

ALICE MILLER AND CANDLEBARK SCHOOLS' ANNUAL REPORT 2022

For various reasons I have read quite a number of other schools' annual reports this year. It's an experience which has induced mild hysteria (of the laughing variety) in me, as the more of them I read the more obvious it is that the concept of schools compulsorily filing annual reports is indeed farcical – but just one of the many farcical practices with which it is compulsory for schools to engage.

Compare, for example, if you can be bothered, the following reports, which can be easily found online: the meagre and meaningless Kilmore International School Annual Report, the extremely comprehensive reports of schools like Salesian College Chadstone, Meadow Flat Primary School (NSW), and the Lutheran School Wagga Wagga (NSW), the glossy but largely empty report of that huge school MLC Melbourne... their report runs to 11 brief pages and contains such bland statements as 'MLC will continue to promote resilience, strengths, positive relationships and a sense of hope and purpose in 2022'...

The report has lots of nice pictures though.

Sofia Mundi School's 2021 report is four pages long. The Scots School Albury's is 22 pages long. Heathdale Christian College manages 32 pages.

What becomes obvious is that although government schools conform to a rigid formula for their annual reports, the reality is that for schools generally, pretty much anything goes.

So, I won't be wasting a lot of time on our 2022 report, but here it is:

At the end of 2022 we farewelled Taran Carter, to take up the position of Director of Music at Melbourne's Preshil School. It is good to see Taran's extraordinary skills as a musician and a teacher recognised and acknowledged by the prestigious Preshil, but a sad day for Candlebark. Taran has been here for 16 of Candlebark's 17 years, which makes him our longest serving teacher, and throughout that time I have admired and respected a person who has built, layer upon layer, an extraordinary richness of music in the school, so that the land and buildings seem imbued with it. And he is one of those rare people who has done all this without manipulating or undermining anyone, without any show of ego let alone narcissism, without a single tantrum (or if he had one, I never witnessed it!), without alienating students or colleagues... I suppose it is unsurprising then that he is so loved and respected throughout the school community. I have never seen a primary school achieve the musical standards we witness here on a daily basis.

John O'Rourke departed late in 2022, to take up a fascinating new job. John has had eleven years with us, and through his work on the maintenance staff has helped create a remarkable number of new buildings and expand a remarkable number of others. On a daily basis he has kept the place ticking by doing everything from driving multiple buses a day (not all at the same time though) to putting on an apron and serving lunch when needed. He has a range of skills, and we wish him all the best in his new situation.

Teacher Kate Tucker, who has been at Candlebark for nine years, achieved a remarkable and long held ambition, by being selected from a very large field of applicants to go to the Antarctic as part of the Australian Antarctic Program. It was news which was exciting for her and we were thrilled for her – but of course it was also sad for Candlebark. Kate brought a wonderful energy and positive vibe to her work here. As an outdoor educator of long experience, and an adventurous human being who cares deeply about environmental issues, Kate contributed greatly to the life of our school, with many camps, hikes, canoe trips and ski trips, as well as her classroom teaching of academic subjects.

Her lively all-embracing spirit has been a source of constant joy to others. I think it's fair to say that Kate felt sad about leaving us, but it is understandable that she accepted the offer to go south; not many people would be able to resist an opportunity like that!

Since travelling to her posting at Casey Station in the Antarctic, we've had the pleasure of video calls and other contacts with Kate and we look forward to continuing those in 2023.



Scott Hatcher decided during 2022 to take a break from teaching. Scott joined Candlebark in 2008, later left to teach at the Western Autistic School, but returned to Alice Miller in 2017, to the great delight of our staff and students. Scott is a gifted English teacher and has taught the subject to all year levels in the school. However, the genuine and heartfelt way that he has built relationships with our young people is what truly sets him apart as an educator. Scott has brought great insight and initiative to Candlebark and Alice Miller over the years he's been with the school, and he is sincerely missed.

