

2020 | TOWERS MAGAZINE

PENRITH SELECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL | 70TH ANNIVERSARY





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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Each year, when I sit down to write the Principal's report for our school magazine, "Towers", the history of the publication is not lost on me. Since starting at the school, it has been enjoyable to read each edition dating back to the opening of the school in 1950. Not only is the name of the publication a respectful nod to the former mansion that sat on the school site, the fact that with the exception of 1951 and 1988, Towers magazine has continuously chronicled the life of the school, is unmatched by many schools not only in NSW but across the country.



MR. MARK LONG

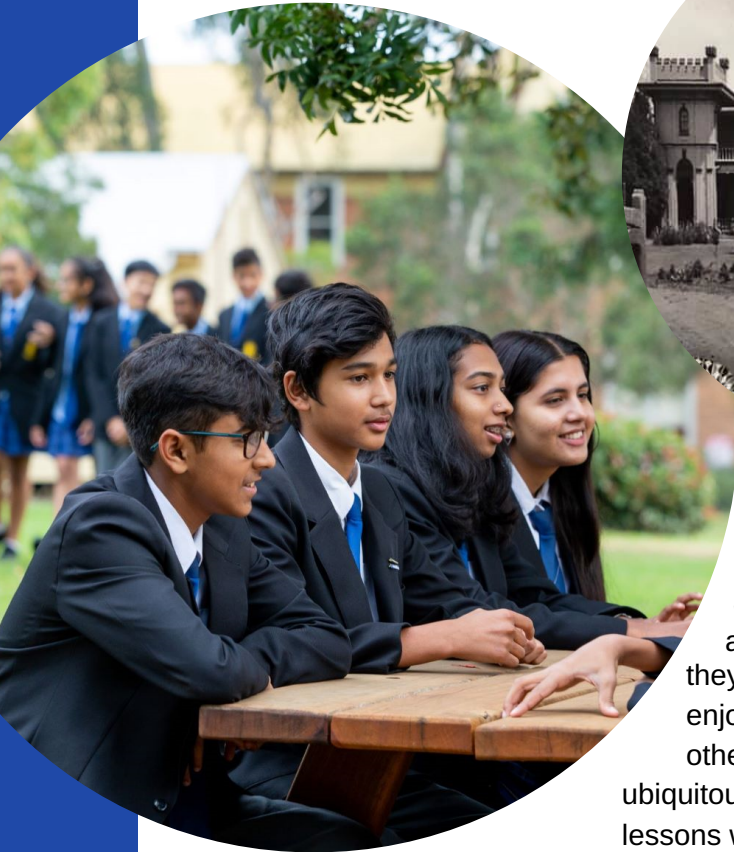
2020 was unforgettable and I strongly suspect that in the years ahead, students who become part of this special community will learn and possibly wonder about what impact the global pandemic of COVID-19 (also known as Coronavirus) has had.

At the end of January, we returned for what was planned to be a year of celebration (for our 70th Anniversary), hard work and anticipated student excellence across all 6 year groups. At the end of 2019, we had put careful plans in place to transition teaching and learning for all into the digital space and students in all year groups were required to have their own laptop each day. That decision turned out to be more important that we could have ever anticipated. By March, a number of indicators were that the world was in a precarious position and we started considering what options might be ahead of us. Key to our thinking was to keep everyone as safe as possible but to also make decisions and communicate clearly with students, staff and parents. This is essential at any time, but this was going to be something that we hadn't experienced before.

In the week before schools were closed and students were sent home to complete lessons remotely, the staff not only taught their lessons, but took turns at leading professional learning in free periods so that everyone had as much upskilling as possible. We made the important decision to continue with all lessons using the regular timetable so that we all had structure, that students were not left behind others in different schools and so that parents knew that even though their children were at home they would be learning, ensuring parents were able to focus on their own work.

Sport was cancelled for most of the year and when learning from home, the regular Wednesday afternoon slot was used for catch up lessons, support or for students to

FROM THE PRINCIPAL



undertake their own activities. Many made the good choice to undertake exercise or another type of wellbeing activity. Our weekly assemblies were held via Zoom with a special account that allowed up to 1000 participants; they were electric in the early days as the school enjoyed the only connection that we had with each other but quickly the term Zoom became as ubiquitous to education as a whiteboard. Still, the live lessons were high quality for the teaching staff.

Education continues to be the absolute focus of the school but we did take the opportunity to undertake a number of significant upgrades to the school while students and staff worked from home. Outside of the summer holidays, when trades are rarely available, this window gave us a unique chance to have multiple projects undertaken simultaneously. We made the deliberate decision to use as many local trades and Australian products as possible given the need for jobs in the community. The day after students went home, we had large team of trades onsite so that when students returned to school, it would be as fresh, welcoming and as modern as we could make it.

