

GG &W

FIRBANK GRAMMAR SCHOOL MAGAZINE



Bridget Roe, Year 12
- starring in *High School Musical* as "Sharpay"



FIRBANK
GRAMMAR

2025 SEMESTER 2 COMMUNITY EVENTS

TERM 3

- Dance Lab**
Thursday 31 July
- An Evening with Bel Canto**
Friday 1 August
- FGS/BGS Year 7 - 9 Production of The Spongebob Musical**
Thursday 14 August – Saturday 16 August
- Father's Day Breakfast**
Friday 29 August
- Performing Arts Aspire**
Friday 5 September
- Turner House Art Show**
Wednesday 10 September
- Connor's Run**
Sunday 14 September
- Sandringham PYP Exhibition Opening Night**
Monday 15 September

TERM 4

- STEM Day and Destination Imagination Tournament**
Sunday 12 October
- Sandringham Art Show**
Monday 13 October
- Visual Arts Show Opening Night**
Thursday 13 November
- Turner PYP Exhibition Community Day & Closing Ceremony**
Thursday 20 November

ALUMNI EVENTS

- Class of 1995 – 30 Year Reunion**
Friday 22 August
- Class of 1985 – 40 Year Reunion**
Friday 12 September
- FOGA Morning Tea at the Art Show**
Friday 14 November
- FOGA Christmas Morning Tea**
Wednesday 3 December

OPEN MORNINGS

- Open Morning Brighton**
Thursday 31 July
- Open Morning Sandringham**
Thursday 7 August
- Open Morning Brighton**
Thursday 11 September
- Open Morning Brighton**
Friday 10 October
- Open Morning Sandringham**
Thursday 30 October

For more information on our events, to book a tour or find out about reunions, visit:
firbank.vic.edu.au or **alumni.firbank.vic.edu.au**

Thank you to our 2025 Event sponsor **Kay & Burton**.



The Firbank Grammar community welcomed other Bayside schools to enjoy a twilight fair. The night was a huge success with endless happy faces.

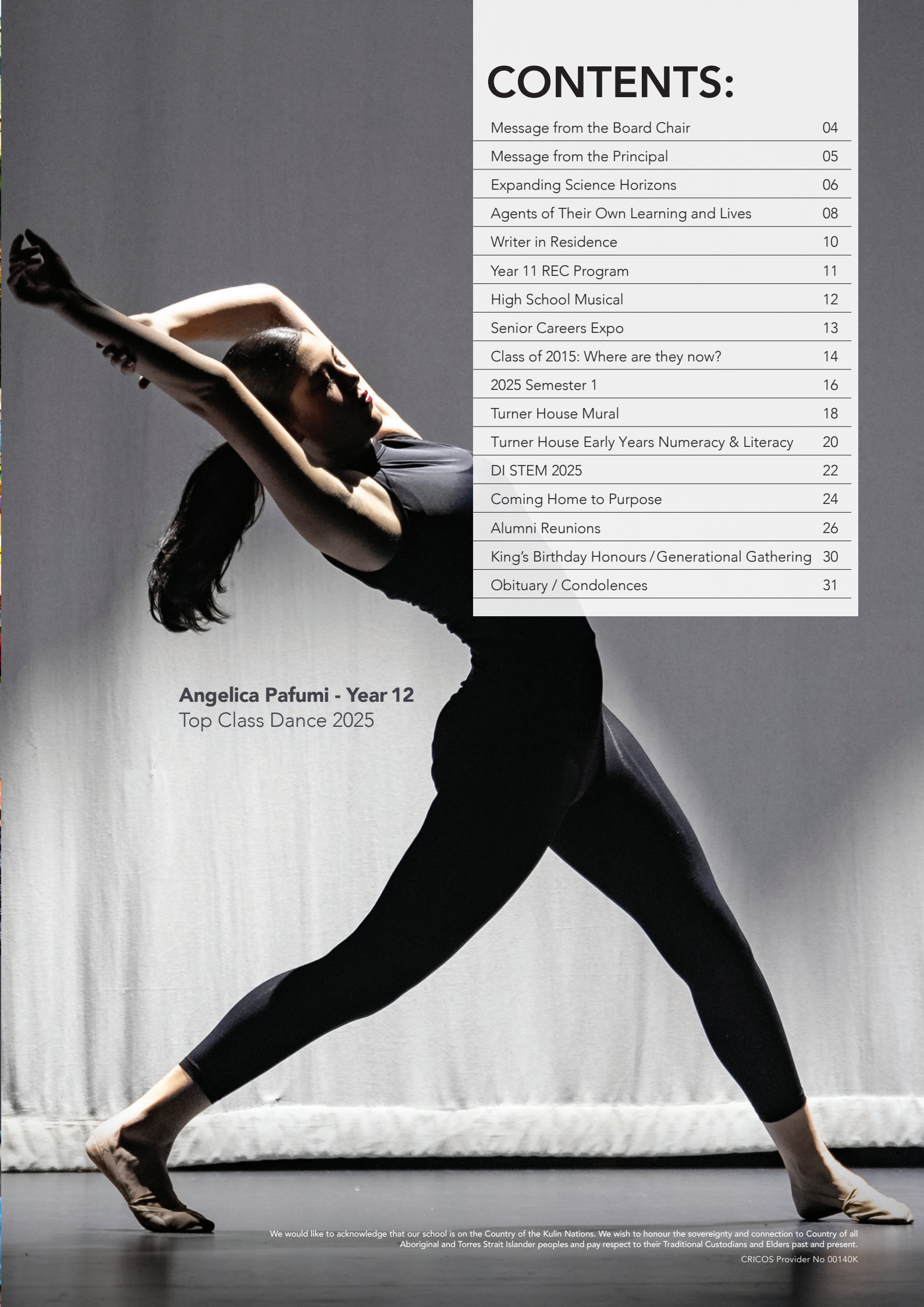
KAY & BURTON

RETIREMENT LIVING BY

ONEtoANOTHER

ANZ

DOBSON'S
Look smart



Angelica Pafumi - Year 12
Top Class Dance 2025

CONTENTS:

| | |
|---|----|
| Message from the Board Chair | 04 |
| Message from the Principal | 05 |
| Expanding Science Horizons | 06 |
| Agents of Their Own Learning and Lives | 08 |
| Writer in Residence | 10 |
| Year 11 REC Program | 11 |
| High School Musical | 12 |
| Senior Careers Expo | 13 |
| Class of 2015: Where are they now? | 14 |
| 2025 Semester 1 | 16 |
| Turner House Mural | 18 |
| Turner House Early Years Numeracy & Literacy | 20 |
| DI STEM 2025 | 22 |
| Coming Home to Purpose | 24 |
| Alumni Reunions | 26 |
| King's Birthday Honours /Generational Gathering | 30 |
| Obituary / Condolences | 31 |



PREPARING STUDENTS

Jennine Ross
- Chair of the Firbank Board

FOR LIFE The Opportunities Offered at Firbank

A great education is more than a pathway to university - it's the foundation for a rich and fulfilling life.

