

From the Principal

Nexus

Nexus is a GVGS school community publication. We welcome submissions to Nexus from staff, students, alumni and those connected with the school community.

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Printing: Prominent Press, Shepparton Printed on 100% recycled paper



COVER PHOTO: Trish Lawless -Celebrating 40 Years of Service

Schools and

Critical Thinking

t a recent school event I enjoyed an animated discussion with one of the guests about the role of school education. I was delighted that they were so interested in fundamental questions about the role and purpose of school education. This person felt that the most important role of school education was to enable students to be critical thinkers. At the same time, they were concerned that schools focussed too much on rote learning of facts rather than teaching students how to think critically.

This conversation resonated with me because as a school we have done a great deal of reading and thinking about these issues. We have noted that these kinds of principles underpin many international curriculum documents and are advocated by some universities in initial teacher education. Unfortunately, this approach has done more harm than good to student learning. While there is a growing movement questioning this kind of thinking, these beliefs are still strongly held in many circles.

I am concerned by two things in particular. The first being the underlying belief that there is a dichotomy between teaching knowledge and teaching critical thinking. Secondly I am concerned by the assumption that schools can teach these capabilities as general skills and expect students to successfully transfer and apply them in a diverse range of situations.

If only it were that simple. Unfortunately, there are two requirements for critical thinking. The first is knowledge of the content from the specific subject domain. The second is expertise in the subject's specific critical thinking strategies. Both of these are in essence subject specific knowledge that must be explicitly taught by the teacher and practiced by the student. Clearly, this is not a simple or rapid process.

Even within a specific subject domain there are challenges in teaching transferrable general critical thinking skills. One commonly identified area of critical thinking is the capacity of students to evaluate the trustworthiness of a claim. If we aimed to teach this as a general capability in history we might teach general principles for evaluating the reliability of historical texts. For example, it might be suggested that an account from an academic source many years after the event, is usually more reliable than the statement of a first-hand witness at the time. Obviously such a guideline is flawed as each individual situation will involve many specific considerations. To make such a judgement the student would need, among many other considerations, a great deal of historical knowledge about the event itself and the author's expertise. reliability and likely objectivity. If teaching general critical thinking capabilities are unlikely to be transferrable by students within one subject domain it seems highly unlikely that they can be successfully transferred across different domains.

For students to successfully evaluate the reliability of an individual truth claim, strong background knowledge of the relevant topic is essential. This is one of the reasons why a curriculum focussed on acquisition of broad powerful knowledge is more, not less important in the modern world.

For these and many other reasons, we are firmly of the view that we first must teach students a rigorous foundational knowledge of English, History, Science, Geography and Mathematics. High quality teaching of these traditional academic disciplines will, in the long-term, provide students with greater capacity for critical thinking across a wide range of domains. Once the foundational knowledge is understood, students must then be explicitly taught and practice domain specific critical thinking strategies and be given opportunities to practise them and receive feedback. These are all practices that we are striving to implement in our classrooms.

Semper Ulterius Mark Torriero, Principal School Captain profile



hen Joshua joined GVGS in 2021, he had only just recently moved to Shepparton and was navigating remote learning while trying to find his place in a new school community. Four years later, he's proud to be leading that same community as School Captain, something he admits came as a genuine surprise.

"I've always been involved in sport and I'd captained my Football Team outside of school, but I never saw myself as the stereotypical leader," he says. "When I was told I'd been chosen to be School Captain, I was honestly shocked. During my time at the School, I've built strong relationships with both teachers and students, so I think they could see that I always try to be positive and upbeat and bring that energy out in everyone around me."

Joshua commenced at GVGS during the pandemic, shortly after both his older brothers moved away from the family home in Melbourne. His older brother Monty, relocated to Canberra for university and Sam left on a European adventure.

"I wanted to be closer to my extended family and moving to Shepparton meant I could be," he explains. "My auntie and uncle live locally and I'm very close with my cousins who also go here, Baxter (Year 11) and Lila (Year 10). My parents both grew up in the region too, so moving here just made sense and I haven't looked back since."

Reflecting on his first year at GVGS, Josh remembers sitting in a Year 8 maths class thinking about how long the road in front of him seemed. "I remember thinking I had ages left of school," he recalls. "Then all of a sudden I'm in Year 12 and it's been a real



shock. One thing that's defined my time here has been the smaller class sizes, which means it's easier for you to have closer relationships with the teachers. They're so invested in your success and if your goals aren't as high as they think they could be, they push you to reach what they know you're capable of."

