

# WARRAH

## SPECIALIST SCHOOL

# Newsletter

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## Semester 1 – June 2020

### Principal's Message

As we close Term 2 and prepare to breathe out and catch our thoughts before returning to what we know will be another interesting, exciting and well planned next semester I thought it appropriate to reflect on what has been a different and yet inspiring time.

First though, my gratitude to you all for your support, feedback and engagement with us as we worked with activity boxes going home, remote learning and a return to school with a strong focus on outdoor activity. We did our best to support those of you who were still working when so much closed down due to COVID 19 and also those of you with children at home, yet unable to get out and about. It was a steep learning curve but one undertaken with great respect for you all and commitment from all staff.

### School News

#### **Covid-19 impact**

Each of us has managed the challenge and unpredictability that the virus brought to our daily and family lives. We are pleased to be in a position to say Warrah has not had any clients, students or staff unwell with the virus. We believe our stringent hygiene and cleaning protocols played a major role in this as did the commitment from all staff to work in a safe and respectful manner with social distancing. School staff worked hard to send home activity boxes for the students knowing that it did rely on you to assist them but hoping that in some way they offered support to you and meaningful activity to the students. Remote learning was as true to our values as possible and thank you to all who participated and supported the students learning. On return to school the majority of our activity and learning was outdoor based which resulted in an exciting learning and insight for us – the students were thoroughly engaged and inspired to such an extent that we will embrace this approach going forward while also maintaining the 1:1 learning time with teachers.

## **New students**

Term 2 brought students back into school quickly with approximately 50% returning on April 20<sup>th</sup> and within a few weeks we had 80% attending with the remaining students and some staff continuing to work remotely.

Another joy was welcoming two new students into our school. Rosie and Ethan settled in quickly and have slipped into our way of working with ease and enjoyment. Ethan particularly loves the outdoors so our gardening and bush craft programs suit him well and Rosie loves to cook and is very adept at crafts while also loving the stories and related activities.



Next term we will welcome two new boys into the school – Jann and Phillip and wish them and their family a happy time at Warrah.

Warrah School is in a strong position to grow in numbers into the mid to high 20s as we have capable, experienced staff, a rich and well developed curriculum, excellent training and mentoring and a wonderful cohort of current students. If you can share your experiences of Warrah with other families who would value the work we do please give them our contact details and encourage them to visit and see for themselves. We are increasingly aware of the unique and vibrant environment we have here which in itself supports the students and creates a platform for learning and development.

## **Name Change**

You may have noticed we have changed our name to Warrah Specialist School. We chose to do this to highlight what we are offering and bringing to students – a unique, specialised, highly focused and designed curriculum that provides skills & vocational based learning for students with special needs.

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## **New staff**

You were introduced to Yong Kwang in Term 1 but no sooner had she arrived and settled in when COVID 19 began to have an impact and she became our remote learning teacher. Some of you will have met Young Kwang online as she carried out an important role during these last months assisted by Robert and Nathalie.

This term we have welcomed Louise Swanson to the staff. You may remember Louise from her time teaching students Bothmer Gym. We are now doubly lucky as Louise will not only be teaching 3 days a week but also bringing regular Bothmer classes to the students.

Jess Youell also joined us this term on placement from TAFE where she is studying Education Support alongside studying secondary education at University. Jess has worked with commitment and an openness to learning and we have appreciated all the time and effort put in. Jess's placement finishes at the end of term but she has offered to volunteer her time for 2 days week returning in Term 3.

## **Mud hut roof and celebration**

For a long time we have been building a shed for storage out of mud bricks – the activity of making the bricks is one of the essential skills taught and involves a lot of energy, science, gathering and mixing. Many students have come to love the process of mixing and shaping, drying then building and we hope that now the hut is almost complete that they will experience great pride in their work. By the end of term a large roof will be in place which will enable activities to continue regardless of weather.

**To celebrate what has been months of work we would like to invite you to join the children on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July at 2.00 pm for music and an official opening during which time they can show you what they have created and share some of their cooking with you also.**



## **Meal times**

This term we made the decision to cook for the students using food from the farm and their gardens at school providing morning tea and lunch. We knew this may be a challenge for some students who prefer the same foods from home but we have been impressed with their response. For some it has taken some time and encouragement and for others less so. Nutrition is so important for us all and we are aware that many children with autism have a narrow range of preferred foods. It was our goal to engage their taste buds and widen the range of good food – we have definitely achieved this. We are also aware that we are in a position to put the time and effort into this and hope that it has knock on benefits for you at home as many of our students are also involved in preparing and serving the good also. Our terrific team of German volunteers led the work and some of the meals prepared have been:

- Pasta with Vegetables
- Fried Gnocchi with vegetables
- Pizza
- Pumpkin Soup
- Risotto
- Sausages with mashed potatoes and veg
- Pie
- Burger with vegetable patties (quinoa or mushroom)
- Pea Soup
- Dahl with Rice
- Chili sin Carne
- Garlic Bread
- Polenta with Mediterranean Veg
- Asian Pasta
- Potato Soup
- Lasagna
- Tomato Soup

- **Fresh cooking every day with vegetables from the Warrah Farmshop**
- **With every lunch we served a freshly made salad**

Next term we will continue to provide simple meals for lunch and ask that you send in morning tea.

