BERENGARRA SCHOOL

Annual Report
2012
Berengarra School Annual Report – 2012

School Overview
Berengarra School is an independent co-educational school for secondary students. The students are of normal intelligence but struggle to maintain their place within a mainstream school due to social/emotional disorders. Disorders include, but are not limited to, high levels of anxiety and depression, oppositional defiance disorder, post traumatic stress, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, and ADHD. These behaviours manifest themselves in school refusal, inappropriate behaviour at school and a lack of social awareness or impulse control. In most cases, it appears that our students have difficulties because of a combination of problems in home and school life rather than through one specific cause.

Berengarra aims to develop self-management skills in students over a period of 6 to 24 months to bring about a change in their behaviour and allow them to return successfully to mainstream schooling, a TAFE course or work education program. In some cases students attend Berengarra for up to three years.

Berengarra Mission Statement
Berengarra School believes in respect and empathy for all members of our community. All young people have a right to an education in a caring, supportive environment.

When young people experience severe social and/or emotional difficulties appropriate support and resources are necessary for them to receive a successful education.

Berengarra School seeks to address these issues in a stimulating, non-judgemental learning environment with specialist staff and innovative programs that are centred on individual outcomes. It provides each student with “A Chance for Change”.

The Aims of the Berengarra School

1. To provide a supportive educational environment for adolescents with social and emotional disabilities and their families/care-givers.

2. To offer a stimulating, challenging and comprehensive curriculum that is relevant to the needs of our students.

3. To facilitate the development of positive self-esteem, responsibility and independence in the student.

4. To promote teamwork, innovation and mutual support amongst staff and encourage participation in ongoing professional development.

5. To establish and maintain a network of support systems relevant to our clientele.
6. To engage parents/guardians in the home/school partnership.

7. To work within the guidelines set out by the Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority and employ suitably qualified and experienced staff.

8. To manage the school as an efficient, effective and financially viable business.

**Governance**

The Berengarra School is a company limited by guarantee. It is registered as a specialist school through the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority, and has status as a charitable trust. The School Council acts as the governing body and is primarily responsible for the strategic direction of the school and the appointment of the Principal. The day to day operation of the school is delegated to the Principal.

**Members of the School council in 2012**

Chair - Simon Le Pastrier (B.A., Dip Ed)

Deputy Chair - Bec Guggisberg – M.Soc. Ecol. (UWS), Grad. Dip Ed. (Melb), B.Outdoor Ed. (Latrobe)

Secretary - Graeme Bird - Dip. Com. Dir, Ass. Dip Bus. (Banking & Finance)

Principal - Peter Heffernan - B.Sc.(Melb), B.Sp.Ed. (Monash), Dip.Ed. (Melb), Grad Dip. Com. St (Hawthorn)

Sue Brown – B. Bus. St. (Swinburne)

Lyn Perry - M. Ed. (Special Ed.), Grad Dip Careers, Dip. Food Services

Cate Thompson – B.A., Dip Ed.


Trudy Thomson – B. Sc.(Hon.), M.Ed. Policy,

**2012 – The School Year**

**Review**

**Curriculum**

While Berengarra School has as its primary focus the social and emotional development of our students, we also recognise the importance of maintaining academic standards. Many of our young people have associated learning difficulties and require extra support in classes. A great advantage of the Berengarra curriculum is its ability to respond quickly to the changing needs of our student body.
**Box Hill Campus**

In 2012 the curriculum was comprised of numeracy, literacy, core and elective subjects.

Students arrive at Berengarra with thorough assessments from psychologists or psychiatrists as well as school reports that reflect their achievement at previous schools. We utilise this information together with our own educational assessments to place students in mathematics and English classes that will foster their growth in these areas. The average class ratio in numeracy and literacy is 10 students to 1 teacher, and the majority of these classes will have the additional support of a teaching assistant. The special education teacher takes a group of 2-3 students who have the greatest needs.

*Core subjects in 2012 were:* art, food technology, humanities, mindpower and physical education. All students participate in the core subjects with their home group.

*Mindpower* has a link with each student’s home group. Students participate in two sessions per week with the focus being on the personal development of the individual. The program is coordinated by the school counsellor, Marianne Wray, and incorporates elements of cognitive behavioural, narrative and solution focussed therapies. This year she has overhauled the program and now twice a week students participate in classes that discuss issues around bullying, anger management, resilience, emotional development and decision making.

