Annual Report 2008

MENINGIE AREA SCHOOL
SCHOOL CONTEXT/ENROLMENT

The issues that have confronted the Meningie community in the last few years have certainly not abated with rainfall and water quality key determinants of the future prosperity and stability of the community. With those problems has come population erosion and the school has not be immune from that. From an opening 224 students, the school has had enrolments around the 230 mark for most of the year. The school has continued to perform a dual function of educating our children and seeking to provide a safe haven within the community for students to feel safe and strive for excellence. We should begin 2008 with around 200 students.

(Appendix 1 and 2)

Senior students of the school have been active in understanding the dimension of the water debate and its impact on the community. On a number of occasions they participated in community events directed to highlighting the plight of the Murray River system and lower lakes region in particular. This included visits from media, the State Minister, attendance at a state wide rally in Adelaide. Two of our students, Michelle Crossman (Yr 11) and Bethany Jurgs (Yr10) met with the governor general when she visited to inspect the lower lakes in September.

As people read through this report they will not help but come to the conclusion that the activities undertaken on a daily basis within the school are to be respected and cherished. This is no mean feat, as the school experiences enrolment decline and it places increasing pressure on the staff to create the diversity in learning opportunities that are essential to a contemporary school.

STAFFING

Meningie Area School has a history of high staff retention, with 14 of the permanent staff of 23 having taught in the school for 4 or more years. With a staff turn over of 39% the school has depth of experience, as well as continuous injection of new ideas with the appointment of young graduates. Staff attendance for 2008 was 97.95%, 96.78% in 2007, and 93% in 2006. This represents an average of 2 days absence due to illness. Data shows that there was significant illness in Term 3 amongst staff and students when the community was hit by winter viruses. Other days when TRT’s were employed represent days when teachers were attending a variety of DECS meeting requirements, specific training sessions on programs relevant to site, district and state initiatives, which ultimately enhance the learning opportunities for students at Meningie Area School.

A few staff left in 2008. Mr Rasi Subhawickrama, who had been appointed to the school at the beginning of 2006, resigned from DECS at the end of February 2008.

Ms Gill Newby and Mr Martin Samuel, Graduate teachers, both of whom taught in the Junior School, left at the end of 2008. Unfortunately our student enrolments were insufficient to retain their positions, and both have taken up positions in the Limestone Coast district.

All staff are well qualified with 25% of teachers having post graduate qualifications. Staff demonstrated and remained committed to professional development, and engaged in time above the mandatory 37.5 hours of focused learning. A total of 748.5 T&D hours is recorded. Focus throughout 2008 was on Strategic Plan outcomes, in particular Literacy and Numeracy, and the New SACE. Whole staff ESL training on site throughout Terms 3 and 4 saw all participants conclude the 20 hours of contact time and strategic implementation. The budget supported an average of $300 per person in T&D throughout 2008.

(Appendix 3 and 4)

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance not only increases the opportunity for success within each student, it builds year level capacity, good relationships and a sense of belonging within the school community. Improving individual student attendance has been a priority for several years, with a number of strategies developed and procedures implemented. Data shows that last year efforts in this regard paid off. These included:

- Regular articles and correspondence to parents linking attendance with outcomes, particularly in Literacy, Numeracy and Retention to Year 12.

- Clear procedures regarding attendance inclusive of phone calls, notes home, home visits by AEW’s for target students and involvement of DECS personnel.

Attendance at Meningie Area School matched DECS state date, at 91.0%, this being higher than both the District average and that of like schools.

Whilst significant, it is critical that we continue to work at ensuring regular patterns of attendance are developed in the early years, and continue to investigate factors that influence attendance for all students and develop strategies to improve this. We already know that
1. successful transition from feeder schools.
2. student behaviour anti-bullying program.
3. strong peer group connection and support
4. positive peer and teacher relations and
5. parental attitudes to schooling in general

are all factors in developing and maintaining good attendance patterns.

Programs with direct links in keeping students connected with the school, and developing good attendance include:

- ESL student support 1:1 or small group
- ITAS tutoring program – for Indigenous students Years 6-12
- Even Start Tutor program, with focus on Literacy and Numeracy within school hours
- Music Program, beginning with all students at Year 5 learning an instrument, leading them in to the Concert Band
- Monarto Zoo Program, enabling students to undertake SACE units in Community Studies
- Homework Centre, with supportive links from Raukkan and Camp Coorong
- Diverse individual SACE patterns, with focus on ensuring students engage in both traditional University and Industry pathways tailored to students’ needs.

