Village School continues to provide an alternative to mainstream education in a rural environment which provides lots of opportunities for ‘real life’ educational experiences. We are committed to empowering students to become independent, resourceful learners who can make choices about their learning experiences. We are also committed to providing an academic program that caters for individual abilities and does not constrain students to operate within any particular grade levels. The school environment contains ponies, alpacas, sheep, goats, ducks, chickens, guinea pigs, a bearded dragon and a turtle and there is an expectation that students will have ongoing interactions with these animals, taking some responsibility for their food and welfare.

**STUDENT ENROLMENT**

- Numbers started at 53 at the beginning of 2012 and finished at 60. Fourteen year six students graduated at the end of the year, which left the school with very low numbers for the start of 2013. Thankfully they are starting to climb again and we have a current student on trial and two to start a trial in the next few weeks.

- We had lots of discussion during the year about including home schoolers as part-time students. Ideas of an extra home schooler group were floated but seen as too problematic. The teachers decided that integrating them into the existing groups was a far better option for the children and the school community. Two home schoolers started in term 4, and one converted to full time at the start of this year.

- It is interesting that we are starting to attract some students with Chinese as their first language. This is in response to the success two of these students had when joining our preps in 2011. We also had one student with Russian as her first language. All students now speak English fluently and have integrated easily into the student body. It is an advantage having a prep teacher who also has ESL qualifications.

- Our graduates chose three state high schools, two Catholic schools and two independent schools. They were: Ringwood Secondary, Billanook College, Mt Lilydale Mercy College, Preshil, Templestowe College, Emerald High and St Josephs.
EDUCATION PROGRAM

- The school continued to deliver an integrated learning approach, choosing themes or 'big picture' topics, which incorporated different key learning areas. Specialist subjects such as sport, outdoor ed., performing arts, library, Auslan and environmental studies were held weekly.

- We also introduced the option afternoon and the children were offered science, cooking, yoga, archery, music ensemble, chess and board games, scrap booking and art. Individual programs and group lessons for maths and language were also regular weekly events. School choir was run as an option on Fridays.

- There was a whole school theme on flight, which brought a visit from Tom Ryan from the Royal Flying Doctors Service with his flight simulator. Other themes were Australian history, indigenous issues and settlement, farming, fairy tales and legends and bugs and mini-beasts. One term was also devoted to the children’s individual study areas. Tanya’s group’s theme on the ANZACs led to our first in school commemoration of ANZAC Day.

- Excursions included a visit to the Moorabbin Flight Museum, the Shrine, Polly Woodside, Melbourne Gaol, The Botanic Gardens, and Edith’s group visited a free-range chicken farm, a free-range pig farm, a dairy farm and a fruit orchard.

- Incursions included a visit from ACMA to discuss cyber safety with the children, and also in the evening for the parents. We had a visit from Fred the Snake Man who also reappeared at the Birthday Fair. Two La Trobe students gave a presentation on healthy eating and also worked with some of our students on body image research.

- Laura started the Prep Orientation program in June and continued each month. She also gave some of her time during the January holidays, meeting the new preps and their families for a social event.

- The children’s work and school photos were exhibited in Croydon Centro during Education Week and statues and pottery were exhibited at the Lilydale Show.

SCHOOL EVENTS AND CAMPS

- Whole school events included a BBQ at the Mini Golf centre on Maroondah Highway, the Music Soiree, the “Meet the Grads” night, the Whole School Performance, Witches ‘R Us, the 30th Birthday Fair and Graduation Night, which also served as a farewell celebration for Mary. These last two events were very well attended and it was pleasing to see the number of past parents and students who visited during this time. It was also pleasing to see the amount of support from the current parent body for the Village Fair.

- The Whole School Sleepover was held in term 2, the performance camp at Camp Oasis in term 3 and the whole school camp at Portsea in term 4.
TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

- The teachers trialled a new system with reporting, which was to separate the parent/teacher interviews from the written report terms. The rationale was that they could talk to the parents earlier in the year so that goals and special considerations could be discussed. Therefore parent/teacher interviews were held in terms 1 and 3 and written reports were sent home at the end of terms 2 and 4.

- We continue to administer standardised spelling age tests (S.A. Spelling Test) comprehension (Torch) Reading tests (Neale), ACER tests for literacy and numeracy and Diagnostic Maths Tasks (Schleiger) so that we can provide the parents with some information about how students compare to their grade level and also use the tests for diagnostic purposes.

- In the NAPLAN testing 2012 four out of the six year 5’s sat the tests, one was withdrawn and one was absent for the language and sat the numeracy test. Five out of the six year 3’s sat the tests and one was withdrawn. The majority of the students scored in the age range expected. One student was below normal in the reading and writing sections, while two other students scored in the above average range for reading. In 2011 five or the year 3 students and six of the year 5 students were withdrawn from the testing by their parents. As a result of the withdrawals the year 5 student population was not large enough to assess and the year 3 group showed above average results for reading, average for grammar and punctuation and numeracy, and below average for spelling and persuasive writing.

FUNDING

- We are still awaiting the announcement of the new funding levels as per the Gonski Report. The only assurance we have that we will not be disadvantaged is the reassuring statement that “No school will be worse off.”

- We received the usual state and federal grants, the extra funds for L.O.T.E. and literacy and numeracy and special needs grants for specific children.

- We also received an interest subsidy grant from ISV for $7290.

- Towards the end of the year we gained a $3000 grant for 2013, for a Learning Assessment project with the school staff and a consultant from the Independent Schools of Victoria (ISV). Leanne (learning support) and myself are the two designated staff members who also attend regular briefings at ISV each term.