*Elective subjects* vary depending on the teachers allocated to take the class. Examples of elective subjects from 2012 were team sports, fishing, pets, textiles, aquatic sports, model making, comic strips, outdoor education and historical tours. Each elective was a term in duration.

In fourth term we held another successful all school camp at Merricks, where the students participated in the many activities run by the camp instructors, including bike riding, fishing, canoeing, snorkelling and swimming.

**Pathways Campus**

The Pathways program has three components: work education, TAFE studies, and classroom based subjects, which are literacy, numeracy and personal development.

This year there have been several significant changes to the Pathways program. At the beginning of the year we were granted senior school registration, and this meant that some of the Pathways students could start their VCAL course while still having the support of the Berengarra program. In previous years they had to move into the TAFE system to commence VCAL, and unfortunately many struggled. In 2012 eight of our students started Foundation VCAL and are now much better prepared for their next place of study. Our new VCAL co-ordinator, Katina Astles, did a tremendous job in organising and planning all the students’ work requirements. We also changed the way we delivered the work education and TAFE component of Pathways with the addition of the warehouse, cafe education and market programs and this has given many of the students the opportunity to complete these components “in-house”. For the Warehouse project 10 students travelled to Kilsyth every Friday and participated in training and work with the Eastern Food Alliance (EFA). EFA is a not-for-profit organization established to provide healthy food to families in the North Eastern suburbs of Melbourne who otherwise wouldn’t have access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Ten students were involved in a small community market project where they helped distribute fruit and vegetables to other members of the local community. Also, in 4th term we received funding which allowed us to purchase a coffee machine and as a result, the Cafeducation project was born. Cafeducation will become one the training programs for our students, offering Certificate 3 in retail, working with the coffee machine and working at the community market. This program also covers the Work Ed and VET component of the students VCAL program.

Another highlight of the program was the Better Buddies program which was developed from a partnership between the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, Sussex Heights Primary School and ourselves. The program ran for six weeks for 3 hours every Wednesday, with Pathways students
having buddies from a group of Sussex Heights students. The program finished with a gala day for all the students from both Pathways and Sussex Heights Primary School.

Student Report

Total number of students enrolled at Berengarra during 2012 – 65.

Berengarra received Government recurrent funding for 58 students for the 2012 school year (Based on August census date). Australian Government special education grant funding – 52 students. (Based on March census date).

Both census numbers were up on last year, (August 56 students, March 50 students).

Student Attendance – 2012 - 76%  
2011 - 73%
In 2012 the number of students that presented with issues around school refusal was an increase on last year, with at least 25% of students having little or no attendance at school for six months or more prior to enrolment, and so this distorts the student attendance figures when comparing them to mainstream schools. Our strategies for meeting the needs of these students are now well developed thanks to the work of our school counsellor, Marianne Wray. Generally they have a high number of days of non-attendance at the commencement of their enrolment. They increase this through careful planning and negotiation to become full time attendees, so it is possible that in the early stages of a student’s enrolment at Berengarra their attendance can be in hours per week rather than days. In some instances it is not unusual for a student to take several months to be attending regularly, and providing realistic attendance goals are achieved this is regarded as a success. While the student is not in attendance, contact is maintained by home group teachers and the youth worker as well as a distance education approach to learning. Our counsellor has been allocated a high portion of time to work with these students.

Transition

Total number of departures in 2012 – 22
This figure amounts to a 34% turnover of students for the year, lower than in previous years due to the fact that the average age of our students was lower.
Destinations of students post Berengarra were as follows:
TAFE – 5
Mainstream school – 6
Alternative Education - 5
Welfare Support - 6

During 2012, eight students that were enrolled at the Box Hill campus transitioned to the Pathways program.
The lower turnover rate (34%) can be attributed to several factors. First, the criteria for accepting new students was re-evaluated at last years’ staff conference and changes were made to accommodate our two new environments. It is important to have the resources and the appropriate program for any potential student, and if you cannot meet their needs in any significant way, then it is in no one’s interest to take on that student. I believe our intake process is more precise than in the past.
Second, we now have the Pathways program well established, and this has allowed many of our older students to progress onto a more “grown-up” Berengarra program before returning to mainstream education. In the past, the step from Berengarra back into mainstream was too great for some, and as a result they struggled.
Finally, we have made some changes to our curriculum that has delivered better learning outcomes for our students. The Pathways program now offers a Pre-VCAL and Foundation VCAL, and because the parameters of assessment in VCAL are very well defined it has resulted in a much better directed program for our students.