Joshua's interest in leadership began to take shape in Year 10, when he decided to join the Peer Support Programme. Now as School Captain, he says the most rewarding aspect has been the relationships he's built across all year levels.

"Joining the Peer Support Programme made me realise how much I enjoy helping others and being part of something bigger than myself," he says. "What really matters to me about being School Captain are the moments when younger students recognise me from Friday Assembly and come up to say hello in the yard. Those genuine connections that you get to develop mean the most."

Joshua is also quick to credit his teachers for their impact during his final year. "My tutor and Year Level Coordinator have been incredible," he says. "They've made sure not only I, but everyone, feels supported and they remind us that we belong here. They've definitely helped me put my best foot forward every day."

Looking ahead, Josh plans to relocate back to Melbourne and study Law at Australian Catholic University in 2026 and live at University College in Parkville. "Law feels like the right path for me because I want to help people. I want a career that's all about making a difference," he explains.

"I'm really looking forward to college life too. A lot of the Year 12 students are heading to Melbourne next year as well, so it'll be great to still have those connections around, whilst also meeting new people."

Student achievements



Furphy Literary Awards

The Furphy Literary Award has been established to promote and extend the tradition of storytelling, both factual and fictional, that is so much part of Australian life. The Furphy Literary Award includes award winning judges, generous prizes and most importantly, the platform and opportunity for all writers to use their talents to compete at the highest standard.

In 2025, the following students were awarded a Furphy Literary Award and Prize:

Youth Short Story

• 1st: Asha Birchall (Year 10) - A Cup of Kindness

Youth Poetry

• 3rd: Aniq Alam (Year 10) - The Highway

Monash Scholars Program 2025-2027

Monash Scholars is a prestigious program for high achieving secondary school students. The program is offered by Monash University to give potential students a unique head start into university life. The following students have been accepted into the 2025-2027 program:

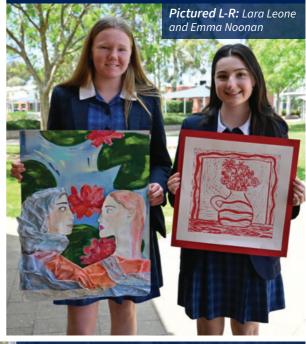
- Ali Al Kundi
- Ayra Fatima
- Viraj Lallar

The Young Picasso Art Exhibition

The Shepparton South Rotary Club ran an Art Exhibition titled the 'Young Picasso Art Exhibition' for local students to submit artworks for judging. A number of GVGS student's artworks were selected as finalists and had their artwork placed on display at the exhibition.

Two students were major award recipients:

- Year 12 student Lara Leone was awarded The Ken Keating Scholarship prize
- Year 11 student Emma Noonan received 1st Prize for the Year 10-12 category





Pictured above L-R: ADF Award winners: Ayra Fatima, Mia Girvan, Charles Locke and Patrick Sharp



Pictured above L-R: Asha Birchall, Sophie Plant and Japjeet Sandhu



Australian History Competition

Andrew Stokie achieved outstanding academic success in History as the Joint State Champion for Year 10 in the Australian History Competition.

This remarkable accomplishment reflects Andrew's deep historical knowledge, strong analytical skills and dedication to learning.

Andrew attended the prestigious National History Challenge ceremony in early November, where he was presented with his medallion and certificate.

Australian Defence Force (ADF) Awards

Each year The Australian Defence Force provides two Youth Awards that acknowledge students in Year 10 and Year 12 who demonstrate the values of leadership, teamwork, determination and service.

The ADF Future Innovator Award recognises students who show curiosity, creativity, and a passion for science, technology and mathematics — the kind of forward thinking that drives progress and shapes the future.

The ADF Long Tan Youth Leadership and Teamwork Award celebrates those who lead by example and who make a positive difference both in and beyond the classroom.

These awards aren't just about achievement, they are about character, resilience and the willingness to step up and contribute.

ADF Future Innovator Award

- Patrick Sharp (Year 12)
- Mia Girvan (Year 10)

ADF Long Tan Youth Leadership and Teamwork Award

- Charles Locke (Year 12)
- Ayra Fatima (Year 10)

ICAS Medal Achievement

For many years GVGS students have had the opportunity to participate in the ICAS competitions. ICAS is an independent skill based assessment programme which tests primary and secondary school students in a variety of subjects. The test assesses skills and learning abilities in students across Australia.