On the last day of Term 4, we reluctantly said goodbye to Sarah Tacconelli. Sarah joined us at the Candlebark campus in 2017. An adventurous, 'can-do' approach is present in everything Sarah does.

When she moved to the Alice campus, we knew she'd enliven the place with positive energy and take the outdoor program to new heights – and she has certainly done that. Sarah has led two of our annual Big Trips and countless camps around Victoria, taught the VCE OES program, and introduced our students to white water rafting and rock climbing. Respected by staff and students, Sarah leaves an indelible mark on our school. Her next adventure is, of course, an extraordinary one: paddling down the Yukon River with her partner. Long term, we're hoping there will be opportunities for us to work with Sarah on future projects.



Rob McCarthy, who teaches senior Maths, decided to hang up his mortar board after many decades in the profession. Rob had already officially retired before he started working at Alice Miller, and we're grateful that he agreed to sign up for a few more innings with us. Rob is another teacher who is respected throughout the school for his knowledge, experience, and warm and disarmingly genuine personality. He is a true teacher, in the profession for all the right reasons. An antidote to the increasing bureaucratisation of education, the presence of Rob on campus reminded us of what should be at the heart of education: an appreciation of the real work which can be done with young people. We wish him all the best in his (actual) retirement - his impact has been immense.

In 2022 we also said farewell to Emily Gaughwin. Emily joined the team in 2020. Her previous experience included epic overseas adventures, such as skiing in Colorado and teaching people with disabilities how to enjoy the outdoors. Emily's approach to teaching has been expansive, closely attuned to her students and their needs, and underpinned by a desire to protect our natural world. Alongside her adventurous spirit, Emily has always had a deep love for place and family, and she'll be leaving Alice Miller for Adelaide, to be closer to her parents and old friends. We wish her the best, in her return home.

Linda Powell finished up at the end of the year. Linda started as a gardener at Alice Miller in 2019 and transformed the school into what often felt like a living Andy Goldworthy museum: a collection of leaves raked into a crescent, rocks carefully stacked like small offerings, and piles of twigs fashioned like birds' nests. Linda's ephemeral garden art was always done quietly, without ego or fanfare, in the knowledge that someone would stumble across it and smile. We thank Linda for her contribution to our school.

Nova Weetman, author of such books as *The Secrets We Keep* and *Sick Bay*, took regular writing workshops at Alice Miller but during 2022 decided to give them up in order to devote more time to her own writing. The workshops were successful and popular, and we wish Nova the very best with her future career.

Joining the English faculty in Semester 2, Ellery Cain was with us for too brief a time. Ellery made an immediate impact on the school through his calm and wry demeanour and his skill in the classroom. However, family commitments have required Ellery to be closer to home next year, which we of



course respect, despite being sorry to lose him.

Three young members of the maintenance staff at Candlebark all took their leave in the early months of 2022, to embark on new adventures. What a terrific trio they have

been, with their spirit, humour, willingness and initiative. Luca O'Flynn, Arthur Scott and Harry Tautkus brightened up the school. They are all ex-students of ours and one of them – I won't embarrass him by giving his name – wrote to me to say 'it has been a privilege and an absolute pleasure to have such trusting and loving staff all around me. Imparting their wisdom on me throughout my working life so far and my schooling years, during which I was treated with the respect of an adult from a young age...it is a community and a place I have fallen in love with, and will always hold a special place in my heart. The wonders of Candlebark and Alice Miller to me are home.'

Kyle Jamieson joined the maintenance staff at Candlebark. A thoughtful and intelligent person who can turn his hand to pretty much anything, he has already made a terrific contribution. An average day can include everything from chain sawing a fallen tree which is blocking a driveway to finding the source of a leak in a ceiling, from tracking down a recalcitrant escaped sheep to refitting a chain to a bicycle, from attending to a disconsolate child to replacing a ruptured trampoline net... so versatility, patience and a sense of humour are much valued.