At Firbank, students are immersed in an environment that fosters curiosity, celebrates excellence, and encourages them to explore their strengths across academics, sport, the arts, and more. Here, students aren't just prepared for Year 12 — they're prepared for life.

Academic Excellence with Purpose

At Firbank's core is a strong academic and wellbeing program that promotes high achievement and deep, confident learning.

Students benefit from academic choice, passionate teachers, and personalised learning that builds skills in thinking, research, collaboration, and communication.

Beyond the classroom, students engage in extension programs, academic competitions, leadership forums, and immersive outdoor education that link learning to the wider world. These experiences build ambition, resilience, and the mindset to succeed in university and future careers.

Sport: Grit, Teamwork, Leadership

With exceptional facilities and a wide sporting offering, all students are encouraged to get involved — whether competitively or socially. Sport teaches life skills like leadership, teamwork, resilience, and perseverance — qualities that shape well-rounded, confident individuals.

Performing Arts: Creativity in Action

The performing arts at Firbank allow students to express themselves through music, drama, and dance. They gain more than stage skills — they learn to collaborate, think creatively, and communicate effectively, all of which are valuable in any career.



From performing to backstage roles, students build confidence, empathy, and discipline. Many pursue arts careers, while others take these skills into diverse fields such as law, business, and education.

Spirit of the School: Character and Community

What sets Firbank apart is its strong sense of community. Values such as kindness, respect, and service are central to the culture. Students are known, supported, and celebrated.

Leadership opportunities, service projects, outdoor education, and international exchanges foster social awareness and global citizenship. Firbank students graduate not only with achievements but with the desire to contribute meaningfully to the world.

Life After School: A Legacy of Impact

Firbank's Alumni are testament to its impact — entrepreneurs, educators, artists, engineers, researchers, and more. Their success reflects not just academic excellence, but the broad experiences and character shaped at school.

University readiness is vital, but so is confidence, courage, and clarity of purpose. Firbank graduates are equipped for both higher education and life beyond it.

CONCLUSION:

Firbank is more than a school — it's a launchpad for life. Through academics, sport, the arts, and a supportive culture, students are empowered to succeed and thrive. With a proud Alumni legacy and future-focused outlook, Firbank continues to shape confident, capable young people ready to make their mark.

Anything worth doing...

In this special 'Year of Courage' at Firbank, I have been reflecting on how courage and risk-taking are closely connected.

We often hear the saying, "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." While that's certainly inspiring, I would like to offer another perspective: "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly."

At first, this may sound surprising. However, I believe it is important for all of us - students and adults alike - to recognise that we shouldn't shy away from opportunities simply because we fear not meeting a standard of perfection.

All too often, we hesitate to try new things unless we feel certain we will excel. Fear of failure, embarrassment, or feeling out of our depth is a very human response. Whether it's trying a new GSV sport and not making the highest team, or working diligently in class and not achieving the highest mark, these experiences can sometimes lead us to retreat into our comfort zones.

Yet, it is precisely in these moments that courage becomes so important. True growth happens when we have the courage to attempt something challenging, even if it means we may not succeed at first.

This is often the case when our students step outside their comfort zone, such as debating, participating in an Experiential Education camp, or attempting to solve a Destination Imagination challenge. Sometimes, sitting with that sense of discomfort and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable is where real learning takes place.

At Firbank, we strive to create an environment where our students feel safe to be themselves and are encouraged to recognise worthwhile risks. We want our students to build the confidence to step forward, to embrace challenges, and to understand that it's okay if things don't always go perfectly. Often, the most valuable lessons come from moments of uncertainty and perseverance.

So yes, while it's wonderful to aim to do things well, let us also remember: "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." Ultimately, at Firbank, we believe the most important thing is to have the courage to try in the first place. After all, "Anything worth doing... **is worth doing!**"

Jenny Williams - Principal



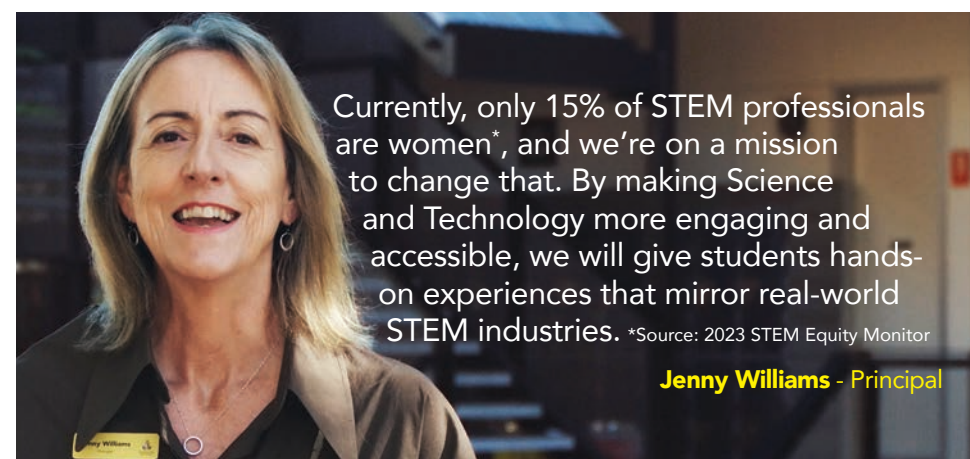
Expanding Science Horizons

FROM THE 1940s, FIRBANK BEGAN BUILDING A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN SCIENCE EDUCATION, LARGELY DUE TO THE DEDICATION AND ENTHUSIASM OF DR LANG.