Medals are awarded to the individual student from a year level who achieves the top score in the state for a subject. In 2025, three students received ICAS Medals:

- Asha Birchall (Year 10) English
- Sophie Plant (Year 11) Writing
- Japjeet Sandhu (Year 11) Science



Trish Lawless Celebrating

40 Years of Service

Staff News

hen Trish Lawless first arrived at Goulburn Valley Grammar School in 1986, it looked very different from the vibrant and well-established school community it is today. It was a far cry from the busy Catholic schools of Melbourne, where she began her teaching career before moving to the region to join her husband, Brendan, who is also a teacher. Yet, despite the initial culture shock, Trish found a workplace that would soon become where she would spend the next four decades doing what she loves.

"I've never felt like leaving and it'll be hard to walk away because it's been a terrific 40 years," she says. "In that time, I've been able to go full-time and part-time when I needed to, which has been wonderful flexibility. It's a very supportive place to work."







Over the years, Trish has seen the School expand from modest beginnings into a thriving learning environment. While much has changed, she believes the heart of GVGS has stayed the same.

"When I first started, the School was always referred to as 'a family' and that really hasn't changed," she says. "There's still that ongoing feeling of belonging and acceptance and we always aim to get the best out of every student, whatever that looks like for them."

Technology has undoubtedly transformed the classroom, but Trish believes the heart of education remains unchanged.

"While the tools have evolved, the essence of good teaching hasn't," she says. "Strong foundational learning is still at the core of what we do. The genuine curiosity and drive to learn of the students has always been what motivates me."

Trish fondly recalls some of the School's early traditions, many of which have stood the test of time. The annual Eisteddfod, for instance, was once held outdoors under a marquee. "It's come a long way since those

days," she says. "But the spirit of it has never changed, it's always been about giving students the chance to shine and celebrate their talents."

The Valedictory Dinner, she adds, is another tradition that continues to hold a special place in the school community, offering students a memorable and meaningful way to mark the end of their secondary school journey.

As she reflects on her four-decade career, Trish feels immense pride in the School's progress and optimism for its future. "GVGS has always been progressive and inclusive. I want it to continue to prosper, support every student and provide the kind of education young people need for the world they're growing into," she says.

"The School has grown so much since I first started and I don't see that changing. Students should see school as a pleasure, not a chore and I'm confident GVGS will continue to be that kind of place."

When Trish began teaching, GVGS had only been founded four years prior. She has since worked under every Principal in the School's history and alongside almost every staff member. In her early years, she taught Human Development to VCE students and helped establish the School's Health Programme. Since 2012, she has served as Director of Students, a role she describes as deeply rewarding.

"I love working with young people and I think that's why I've stayed so long," she says. "Working in student welfare, you get to support and help young people every day. It's so important that everyone feels included and part of the community."

Long Serving Staff

Long term staff hold the institutional memory and culture of the School and therefore play a particularly important role in the School's stability and evolution. During 2025, we thank and congratulate the following staff on their outstanding contribution to the School.





Kathryn D'Elia

Cheryl Garratt

Anne Kenyon

Brooke McLeod

Sharon O'Connor

Noel Shillington

30 YEARS



Leon McLeod Geraldine Thompson



Trish Lawless









The School held the annual Grandparents Day on Thursday 28 November. The students enjoyed morning tea with their Grandparents and Special Friends and then gave them a school tour.



GVGS Reunion Class of 2020

Reunions provide an opportunity for our past students to reconnect, reflect on their time at school and reminisce about the shared experiences that shaped their school years.

This year we welcomed back past students from the Class of 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and most recently the Class of 2020.



L-R: Will Rhode, Bailey Jones, Daniel Dalton, Jack Cassidy, Nicholas Osborne, Cooper Sorrenti, Frederick Thompson, Sean Musolino.

