sport, and the Deep Space Communication Centre.

As previously mentioned, our Drama students performed at the Village Festival in the Edinburgh Gardens, but they were joined by the Motion Media students, who documented the whole process. This was a huge endeavour involving the full gamut of festival performance, and requiring immense stamina of the students as they performed/documented multiple shows over many days.

Our Year 9s completed an epic six-week trip to the Balkans and Italy. This included a hike through the mountains of Albania, staying with Albanian families in their cottages along the way, time in Montenegro with ex-Candlebark teacher Chris Le Messurier, visits to Venice, Florence and Rome, and a homestay for a few nights with Italian families. When they returned, the students made it clear how much they were able to expand their worlds during this experience, and how well they treated each other and the teachers through the process.

The Outdoor Ed program continued to be jam-packed and adventurous. We ran VCE camps to the Goulburn River, Mt Kooyoora, held a low-tech camp-out at Alice Miller, participated in a Black Hill Reserve climbing day, a Mount Arapiles climbing camp, a Mount Stirling Ski trip with Candlebark's Year 8s, an elective trip to Lerderderg Gorge, a Year 8 Great Ocean Rd hike, a Year 9 Cathedral Range hike, and a Year 12 Ski camp. This tremendous program has been envisaged, built up from scratch, and coordinated with great love and expertise by teacher Amy Naivasha.



Our Biology and Environmental Science students worked on fauna monitoring at the campus using motion sensor cameras, which contributed to biodiversity knowledge in the local area.

We held a bush dance for both Candlebark and Alice Miller Schools as a fundraiser for the Year 9 trip, which involved the most hilarious and ridiculous dance competition I have ever seen.

The Stella Girls Write Up helped many of our female students become engaged in feminism and feel more comfortable with asserting themselves and taking up space.

We wrote like crazy for the NaNoWriMo competition, producing a total of 815,623 words in exactly one month.

We participated in two chess tournaments, finishing last at Brimbank and first at the tournament we hosted. Year 11 student Dante led the team, with seven wins out of seven matches in the latter competition.

The Year 8 City Camp involved doing geography fieldwork on Port Phillip Bay and comparing demographics between East Melbourne & Footscray (and eating a lot of dumplings and dancing at the night market).

The Year 10s completed two weeks of work experience, ranging from working on a film set to a council, to helping out at an animation studio and preparing food in a vegan cafe.



We had too many excursions to count: Top Class for Dance, Drama and Music, the biomedical animation excursion for VCE Biology, Art excursions to NGV Van Gogh, NGV David Hockney, NGV Bill Henson, Bendigo Art Gallery, 45 Downstairs Forest exhibition, and Annual show, Top Arts, and other commercial galleries, the Sustainability excursion to CERES, trips to the Melbourne Museum Bug Lab and the Mt Rothwell Biodiversity Interpretation Centre, the Climate Change talk with Clive Hamilton, trips to the Melbourne Symphony, the Victorian Opera, and a range of different contemporary music including a night out at the Jazz Lab in Brunswick, the Philosophy unit 1 & 3 Peter Singer School of Life lecture, the Year 12 Krista Tippet School of Life Lecture, and many more. Phew!

All of these experiences support a central tenet of our philosophy: that learning is not only confined to four-walled buildings, that the world is our classroom, and that we want our students to feel deeply connected with the world, and comfortable in it.

Of course, we graduated our very first class of Year 12s this year. This was a bitter/sweet experience. The young people of the Class of 2017 are an extraordinary group: immensely warm, adventurous, thoughtful and kind. They set the bar high for the rest of school in terms of how to embrace experiences and opportunities, and how to approach life with a mature mindset and open heart. They have been leaders of the school in the truest sense.

Administering the VCE in a fledgling school is a formidable process, but one that VCE Coordinator Skye Myers undertook with intelligence and calm assurance. Skye developed the application to allow VCE exams to be held on the school grounds; as a small school, the default option is for students to attend other schools in the district to complete their exams. Having exams on our campus took a great deal of pressure off our students during this period - they could study at school beforehand, support each other coming in and out of exams, and be relieved of the burden of having to navigate an unfamiliar campus. We received excellent feedback from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority about how the exam process was administered. Huge appreciation also to Penny Gronset and our Chief Examiner, Helen Musk, for providing a well-run and calm setting for our students to complete their exams.

It would be remiss of me not to celebrate some of the excellent results that our students achieved. Yasmin Hopkins performed in the top 4% of the state in VCE Art, and Tia Weiss in the top 9% for Studio Arts. Kalum Gibson performed in the top 15% in Outdoor and Environmental Studies, while Bethany Robertson and Yasmin Hopkins also performed in the top 15% in Studio Arts. In Further Mathematics, Harrison Nelson performed in the top 15% of the state, while Steven Cottle and Kalum Gibson performed in the top 18%. Despite only being a Year 10 student, Una Mitchell performed in the top 7% of the state in Further Mathematics, showing that our VCE acceleration program can help our younger students achieve outstanding results. Many more students performed in the top 26 percentile in their subjects, with Study Scores of 35 and above.

While it's important to celebrate distinction in the VCE, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate all our Year 12s for successfully achieving a Victorian School Certificate. The VCE is one of the few remaining rites of passage for young people in our society. It requires incredible stamina, grit and serious application, not just content knowledge. As adults, teachers and parents, we can support them to a point, but once the exams begin, they need to navigate this phase alone. We are immensely proud of every one of our Year 12 students for successfully passing this significant test.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say a "goodbye, but not for good", to our Head of Art, Basil Eliades. Basil is taking a well-deserved year off to travel, spend time with his wife, Jane, and paint. In typical Basil style, he is not doing things half-heartedly. The trip involves catching the Trans-Siberian Railway through Mongolia, and delivering teacher training at a school in Chennai, India, with thousands of teachers and tens of thousands of students. We will miss Basil's tremendous thirst for life, art and his commitment to the development of young people in all areas. We're looking forward to having him back in 2019.