While Physics and Chemistry were first taught to Firbank girls in the 1920s, the reputation for excellence in Science Education grew during the 1940s due to the dedication and enthusiasm of Science teacher Dr Lang, who was awarded an OBE for Education in 1979.

On March 21 2001, the Lang Science Building was opened in her honour, serving as an advanced Science centre with spacious laboratories, preparation areas, and staff offices, all constructed to the highest standards.

Now, 25 years later, with the support of the entire Firbank community, the Lang Science Building is poised to step into the future. It will undergo a mini-internal facelift, incorporating new technology and equipment designed to inspire and empower the next generation of Firbank scientists.



Currently, only 15% of STEM professionals are women*, and we're on a mission to change that. By making Science and Technology more engaging and accessible, we will give students hands-on experiences that mirror real-world STEM industries. *Source: 2023 STEM Equity Monitor

Jenny Williams - Principal

Lang Science Building Redevelopment

One of the most exciting additions to the Science building is four student-centric spaces, which provide students with the opportunity to work individually or as part of a group while accessing all the resources available.

New classrooms will feature more natural light, and the Physics room is being expanded due to the subject's popularity. While changes are directly applicable to the curriculum, new programs, electives and clubs can be introduced.



One of the most exciting things about the redevelopment is the Technology Room.

"The new echnology Room and equipment will allow us to participate in STEM Racing (formerly F1 in Schools) which we are so excited to participate in."

Grace - Year 9

The future-ready Technology Room will include state-of-the-art equipment

4 x 3D PRINTERS: Encouraging creativity and problem-solving

From designing ergonomic tools for people with arthritis to prototyping F1 parts for STEM Racing projects, students will work through the entire design cycle - from concept to final product. They may create packaging prototypes, architectural models, or wearable tech.

1x LASER CUTTER/ENGRAVER: Precision Meets Creativity

Students can design intricate parts with extreme precision for engineering projects, custom jewellery, and books for vision-impaired users. Engraving can also be applied to timber and leather. Students gain insights into industrial design, product development and engineering.

1 x 4 AXIS CNC MACHINES: Advanced Engineering for Young Innovators

Introducing high-end engineering tools, such as Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machines, builds confidence in women to enter a career in real-world manufacturing technologies used in the aerospace, robotics, and automotive industries. It enhances coding, CAD, and mechanical reasoning skills.

Thank you to our generous donors

On Thursday 29 May, we held our 2025 Giving Day, raising money for the redevelopment of the Lang Science Building.

Thanks to the incredible support of the Firbank Grammar community, our Giving Day was a resounding success, raising over **\$150,000**.

Matching Donors

A special thank you goes to our matching donors, whose generosity doubled the impact of every donation.

Xin Dai
Sally and Mark McLean
Sherrill Muir
Allan Strain
Jenny Williams
Cathy and Costa Zhao
Phoebe and John Zhao
Wenzheng Zhi and Jing Li
Firbank Grammar Board
Firbank Old Grammarians Association
Hwait International Group
Kay & Burton
TLC Aged Care Pty Ltd



AGENTS OF THEIR OWN LEARNING AND LIVES

Deputy Principal, **Ceri Lloyd**, introduces the Firbank Academic Mastery Program.

Returning to Firbank Grammar School, where I spent my early years at Turner House and later at Senior School, has been a source of great joy. Firbank holds a special place in my heart. My time here was filled with friendship, learning, and the formation of values that continue to guide me today.

As someone deeply passionate about the education of young people, it is a genuine privilege to play a role in leading and guiding them as learners, supporting their growth, curiosity, and capacity to thrive.

Firbank has long been committed to nurturing the individual talents and potential of every student. While many of our Alumni have gone on to shine in diverse careers, it is not just individual excellence we celebrate. The Firbank Way is founded in the belief that we are better together. It reflects the thinking behind collective efficacy, that we thrive through collaboration, and that each student's success is shaped by the encouragement and support of those around them.

At the heart of our approach is student agency. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Future of Education and Skills 2030 defines this as the capacity to set goals, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change, shaping one's path rather

than being shaped by it. When students are agents in their learning, they are more likely to have "learned how to learn," a lifelong skill. Our Academic Mastery Program is a clear expression of this philosophy, giving students greater ownership, voice, and direction in their learning journey.

Agents in Learning - Firbank Academic Mastery Program

The new Firbank Academic Mastery Program has been designed to provide VCE students with an enriched academic experience that extends beyond the classroom. The program offers subject-specific lectures, specialist

masterclasses, one-on-one tutorials, and focused academic support from expert teachers.

This program is a deliberate investment in students as self-directed learners—those who can reflect, adapt, and take initiative. The OECD 2030 highlights transformative competencies as essential future skills, including the ability to create value, take responsibility, and navigate

complexity. Through the Academic Mastery Program, Firbank students are building these capabilities, alongside independence and resilience, equipping them to thrive in an ever-changing world.

The impact of the Firbank Academic Mastery Program is best expressed by those who experience it first-hand, our students and teachers.



"The program has allowed us to get specialist advice directly linked to our VCE studies.

It gives us insights from industry professionals, helping us develop skills for school and beyond.

This gives us the best opportunity to strive for excellence in our VCE studies."

Eadie Spencer

Year 12 School Co-Captain



"This program provides us with an opportunity to build a strong and rigorous culture of learning in our VCE students.

The options for students are targeted, timely and meaningful.

Each week is deliberately planned, ensuring a balance between assessment, individual support, masterclasses, and independent study."

Jo Thompson

Director of Learning



"The English faculty has used the program for expert lectures, one-on-one meetings, small group work and timed-writing practice sessions, all of which are proven to benefit learning outcomes.

We are excited for the future of the program and how it can support our students to achieve their personal best."

Julia Lloyd Bruin

Head of English



Reflecting on my time at Firbank, I'm reminded of the enduring values that shaped me, the courage to speak up, the space to grow, and the unwavering support of a community that believes in each learner.

