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22 May 2019

Dear Parents, Guardians and Families,

Hello again from the community of the Snowy River Campus! We are still flat out here and going strong. By the time you read this, the first expedition groups have headed-out and returned. They have bushwalked along the nearby coastal bluffs of Cape Conran camping out at the beautiful Dock Inlet, putting into practice all the skills learned in their expedition preparation sessions. The students were well prepared and so full of excitement, apprehension, “coolness” and worry, all mixed into one! I know, however, that what they will learn through their undertaking will put them in great stead. One of the concepts we use in designing our type of education experience is to move from the known to the unknown. In moving to, and living at, the Snowy River Campus, students initially are in a much unknown environment (socially, physically, emotionally, geographically and so on), which they soon become comfortable and familiar with. I am sure this is conveyed in correspondence, and will be obvious at the visiting weekend. The expeditions are another move from known to unknown, from the known existence of the Snowy River Campus into the wild coastal environment and with lightweight tents. The next expedition will be largely canoe-based on the wonderful estuarine environment. The challenges are new and different to the first expedition. It is a very deliberate part of the process of learning both leadership skills and to be enterprising.

Some of your emails, blogs (on SWAY) or letters from your sons and daughters may indicate that, while things are different at the Snowy River Campus, it is still hard work and fun. If that is so, we are very happy! We believe learning is hard work and should be enjoyable. Real learning challenges what we believe and know. It is not much use us re-learning what we already know! However, *how do we know what we don't know?* That is a hard part of what students learn here. To be able to unlock the potential of knowing what we do not know (we call it becoming *autonomous learners*) is an enormous skill! Students should approach this or indeed achieve this towards the end of their School for Student Leadership - Snowy River Campus experience and in their reintegration period when they are at home at the end of the term and next year. This is what will set them ahead of their peers! Our research suggests this is one of the key things students of this age should be undertaking, more so than perhaps Maths or English (which they often do in the Learning Projects anyway). Past students are indicating to us that after a settling-in period at home and school and in friendship circles that, as well as everything else they have learnt here, their experience here has dramatically improved their academic ability. We do know that the period of readjustment is similar to the period of separation...so, the holidays may be a challenge but with light at the end of the tunnel.

The **Visiting Weekend** is rapidly approaching. You may pick up your son/ daughter at 9.00am, Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June and return them no later than 4.00pm Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June. If you need to drop your child off earlier than midday on the Sunday please inform the campus and we will make the necessary arrangements. Remember this weekend is about spending quality time with your son or daughter, enjoying their company and encouraging them to share their experiences thus far. We strongly recommend only immediate family members be a part of this reunion.

We are advocates of the use of email facilities, as long as they can positively add to the experience of the Snowy River Campus for sons and daughters as well as parents, families and friends. I can also add that it is pretty normal for students' emails to be increasingly brief, and that brevity will more than likely become more common; the letters will probably get shorter rather than longer! There is the risk of what I call the “tyranny of technology” and “cyber proximity”! When emailing, please be aware of the effect some comments and conversations can have on your son/daughter up here, and we message the same to your sons/daughters. It is difficult for parents when one receives an email extolling how terrible and homesick a son/daughter is when you are often so far away and most likely feeling helpless. Please try to avoid supporting “chat” about homesickness. Use terms like “we know you will do well” and “we know you can do it”. Also, perhaps avoid sharing too much of your own anxiety. Tell them “we look forward to sharing the stories in only a few days” or “we now know how much work you do around home” (if that is the case!). Comments about how sad and distressed you are, even if it is the case, are sometimes unhelpful. Moreover, set time limits on the email, as it can be a very isolating activity for your son or daughter.



I have had the experience of a parent ringing me to advise their daughter was unwell in her room and why had we not attended to her, when said daughter had emailed home this complaint instead of walking or getting their roommate to walk the 23 meters to me or even less to get a friend or other staff member to seek some help! I hope these are useful hints?

