

2013 Annual School Report Highlands School



Our school at a glance

Students

Highlands School exists to educate students.

Commencing in 2002 the school has always catered for students who are unable to access mainstream education as a result of longstanding and substantial behavioural issues.

In 2013 the school expanded to include students with diagnosed mental health conditions who are unable to access specialised units in mainstream settings as a consequence of the severity of these conditions.

As a consequence of the students exhibiting an extremely diverse range of educational needs the intervention programs of the school are eclectic and innovative.



Staff

Carl D. Glickman in his book “Differential Supervision” identifies professional staff as those with high level of commitment and a high degree of abstraction (see problems from many perspectives, can generate many alternative plans and can choose a plan and think through each step). Highlands School is very fortunate that every staff member displays these qualities.

As a result of this involvement of the staff students benefit dramatically from the extracurricular style programs. These include outdoor activities, broad school to work ventures, enterprise education, work oriented courses, engagement programs, camping programs (each designed with meeting differing needs of the students selected to go on the trip), values programs, photographic courses, computer courses to name a sample of the opportunities available to students through the competencies of our staff.

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

Significant programs and initiatives

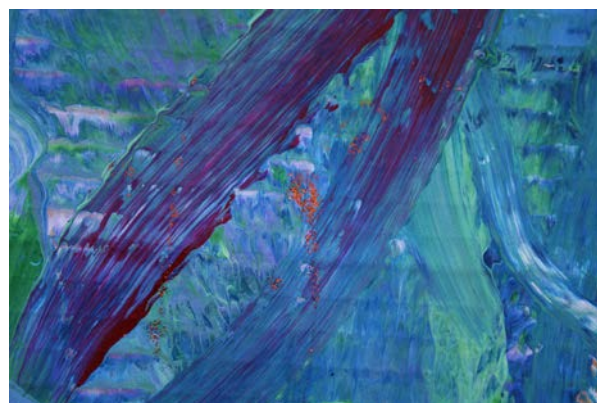
The significant programs and initiatives are delivered at Highlands School in a holistic manner. Combining academic, social, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and psychological perspectives into well-reasoned, inclusive programs has demonstrated dramatically improved outcomes for our students, particularly in academic and personal terms. Founded strongly on educational, psychological and welfare theories the school employs a cohesive culture.

Academics

Students typically arrive at Highlands School many years behind in their academic development. Programs countering this trend have proved particularly effective using the cohesive culture that values all members of the school. Significantly our students all acknowledge the very real progress they have made in this area. The school is particularly proud of the fact that by Year Ten our students are performing at age appropriate norms.

VET

“All education is about employment” is an overriding perception at Highlands School. Any cursory interview with our new students reveals a clear pessimism about their job prospects. The student’s views substantiate research findings regarding poor performance at school and limited job opportunities. Hence vocationally based up skilling through industry experience, industry accreditation and the development of employment skills not only allows the student to break the cycle of failure through improvement in self esteem, self confidence and self worth it also is conducive for our students to gain meaningful employment upon the successful completion of their time at Highlands School.



Outdoor Recreation

For decades research has identified the benefits of outdoor education in breaking the cycle of failure experienced by our students. A broad range of outdoor recreation activities amongst the activities at Highlands School. Every student has the capacity to engage in these activities as they are not seen as a “privilege” nor a reward rather they are seen as a way of addressing the developmental needs of the student



Student Welfare Practices

Highlands School seeks to provide benchmark welfare practices. To ensure the delivery of such programs briefing, debriefing and whole school meetings are held daily. The morning meetings (briefing) focus on communication (departmental, community and school) as well as the content of the day's activities. Whole school meetings are about resolving issues, generating a sense of identity and purpose and organising the remainder of the day. The debriefing meeting (held at the conclusion of the day) evaluates the progress of each student. Minutes are kept of all meetings.



Principal's message

The school is now in its twelfth year and I believe it enjoys a happy and healthy reputation amongst its peers and the community. This is affirmation of the positive partnerships that exist in and outside

the school. The school culture is one in which all participants in this enterprise are genuinely given the opportunity to participate according to their skills. Looking back over the last twelve years I am reminded of a poem I wrote at the end of 2002 which, I think, sums up my thoughts on Highlands School.