At Firbank, we are not just educating students; we are empowering them to become agents of their own learning and lives. This is the very foundation of the Firbank Way, and I look forward to developing more programs like this, further nurturing student agency and empowering excellence.

Ceri Lloyd

- Deputy Principal | Head of Senior School

WRITER IN RESIDENCE

Firbank Grammar welcomed **Kgshak Akec**, our inaugural Writer in Residence, on the 3rd and 4th March. For two days, this amazing writer and poet informed, entertained and encouraged our girls in their writing journeys.

Kgshak's writing is inspired by the small moments of the everyday – the untold words and unsung songs of life. Her debut novel, *Hopeless Kingdom*, won the 2021 Dorothy Hewett Award and was shortlisted for the 2023 Miles Franklin Literary Award and the 2021 Vogel Award.



A timely exploration of belonging, race and gender, *Hopeless Kingdom* contrasts the lives of one family's mothers, daughters, sisters and grandmothers, exposing the lived reality of African Australian women.

"Kgshak brought a really good, entertaining vibe. It wasn't like a lecture, which made it easier to listen and be involved." Year 11 student

Kgshak's passion and energy for creative writing was infectious with staff and students alike. Her Firbank Grammar residency comprised of lively and productive creative writing workshops with each Year 11 English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literature class, a Year 12 lecture and a professional development workshop for English staff.

The impact of the author's visit was best reflected in the students' feedback:

"I learnt more about the consideration of characters' inner psyche and personalities and how that influences their outward behaviours." Year 12 student

"I learnt how to plan my writing and not to be afraid of implementing my own voice and experiences in my stories." 11B English student

"I learnt a lot about structure, which helped me think more deeply on how I can play with structure, and how I can use good structure in my SACs." 11D English student

When the students and English teachers were asked how Kgshak's Residency could have been improved, the only comment was 'More sessions and more time!'

Vanessa Will

- Head of Libraries & Information Systems



YEAR 11 REC PROGRAM

Firbank Grammar's Year 11 REC program is a unique offering that brings students together fortnightly to enjoy being physically active.

The one-hour timetabled program, run by the Firbank PE department, offers students a selection of sports and recreation opportunities in the local community, including golf, martial arts, Pilates, fencing, squash and power walking.

The concept is to connect our senior students with activities they may enjoy beyond their time at school and increase their physical activity levels for life.

There are fantastic health and social benefits for our students taking part in our REC activities, and there is always a buzz in the PESC on Thursday REC mornings.

Additionally, research shows there is a link between physical activity and enhanced academic achievement among senior school students.

Our Year 11 REC program is a hit with the students and an important and special component in our Firbank Senior School timetable.

Student feedback suggests they find the sessions useful as a break from studies and to form new social and community connections.

Verity Whinnerah

- Head of Health and Physical Education

"The REC program at Firbank has been the highlight of my week as a Year 11 student. The freedom to choose from such a wide range of sports and a break from VCE classes makes the program so versatile and something to look forward to each fortnight."

I especially love the opportunity it gives us to engage in sports outside the school, from martial arts to golf. This hour of exercise, especially in the busy life of a Year 11 student, has been so beneficial to me and my peers, and I am so grateful that it is something we value here at Firbank"

Mia S, Year 11, 2025 student.

HSM

In 2025, we chose *High School Musical* because this Disney story can also be our story.

We don't need to be defined by societal or others' expectations. We can stand against the status quo, and be the complex, multi-faceted humans we are meant to be.

As a company, we worked hard to create the culture we all wanted to be part of and build the bravery to do things in new ways. The season was a fabulous success. We are grateful for the 2,800 people who came to watch, and for all the parents who helped us behind the scenes.



We are proud of what we were able to achieve together, and this is best expressed by some members of our company.

Heather Timms

- Director of Performing Arts & Director of High School Musical

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL! THE FIRBANK WAY



I have learnt so much about vision, trust and vulnerability throughout this experience. By sharing the vulnerable, raw parts of ourselves as performers, we as a company were able to emerge as one entity and ensemble, and it was an utmost privilege to make a vision come to life.

Yuan Yuan Li - Band Member

The site-specific location gave the audience an exciting and immersive theatre experience, and I really valued the skills we were able to develop as young aspiring performers, performing to three sides. I loved feeling our efforts and risk-taking pay off.

Eadie Spencer - Cast Member



The process of creating *High School Musical* was a monumental time for everyone. I would say that the cross-collaboration from Years 10 to 12 was my favourite part of the process, as I got to meet a whole new range of creative people who shared my interests and love for the arts.

Bridget Roe - Cast Member



We delivered an important message - don't be afraid to break the status quo. We certainly did this - incorporating the worlds of sport and theatre to perform the show in the PESG, breaking boundaries and pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones, proving that as humans we don't have to limit ourselves to one passion or hobby - we can spread our wings and truly fly in a multitude of directions.

Skye Weddell - Cast Member

It's an amazing feeling, being in the moment, hearing the crowd cheer, seeing everyone shine and feeling so proud of everything we have all accomplished. A lot of the experiences are lessons that I will use for the rest of my life.

Evie Burgess - Stage Member

SENIOR CAREERS EXPO



The combined Firkbank Grammar and Brighton Grammar School Careers Expo was attended by students in Years 10, 11 and 12, and their parents during Term 1.



There was a wide range of tertiary institutions, including Victorian and Interstate Universities, TAFEs and private providers, together with industry representatives, including the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

It was a fabulous opportunity for students to gain insights and information about universities and courses, plus ask any questions they had. An extensive speaker program was curated by our Careers Manager and Alumni Manager

to showcase a wide range of pathways for students. We were very grateful to the Alumni who returned to speak about their careers leading to their current employment. Speakers reflected fondly on their time at Firkbank and answered thoughtful questions from the audience.

Staff, students and their families were extremely appreciative of the time and effort our speakers and representatives put into preparing for the evening.



Class of 2015

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

During 2025, we celebrated the class of 2015 with their 10-year reunion.

Additionally, many returned to speak at the Firbank Grammar Careers Expo, sharing their journey from school to university and beyond.