Lisa Bysouth took up the position as Office Manager of Alice Miller from the beginning of 2022. Her degree in planning and design from the University of Melbourne, her management positions in a major fine arts supply business, and her wide range of skills and interests have proved to be an ideal background for this busy and endlessly unpredictable role with us.

New members of the teaching staff appointed during 2022 include Tamara Ferraro, a skilled and highly experienced advanced Mathematics teacher who held previous roles as the Head of

Mathematics at Hume Anglican Grammar and at Ivanhoe Grammar. When her last employer, Colmont School, closed suddenly at the beginning of Term 3, we snapped Tamara up, to the great delight of our students and staff.

Samone Hosking took up the teaching of Biology/Maths at Alice Miller at the beginning of the year. Samone has enjoyed a long career at Melbourne Girls' College. She is a Biology specialist and has taught VCE Biology for ten years. At Melbourne Girls' College, she has been the Science Domain

Leader and led the Biology team to integrate Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island perspectives into the Year 11 curriculum. She was deeply involved in sustainability programs at the school.



Sarah Lewis has an interesting connection with the Tye Estate, upon which Candlebark is located. Twenty years ago her grandparents, Warwick and Susan Kirk, were the property managers, and lived on the estate. In between their hard work here they found time to look after one of their little granddaughters for many weekends and during school holidays. That granddaughter described in an email to me her memories of the property, which, in her words, included 'searching for fairies in the forest, watching Mr Platypus in the creek, and long walks in the busy yet peaceful bush.'

That granddaughter is Sarah Lewis. She became a primary school teacher, and worked in quite remote areas, including Mount Isa, the rodeo capital of Australia. We were delighted to be able to welcome Sarah back to the Tye Estate where she has been teaching

part-time in 2022 and will teach full-time in 2023.

Another wonderful addition to Candlebark's full-time staff has been a second teacher already well known to us, Megan Philip, an English specialist, who is an outstanding practitioner and who made a real impact in 2022. There is often a big – and arguably unfortunate – gap between the nature of the work done in primary schools by students, and the nature of the work done in secondary schools. It has been a delight to see the thoughtful and skilful way in which Megan is able to bridge that gap with her classes.

Chloe Lewis came to Alice Miller from Denmark Senior High School in Western Australia where she was a teacher of senior English, the Year 11 and 12 Coordinator, and Head of Literacy. She previously

taught English and Media and was Head of Media at Joseph Banks Secondary College, where she also implemented a literacy program for the entire school. In applying for the 2023 English role, Chloe taught herself to code and designed a website that taught us about herself and why she wanted the job. We were impressed!



Dakota Dib has joined the Maths Department at Alice Miller. He graduated with a Masters of Teaching (Maths and Physics) from the University of Newcastle and also holds degrees in Science and Mathematics. He was awarded a grant by Newcastle University to undertake courses at the University of Cambridge in Astrophysics, Special Relativity, and Quantum Mechanics. His professional background, prior to teaching, was in Data Science and Software Engineering. He has plenty of energy and a real commitment to teaching.

Moving on, a significant initiative for our School in 2022 was to buy a property at Nulla Vale, about 15 minutes out of Lancefield, which is currently quite-high-altitude farmland, dominated by boulders which are about 370 million years old (I'm sorry I can't give a more precise date). To quote from a geological report on the district, 'Around the paddocks you will see large, grey coloured rocks that are generally rounded in shape. These are members of the rock unit known as the "Harcourt Granodiorite" ("granodiorite" is a granitoid rock with more plagioclase feldspar than a typical granite, for the lay people, they're typically just called "granite"). These erode in a characteristic 'onion skin' pattern, resulting in rounded boulders and curved sheet like portions that have 'peeled off' the boulders. They also tend to form very coarse sand as they erode, typical of the river sand you see in the Coliban and Campaspe Rivers.'

The property is about 475 acres, and is mostly pasture, but it's very beautiful country with a touch of wildness about it. Our plan is to use it for school classes, sleepovers, and camps, but at the same time to begin restoring it to its natural forested condition. It's a tangible attempt to help improve the

environment.

