

Around the Schools by Lorraine Harris

Beaumaris Secondary College

Driving through the pleasant streets of Beaumaris en route to my appointment with the Principal of the newly opened Beaumaris Secondary College, I was entranced by the old established gardens adorning the area. Tall graceful gum trees have marked the progress of this affluent suburb for decades. Established in 1852 the area has obvious positive links with a successful past - a place where tradition and habitual practices have prevailed.

And yet this new government school arising from the demolition rubble of the old Sandringham campus - so familiar to those driving along Balcombe Road - owes little to the past. Although a work in progress, the school opened its doors to 149 year 7 students at the beginning of 2018.

For those of us who received a secondary education in the 60s -80s here in Melbourne, our concept of a secondary school building will revolve around the old LTC. (light timber construction) chicken shed configurations that sprang up throughout Victoria to meet the demands of the baby boomers. Beaumaris Secondary College is as different from this as chalk and cheese.

The imposing exterior of glass, steel and timber sets the scene. This is no second-rate institution apologising for using up tax payers' hard-earned dollars. This is a proud structure confident of its role in creating and nurturing the future citizens of the 21st century.

I marvel as we tour the building at the beautiful spaces the architects have created. Using modern fabrics and materials, the learning areas are purpose built, aligned to the pursuits to be undertaken within them. Wide stairs able to double as tiered audience seating soar above, facilitating movement within the building; felt covered walls add to the acoustically calibrated performance areas; a beautifully proportioned gymnasium designed to accommodate players and spectators awaits the sportspeople of the future, while a 3D printer stands inconspicuously in the Innovation Laboratory's silently signalling future potential.

My talk with the Principal, Debby Chaves, reveals that it is not just the physical structure of the school that reflects how attitudes to education have changed. It is imbedded into the fabric of the ethos of the school.

Where parents of yesterday might well have felt a gulf between themselves and the school, even a degree of intimidation, willing to hand over the education of their young to those more qualified, nothing could be further from the truth at Beaumaris Secondary college. As long as seven years ago (4 years prior to the closure of the Sandringham campus) a group of concerned local parents began to lobby the Education for a 7-12 modern stand-alone college on the site.

Their engagement and involvement with the school continued seeing the local community actively participating in many of the decisions as the school became a reality. From the design of the buildings, the creation of the school's logo, selection of furniture, uniform planning and curriculum development to the staff selection process, parents have been encouraged to collaborate with staff. As the school moves forward it is evident that this trend will continue. Parent expertise is being incorporated into curriculum delivery. On my tour I visited the state of the art food technology area (kitchens) where professional chef and parent, Shaun Bowles, was delivering a unit of the Healthy Lifestyles program. What a fantastic way to break down barriers between home and school. No doubt leadership positions will gradually evolve from among the student body with a particular emphasis on community connections. Equally there is no doubt that there will not be an Ink Monitor among them for the curriculum is being explored via a digital medium. Students are equipped with state of the art interactive laptop computers. The Principal assures me that the cost involved here is more than offset by the reduction of set textbooks for years 7-10.



Students using Technology including Ink Shape Stylus.

The school is in partnership with the global colossus Microsoft to utilise their 365 One Note program. Free to students and teachers, this program allows the school community to share work, both in the devising of the material and as students work through it. Using an Ink Shape stylus, one can actually write on the screen thus ensuring that handwriting skills are preserved. Work is stored in the Cloud and able to be retrieved by teachers for correction and feedback. No more "dog ate my homework" excuses. With the

backing of Microsoft comes a guarantee that astute minds will be constantly at work refining, improving and extending the applications offered to our young learners by this technology. While the school is in its infancy and there are many blank spaces where equipment and resources are still to be installed, the air is one of an enthusiastic, collaborative community focussed on the potential of the future and the realities of its demands.



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