Elise Senior (2015) Marketing Manager – Adore Beauty

Elise oversees the loyalty program and communications across email and SMS.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: My time at Firbank taught me the value of building meaningful relationships with peers, mentors and teachers. The ability to develop a solid network throughout university and into my career has significantly accelerated both my learning and personal growth, helping me reach where I am today.



Jade Layton (2015) Architect/Owner – Almeida Architects

Jade co-founded Almeida Architects with a former boss. She is passionate about residential design, but has also completed projects in education, office fitouts, hospitality, local government, sports/leisure, and healthcare.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: During VCE, Visual Communication Design (VCD) was my best subject. Rather than being scared by a career in design, Firbank encouraged me to follow this passion. For my Year 12 VCD project, I designed a golf clubhouse, which ended up being my best project.

Charlotte Barrow (2015) Chartered Accountant – Deloitte

Charlotte is a Manager in Deloitte's Turnaround and Restructuring team, which falls into the Strategy, Risk and Transactions division.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: Don't be weighed down by the expectations of others - you are the only person who truly knows your own mind and therefore, the person who is best placed to make decisions about your future. Seek advice, then own and stand behind your decisions.

Lauren McElroy (2015) Licensed Real Estate Agent – Belle Property

Lauren is a Licensed Estate Agent at Belle Property Carlton, Melbourne, North Melbourne and Ascot Vale.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: Firbank mainly helped me with

discipline and determination (days of being a rower) and communication (coming out of your shell) with your fellow peers. My advice would be to enjoy your time at school, the friendships that you make at school will last a lifetime.



Shi Shi Qian (2015) Senior Engineer – AEMO

Shi Shi works at AEMO (Australian Energy Market Operator) as a Senior Engineer in the Victorian Planning and Connections team.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: My advice to current students would be to make the most of all the opportunities and experiences that you have access to now, while you still have the time to do them.

Brittany Armstrong (2015) Vet – Westernport Veterinary Clinic

Brittany works as a Veterinarian at Westernport Veterinary Clinics and Racetrack Veterinary Services in Mornington.



She performs surgery and consults on a range of different cases in both small animal GP and equine medicine.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: Firbank encourages a strong work ethic and provides global experiences. The teachers provided every opportunity to follow your interests and support your learning.

The subjects I found most challenging turned out to be my favourite, as I would dedicate so much time and energy to learning things that didn't necessarily come easily. I recommend taking advantage of every opportunity and having a good attitude, because it will be favourable for whatever path you choose.



Rachael Joyce (2015) Opera Singer – Victorian Opera

Rachael is on a full-time performing contract with Victorian Opera as one of their Opera Prize winners for 2025.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: Firbank really helped me

explore my creative side, offering many opportunities to perform and explore the arts, which helped foster my passion.

Brooke Davies (2015) Nurse – Royal Children's Hospital

Brook is a Registered Nurse on the Kookaburra ward (Paediatric Oncology) at the Royal Children's Hospital.



FIRBANK REFLECTION: Firbank gave me the confidence and skills to give everything a go, ask questions and work hard. It also taught me the foundations and structure to learn and work in an environment outside of school. My advice would be to work hard and do something that makes you happy.



India Tait (2015) National Account Manager – Mars Confectionery

India is currently a Customer Development Leader (National Account Manager) at Mars Confectionery.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: Firbank gave me the

foundations to manage competing priorities — like sport, study, work, and social life — and taught me how to communicate and collaborate effectively with different people. I appreciate how Firbank shaped me as a person, the skill sets I learnt, the values I try to encapsulate, and how I collaborate with people and go about my work.

Laura Scott (2015) Physiotherapist – Science Physiotherapy

Laura is the founder and pelvic health physiotherapist at Science Physiotherapy, working in women's pelvic health.

FIRBANK REFLECTION: My time at Firbank taught me to have a good work ethic and gave me the expectation to provide the best possible care to my clients/patients. My advice would be to back yourself in.



2025: SEMESTER 1 EVENTS

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| JANUARY |  Welcome Back! Start of Term 1 |  Smoking Ceremony |  Commencement Service |  Commissioning of Ceri Lloyd |  |  |  | |
| FEBRUARY |  BLSC Bathing Box Classic |  Sandringham Swim Carnival |  Senior School Swim Carnival |  Generational Gathering |  Parent Welcome Back Cocktail Party & Lunar New Year Celebration |  Sandringham House Welcome Picnic |  Bayside Community Fair |  GSV Triathlon |
| MARCH |  IWD Breakfast with Catherine Freeman OAM |  Head of the School Girls Regatta |  Big Band at The Paris Cat Jazz Club |  Careers Expo |  Performing Arts Open House |  Brighton Classic Car Show |  GSV Division 1 Swim/Dive Carnival | |
| APRIL |  Year 12 Formal |  Senior School Athletics Carnival |  Grandparents & Special Friends Day Sandringham |  |  |  | | |
| MAY |  GSV Championship Cross Country |  Rowing Presentation Night |  Turner House Camp Out |  Mother's Day Lunch |  Turner House Mother's Day Morning |  Sandringham Mother's Day Morning |  FGS/BGS Senior Production High School Musical |  Destination Imagination Global Finals |
| JUNE |  BGS X FGS Amazing Race |  Turner House Musical Moana | | | | | | |



Emily Ramsden initiated the creation of the Firbank mural, 'Connecting Our Worlds', in 2024. The mural is designed to promote cultural understanding within the Firbank and wider community. It created an opportunity for collaboration between campuses and students from different cultural backgrounds. It has generated discussion about Country, the diversity of culture within the First Nations community and the common things that connect us all.

The design process began with First Nations students from Firbank each creating a drawing that represented their Country, Dreaming, or a connection to home. With guidance from Sarai Atkinson, these were brought together into a unified design, expressing what each student brings to Firbank, what they carry back to their community, and how they connect with one another. The central circle of the mural represents where the students connect and meet at Firbank on Bunnerong country. The symbols from their homes come into the circle and show the bridging of cultures between the countries the students are from. The manna gum leaves



represent the sprinkling of the Bunnorung country going back to the student's home.