Sadly, we also say goodbye to two of our exceptional instrumental music teachers: Heather Cummins and Savanna Griechen. Heather has been with us since Candlebark's inception and has trained many of our young string players from the outset. She will be teaching closer to home at Castlemaine Secondary College and focusing on her own playing. Savanna is taking on a Head of Music job in Noosa. She made a huge impact on the music program in the year she was with us as a Classical Voice teacher. Both teachers will be dearly missed. As well, we farewelled Dr Lola Hill, who had been helping a number of students, mainly with maths, and who engaged with them so well as they progressed with their studies.

2017 has been a great adventure at Alice Miller, strongly assisted by the support we received from parents and other friends of the school: support that we value more than we can say.

OVERALL

It's always good to finish with something that has been written by a relatively disinterested observer, as this at least gives the impression of objectivity.

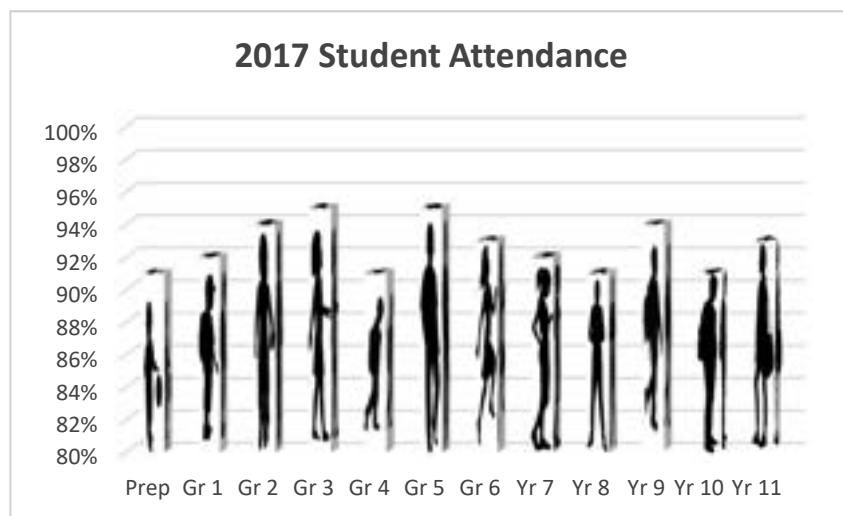
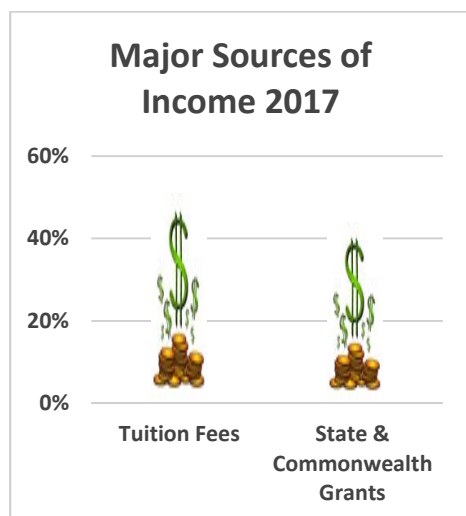
So, here is an extract from a letter from the parent of a student who left Candlebark at the end of 2014. When he left, one of his parents wrote the following: 'We would like to acknowledge the exceptional education you have provided for our son, X; and will continue to provide for our Daughter, Y. Our expectations have been met and exceeded and we sincerely thank you for all of your effort in creating a school that is unparalleled and one of a kind. We trust that X will move on to greater things, safe in the knowledge that Candlebark has been a major influence in creating the stable, confident young man that he is today and the successful man that he will become.'

In those days, we did not go to Year 12, and so X had to go on to another school. Recently his other parent wrote to me, regarding the next stage of his life. The reference to "Sam" is to Sam Ford, who is in charge of outdoor education at Candlebark.

'I felt it was worth bringing it to your attention mainly because of the absolutely gruelling series of tests and interviews that he has endured for the last six months to get into the course to be a Navy Officer. The psychological testing, physical assessment, and academic tests are very thorough. Whilst I was a bit surprised that he wanted to go into the ADF, (it took me a long time to come to terms with it), I have to acknowledge that the testing truly has been amazing. When I talked with X throughout the process - it became more and more evident that his years at Candlebark have played a massive role in getting him into his chosen career. Far more than the last couple of years at (his more recent school). The Navy testing highlighted resilience, independence, leadership and personal confidence as major factors in his personal makeup that they saw as outstanding. I truly think that the Candlebark years made X the man that has taken this massive step. With 20,000 applicants nationally, he's one of 80 to commence the Officer training. I had a laugh when they (unsuccessfully) sought to shock X in one of the interviews - describing the physical challenges that he would face in his first phase of the training - he felt that "I don't care dad...I have done harder with Sam at Candlebark..."'

John Marsden and Sarita Ryan

Official Staff:



YEAR 9 NAPLAN RESULTS					
	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	43%	86%	71%	100%
2016					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2015					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 7 NAPLAN RESULTS					
	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
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%
2016					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark)	100%	100%	89%	100%	100%
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2015					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	58%	85%	100%
YEAR 5 NAPLAN RESULTS					
	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	92%	100%	100%	100%
2016					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	93%	94%	100%	100%
2015					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 3 NAPLAN RESULTS					
	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2017					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	93%	100%	100%	93%	100%
2016					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	91%	100%	100%	84%	100%
2015					
% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	86%	100%	100%