Angus Hatty, Fraser Ingram, Joe Joseph, Samuel Morgan, Genevieve Lodge, Tom Janke, Katya Spiller, Chloe Charnstrom,

Chloe Stone, Molly Rae, Emily Ratten, Merdi Yamfu Bwanga, Caitlin Pogue, Eloise Schmedje, Chelsea McKindley, Tegbir Kaur,

Kate Adams, Hana Verge, Jordan Clothier-Harris, Hugo King, Layne Moroney, Carrie Hall, Meg Eishold

Save the Date Reunions 2026

Saturday October 17, 2026

Class of 1986 (40 year), Class of 1991 (35 year), Class of 1996 (30 year), Class of 2001 (25 year), Class of 2006 (20 year), Class of 2011 (15 year) Class of 2016 (10 year)

Saturday November 21, 2026

Class of 2021 (5 year)

Alumni Portal Launch 2026

In 2026 we will be launching our GVGS Alumni Portal as a special addition to our current GVGS website. We hope to provide a platform for our alumni to engage and celebrate life stories. Stay tuned for more details early in 2026! **Alumni Reunion**

GVGS Reunion's

Class of 2005

L-R Back Row: Erin Osmond, Rachel O'Dwyer, Steven Connor, Marnie Brain (Joyce), Kate Sneyd, Shane Sali, Elizabeth Cusworth (Hollingworth), Felicity Denaro (Kane), Jessica Kanaley (Skilbeck), Kera Pethybridge, Stuart Moore.

L-R Front Row: Imagen Randall, Ella Thompson, Joanne Baxter, Sarah Wathan (Borrman)

▶ Class of 2015

L-R: Back Row: Joshua Wells, William Phillips, Eugene Calandro, Thomas Spencer, Lochlan Hicks, Andrew Burgemeister, Jemma Coulthard, Joe Waldron, Gabriel Zito, Drew Tozer, Christopher Wijesingha

L-R: Front Row: Sam Widdicombe, Fergus Kearney, Nick DeMaio, Stuart Hart, Jake Trounsen, Tahlia Rea, Eliza Galbraith, Sarah Giuliani (Young), Akashpal <u>Thandall</u>



Class of 1995
L-R: Andrew Sim, Gregor Jeffery,
Mia Growden (West), Andrew
Starritt, Brooke McLeod (Wilson)









▲ Class of 2000

L-R: Back Row: Felicity Baker, Simon Brettig, Katherine Hood (Faram), Campbell Cooper, Joshua Pennell, Gabrielle Ostberg (Turnbull), Elizabeth Price (McPherson), Jaclyn Stojanovski (Retzos), Edwina Kaye (Oram).

L-R: Front Row: Stephen Brooks, Alistair Ball, Oliver Palmer

Class of 2010

L-R: Mathew Heard, Tim Day, Ross Threlfall



GVGS Alumni

When passion takes flight

Nicholas Brun's journey from GVGS to the skies

quadron Leader Nicholas Brun (Class of 2008) found his calling for the Air Force around Year 10.

"I knew that I wanted to do a job that was physically and mentally stimulating and I'd always been interested in aviation."

Nick briefly considered following his GP father into medicine, but his mind was made up after his first flying lesson at Shepparton's Gawne Aviation. "I fell in love with it and knew that's what I wanted to do."

Growing up in Kyabram, Nick spent most weekends flying or playing footy. "I played footy for the Kyabram Bombers but stopped just to focus on studies – thought it would be a good idea not to risk it for the final year after a couple of injuries!"

Nick's career has taken him from leading operational missions overseas to working with cutting-edge aircraft such as the AP-3C Orion, P-8A Poseidon and Pilatus PC-21.

"It's hard to pinpoint any one highlight location in particular – Hawaii, Malaysia, Fiji, South Korea, Guam, Cook Islands ... the list goes on, but I just think being able to go overseas with a group of really talented individuals and fly operational missions, is a real highlight."

A standout moment was becoming one of the first crew captains to train on the P-8 Poseidon in the USA, then bring one back to Australia. Nick says, "Bringing that capability into service was really exciting and a really good challenge as well."

Today, Nick is an Air Force pilot instructor, shaping the next generation of aviators. "Teaching brand-new student pilots how to fly something with 1500 shaft-horsepower is pretty incredible."

His personal life is equally rewarding. Nick met his wife Essie, a tactical coordinator on the same aircraft in the Air Force.

"It's been a bit of a whirlwind, we just got married this year. We do a lot of camping and sport together." His dad Robert shares the passion for flying too. "We've gone on some trips in his little plane since he got his private pilot licence."

Nick credits his GVGS years for laying the foundations of his success both academically and beyond.