How the mural sections connect

The top section of the painting was created by the students from Bulman, the right hand side the student from Ngukurr, the bottom the country of our Yorta Yorta students and the left section our student from Yarralin. Woven through each section the meeting circles show the young Firbank students coming together. The Manna leaves of Victoria travel back to community with our FN students and their dreaming and stories travel through the Firbank circle.

Sheronica comes from a community called Yarralin (Walangeri in Sherry's language). She has represented her country by painting the moon and the sun. These symbols are Yarralin's dreaming.

The sun starts at gullawilla (Sandy creek) and then it goes to the table top hill up Sandy Creek and on the plains. Yarralin dreaming also tells the story of the flying fox wishing to travel through the area but it was scorching hot, so the flying foxes split, half going one way to Yundari (a rock hole) and the other half to Judburra. The sun travelling burnt the landscape and then it hid amongst the trees



Our Countries- CONNECTING WORLDS

The Turner House Mural Story

before travelling to another billabong which is near where our local airstrip now is. The dreaming tells us how features of the land were created and how we connect to the sun and the moon.

The moon dreaming comes from the Lingara Mob, and it represents us committing to and helping nearby communities. The black headed python is a totem with spiritual significance to our FN student. "When I was a baby in my Mum's womb, Mum said I looked like a snake in the womb. This day Mum was washing the dishes outside and a big big black headed python crawled up to her and started staring at her and then left her. And then I came."

The Python in the painting becomes the Rainbow Serpent in Bulman. "This shows the connection I have with PJ, who has been on the journey in Melbourne with me".

PJ and Jodie created symbols from their country, Bulman, painting the Long Neck Turtle and the Rainbow Serpent.

"This is the Rainbow Serpent, like a creator of our culture and our people and that... It looks after us and the land and creates rivers. This is the long neck turtle-a bush tucker that we eat where I'm from, and water lilies and it's in ponds and billabongs. We also eat the flower part of it as well." PJ, Year 12

Ngukurr is Laelani's country in Arnhem Land. She has represented her waterways and with Barramundi

"Laelani wanted to paint a traditional Barra painting. There's also a river that connects with the Victoria River" "In Yorta Yorta there's another Long Neck Turtle, but this



one is a totem for the Yorta Yorta girls" PJ.

Turner House students immersed themselves in the experience.

Throughout the painting process, the Turner House students were enthralled and curious about what the stories meant. They would often sit, watch the students paint, ask questions, and in doing so, learned about the diversity of First Nations Australians.

They learnt that some of the paint used in the Bulman section was the Gumunargur or 'white paint', which was dug up by Sally Gorton and PJ during PJ's visit home over the holidays. PJ's ancestors have used this paint for more than 65,000 years as body paint and in artwork.

The mural gave our First Nations students a space to showcase their cultures and celebrate their connection to Country and to each other through their stories and artwork.

Our Year 4 students also contributed to the mural, painting the meeting circles throughout the design, which represent people coming together with shared connection and understanding.

We acknowledge this is what First Nations Australians have done on this land for over 65,000 years. They care for it and nourish it still. The mural represents our celebration of the incredible living culture and our commitment to learn about and honour it.

Sally Gorton

Co-ordinator First Nations Program





A STRONG START

How Literacy and Numeracy Flourish in the Early Years at Firbank

Step into a Firbank Early Years classroom on any given morning, and you'll find a hum of purposeful activity.

In one corner, a group of children are building a café using blocks and clipboards, busily taking each other's 'orders' while unknowingly rehearsing early writing conventions and numeracy concepts.

Nearby, another small group is sounding out words on a whiteboard, fingers tapping as they blend phonemes together. Outside, a teacher crouches next to a child who is measuring leaves collected from the garden, asking, "Which one is longer? How do you know?"

These moments may seem simple, but they are powerful. They represent the carefully designed, research-based approach that underpins how we teach Literacy and Numeracy in the Early Years at Firbank.



"EVERY EXPERIENCE IS INTENTIONAL. EVERY TASK HAS PURPOSE. AND EVERY CHILD IS KNOWN, SUPPORTED, AND CHALLENGED..."

At Firbank, we know the early years (ELC-Year 2) are more than a beginning. These years are a foundation. This belief is reflected in our commitment to the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP), a globally recognised framework that places the learner at the centre.

Through the PYP, our students develop conceptual understanding through inquiry and play, learning to ask questions, solve problems, and make meaning of the world around them.

Literacy and Numeracy are woven through these experiences, never taught in isolation, but always in ways that feel relevant and exciting to young minds.

In Literacy, our approach blends the joy of storytelling with the science of reading. We use the Orton-Gillingham Approach, which is a structured, multisensory method proven to support the development of strong reading and spelling skills.



In the Early Years, this means children are not just taught the sounds that letters make; they are immersed in them. They sing them, trace them, build them with playdough, and feel them in their mouths as they speak.

This is phonics instruction at its most powerful - explicit, sequential, and supported by ongoing assessment to ensure every child is progressing. But at the same time, our classrooms are alive with language. Children listen to

beautifully read stories, engage in rich conversation, and are encouraged to express themselves in both spoken and written forms. They begin to understand that words have the power to entertain, to inform, and to connect.

In Numeracy, our focus is on building strong number sense

and a deep understanding of mathematical ideas. Aligned with the Australian Curriculum and best practice research,



our program helps students develop not only skills but also confidence. Children learn through doing - sorting, counting, measuring, and playing with patterns. Mathematics is everywhere in a Firbank Early Years classroom, from the calendar routines in morning meetings to the puzzles laid out on the tables to the outdoor

construction projects that require teamwork and spatial reasoning.

Assessment is not a one-off event; it is embedded into daily practice. Our educators skilfully observe, document, and reflect on student progress, using a mix of formal tools and informal strategies.

This allows us to adapt teaching in real-time, ensuring that every learner is supported and stretched appropriately.



None of this is possible without expert teachers.

Our Early Years team brings together deep content knowledge, high-quality training in both the IB and Orton-Gillingham methodologies, and a genuine passion for early childhood development. They create classrooms that are warm, inviting, and rich with opportunity.