(Appendix 5)

LITERACY AND NUMERACY DATA

During 2008 students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine all sat for the NAPLAN Tests. For the first time the standardised tests in Literacy and Numeracy was conducted nationally. Our school performed commendably, obtaining a spread of results that would be considered predictable for a school with the diverse demographic of Meningie. What was very pleasing was the high percentage of students who achieved High or Average Achievement rates since their last assessment. Between 70% and 92% (Maths) and 73% and 100% (literacy) achieved this rating. Our results give heart to the sustained efforts of teachers, particularly in the early years, and SSO’s who work tirelessly with students in these basic learning areas. The staff’s commitment to improving their ability to lift achievement was witnessed by the whole staff undertaking a course in teaching English As a Second language (ESL) that run over a full term in their own time. The Junior School also undertook the First Steps course in Literacy in addition to this. The Junior School is involved in the Early Intervention Program whilst English as a Second Language involved individual student support and tutoring feature. This year students who achieved critically low results in the specific NAPLAN tests were eligible for extra tuition through the federally funded An Even Start Program. We cannot afford to lessen the emphasis on literacy and numeracy as the foundation of our children’s learning if we are to lift the results of our students. To do this there has to be a real and substantial partnership between home and school to model, champion and practice the value of Literacy and Numeracy in children’s lives. For parents it involves putting their own experiences to work to help their children see that reading and language is the key to success in learning. For us at the school, it means we must work on our methods of communication so that parents can understand what we are doing, the help we need and how we value their critical role in the process. As a tangible step towards this we have had Ms. Anyupa Giles leading a team of our Aboriginal Community Education Officers in attempting to improve the communication between the school and community for our Aboriginal students.

(Appendix 6 to 9)

OPINION SURVEYS

All stakeholders (parents, students and staff) were involved in opinion surveys. Students from Years 3 to 12 completed these online with class teachers. Parents were informed through DECS letters posted home on how to access the surveys and were given the option of completing a hard copy on request.

Parent Response

Quality of Teaching & Learning
- My child receives high quality teaching at Meningie Area School
- Meningie Area School has high expectations of students
- Teachers at Meningie Area School want to help my child learn
- The teachers know what my child can do and need to know

Support for Learning
- My child is motivated to learn at Meningie Area School
- Teachers provide help and support when it is needed
- Students know they are expected to behave at Meningie Area School
- Meningie Area School encourages students to have pride in their achievements
- Students are happy at Meningie Area School
Relationships & Communication
- Parents feel welcome at Meningie Area School
- Parents feel they can approach their child/children’s teachers to discuss progress
- Parents feel they have opportunity to have a say in matters about the school
- Parents feel well informed about school activities
- Parents feel encouraged to be involved in the school in a variety of ways

Leadership & Decision Making
- Parents are confident in how the school is managed with effective leadership
- The school is always looking for ways to improve what it does
- Parents feel they have opportunity to be involved in school plans
- Opportunities exist to be involved in decisions about their child’s education.

Analysis of Each Area

Quality of Teaching & Learning
- 22% of parents say the school does not have high expectations – (66% do)
- 37% of parents are not happy with learning program offered at Meningie Area School – (56% do)
- 22% of parents think the school does not have an excellent learning environment – (44% do)

Relationships & Communication
- 23% of parents feel we don’t listen to what they have to say about their own child’s development and needs - (61% do)

Support for Learning
- 21% of parents do not think we change our programs and activities to improve student achievement

Areas for Improvement
- Further strategies to be developed and implemented to improve student achievement
- High expectations are expected of all students

Teacher Response
- Most teachers in the school are extremely hard working and develop learning programs to support individual students
- Leaders within the school really support teachers in the management of students and their welfare
- Staff work well and issues of grievance are managed using appropriate procedures
- Leadership is supportive and work well as a team

(Appendix 10)
SACE

Stage One
This year the completion results for Stage One subjects are very pleasing indeed, with a steady increase in the number of students achieving Satisfactory Achievement (S.A) for subjects. Importantly this year this rate has crept into the ninety percent and above category and this represents a 1.8% increase on last year. What is more pleasing is that Meningie Area School now has an achievement rate that is 5.9% above the state average. Once again, though, the defining issue when looking at those who did not meet academic requirements was poor attendance.