There is a nice synergy and sharing of experience with the e-buddy link with our other campuses, Gnurad Gundidj in the western district and Alpine in the northeast. However, if students choose to download large images, music, video or access other (let's hope they are permitted downloads) files, they will be cautioned about appropriate use of technology. Inappropriate use may see their access to technology restricted or, worst-case scenario denied. We encourage and support students in the appropriate use of technology however should they temporarily lose technology privileges it may be that they have to hand write you using "snail-mail". Oh well!

Post visiting weekend tends to see a return of "separation anxiety" for both families and students. Quite a number of students will indicate their reluctance or insecurity about the visiting weekend, while many just can't wait! They are not really saying they didn't want to see you, if that is the message you got. They are saying they can do it alone; they wanted to and have tried that independence they all strive for at this age. However, for some this may not be so! It is a critical component of our program, and they DO need you to support them in their considerable endeavour at the Snowy River Campus. The weekend, hopefully will allow you as parents/guardians or caregivers to have a better-shared understanding of the Snowy River Campus experience. This will help in the reintegration, when your son/daughter comes home, so you can perhaps better understand the people and places being spoken of and the experiences undertaken. It may also have been the first time your son/daughter showed YOU around THEIR home! There are times when the whole building seems like one big, smelly adolescent bedroom, you know the place? Well, it is their home after all and not one student in our 7000 plus who have been through our programs has suffered serious injury as a result of their bedroom being untidy! We try to remember to keep things in perspective and choose the battle when working with adolescents.

We will, however, place a bit of leverage on them to tidy the place for the visiting weekend!

Some behaviours we may see after the visiting weekend may include even fewer letters or correspondence home after the weekend and an anxiety of the experience finishing too soon, before students are ready for it to end! Sometimes there are just apparently irrational feelings that manifest themselves in all kinds of behaviours. As has been mentioned to you in the past, we are experts at creating and dealing with these emotions and they are normal and individual. We also recognise that the manifestations of these emotions are different for every person and treat every issue individually; there is no book of cures at our disposal.

Students tend to have a very strong association with the Snowy River Campus as "home" in the latter stages of their experience. We work deliberately during these latter stages to forecast the return and the "dismantling" of the Snowy River Campus community, and the recreation of their home community and reintegration into it. We begin the "mourning" (or *adjoining*) process at this stage after the visiting weekend. I would always welcome your experiences in regard to any of these thoughts, as anecdotes can only help us better understand the complexities of the Snowy River Campus experience and the teenage interpretation of it. How, parents and families, will you cope with that return of "separation anxiety" after visiting weekend?

In regard to *mourning*; I encourage all of us to think about "celebrating the fire rather than lamenting the ashes". This is a fantastic and formative experience in a young person's life, but it is not forever.

At the end of your child's SSL journey they will receive a reporting package- please ask to see them, in fact insist upon it and ask them to go through it with you.

Students will receive a written report aligned with the Victorian Curriculum when they complete their SSL journey. In addition students present their individual growth and learning in the forms of a metaphor, a PPI or Personal Progress Interview (and review), a portfolio and presentation of learning (POL) and completion of their CLP (which their community judges...). Here are some examples and background. Names have been fictionalized; and dates altered to protect the privacy of the original student author.



### **James' Alpine School Metaphor**

"My Alpine School experience has been like climbing a huge mountain. You start off at the bottom not knowing anyone. As you start to climb you make new friends. Then the mountain gets steeper as you face new challenges. No part of the mountain is the same; every day is different with new challenges. As you climb you are always learning new things and by now you've made friends that will stick with you for the rest of your life.

You climb a bit further till you reach half way. It's dead flat here and your Alpine School experience has halted for a while, but you get to see your parents. After two days you say goodbye to your parents as you start to climb again. Climbing and climbing, you near the top. You look back down and you can just see the bottom. You realise how far you've come since that first day when you started climbing.

After a few weeks of climbing you finally reach the top. It has been a great journey but also a tough one. It's time to say goodbye to The Snowy River Campus and all your friends for now. It's been a long journey but it had to stop. It's time to leave The Snowy River Campus and start climbing back down the mountain.

A few weeks later your life is back to nearly what it used to be. You're a new person and life will never be the same."