Battle's blood still red and flowing, scars are still unhealed.

Take control; don't lose your soul, back to the battlefield.

Girding ancient armour with weapons dull from use

Looking to the battle now the dogs of war are loose.

Start with nothing, resources few, it forever is the same.

But that is what you're in for when you play the welfare game.

The job at hand is to build a place that travels in dark places

That works outside the dots of nine when there's loaded bases.

So carefully choose your friends, before you count your foes

For the time ahead is dark as night and your stuck with how it goes.

So choose them right, steel yourself, head on down the track.

For no matter whatever lies ahead you're never coming back.

So when the pressures on, and the situations tight

Look to those around you and you know you got it right.

So I look to those around me and I know I got it right.

Ross Bowey

I certify that the information in this report is the result of a rigorous school self-evaluation process and is a balanced and genuine account of the school's achievements and areas for development.

Ross Bowey

School context

Student enrolment profile

Situated in a pleasant rural setting on the outskirts of Mittagong Highlands School now comprises two discrete programs. The behaviour program exclusively for students with severe behavioural challenges and whose home schools have exhausted all available resources. Capped at a maximum of 21 students referrals are generated through Access Requests generated by the home school. As part of the referral process Highlands School sets up a positive relationship with the referring school and the school most likely to accept the student at the successful conclusion of the program. A mandatory part of the referral process is the introductory visit by the student, parent/caregivers and teaching staff to the school. As a result of this visit the candidate perceives they have chosen to attend Highlands School rather than being sent.

The second program is one in which students who have a diagnosed mental health condition and are unable for what ever reason to be connected with a mainstream school are able to be educated at Highlands School. The Multicategorical Program has begun and there is a distinct possibility it will be extended in 2014.



Student attendance profile

Engagement of students is seen at Highlands School as an essential component of our culture. Breaking the cycle of failure is possible only when our students attend consistently. While there is still an opportunity to improve our attendance for the year is considered a positive feature of the school.

Structure of classes

Capped at 21 enrolments the behaviour program comprises three discrete classes. However in reality classes are organised according to student need and/or interest. Primarily for academic subjects the students follow a year based mode of delivery. For vocational subjects the mode of delivery is based on interest groups. The multicategorical class operates on a separate model from the behaviour program. Little interaction exists between the two programs.



Staff Information

The staff of Highlands School are acknowledged to be of very high calibre. This is consistent with evaluations of previous patrons who also commented specifically on the qualities of the staff at all levels.

Staff establishment

| Position | Number |
|--|--------|
| Principal | 1 |
| Deputy Principal(s) | |
| Assistant Principal(s) | 1 |
| Head Teachers | |
| Classroom Teachers | 3.8 |
| Teacher of Emotional Disabilities | |
| Teacher of Mild Intellectual Disabilities | |
| Teacher of Reading Recovery | |
| Support Teacher Learning Assistance | |
| Teacher Librarian | |
| Teacher of ESL | |
| Counsellor | 0.2 |
| School Administrative & Support Staff (SASS) | 5 |
| Total | 11 |

Staff Retention

There has been no staff turnover at Highlands School this year. Obtaining high quality casual staff for all positions continues to be no problem.



Teacher qualifications

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

| Qualifications | % of staff |
|-------------------|------------|
| Degree or Diploma | 100 |
| Postgraduate | 40 |

Financial summary

This summary covers funds for operating costs and does not involve expenditure areas such as permanent salaries, building and major maintenance.



| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Date of financial summary | 30/11/2013 |
| Income | \$ |
| Balance brought forward | 196013.33 |
| Global funds | 70621.11 |
| Tied funds | 95006.40 |
| School & community sources | 5519.06 |
| Interest | 6189.89 |
| Trust receipts | 364.45 |
| Canteen | 0.00 |
| Total income | 373714.24 |
| Expenditure | |
| Teaching & learning | |
| Key learning areas | 12032.23 |
| Excursions | 796.40 |
| Extracurricular dissections | 5560.6 |
| Library | 42.32 |
| Training & development | 10927.03 |
| Tied funds | 59553.43 |
| Casual relief teachers | 15379.69 |
| Administration & office | 33029.57 |
| School-operated canteen | 0.00 |
| Utilities | 20594.82 |
| Maintenance | 8237.33 |
| Trust accounts | 104.46 |
| Capital programs | 0.00 |
| Total expenditure | 166257.88 |
| Balance carried forward | 207456.36 |



School performance 2013

Determining success in behaviour schools has always been a vexed question. The staff of the school have formulated the view that success for our students is best measured as to whether our students are in full time employment, full time education or full time training. The difficulty is that it is problematical to monitor our students after they have left school. Informal networks and anecdotal evidence continue to confirm the school operates successfully.