Judith Wright wrote in 1963:

These hills my father's father stripped;
And, beggars to the wind,
They crouch like shoulders naked and whipped
– Humble, abandoned, out of mind.

It seems that nearly 60 years ago she was well aware of environmental damage which world governments have, in 2022, still not been able to confront appropriately.

Looking back over 2022, of course there have been squabbles, disappointments, frustrations, mistakes, anger-detonations, but these will always happen in any place where more than two or three are gathered...! (I'm quoting from the Protestant prayer book here; I really need to amend it to 'where more than one or two are gathered!').

But overall it has been an excellent year; if it could be bottled and cellared, it would I think be acclaimed by the James Hardies of this world.



Meandering on with this report, I feel the urge to tell the story of an extraordinary experience at Candlebark the other day: something unique in my life. I was standing looking out across the tennis court at the kangaroos and birds, when, on the other side of the court, a rosella fell to the ground in just a short drop from a tree. At first I thought it might have been two rosellas mating, as there was a lot of twisting and turning and contorting and squawking. But then it became a shape on the ground which I could barely discern (those very green rosellas are so effectively camouflaged) and for about three minutes there was no

movement. So finally I walked over slowly to it, but no matter how close I got it didn't stir, and I confirmed that it was just one rosella, and the reason for its lack of movement was that it was dead. So what I had seen were its dying moments. I have no idea why it died... perhaps a heart attack or something as natural as that, but I did wonder if it might have been bitten by something deadly in the tree. I stared into the branches, checking if a snake was there, but saw nothing out of the ordinary.

It reminded me of something I talked about to the Grade 6s the other day – a conference on education which I attended recently, where a speaker told of her interactions with the first Japanese Buddhist monk to 'set up' in the USA. She was at a seminar which he took and a member of the

audience asked: 'I have been studying Buddhism for two or three years now and I'm wondering if you could sum up the essence of it for me, in just a couple of sentences?'

I told the Grade 6s that I thought the questioner was – sadly, in my opinion – showing us another example of what to me are among the dreadful ways in which the American Empire has infiltrated



and corroded humanity, with its constant emphasis on shortcuts, easy answers, slogans, one-liners.

The answer given by the monk comprised just two words: 'Everything changes. '

And to me this was another example of something significant: that someone who has spent much or most of a lifetime studying, thinking, reading, reflecting, listening, can sum up something profound, something infinite in its reach, in not just a couple of sentences but in two words. So the paradox is that what the Americans seem to want so badly (and of course Americans are not alone in this nowadays, and never were alone in this) could be achieved, but not by 'crash courses' or 'sound bites' or via Reader's Digest condensed books.

What this all amounts to is that the dying moments and death of the rosella and the

distillation of Buddhism by the Japanese monk have reminded me vividly in recent times of the patterns and movements of life. Our responsibility as a school is to do all we can to counter what is now almost a global tsunami of superficiality, narcissism, extremism and righteousness, and promote instead something I can best call 'thinking'. And by that I mean recognising the profundity, complexity, subtlety, ambiguity of everything, including the death of a rosella and the nature of Buddhism. We would do well perhaps to have less hedonism and more Hellenism (hope you appreciate the epigram!)

An Alice Miller teacher wrote to me recently, commenting that young people of this generation have become so over-aware of their emotions that in many ways they are becoming unable to function effectively. Children and teenagers who suffer from this affliction become very limited in their ability to interact socially. We do all we can at both Candlebark and Alice Miller to counteract these difficulties, but to do so thoughtfully, so that we do not revert to the 1950s but instead encourage

children to respect their own and other people's feelings without becoming unduly sensitive. It's a matter of recognising the realities of human temperaments, human impulses, human behaviours. As with most things in life – maybe everything in life! – it's a matter of finding a good balance. Yet in recent decades children have been encouraged to turn their gazes inwards to an extent which is hardly in the best interests of humanity or the planet... for example, I was looking the other day at an activity book for young children which asked them to reflect on haircuts they had had during their life, "what I watch on TV", what were their favourite subjects at school, what they collect, what their sporting achievements and failures had been, what were the songs they most liked, what clothes they would like to have... the entire book was about nothing but themselves.