We are proud that Firbank's Early Years program sets children on a path not only toward academic success but toward becoming compassionate, curious, and capable learners. Literacy and Numeracy are more than subjects; they are languages of the mind and the heart. And when taught well, they open up a world of possibility.

At Firbank, that world begins with a story, a question, a spark - and a teacher who knows just how to help it grow.

Melanie Smith

Head of Campus | Turner House





DESTINATION IMAGINATION 2025

On an ordinary school day, you might find a group of Year 6 students hunched over piles of cardboard, tangled string, and circuit kits, arguing productively over the mechanics of a homemade trebuchet.

Down the hall, a different team is rehearsing a skit that fuses physics with satire. This is Destination Imagination (DI) at Firbank - where science, technology, engineering, and mathematics don't sit in isolation, but come alive through long-term challenges that demand collaboration, imagination, and academic depth.

Destination Imagination is not a competition for the faint-

Firbank takes on the world in Kansas City

hearted. It is a highly rigorous international STEM program that pushes students to apply explicit learning from the classroom to open-ended, complex challenges.

Whether building a working machine, composing an original soundtrack, or solving technical puzzles within a theatrical framework, teams must draw on their understanding of scientific principles, design thinking, mathematics, and the humanities, all while working to tight constraints and high standards.

At Firbank, DI is not an add-on to the curriculum; it is an extension of it. The design cycle, which forms the backbone of the DI process, mirrors the way students learn in their STEM classrooms: ask, imagine, plan, create, test, and improve. Teams are encouraged to fail fast, reflect thoughtfully, and refine persistently. There are no shortcuts. Over several months, they develop, test, and improve their solutions. They challenge one another. They compromise. They grow.

This year, two Firbank teams earned the extraordinary honour of representing Australia at the Destination Imagination Global Finals in Kansas City, USA. Competing among the brightest young minds from across the globe, our students stood out not just for their academic acumen, but for their creative bravery. These Finals are more than a competition; they are a life-changing experience. Students return from this global celebration not

only with memories but with sharper critical thinking skills, stronger resilience, and a renewed confidence in their ability to take on the unknown.

According to Destination Imagination's research, students who participate in the program significantly outperform peers in key future-ready skills: creative and critical thinking, collaboration, project management, and problem-solving. These are not soft skills - they are survival skills for the world beyond school. Whether students pursue careers in engineering, medicine, law, the arts, or entrepreneurship, the ability to work effectively in a team, think laterally, and persist through challenge is invaluable.

Importantly, DI doesn't reward the "right" answer but rather celebrates the bold one. Students learn that diverse perspectives enrich a project, and that success often comes from the most unexpected ideas. In this way, DI nurtures a culture where creativity is not an optional extra, but a driving force.

It affirms that STEM and imagination are not opposing forces, but powerful partners in innovation.

Now, excitement is building as nearly 100 students from across all three Firbank campuses prepare for the 2025 Australian Destination Imagination Tournament, proudly hosted on our grounds in October. This event will bring together teams from across the country in a festival of ingenuity, where robots might dance, bridges might sing, and problem-solving will steal the spotlight. Open to the public, this will be a true celebration of STEM education, showcasing the academic excellence, collaboration, and creativity that DI inspires.

At its core, Destination Imagination teaches students how to think, not what to think. It demands rigour and imagination in equal measure. It shows young people that they can take knowledge learned in the classroom and use it to build, solve, perform, and lead. And for many, it becomes a defining part of their learning journey,

not just because of the medals or the applause, but because of the confidence it builds to face whatever challenge comes next.

Melanie Smith

Head of Campus | Turner House



COMING HOME TO

After spending the past 25 years living and teaching overseas in England, Indonesia, and Vietnam, I feel incredibly fortunate to have returned home to Australia and even more fortunate to now have the privilege of working at Firbank Grammar School Sandringham.

Stepping into Sandy House felt like finding a place that genuinely reflects the values and educational philosophy I hold dear.

What first drew me to Firbank was its long-standing commitment to the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP). Having been a PYP school for over 15 years, Firbank's dedication to this internationally recognised framework signalled a deep and sustained understanding of how to nurture and educate the whole child. As a passionate PYP teacher and coordinator, I firmly believe in an educational model that fosters academic excellence alongside conceptual understanding, approaches to learning skills, meaningful action, and the personal attributes essential for becoming thoughtful, engaged global citizens.



PURPOSE:

My Journey to Firbank Grammar School Sandringham

Leanne Raeside - PYP Coordinator

from the beach. The environment provides a sense of calm and wonder, creating the ideal atmosphere for learning and personal growth. It's a small, close-knit community where students are known and celebrated as individuals. Teaching and learning are personalised to reflect each child's strengths, interests, and learning needs. What stands out most to me is the spirit of collaboration among staff. The shared commitment to student wellbeing and growth fosters a warm, supportive environment that genuinely feels like one big family, a place you look forward to coming to every day.

While the PYP promotes inquiry-based learning that is concept-driven, collaborative, inclusive, and grounded in local and global contexts, we also value the role of explicit

teaching as part of the inquiry cycle. At Sandy House, we adopt a balanced approach to teaching and learning. Foundational skills are taught intentionally, equipping students with the tools they need to inquire deeply and confidently. English is taught using the Talk for Writing approach, alongside the Sounds-Write spelling program, while Mathematics, Science, and other areas follow the Victorian Curriculum.



This mirrors Lynn Erickson's belief that authentic inquiry must begin with a solid base of knowledge and skills.

Our curriculum is rich and diverse, designed to support every learner. We are proud to offer a dedicated English as an Additional Language (EAL) program, which supports students developing English proficiency in a safe and structured way. Our Learning Strategies team provides expert guidance for students with additional learning

needs, ensuring that all students can access the curriculum and reach their potential.

For students needing extension, our Enrichment

program provides opportunities to explore Mathematics, Robotics, and Science at greater depth. The purpose-built STEAM Centre is a hub of hands-on exploration, creativity, and innovation. It also hosts our Destination Imagination teams, where students work collaboratively to solve real-world challenges in Science, Technology, Engineering, The Arts and Mathematics.