*We are very interested to know favourite healthy foods for your child so please let us know so we can make them. We are doing all possible to allow to them to let us know which meals they are enjoying.*



## **New Curriculum**

Last year Warrah School implemented a change in the way our curriculum is delivered after studying current research and considering our own careful observation of the students and the way they learn. Experiential learning in a natural environment which promotes curiosity, observation, exploration and the potential to teach traditional crafts and skills which then provide a gateway for numeracy, literacy, science and life skills in a meaningful way is the foundation of our curriculum. Recent research shows that if we ignore the time honoured learning methods of “hands-on experience” with their inherent forms of bodily movement, then the brain, rather than becoming more “intelligent” will “atrophy”.

(See “The Real Meaning of Hands-on Education” by Prof Frank R. Wilson MD).

Our hands along with the rest of our body are our primary tools for experiences of the world and when these experiences are lifted up into consciousness they become Real Knowing.



This curriculum was presented the National Education Standards Authority for approval earlier this year as part of our submission for registration (a regulatory process for all independent schools on a 5 yearly basis). As yet we do not have a formal response but ongoing dialogue with the inspectorate indicates a very favourable view of our work.

This year our focus is on familiarising ourselves with the land. Each term has a focus:

- Term 1 Human & Animal, What does our environment tell us?
- Term 2 The Earth on Which We Stand – what lies beneath our feet;
- Term 3 Life Cycles Who/What else is here? How do they live and grow?
- Term 4 Home surroundings, Where are we”

This semester we have explored the 4 key learning areas of Warrah – the school and its gardens, the Farm, the therapeutic Spiral gardens and the wilderness. We have done this in many ways including using a compass to learn direction & orientation, observing, drawing and listening to the natural environment (birds, plants, insects,), forging a pathway through the bush, further developing our school based gardening program, potting and seedlings, cooking and making pickles &

jams, finding natural grasses for weaving, weaving, building, painting, storytelling, poetry, rhyme & rhythm and many other learning activities while teachers have had time each day to work individually with students on their ILPs.



## **Winter Spiral**

On Tuesday afternoon we held the traditional Winter Festival with our spiral talking the students inward then leading them out into the light. It is a much loved festival and one which brings peace and calm to all. Laurenz and Robert played some beautiful music on the cello and harp and sang quietly throughout. This festival brings a calm and stillness which we hope lives on in each student during these cold and darker days.



## **Volunteers**

We are coming to the end of our time with the 3 remaining volunteers from Germany – Maren, Nele and Laurenz. It is difficult to express the extent and quality of their contribution to the students, staff and school. They have initiated many activities, shared their ideas and observations and given their energy and love of your children in everything they have done and we shall miss them greatly. The time and commitment these fine young people offer us make a significant contribution to the success of what we do each day and it is also our hope that we have provided them with learning and understanding to take into their work and study in the future. They will return for the first week of Term 3 before flying home. We thank them for having the courage to stay on when called back home when the covid virus outbreak hit us all, we thank them for their generous contribution and for giving us all confidence in the future.



The new team of volunteers we were expecting in August will of course now not be coming. It is doubtful we will see them at all which is a disappointment for them and us but should this change you will be introduced to them.

We are grateful to have Roxana working as a volunteer one day a week with us this term and hope she will be able to continue into the next semester. She has brought kindness and a steady, calm manner to her work with the students. She will be joined by Jess next term.

### **Vacation Care & After School Care**

You will be aware that we are now offering After School Care and a holiday program. It is our intention that these will grow and become regular over time. Dates for the vacation care these holidays are July 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> 8<sup>th</sup>. Please contact Erin or Jan if you would like to participate.

**After-Hours School Program**

After-Hours School Program Expanding in  
Term 3, 2020

Monday – Thursdays inclusive: 3.00pm – 7.00pm

Contact Erin Bateman to express interest or for further information.  
E: [ebateman@warrahspecialistschool.nsw.edu.au](mailto:ebateman@warrahspecialistschool.nsw.edu.au)

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Wishing you all warm nights and happy holidays.

Jan Fowler

## Upcoming Events

Friday 26 June

Last day of Term 2

Wednesday 22 July

First day of Term 3

Tuesday 28 July

Celebration for the completion of the mud brick hut