Stage Two

2008 saw an average sized cohort take part in Stage 2 studies, with fifteen students attempting subjects including part-time students and three Stage One students undertaking some sort of Stage 2 study. Of the eleven students that indicated that they were striving to complete their SACE in 2008 ten were successful, this equates to a success rate well above the state average. In addition to this the positive upward trend in average achievement scores continues. 2007 saw us make a substantial increase on 2006 figures, and 2008 saw yet another increase that raised average achievement into the “B” grade band. This is well above the state average and the average for like schools in the state. This kind of improvement puts us well on the way to achieving one of the Site Plan objectives of an average achievement score of 14.5, therefore all teachers involved with this improvement should be congratulated for their flexibility, dedication and skill.

Destination Data

Of the 11 students that were striving to complete their SACE in 2007 the following destination data was gathered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESTINATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Study- TAFE, University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively seeking work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*note this data represent the main occupation of the students, it is possible that some students actually undertake a mixture of activities (i.e. hey study and also have a part-time job).

ESL

The ESL program supported 49 students across the school during 2008. A teacher and an SSO were employed to work with all identified students in either individual or group settings as determined by need and student plans.

Individual tracking and data collection shows that the ESL program effectively improves individual student skills, however regular attendance is a significant contributing factor in long-term development.

Staff engaged with teaching ESL Students In Mainstream Classrooms over Terms 3 and 4. This represented 26 hours of contact study with strategies to implement in the classroom.

RUNNING RECORDS

Running Records has been a major focus of the Early Intervention Strategy for many years now, enabling teachers to closely monitor student reading development in the early years. By comparison with State, District and Category of Disadvantage, we have a higher level of students in levels 1 – 5, by the end of Year 2 only 5% of students are represented in this level bracket, while 50% of all students are in the highest band (level 21 – 26). More significantly, 78% of all Year 2’s are in the top 2 levels, which is equal to State data. Girls still out perform boys, and Indigenous students fall below non-Indigenous, a trend apparent statewide for some time.

PROGRESSION & RETENTION

Many students come and go throughout the year, a pattern consistent over many years, reflecting our mobile population. If all enrolments had stayed there would have been 263 students at the school instead of 224.

Of the 81 students who left, 38 (46.9%) transferred to other SA Government schools. When compared with the previous two years, 28.6% (2005) and 42.5% (2006) this shows the continuing impact that drought and water shortage in the lake have had on the socio economic situation within the community.

Ten students left and went to private schools, both in the city and regionally. Twelve students (14.8%) took up employment; 10 students (12.3%) went interstate; 6 students (7.4%) began either at University or TAFE.
The Monarto Zoo Program was initially established in 2001 as an initiative to encourage attendance and provide alternative programs for students in the Middle and Senior School who were at risk of leaving school, particularly Indigenous students.

This program has seen many students achieve SACE Stage 1 & 2 subjects before reading Year 11. For many students this presents as a less stressful year for them as they have already achieved accreditation for units of work in either Community Studies/Integrated Studies or both.

Throughout 2008 15 students Years 8-12 regularly attended the Monarto Zoo Program. Selection for inclusion is based on a set of criteria and recommendation.

At the end of 2008, three students completed Stage 2 subjects, two of which got their SACE as a consequence of their involvement.

Meningie Area School is well regarded at the Monarto Zoo Program. They have forged and developed strong relationships with the Education Personnel and Zoo staff. Meningie students are reliable and regularly become involved in activities beyond the normal voluntary work assignments.

There is no doubt that Meningie Area School are wonderful ambassadors for the school, and their work is recognised as an integral part of the Monarto Zoo Program.

Connecting Spirits 2008

On the 23rd November 2008, 8 students from Meningie Area School, along with 12 from Birdwood High School and 12 adults from both school communities, set off on the second Connecting Spirits journey to the Western Front in France and Belgium. The first stop was Singapore where we spent two days looking at significant sites from the invasion and occupation by the Japanese during World War II and the cultural mix of Chinese, Indian and Malay communities. Highlights included the Battlebox Museum, the Changi Museum and the Kranji War Cemetery and Memorial where we commemorated the first 4 of 100 soldiers that would be remembered by this group during our three week trip. From here we flew to London. This included 3 days of sightseeing, taking in many of the usual tourist sites, but especially including Churchill’s War Cabinet Rooms, the Imperial War Museum and the Australian War Memorial in Hyde Park.