I'm not advocating for children to be immersed relentlessly in the study of philosophy, sociology, politics and religion. I was interested when a Candlebark teacher asked the kids at a morning meeting, after a four-day camp, what they had enjoyed most about the camp, and a Grade 5 boy said, quite strongly, that it had been the freedom to play. He added that having heaps of time to play – to be able to play for hours on end – had been wonderful.

I appreciated this as a great endorsement of our philosophy as a school but also an implicit criticism of the nature of childhood in the 21st-century, where opportunities to play freely have become more and more limited, not just by the obvious constraint of time, with children kept frenetically

busy going to organised after-school activities of different kinds, but also by the less obvious constraints of adult interference, adult control, and the imposition of more and more rules as to how 'free play' is, paradoxically, to be regulated.

Play is the way children rehearse for adult life. It is a wonderful means to a worthwhile end: the end being the ability to think things through, to understand different points of view, to recognise concepts like fairness and equity, to gain insight to status transactions, to develop the skills of negotiation and mediation and compromise. It is perhaps no coincidence that the disappearance of play from the lives of so many children in western countries has occurred almost side by side with the growth of shallow judgements, sly manipulation of democratic processes, corporate greed, environmental destruction, inflexible points of view.

Time to wrap up this report, which I had intended to be a short one! However I'm sure I should mention the VCE results of 2022 and congratulate our talented, creative, funny, and kind-hearted Year 12s. A diverse group, they are pursuing pathways in tattoo artistry, medicine, engineering, music, criminology, science, performance, dog grooming, architecture, sustainable construction and



design, osteopathy, fine arts, paramedicine, cybersecurity, and business. They have clear visions for what may be interesting, meaningful futures.

While ATARs and study scores will never capture the full extent of our Year 12s' success, it's important that we acknowledge their achievements in this field.

Half of the cohort received an ATAR over 80. All of our students have access to at least one of their university preferences, which is, of course, one of the main reasons for undertaking this process in the first place. Many will receive their first or second preference, and a considerable number have already received early university offers. All of our Year 12 cohort have achieved their VCE. Special congratulations to our Dux, Angus Ware, with an ATAR of 98, and our Dux Proximus, Maxwell Burder, with an ATAR of 97.7.

I'd also like to single out Aaliyah Roadknight, whose VET Music (Sound Production) work was selected for exhibition in Top Designs 2023, part of the VCE Season of Excellence. Top Designs received over 1000 submissions this year, 140 of which were shortlisted. Aaliyah was one of only two VET Music (Sound Production) students chosen for exhibition. Our congratulations to her.

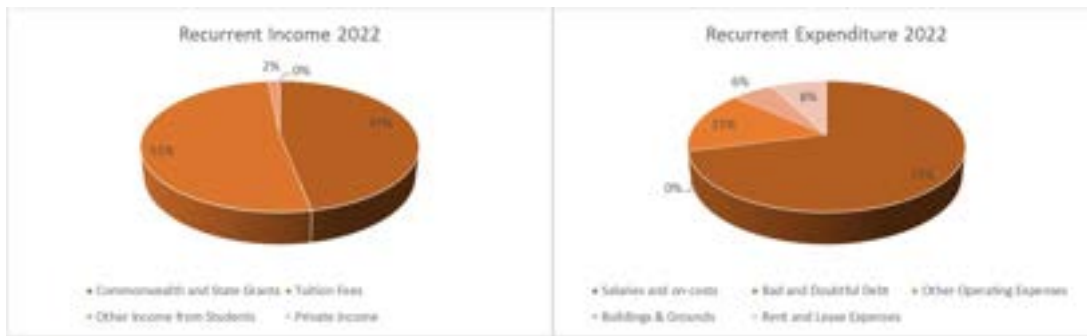
Wishing you all a 2023 where you are able to do lots of thinking and where children are free to play!