Achievements

Arts

In addition to artistic activities which include free expression, formal lessons and art for display Highlands School has added photography. Several successful exhibitions were undertaken by the students which saw their work acclaimed by a number of local photographic experts.

Fostering creative skills is prominent in the culture of Highlands School. Daily opportunities are provided to the students. The daily fare of Art, Wood Burning and Puzzle has now been running for over half a decade and still shows no sign of declining. Student generated art adorns the walls of the school and several students have created art works in response to a specific need.

Social Skills/Sport

Highlands School, because of the nature of the students, is unable to participate in organised team and/or individual sport. However every student everyday is expected to participate in daily sport. The sports selected are commensurate with the sports that are found in mainstream high schools or are considered skills based activities linked to those sports. It is heartening to see the physical, attitudinal, emotional and social progress our students make as a result of this activity.

Several of our students contribute to the running of interschool carnivals in swimming and athletics.



Technology

Highlands School students, like other students, are expected to sooner or later leave and win employment in an open market based on merit. All academic and vocational activities at the school are geared toward our students achieving this. Hence the schools focus on literacy, numeracy, technology, and vocational skills. It is common knowledge that technology has permeated to all employment. Thus courses are

developed and run to educate about word processing, data bases, spreadsheets, robotics and the applications of these to worklife.

Academic

Individual programming attempts to engage the students at their point of need particularly in literacy and numeracy. Appropriate and engaging programs continue to evolve at Highlands School. It seems students prior to year nine benefit from simple engagement in academic pursuits. As the students progress through year nine they seem to drift/progress to completing subjects through Distance Education. By end of year nine the students are ready to add to their ROSA through Distance Education. It is pleasing indeed to see a trend to the number of year ten students achieving good passes in the School Certificate continued in 2013.

Key evaluations

It is a requirement for all NSW public schools to conduct at least two annual evaluations – one related to educational and management practice and the other related to curriculum. In 2009 our school carried out evaluations of management practice.

Educational and management practice

Background

Highlands School continues to enjoy a high status within the region. As such we receive a large number of visits from professional colleagues. Visitors are surveyed at the conclusion of their time at Highlands School with extremely positive comments.

Findings and conclusions

The school's management practices are seen as positive. One student after a one day observation prac wrote

"Thank you so much for letting us into your space today. I have learnt more from half a day at your school than I have in a year at university. It's been so amazing to get to see how well the system is working and how much mutual respect is around. These kids are learning such valuable lessons, they are so lucky have this opportunity. I know so many other kids that would have gotten so much out of it. In any case, everyone (teachers and students) are very lucky, very lucky."

Future directions

It is expected that the patron style of evaluation will continue.

Curriculum

Delivery of curriculum continues to evolve at Highlands School. As mentioned previously students “drift” into completing their Year Ten and now for a few their Year 12. It seems that the vast majority of students seek to attain their ROSA to enhance their employment opportunities.

Future directions

It is expected that in the immediate future greater numbers of students will attempt and gain good passes in all levels of schooling.

Professional learning

Professional learning will continue to play a major role in the continuing evolving culture of Highlands School. As courses become available staff are expected to engage in them.

School development 2011 - 2014

The focus of Highlands School will continue to be functional literacy, functional numeracy, VET accreditation, personal development through outdoor recreation, agricultural, horticultural, aquacultural skill development as a means to enhancing the employability of our students.

Targets for 2014

Target 1

The addition of the mental health program has had a big impact on the culture of the school. It seems the biggest target for 2014 is to progress the integration of this program to the established culture while allowing this program the necessary ability to evolve in a way that best suits all concerned. I suspect this target will take several years.