"Maths and physics set me up really well for uni at the Australian Defence Force Academy, but English and public speaking surprised me with how important they'd become." He warmly remembers teachers including Mrs Yarwood (English), Rita Bloomfield (Speech Studies) and Mr McDonald (Maths).

"The time and effort that Mrs Yarwood put in really got us up to standard. Speech nights and having to get up in front of a crowd, were super important experiences later on in the military, especially for communication."

Nick says sport, academic challenge and a focus on building well-rounded individuals helped shape who he is today. "It makes you a well-rounded human, you can be a master of almost all trades if you want to."

His connection to GVGS peers remains strong, catching up for an annual golf tournament.

"We still have a really strong bond among the guys and girls in my year level. I really enjoyed it. The opportunities GVGS provided were fantastic. It sets you up really well for the future."



If you blinked in the early days of GVGS, you might have missed Sallie Cowan (Class of 1987) powering through the bus doors, golf bag in hand already driven and ready for whatever life threw at her. A member of the pioneering GVGS cohort, Sallie's time at school seeded the discipline and resilience that continue to define her career.

"I was very motivated to do well in Year 12," she recalls. "Mum complained about when she could serve me dinner, so I could fit in study and sport; it taught me a lot about how to manage time and commitments."

With parents who met on a golf course, Sallie's sporting talents emerged early, spanning netball, swimming and a state golfteam spot in Years 11 and 12. These days, she only plays the annual Cowan Cup, her family's Christmas Day tradition.

Sallie was also the first girl to play in the Benalla Football League. There was one coach happy to have a girl in the team. I wasn't a liability and nobody batted an eyelid."

At just 15, a Rotary Exchange took Sallie to America for a year. "There's no way I'd let my own kids go at that age, but I was the eldest and pretty confident."

Small classes and supportive teachers at GVGS fostered that confidence: "Sarah Dudley was brilliant at helping me work out what I should do with my successes and Mr Humphreys for maths was fantastic."

Achieving her aim of School Dux, Sallie soon found new horizons and almost by accident, fell into physiotherapy. "I didn't want to be a doctor; giving people drugs wasn't for me. Physios were always visible in elite sport and I wanted to help people without medication."

Her passion for sport and science soon led into research, especially knee injuries and patellofemoral pain. "We showed that physiotherapy could change motor control and improve pain and disability."

With research funding always unpredictable, Sallie's entrepreneurial instincts took over and she co-founded and led Clifton Hill Physiotherapy, Clifton Hill Pilates & Rehab and Inner North Physiotherapy in Thornbury, managing up to 55 staff at their busiest. "My youngest spent a lot of time in a porta-cot in a treatment room."

Building practices that served communities gave her pride, but Sallie couldn't give up research. She now works at La Trobe's Sport and Exercise Medicine Research Centre, managing HERknee Centre projects to reduce injuries in female athletes and improve outcomes for women post-injury. "It's still harder for women in sport, more harassment, less pay, fewer leadership roles. We're changing that environment."

Sallie's active streak remains: she recently rode 800km on the Pain Revolution Tour, "getting pain education to rural communities" and is fiercely proud of her four offspring, who are now teens and young adults.

She's also taken her expertise globally, helping Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences in Nepal upgrade to Master's and PhD-level training. "That's been really good to be involved with and we've got our first PhD student from Nepal starting later this year."

Looking back, Sallie credits the GVGS experience for her grit and sense of possibility. "Everyone knew everyone and the teachers were super supportive."

From dairy farm to dietetics leader

Rebecca Monk's local legacy



Rebecca Monk's love of food, health and community began on a dairy farm near Katamatite, where she grew up knowing exactly where her meals came from. "It was very much a paddock-to-plate way of life," she says. "My sister was a great baker and my mum could whip up slices and sponges in a heartbeat. Food was joy and it was real."

Unlike many who leave for Melbourne or beyond, Bec (Class of 2002) has chosen to stay local in the Goulburn Valley. "This is where I wanted to be. I think it's really important for young people to see what can be done here."

The School Captain's passion for health and nutrition crystalised during her school years at GVGS, where she loved biology and chemistry. "I'd go to uni open days, check out medicine and physio and then there'd be something about dietetics and I thought, 'Ooh, food and health, okay, that's all right.' I was lucky because I enjoyed the sciences enough to head straight into a degree that's become my 20-plus-year career."

Founding Ripe Health in Shepparton, Bec believes in herself to create meaningful impact.