Sustainability, one of Firbank's four key pillars, is embedded in our culture. Students take leadership in authentic actions such as the Garden-to-Kitchen Program, composting, our Recycling program, and the care of our chickens. These experiences instil responsibility, care for the environment,

and a deep understanding of how small actions can lead to meaningful change.

Our Health and Physical Education program encourages students to take risks, stay active, and build resilience. Whether it's in our brand-new Sandringham Sports Stadium or through participation in district sports, cross-country, swimming, or interschool carnivals, students develop lifelong habits for wellbeing. From Year 3 onwards, students also take part in our Junior Instrumental Program and have opportunities to shine in

choir, Sinfonia, the school musical and the House Choral Festival, fostering creativity, confidence, and joy.

SANDY HOUSE IS A PLACE WHERE THE FIRBANK PRINCIPLES AND THE PYP LEARNER PROFILE COME TO LIFE.

It's a vibrant, nurturing community where students are encouraged to be courageous, curious, compassionate, and balanced learners. I feel truly blessed to be part of such an inspiring and purpose-driven school.



BEYOND THE FIRBANK GATES

SYDNEY

In June, we were delighted to host two special events in Sydney. The first was a beautiful high tea held in the historic Queen Victoria Building, where 14 of our Alumni from peer years 1945 to 1975 gathered to enjoy a delicious afternoon tea. Jenny Williams shared updates on all that's happening at Firbank, and the group spent a lovely time reminiscing and exchanging stories from their school days. That evening, we met with a number of our 'younger' Alumni for drinks, and it was a pleasure to hear about the diverse and fascinating career paths they are pursuing in Sydney. It's always inspiring to see the many ways our former students are making their mark in the world.



BLACK ROCK HOUSE

A group of our past students visited the Historic Black Rock House, where we had a delicious morning tea followed by a fascinating tour led by our past principal, Anne Sarros, who is one of the volunteers. She regularly takes tours of this beautiful restored home, which is well worth a visit.



Class of 2020 - 5 Year Reunion



Class of 2015 - 10 Year Reunion



Class of 2005 - 20 Year Reunion

BEYOND THE FIRBANK GATES



Class of 1970 - 55 Year Reunion

Throughout Term 1 and 2, we had the pleasure of welcoming back Alumni for their reunions. These events were filled with laughter, reminiscing, and heartfelt reconnections as past students shared memories of their time at Firbank.



Class of 1965 - 60 Year Reunion



Class of 1955 - 70 Year Reunion



Class of 1975 - 50 Year Reunion



**FOGA
LUNCH**





Dr Tonia Cochran Awarded OAM

Congratulations to Dr Tonia Cochran OAM (1978) who received an Australian Honour for service to conservation and the environment.

Nicole Livingston Awarded AO

Congratulations to past parent Nicole Livingston AO, who received an Australian Honour for distinguished service to sports development and administration, to the promotion of women in sport and to community health.

Prof. Jodie McVernon Awarded AO

Congratulations to past parent Professor Jodie McVernon AO, who received an Australian Honour for distinguished service to medical research in the field of epidemiology and infection prevention, to tertiary education and to public health.

Remembering Susie Facey-Smith (1980)

We are saddened to share the news of the passing of former Firbank student, Susan Facey-Smith, known to many as Susie.

Susie began her journey at Firbank Girls' Grammar in 1970 at Sandringham House, and graduated Year 12 in 1980. She went on to study teaching at Toorak Teachers' College and spent the majority of her career working in primary schools across Melbourne, as well as three years teaching English in Japan - an experience that combined her love of education and adventure.

Susie had a love for art and photography, which led her to further study in these areas and resulted in a large collection of her work.

Travel became a big part of her life, and she embraced the chance to explore the world whenever she could. One of her greatest joys was sharing these experiences with her son, Eden, with whom she travelled often and made lasting memories.

After facing cancer with courage and determination for two years, Susie passed away in December 2024 at the age of 61. She is remembered fondly for her warmth, creativity and adventurous spirit and is deeply missed by her family and friends.

2025 FIRBANK CROSS GENERATIONS GATHERING



CONDOLENCES

We extend our heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of:

Bev Kenny nee Vicary (1960)
on 16 July 2024

Betty Game nee Marriott (1946)
on 1 September 2024

Jill Drew nee Mumford (1984)
on 15 September 2024

Antoinette Ladanyi (1964)
on 20 September 2024

Leonie Crockett nee Eaton (1957)
on 30 September 2024

Pam Trevethan nee Saunders (1957)
on 1 October 2024

Vondel Donavon nee Young (1948)
on 10 November 2024

Marie Huntington nee Williams (1951)
on 10 November 2024

Patsy Blair nee Wallman (1957)
on 10 December 2024

Alison Nash nee Moxham (1966)
on 16 December 2024

Jenny Makula nee Hodges (1953)
10 January 2025

Barbara Grigg nee Cutts (1959)
on 31 January 2025

Shirley Shannon (1943)
on 3 February 2025

Susie Facey-Smith (1980)
on 7 February 2025

Pat Balfe nee Cholerton (1958)
on 5 March 2025

Sue Gaballa nee Chambers (1964)
on 18 March 2025

Wendy Baker nee Whitehead (1960)
on 1 April 2025

Yvonne Dunstan nee Du Rieu (1949)
on 8 June 2025

Marie HUNTINGTON (Williams) (1951)

Marie was a Boarder for four years, a Probationer, member of the library committee and an active committee member in School House. She attended many reunions over the years; she regarded her years at Firbank with great affection. She died on 10th November 2024. Aged 90 years.

What's happening in **VISUAL ARTS**2025



are we there yet? Ruby Hogan - Year 12 (Oil on canvas)

A depiction of a somewhat universal 'middle of nowhere' pitstop. The piece explores reminiscence within the Australian landscape, attempting to capture the warmth of a seemingly insignificant moment. The isolated child amid the stretching road conveys the future's unknown, as life strays further from a sheltered childhood.

Inspired by artist Thea Anamara Perkins' creative practice, this piece is compiled of various intimate family photos to create an ultimate memory - yet its inexistence reflects the fallibility of recollection.

By creating a piece of this scale, the audience is invited to share in this moment and relish the grounding sense of presence.