The projects undertaken this year include: upgrading the T Block quad with seating, new grass, landscaping and four outdoor table tennis tables. Construction of the Alumni garden continued and this was used for the Year 12 graduation instead of the hall, the dust bowl also known as the Hockey field was irrigated and top dressed, the Basketball courts were re-fenced and outdoor seating was installed along with a water filling station. The school foyer received an upgrade including two large (wall paper size) historical pictures of the Towers Mansion. The A block bulkheads were decorated with the school values and quotes voted as inspiring from the 2019 student voice competition held in Education Week and the A block Art Gallery was installed with 30 frames that are used to showcase student works are rotated each term. The gym was air conditioned and the long standing but unused (due to safety) cricket nets were demolished and rebuilt given the love of cricket amongst the student body. Classrooms were not forgotten and all rooms were painted and additional notice and white boards installed and ten rooms received new furniture to foster collaboration in lessons.

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

The school looks fantastic in 2020 and the generous financial support from the parents, alumni and the Department of Education has been essential to complete such a large number of works.

I conclude each newsletter and each speech by expressing my thanks to the school community for their ongoing support of the school and this report could not possibly be any different. Parents and students are wonderfully cooperative, supportive and polite in their interactions with the school each day. The staff are quite simply brilliant and for the first time, many parents had the privilege to see them in action via Zoom this year and understood in real time what happens in classrooms each day. When the teaching staff worked from home given the public health advice, the administration staff stayed at school everyday to keep things moving as did the senior executive - Deputy Principals Jaclyn Cush, Brian Ferguson and Doris Lee, and Business Manager Maria Ryan. We wanted to be onsite and the routine of coming to work each day really helped with supporting each other as well as managing the operation of a remote school and the largest number of major projects being concurrently undertaken for many years.

Finally, to each of the students. You have all done a remarkable job. It hasn't been easy and for some it has been much harder than for others. I am proud of each and every one of you. My sincere thanks for being such an amazing group of young people. My position as Principal of the school is an incredible privilege.

Here's to a less complex 2021 at this wonderful school.

Warm regards,
Mark Long
Principal
B.PE, B.Ed, M.Ed (Lead)



Despite the unexpected challenges 2020 has thrown at all of us, we couldn't have asked for a better run as your School Captains. The continued dedication of our teachers, as well as the resilience of our peers during online learning, has really made us appreciate just how lucky we are to be part of such a supportive and connected school community.

From online club meetings to whole-school zoom assemblies, we've had the opportunity to learn how to be adaptive and flexible in our leadership, something we will both take with us into life beyond high school. With our peers continuing to lead clubs online, creating websites, online challenges and videos, and performing musical items via Zoom, we came to really appreciate the enthusiasm that everyone brings to school every day. We are both incredibly proud to be part of a school where students are genuinely passionate about learning both within the classroom (or, for some time this year, at home) and through extracurricular activities. The continued support of our teachers, whose hard work made the transition to online learning seamless and ensured we remained connected even in the period when we were learning from home, has also been extremely valuable to us.

The opportunities we've had to connect with those outside of the school over our term as School Captains have been fantastic. Ranging from Prefect Afternoon Teas and fundraisers to alumni tours and special conferences, such opportunities have exposed us to a range of perspectives and to gain a sense of how Penrith High is linked to the broader community. Speaking with visiting alumni allowed us to appreciate the history of our school, while being present for the opening of teachers' conferences about changes that would be made to our learning gave us a sense of where our school is headed.

For all of us Year 12 students, the fact that we're graduating soon hasn't sunk in properly yet as it seems like only yesterday that we began our time at Penrith. We remember the Class of 2019 advising us that this year would pass really quickly, and now here we are saying the same thing already. To Year 11- you are an incredible group of people and we wish you all the best in your HSC year. Attending the recent elections for the 2020/21 Student Executive Body reminded us just how many enthusiastic, genuine and hardworking students make up your year. There are so many fantastic leaders both within and

outside of the 2020/21 Prefect Body, and we look forward to seeing you continue making such a positive impact on our school next year.

To conclude, we would like to thank everyone who has made our final year of high school such an enjoyable one, regardless of the challenges we've all faced. To all our classroom teachers, the Senior Executive, administration staff, careers advisers, and of course our Year Adviser, Mr Hoekstra - thank you for the endless support you have offered us throughout our final year of high school. We will definitely miss the great sense of community that we have at Penrith, which has been made possible by both the staff and students. Perhaps surprisingly, being physically apart during our online learning period only made us more aware of how connected we are as a school community.

- Ethan Shackley and
Sophia Hadjimichael,
2019/20 School
Captains

SRC REPORT

What a year 2020 has been!

We began our SRC term during term 3 of 2019, with Ms Horsley and Ms Zhou guiding us. Our Variety Night was wildly successful and we already had begun planning for our future events.

However, when we returned to school in 2020, we were confronted with the reality that this year would not be a normal one. With both Multicultural Day and School Spirit Week cancelled, and all the students learning from home, we were forced to keep the student body motivated by utilising the resources available to us at home. We ran Friday nighttrivia, with Ms Kwiet as our quizmaster, and a variety of other programs to keep morale up within the student body.

We would like to thank our SRC supervisors Ms Zhou, Ms Horsley and Mr Coburn, all of teachers who support our events, the hard-working members of the SRC, and of course the student body.