- We received a Coles Junior Landcare Grant for $1000, which was used in Max’s gardening program and the collection of supermarket dockets provided the music program with some much-needed new percussion instruments. Thanks to all the parents who contributed these.
STUDENT ATTENDANCE

- The school maintains the policy of ringing students who are absent after 9:30 each morning if there is no notification of an absence. Most parents contact the school and give reasons for student absences. Any prolonged absences that are not explained are followed up with an interview between parents, child and teacher. Overall the school had a 94% attendance rate in 2012, which was comparable with the attendance rate in the previous year. Each grade level also had attendance rates within that range being 90% for preps, 97% year 1, 95% year 2, 97% year 3, 96% year 4, 95% year 5 and 90% year 6. In general attendance at Village School is always high which reflects the positive attitude the children have about attending the school and also the parents commitment to our programs.

GUEST SPEAKERS

- We continued to hold regular guest speaker events for both parents from the school and outside parents. We used mainly fliers to kindergartens and crèches as well as an advertisement in the local paper to publicise these. They are good value ad they bring outside people into the school and also provide enrichment for our current parents.

- The speakers were Michael Grose, Kathy Walker, Maxine Cowie from “Starjump” and Mirra from ACMA (Australian Communications and Media Authority).

- We also had a visit from staff from the principal of Templestowe College, a school with whom we have developed a Memorandum of Understanding. Their Transition officer, Peter Ellis was also a guest speaker at our “Meet the Grads Night” in term 4 and one of their students played drums for our school production.

- Simone from Mansfield Autism was also a guest speaker as part of the involvement Mansfield Autism had with some of our students and parents.

STAFF

- Two new members of staff started at the beginning of the year, Max replaced Vikki and shared the year 3-4 group with Mary. Jenni the new Auslan teacher took over from Fiona who wanted to do more study.

- Sally continued in the library, Tanya taught the year 5-6 group, Edith taught year 1-2 and Laura continued with preps.

- Learning support was Leanne and Lyndal. Bronwyn is on extended leave of absence due to illness and Meredith has replaced her.

- We had several trainee teachers across the year, but one, Portia returned for her internship for the whole of term one. She will now be extending her internship in term 2 and will be a part time teacher in Tanya’s group when she gains her full qualifications as a Master of Education in terms 3 and 4. She will be a very welcome addition to the school’s teaching staff.
The teaching staff appreciated the time release that Mary was able to provide for them during the year. Unfortunately this has not been able to continue due to a decrease in overall staff numbers. Hopefully this can be addressed when student numbers allow us to employ another full-time teacher.

**TEACHING STAFF EMPLOYED IN 2012**

- Mary Hawthorne (Principal)  
  Bachelor of Education
- Tanya Heine  
  Master of Education
- Edith West  
  Diploma of Primary Teaching
- Laura Fraser  
  Bachelor of Arts, Diploma of Education and ESL qualifications
- Max Yardy  
  Diploma of Primary Teaching, Graduate Diploma

**ANIMAL PROGRAM**

- Laura’s group hatched some chickens. The geese sat on eggs for far too long and no goslings resulted. The geese have since been relocated to a farm in western Victoria.

- We had trouble with foxes and as a result there was extensive work put into making the animal enclosure safer and we also installed two new chook and geese houses.

- We found a new home for our male goat Basil and acquired a sheep called Kevin. The oldest goat, Dolly needed a mastectomy and our local vet was very supportive and charged us a very fair price.

**FIRE SAFETY**

- Village School has been placed back on the Bushfire at Risk Register, which means that we are required to close on Code Red days. This is because of the position of the school on a dead end road, which could result in a tragic traffic situation with cars and/or fire trucks in the event of a serious fire on or around the property.

**PARENT SATISFACTION**

- As an incoming principal I tried to contact as many parents as possible by phone to get feedback concerning expectations being met and if there were any concerns. They were asked the following questions:
  
  What made you choose our school?
  
  Have your expectations been realized?
  
  Are there any issues you would like to raise or discuss?

- 90% of the parents were contacted and of those, all stated that we had met their expectations and in one case, over and above their expectations. Many of our parents had an intuitive response to question number 1 eg: “it felt right” which suggests that emotions play a large part in the selection criteria for our school. One parent would have liked the availability of more intensive one to one with students who were struggling but understood that this came down to a funding issue.

- The parents were also involved in a very consultative approach to hiring a new principal and they expressed appreciation for the process and also were supportive of the outcome of the hiring process.
There were two concerns: one was disappearing peer groups over the years and the other was the need for staff to maintain similar teaching styles. These two issues are therefore my main focus for this coming year.

It was pleasing to hear that most people were very happy and felt Village School was delivering as regards philosophy.

**STUDENT SATISFACTION**

- The children have a daily forum (class meeting) in which to discuss any issues they may have and they also are aware that they can arrange a meeting with any staff member, supported by another staff member and their choice of a friend.

- Some of the older children initially had issues with a new staff member’s different behaviour and were allowed to express this to the staff member, which had positive outcomes for all concerned.

- Village School continues to maintain systems, which empower the children to be heard in a meaningful and productive fashion.

**STAFF SATISFACTION**

- Staff satisfaction is monitored in the weekly staff meetings. The principal works collaboratively with the teachers and almost all educational decisions are made by consensus.

- The teaching staff members were particularly happy with the time release that the principal was able to organise across the year as this is something that has been historically lacking in the school.

- Generally the parent body continues to be very supportive of the staff which makes for a relaxed and enjoyable working environment.

*Tanya Heine: Principal*