From London we travelled to the Somme region of France, where the real purpose of commemorating soldiers who lost their lives in the First World War and learning more about their experiences began. On our first full day in the area we commemorated 12 soldiers in 10 different cemeteries. This set the pace for the rest of the trip which required the students to be well organised, alert and able to “switch on” to the appropriate mindset while experiencing an emotional roller coaster as they came to terms with the sheer waste of life that this war brought to the world.

5 days later we moved to the Ieper region of Belgium, stopping on the way to visit the Fromelles battlefields where earlier in the year 400 bodies had been discovered in mass graves. These are believed to be soldiers who were killed at the Battle of Fromelles on the 19th and 20th July 1916, where almost 2000 Australian soldiers were killed and 3000 more injured in Australia’s most bloody 24 hours in history.

While in Ieper we continued to remember soldiers from our communities, including Rufus Rigney, a young Ngarrindjeri soldier, who is the reason that these trips began. He is buried in a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in the town of Harelbeke, which is on the outskirts of Kortrijk, the administrative centre for Western Flanders. On the morning of Sunday the 7th December we gathered at his graveside to remember his sacrifice in a special service that involved all 20 students on the trip. This ceremony was witnessed by a crowd of local Belgians and some who had travelled from further afield to pay their respects. Australia’s Agricultural attaché to the EU represented the Australian Government and left a floral tribute from the People and Government of Australia. Likewise the mayor of Harelbeke presented a wreath on behalf of her townspeople and invited the group back to the Town Hall for a civic reception. During this reception she invited us to work together to forge a lasting link between our communities, held together by the remembrance of a young indigenous soldier who lost his life half a world away from his homeland over 90 years ago. Work has already begun to prepare for the 2010 trip and to develop opportunities for Australian and Belgian students to share their culture and develop friendships. After completing our last commemorations in Belgium we returned to France, travelling to Paris for 2 days of R & R before returning to Australia.
Planning for the 2010 trip is well underway, and there are already 14 Meningie Area School students who have expressed interest in attending this next journey.

2 students from the 2006 trip, Rita Lindsay from MAS and Flo Bourke from BHS, have each written and recorded a number of songs inspired by their experiences on the Western Front. A CD of this music is being produced and will be launched on the 22nd April this year in time for ANZAC Day ceremonies.

It may never be possible to measure the impact that these journeys have on the students that participate, but the growth that is seen in each during their time away is tangible. Perhaps the best way is to let the students express themselves through quotes that they wrote as they followed the footsteps of the soldiers that they researched.

In the following pages I have attached quotes from each of the Meningie students to photos. These quotes can be found on the Connecting Spirits webpage www.connectingspirits.com.au.

“Today was really special seeing 11,000 names written all over these massive walls. It was upsetting to think that all of those names, ALL of them are still out in the fields somewhere buried or just blown up. Seeing 20 soldiers commemorated all at once told the story.” Chloe Padman

Today was precious. Scott choked back the tears as I did when Michelle played the Last Post. At that moment I thought about all of the moving times we’ve had and of the tears that dropped into the soil of these men’s graves. I will miss this experience and can’t help wondering if I will ever return. I hope and dream that I will one day. Once again diggers, you are not forgotten nor will you ever be. Our group will make sure your story will last forever. R.I.P. Lest We Forget. Chloe Padman

“As we drove through the Menin Gate for the last time at 7.30 in the morning, I thought back to all that we have done and the people we have met. It is unbelievable how many people are committed to the memory of the Australian digger; individuals like Johan, Anny and Shrapnel Charlie give their time for us to be able to hold the memory of those brave lads that gave so much believing they were making our country safe. It’s not just the Belgian and French who are grateful that we came from so far away to fight for the liberation of their country. A man came up to me just before we had our Menin Gate service. He shook my hand and said, ‘Thank you and Australia for fighting for us.’ That man was not from Belgium or France but from Scotland. I could see the emotion in his face and knew we were doing something very special to so many. Even after the service you could see how many people were grateful for our commitment to the Remembrance of our war dead. I felt so proud to be Australian.” Hamish Jurgs

“Villers-Bretonneux ceremony was very moving especially Flo’s song. Seeing all the names on the wall while Flo was singing made me shed a tear. I commemorated Arthur Hamlyn and felt sad that his body was never recovered. I will never forget today.” Hayden Biddle

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“Today I commemorated my great, great, great uncle. I never realised how the emotions would hit me. As I sat at his headstone after the commemoration my eyes began to water as I looked at where my own flesh and blood lay. When I said my last line my voice became choked up and then when I put my hand on the headstone I looked up to the sky. I felt he had finally been laid to rest. Uncle George I will always remember you.” Hayden Biddle