"Making the leap from public health to fully running the business was huge. Figuring out how to pay the bills and supporting my team, it's been a big learning curve, but it's what I love."

Bec's community spirit extends beyond nutrition. The life-long footy and netball fan is a strong supporter of Shepparton United's Female Football Program, joining the club's inaugural women's team in 2022 and this year was co-captain of its first premiership team. She was also Club President during the 2022-24 seasons. "Sport was always a big part of my life. I thrive in team environments, and I love how local sport brings people together."

Reflecting on GVGS, Bec says, "GVGS celebrates you to do better. It's small enough so you're never lost as a person, but big enough to push you." Bec's three older siblings also attended GVGS, with sister Julie Monk the School Dux in 1993 and brothers Alistair (Class of 1997), and Haydyn (Class of

Favourite teachers shaped Bec's curious, grounded approach. "Mr Widdicombe was our biggest support when I was School Captain, his office was a safe haven during stressful times. Mr McLeod and Mr Harrison were fantastic sports teachers who made sport fun and inclusive."

Bec also recalls her love of science teachers, "I was heartbroken when Mr Bayly took long service leave during my Year 12 chemistry, because he was such an inspiring teacher and Miss Ward (now Mrs Thompson) was brilliant with maths in my early years too."

Looking ahead, Bec is committed to continuing her work locally, helping her community develop a positive, joyful relationship with food.

"People are so consumed with trying to be perfect, but I say: work with what you do well, celebrate what your body can achieve."

GVGS Community News

Community announcements

Thanks to GVGS teacher, Alumni Coordinator and past student (Class of 1987) Mr Glen Edwards for sourcing many community news items. If you would like to share your news items with Glen, please email him on GVGS.Alumni@gvgs.vic.edu.au





Claudia Smith (Class of 2013) married Shawn in August at St Mary's Star of the Sea followed by a reception at The Trust in Melbourne.



Nicole (current staff member) married Daniel at Dookie Chateau on 10 November.



Dayna Powell (Class of 2016) married Lachlan in August at Mitchelton Winery.



Jacqueline née Taylor and Nicholas Mountney (GVGS staff) were married in November at a ceremony held at Dromana.



Michael Van Dorsser (Class of 2006 and past staff member) and wife Chloe welcomed their first child Evie Marlee in November.

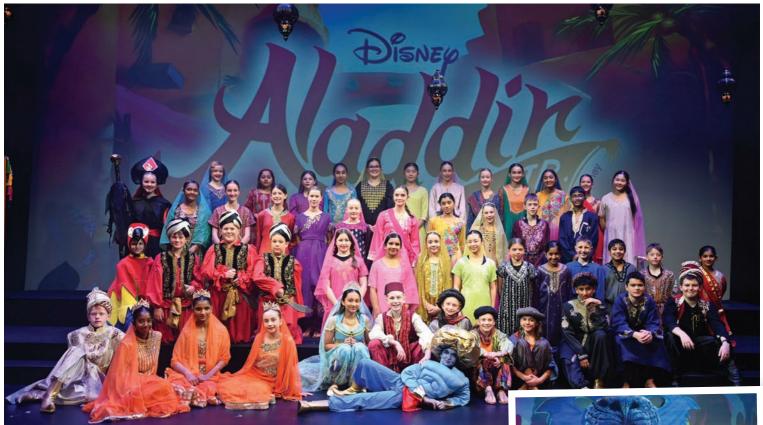


Pictured left: Kieran Stokie (Class of 2008) and partner Michelle welcomed Hazel Eleanor in September.

Pictured right: Rebecca Stokie (Class of 2011) and fiancé Jason welcomed Oscar John in October.



Elizabeth Jamison (Class of 2011) and partner Corey welcomed Matilda Ivory in September.



Middle Years Production

Disney's Aladdin JR.

The Middle Years Production of Disney's Aladdin JR. was performed over three nights at Westside Performing Arts Centre.

Participating in a production is a wonderful experience for students. They become part of something much larger than themselves. Productions bring together students spanning a range of age groups and strengthen community connections.

The many months of rehearsal and planning were clearly evident through the level of confidence and polish in the student performances. The cast and support crew were congratulated for their collective efforts over many months. From the opening number, students delivered self-assured performances, high quality singing, acting and dancing.

The students were supported by Helen Janke – Director, Amanda Harry – Musical Director and Nicola Bolton (Class of 2013) – Choreographer.