John Marsden

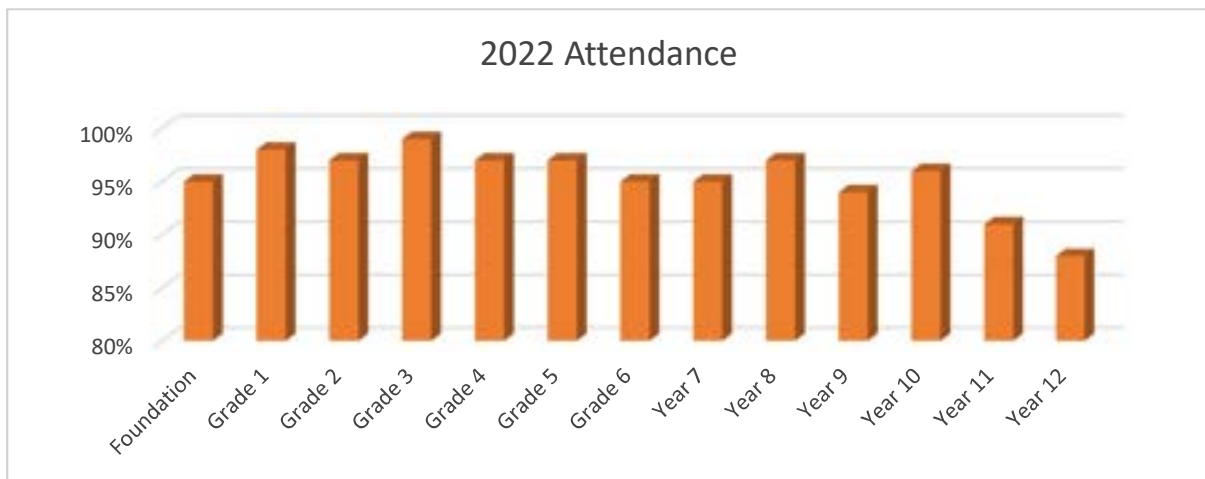
December 2022



Income and Expenditures:



Student Attendance:





Staffing: In 2022 Alice Miller employed 28 VIT registered teachers, and Candlebark employed 18 VIT registered teachers. All are qualified and registered. As well as the teaching staff, in 2022 we employed a Principal, a Head of Campus, a Business Manager, an Administration Manager, two Property Managers, three maintenance staff, a lab technician, a gardener, two chefs, two kitchen hands, and three part-time bus drivers.

Naplan Results:

YEAR 9 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2022 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller School)	96%	93%	89%	93%	96%
2021 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller School)	96%	75%	83%	100%	100%
2020 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller School)	NAPLAN DID NOT PROCEED IN 2020 DUE TO COVID-19				
YEAR 7 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2022 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark School)	100%	100%	82%	100%	100%
2022 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller School)	100%	93%	93%	100%	96%
2021 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark School)	100%	92%	100%	92%	100%
2021 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller School)	90%	82%	91%	91%	90%
2020 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark School)	NAPLAN DID NOT PROCEED IN 2020 DUE TO COVID-19				
2020 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller School)	NAPLAN DID NOT PROCEED IN 2020 DUE TO COVID-19				
YEAR 5 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2022 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	91%	82%	100%	100%
2021 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	90%	80%	100%	100%
2020 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard	NAPLAN DID NOT PROCEED IN 2020 DUE TO COVID-19				
YEAR 3 NAPLAN RESULTS	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2022 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	83%	83%	100%	100%
2021 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard	88%	100%	75%	100%	100%
2020 % of students at/above National Minimum Standard	NAPLAN DID NOT PROCEED IN 2020 DUE TO COVID-19				

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