President’s Report for 2014

Annual General Meeting

Blackwood Special Schools Outdoor Education Centre

Monday, March 16th

Blackwood Special Schools Outdoor Education Centre (Blackwood) continued to improve facilities and programs during 2014 to ensure the students and staff who attended the camp enjoyed and quality educational experience.

Thanks to the excellent presentations given by Chris and Tony at the Principals Association of Specialist Schools (PASS) meeting, at the PASS conference and at the Wimmera Special Schools Conference, our membership increased from 25 to 30 member schools. We welcomed Kalian School, Portland Bay School. Warracknabeal SDS, Horsham Special School and Port Phillip Specialist School.

The numbers of students attending the camp for the year exceeded 1800. Schools began using the facility on day 2 of the school year. There was only one week during the year (Tony and Chris were attending Professional Development activities) that the camp did not have any student in attendance.

It was endorsed at a meeting of the member schools early in 2014, that the committee of management continue to work to have Blackwood recognised as a school in its own right to ensure it remains a leading outdoor education facility for the students in our specialist schools well into the future.

In our attempts to achieve this aim, we continued our discussions and attended many meetings with representatives from many departments of the then Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)

As a recognised campus, the Department of Education and Training mandated that all Blackwood’s finances would have to be transferred to Frankston SDS and go through the CASES system. Prior to this happening, the committee created a working program budget for Blackwood based on the CASES coding. The transferring of the funds and the responsibility for the Blackwood finances meant more work for the Frankston SDS administration staff. The committee looked at the budget they had established and considered future expenditure and agreed that Blackwood could afford to pay the salary of administration staff member based at Frankston SDS for 0.2 per week. Wendy Bice will undertake this position in 2015. It is also hoped that Wendy may undertake some other administration roles to allow the Blackwood staff to spend more time with the students and the programs as opposed to being involved in administration work.

The Blackwood finances were transferred to Frankston SDS at the end of 2014, the end of the Blackwood financial year.
Scott Tucker, Principal of Frankston SDS in conjunction with the Frankston SDS School Council decided that the management decisions in relation to Blackwood be affected by the member schools. To this end, a subcommittee of the Frankston SDS School Council will be formed in 2015 comprising representatives from the member schools. The subcommittee will then report its decisions to the School Council. Minutes of meetings of the subcommittee together with CASES generated financial reports will still be distributed to member schools.

We continued our discussions with the Residential Outdoor Schools Association (ROSA) and received great support from the ROSA school Principals and from their Principal Liaison Officer.

During 2014, we sought to become a member of the ROSA. On receipt of our application, ROSA then realised that they needed to formalise their structure and processes to be able to address our application. Following this process, they agreed to accept our membership and in November 2014, we officially became a member of the organisation. Thanks must go to the Frankston SDS School Council who made a generous contribution to the membership fee. Scott Tucker, as the Blackwood Principal has already in 2014 attended meetings with the other ROSA Principals and Department of Education and Training (DE&T) personnel.

Blackwood SSOEC ran its annual events with The Alpine Ride and The Blackwood Super Ride continuing to provide all those who attend with great learning, fun and the opportunity to interact on a social level. Planning has taken place this year to introduce another annual bike ride in 2015 – The Cheviot Ride.

The camp has again benefitted from its community supporters. The local townsfolk and the Ballan Lionesses who supported the Super Ride and the Charity Golf Day, the Frankston Rotary Sunrise Club who supported the Charity Golf Day and a working bee and the friends of Blackwood who supported the Golf Charity Day. To all the community supporters, thank you. We welcome and recognise your contribution in helping Blackwood SSOEC achieve its aims.

We farewelled Chris Cook as a staff member at the end of the year. Chris embraced his role with enthusiasm and passion. He developed a great rapport with all the students and worked professionally with the staff from the member schools. He worked very well in partnership with Tony to provide excellent programs for the students. Thank you Chris for the wonderful work you have done with the students and around the facility.

Tony attended the International Camping Fellowship Conference in Turkey during October. Whilst there, he gave a short workshop presentation about Blackwood SSOEC. This valuable experience enabled Tony to showcase Blackwood SSOEC to the world and at the same time make great connections with others around the world that provide outdoor education experiences for students with disabilities.

While Tony was away for the month, he was replaced by Callum Perry. Thank you Callum for stepping into this role with little Blackwood experience, yet fulfilling the role so capably. The students and staff enjoyed working with you and benefitted from your knowledge and compassionate approach.

I would like to acknowledge the great work that Tony has continued to do this year, not only in working with the students and staff from the member schools, but in liaising with the community.
organisations, in working to ensure the camp is properly maintained and in attending so diligently to all the administrative work involved. Thank you, Tony.

Staff from member schools have continued to complete an online evaluation form of their experience at Blackwood. The results from the surveys endorse the professionalism and dedication of both Chris and Tony and very often provide thanks for all Chris and Tony do to ensure the time the students have at Blackwood is not just an adventure, but adds to their school learning outcomes.

The committee of management have met regularly this year and have embraced their commitment to effectively manage the camp and provide support and guidance to the staff on behalf of the member schools. Their commitment, enthusiasm and willingness to work has been outstanding and I would like to thank them for their great contribution to ensuring Blackwood SSOEC is a facility that provides the best outdoor education experience for the students from the member schools.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the member schools for their ongoing commitment and support to Blackwood. Without your support, we could not offer our students the amazing experience that Blackwood SSOEC has to offer.

Judy Lonza    President, Committee of Management