“I feel so lucky to be able to come to the other side of the world to remember the men that gave so much for our country.” Melanie van den Brink

“It was a great honour to play the “Last Post” at our memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. It touched my heart deeply.” Michelle Crossman
“Doing my commemoration today (John Rigby) was really good. I felt connected to John much more than I thought I would. It was very special and I felt like I had done something good for John: he deserves it.” Stephanie Sanders

“This trip has been an amazing experience that has moved me every day. It has been a huge privilege to commemorate our Australian soldiers and the memories will be forever sketched into my heart and mind. I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to play the Last Post at ceremonies. I will never forget this.” Michelle Crossman

“Today was the most emotional day I have ever experienced. I commemorated three soldiers including my great, great uncle Frank with Hamish. It went well until I came to his adopted grave and I couldn’t hold back the tears. It was the most wonderful and sad thing I have ever done”. Bethany Jurgs

Premier’s Reading Challenge

At Meningie Area School we have increasing numbers of students taking up the challenge, which we are pleased about, as participation shows students are prepared to make an extra effort. This year Mrs Appelkamp, Chairperson of the Governing Council, was present at the special assembly to congratulate 31 students.

For her first year of participation, Brigitte Botha received the Certificate. Brigitte read more than 12 books in a language that is not her first language. This is an amazing achievement for a person who has been in Australia less than two years.

The first person to achieve the required reading for the fifth year, winning the Championship Medal, was Sam Sanders.

Music

Music has been busy this year with the Year 5 band program again giving the opportunity for all students to learn a concert band instrument – flute, clarinet, trumpet and trombone. They all play in the year 5 band.

Students from year 6—12 have continued to learn a variety of instruments and be part of a variety of bands and groups. Matt Miller has worked with Mr Hickey to record some original song material for Year 12 Community Studies.

Mr Hickey, Mr Longden, Mr Kozikowski, Mrs Thomas and Ashlee Crossman all taught music at school.

Choir for year 5 and 6 has once again had a successful year singing in Adelaide and learning many new skills.

One highlight of the year was the concert in Murray Bridge with the High School and Murray Bridge Community Band and the Australian Girls Choir.
CONCLUSION

In our future planning, the Governing Council and staff have a number of key issues to drive the school forward.

These include:

- Proposal for a reconstructed school. Council was invited by DECS to submit a site profile outlining the deficiencies of the current DEMAC buildings that constitute the majority of the school’s construction. These buildings are approaching the end of their working life and are a risk with asbestos should they ever fall into disrepair. Upon receiving this site summary, DECS invited Governing Council comment upon a proposal to remove the three major buildings of the school, including the community Library, and replace them with a contemporary design. Governing Council has supported this and now waits to see if our school will be scheduled for upgrade and replacement commencing in the 2009/10 financial year. Council has already and will continue to be active and consultative in analysing the suitability of proposals to deliver the type of learning site needed for the 2000’s and beyond.

- Closer links with Raukkan R-5 School. DECS conducted a review of Raukkan R-7 School during 2008 and concluded that it should become an R-5 school from the beginning of 2009. This would mean that students living at Raukkan would come to Meningie two years earlier. The Review made comment that there needed to be much stronger ties and communication between Raukkan and Meningie Schools particularly in the area of transition of students from one school to the other. Meningie Area is a school that serves multiple communities. Meningie, Raukkan and Salt Creek all

- Entrust their students to us and we have obligations to those communities. The Community Council at Raukkan is especially keen to see strong, positive communication exist between itself and Meningie School.

- A major external review of Literacy within the school conducted with us by the DECS Quality Standards Unit.

- Investment in the structure, course content and support for our senior students facing up to the introduction of future SACE now so close in 2010.

Meningie Area is a good school in a community determined to meet its challenges. The attributes that will be required to achieve a bright future require a community that is ORGANISED, GETS ALONG with each other, displaying the CONFIDENCE to be PERSISTENT and RESILIENT. That is precisely what Meningie Area School is about.

Our priorities in 2009 reflect site, district and state initiatives.

They will include targets and strategies in:

- Positioning the School in local community.
- New SACE Introduction
- Aboriginal Education R-12
- Literacy and Numeracy

_____________________________________________________

Monica Williams
PRINCIPAL

_____________________________________________________

Judy Appelkamp
GOVERNING COUNCIL
CHAIRPERSON