**James, School for Student Leadership**

### **Reflections in Onenote and Sway address the following capabilities of the Victorian Curriculum:**

#### **Personal and Social Capability, Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Capability and Intercultural Capability**

Student portfolios will demonstrate the capabilities through reflection on the Snowy experience, for example:

**My Story**- examines student's personal backgrounds, philosophies, beliefs and values, their role models and achievements up-to-date.

**Working in teams** - examines team roles, student strengths and areas of improvement, team skills, and the value of working as part of a team.

**The Individual learner** - examines diversity of learning and thinking styles and their impact on individuals.

**Going home** - examines how students settle back into school and how they plan to use their learning in the future.

The Sway encourages students to reflect on their learning in both formal and informal aspects of the Program.

Reflection sessions are structured into the program on a daily basis to assist with this process. Student reflections are accessible via their Sway. Please take the opportunity to view them!

### **Example of Sway/Onenote excerpt:**

"Goals are important because they give you something to focus on. They are what you hope to achieve. Goals can take place with the smallest thing to the biggest thing. I think it is important with goal setting that you use steps to help you reach big targets. I also think your goals should be realistic; something you think you could be able to achieve in the near future or the future. I think there is a difference between goals and dreams. Dreams can be goals but to me goals that we set and really believe we can achieve are plans, therefore they have steps.

When I set goals I like to have a reason to set them. I do not think you should set about to do something that you are not inspired by. I start by thinking about the end result of my goal and then think of the smaller steps, which I can use to make it happen."

**Anita, School for Student Leadership**

### **Personal Progress Interview & Presentations of Learning**

Mid way through the program and at its conclusion, students are required to first undertake a personal progress interview, and then later a more formal presentation of their learning to a small panel. This encourages students to identify, clarify and articulate their learning orally and supports their written portfolio. It also prepares students for the task of showing what they have gained from The Snowy River Campus experience to their family, friends, school and wider community. Students are given guidelines and suggested activities to assist them in preparing for this. An example of a student Presentation of Learning follows:

Dear Panel Members,

...When I first looked at myself to see how I have changed I thought that there weren't many differences to



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when I arrived. But when I look deeper I see that I have changed...

One of the main things The Snowy River Campus has taught me is that if you want something to happen, you have to use your initiative and just go and make it happen for yourself. An example of a time here when I have used my initiative was when I helped organise a hike to the Yeerung Gorge.

Another big thing I have learnt from The Snowy River Campus is to set goals for everything you do. Before I came here I never used to set goals, so many things never got done. But here I set goals all the time and so I am always saying to myself, "Now remember your goal and do this or do that". One of the goals I have set since being here is to improve my public speaking, by speaking up and expressing my opinion. Back home in class I hardly ever said anything unless I had to, and I know up here I am fairly quiet but I have been telling myself to speak up more when I have something to say...

Finally I would like to say that The Snowy River Campus has taught me that we are capable of doing whatever we want, as long as we have the motivation and drive to put in the hard work. The story of the twelve year old boy who started the Save the Children campaign really made me realise that just because we can't vote or drive or don't have a fulltime job, doesn't mean we can't make a difference in the world. I have always thought about things like child labour and starving third-world countries as a problem too big for us to do something about but now I know that that's not true. Any individual who believes they can do something can, even if it does involve a lot of hard work. Although people have told me this my whole life The Snowy River Campus has really made me believe it through all the things we can get just by organising them, writing a proposal....So I think even if on the outside many of the changes in me are not very noticeable, inside there have been some very big changes.

**Bernie, School for Student Leadership**

All this information is available on our website. Go to <http://www.snowyriver.vic.edu.au> for more information. I ask you as parents and guardians to ***insist upon seeing, hearing or having presented to you all of these reports when your son/daughter returns home.***

The Snowy River Campus experience is ultimately a very personal one for parents and guardians, students and families and each experience is slightly different. We thank you for being a part of our community. I look forward to seeing you on the visiting weekend and hearing from you in future with any feedback that might assist us in ensuring our program continues to be the best of its type.

With every good wish,

Mark Reeves  
Principal, School for Student Leadership  
Alpine, Snowy River and Gnurad-Gundidj Campuses

Robyn Francis  
Campus Principal  
Snowy River