About this report

In preparing this report, the self-evaluation committee has gathered information from evaluations conducted during the year and analysed other information about the school's practices and student learning outcomes. The self-evaluation committee and school planning committee have determined targets for the school's future development.

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Ross Bull Assistant Principal
Steve Adams Patron

School contact information

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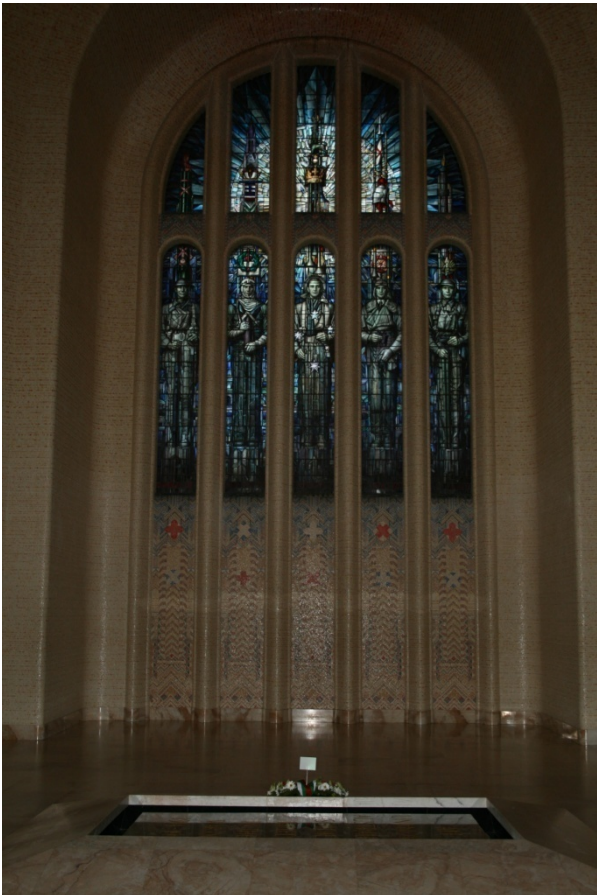
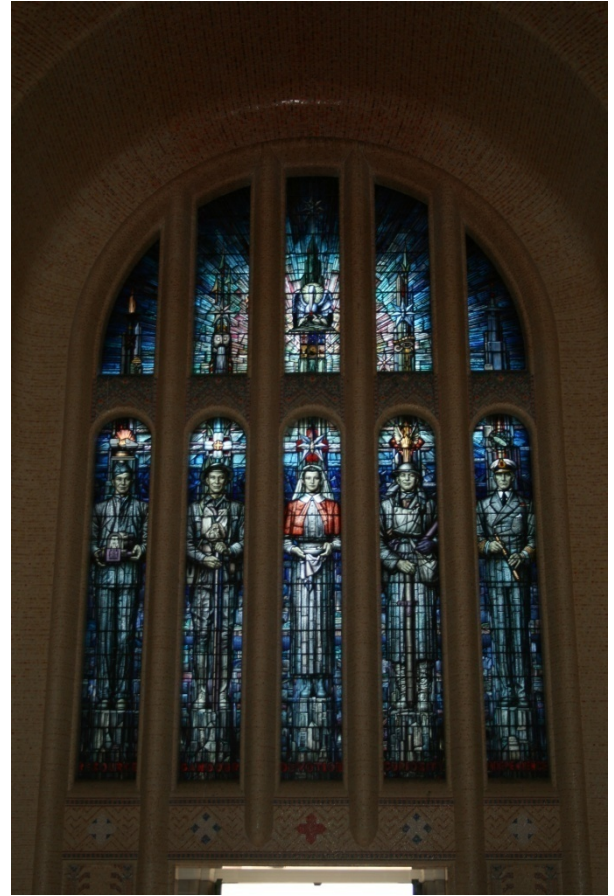
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Parents can find out more information about Annual School Reports, how to interpret information in the reports and have the opportunity to provide feedback about these reports at:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/asr>





The Values of Highlands School

- Resourceful
- Candour
- Devotion
- Curiosity
- Independence
- Comradeship
- Ancestry
- Patriotism
- Chivalry
- Loyalty
- Coolness
- Control
- Audacity
- Endurance
- Decision