**Staff Report**

20 staff were employed during 2012, with the physical education and English VCAL positions changing hands in 3rd term and the addition of another teaching assistant in 2nd term.

**Staff break-down of employment time (end of term 4) – Total 14.7**

- **Principal** Full time
- **Deputy Principal** 2@Full time
- **Business Manager** Full time
- **Teaching Staff** 3@Full time
  - 3@ .8 FTE
- **Counsellors** 1@Full time
  - 1@.8FTE
- **Teaching Assistant** 2@ Full time
  - 1@ .4FTE
- **Receptionist** 1@ .6 FTE
  - 1@ .4FTE
- **Cleaner** 1@ .3 FTE

Psychologist engaged on a sessional basis

**2012 Staff**

- Student Welfare
- Secretary – Jan Billings Dip. Youth Work

Teachers
- Cheryl Vickers – Dip. Ed (Primary), Dip. Counselling,
- Lyn Perry – M. Ed. (Special Ed.), Grad Dip Careers, Dip. Food Services
- Justin Finnerty – B.Sc. Ed.
- Brad Hicks – B. Health Sc. & Outdoor Ed, Dip. Ed.,
- Rebecca Emmett – B. Ed.
- Katina Astles – B.A., B. Teaching (Hons)
- Counsellors
- Marianne Wray – B. Social Work
- Catrina Salton – Dip. Youth Work
- Teacher’s Assistants
- Jarrod Salton – Cert IV Youth Work
- Emma Williams – Cert. IV Youth Work
- Fran Jackson -

This year we said farewell to two staff members, Sam Murray and Brad Hicks. Sam started with us at the beginning of last year, and played an important role in establishing the Pathways program in its first year at the new Community Hub. His replacement was Katina Astles,
who brought a passion for teaching VCAL, and impressive reputation for curriculum knowledge and organisational skills from her last teaching position at Williamstown High School. In second semester she played a major role in developing the VCAL program from its formative beginnings into an integral part of the Pathways curriculum, and also improving the literacy standards and expectations of all students.

Brad Hicks, our physical education teacher at Box Hill for 2½ years, moved onto a position at Wesley College. Brad came onboard soon after our relocation, and his excellent teaching skills, relaxed nature, good humour and country charm were a great asset to the school. His replacement was Rebecca Emmett, (another country born phys. ed. teacher) who after several years on a working holiday in Europe and the Middle East (work = teaching!) she returned home early in the year to settle back in Melbourne.

This year we were able to employ another half time teaching assistant at the Box Hill campus, thanks to addition special education funding from the State Government. Fran Jackson, a trainee teacher and daughter of former Berengarra art teacher Mary Jackson, assisted in all the art classes as well as language and maths. We now have a teaching assistant in half of the classes, and this has made a significant difference to learning outcomes and behaviour management.

**Total Staffing for each term**

Tern 1 – 14.3 FTE positions
Term 2 – 14.3 FTE positions
Term 3 – 14.7 FTE positions
Term 4 – 14.7 FTE positions

**Qualifications**

All teaching staff hold VIT registration.
Three staff members hold special education qualifications.

**Absenteeism**

2012 – 9.4 days
2011 - 6.2 days
2010 - 5.8 days
2009 – 7.6 days

The increase in absenteeism this year can be attributed to one staff member being involved in a serious car accident which resulted in six weeks convalescence, and two staff members each requiring 3 weeks leave for surgical procedures.

**Employee Assistance Program:**

The employee assistance program is available to all staff members, it allows for three sessions with a psychologist to talk through any issues that are affecting their lives.

During 2012 the EAP was not utilised by any staff member.

**Professional Development**

All staff participate in weekly staff meetings and briefings which often have aspects related to professional development. They also have access to the PD offered by AISV and other professional development organizations. Several staff were supported in upgrading their qualifications in first aid, outdoor education and Certificate IV teaching. Staff attended seminars on leadership, learning disabilities, autism and risk assessment.
The School Council

Ann Jeans, Trudy Thomson, and Shane Kamsner were three new appointments to the Council at the start of the year and they all brought fresh ideas and energy. The Council have committed to developing a strategic plan for the years ahead, and have engaged a facilitator from Independent Schools Victoria to guide them through the process commencing at the end of January, 2013. It will be followed up by sub-committees throughout 2013 and they expect it to deliver a final report by second semester.

New Bus
At the end of 2011 we received great news from the Variety Club that they had gained support from a corporate partner, Gloria Jeans Coffee, to purchase a brand new 12 seater bus! Given that two of our three buses are over 14 years old this was a wonderful and timely gift to the school. Both our programs have made excellent use of the new bus. It is air conditioned, has a sound system that works and has seats that feel like the most comfortable bed you can imagine. Absolute luxury! Thanks to all the people at the Variety Club and Gloria Jeans Coffee for making it all happen. In addition, Gloria Jeans donated a coffee machine for our staff room, which was greatly appreciated by all the coffee buffs on staff. Many thanks to our business manager Graeme Bird, who made the initial approach to the Variety Club, then saw the application through to the final delivery of the bus.

Ian Watson
It is with sadness that I have to inform the school community of the passing of Ian Watson, Principal of Berengarra from 2000-2004. Prior to this he served as Deputy Principal between 1995-1999. Ian was an educator of the highest calibre, being an inspiration to the staff over this time. His greatest achievement at Berengarra was implementing many changes to school processes that incorporated a more therapeutic approach when dealing with student’s behaviour, and his legacy is that this is now the default mode in all aspects of the school’s processes and procedures. He was a gentle giant, a compassionate man, great company and all round top bloke who will always be remembered by the staff who had the privilege to work with him. To his wife Jan, children Darien and Kirsty, and grandchildren we extend our sympathy. A typical photo of Ian has been placed on the front of this annual report as a mark of respect.

School Satisfaction Survey
In 2013 the school will implement a formal survey of parents, students and staff that will provide feedback on many areas of the school. At present only staff provide this at their annual review. However, the anecdotal feedback from parents has been excellent, with many expressing relief that school is no longer a traumatic experience for their child. In 2013 there will be an opportunity for parents to provide written feedback to the school with a feedback form included in the student’s semester report. At the start of the term following a semester an Educational Support Group meeting is conducted with every student and their parents/caregivers where the feedback form can be discussed. The improvement in student attendance is one indicator that student satisfaction is up. Also, there have been no formal complaints made to the school.
At the staff conference next year we plan to develop a questionnaire that will be appropriate for our clientele.
2013

Tenure

We have three more years of the lease to run after it was extended for another year. Unfortunately the Catholic Diocese of Melbourne has not decided on the future of this site and so we are still unsure whether we will be able to stay here beyond 2015. The situation should be clearer by the middle of next year. They are delighted to have us as tenants and if they don’t require our site then an extension of the lease or purchase of the property are possibilities. If we did have to move on then they are well aware of the time that may take, and would certainly accommodate us for as long as possible.

Pathways

With the success of the Pathways program at Chadstone, in 2013 the school will be looking for other opportunities to expand through partnerships with other organizations. Next year we will be able to offer School Based Apprenticeships thanks to the work of Graeme Barwise and Catrina Salton.

Severe Language Disorder Grant

At the end of 2012 we successfully applied for a $7200 grant from the Federal Government to develop curriculum practices to better meet the needs of students who present with severe language disorders. Since we have been at Box Hill the number of these students have doubled, and so this Grant has come at an opportune time. The money will be used to employ a language consultant who will examine some of our teaching methods and curriculum ideas, then, working with the whole staff help initiate any changes.

Staff Conference

Next year’s staff conference will focus on curriculum development, counseling skills and the learning and teaching component of the strategic plan.

Finally

To the students, the parents and caregivers, the staff and members of the school council I thank you for all the hard work, support, and contributions to our programs. I look forward to working as Principal in 2013.

Peter Heffernan

Principal

Berengarra School

2012 - Special Donations

Invergowrie Foundation - $10,000

The Variety Club and The Coffee Company – A bus!