



*Learning for Life*

# MINERVA SCHOOL

## NEWSLETTER

Eton Street SUTHERLAND NSW 2232 Telephone: 9521 3433 Fax: 9545 3316

E-mail: [minerva-s.school@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:minerva-s.school@det.nsw.edu.au)

WEBSITE: [www.minerva-s.schools.nsw.edu.au](http://www.minerva-s.schools.nsw.edu.au)

Donations to Minerva School are now tax deductible.

### DATES TO REMEMBER

### TERM 4 2016

DECEMBER  
LAST DAY OF  
TERM 4 FOR  
STAFF AND  
STUDENTS

*Friday 16th*

### TERM 1 2017

JANUARY  
FIRST DAY OF  
TERM 1 FOR  
STUDENTS  
*Monday 30th*

### YEAR 12 GRADUATION FORMAL

On Thursday 24th November at Club on East Sutherland, we celebrated with our graduating Year 12 students and their families for successfully completing their schooling.

It was a wonderful night with a relaxed atmosphere.

Our graduating young men Jake, Adam, Alex, Bailey, Seb and Michael looked very handsome and mature as they celebrated in style.

Our best wishes for the future go to these fine young men as they enter the next chapter of their lives. Congratulations!



## PRINCIPALS MESSAGE

Dear Parents/Carers,

As we quickly approach the end of 2016, it has been therapeutic for me to reflect on the year that's been and to take a moment to acknowledge the successes and efforts of our school community. At the beginning of the year I was introduced to 'new' students, 'new' staff and 'new' families - everything seemed 'new' and unknown. Twelve short months later I am about to wish 'happy holidays' to my friendly, successful students; my fabulous, enthusiastic staff and my supportive and committed parents, families and community. I am very appreciative of how warmly I was welcomed into such a caring and positive community.

This year our students have participated and engaged in some great learning opportunities: from surf awareness clinics to work experience placements and rigorous individual classroom learning programs. Our school focus on Positive Behaviour for Learning and Mind Matters has provided a framework which has fostered positive expectations and supported mental health wellbeing. The students have worked particularly well with our Student Support Officer and School Chaplain, Karla Donaldson and as a whole school we have celebrated individual successes and an improved sense of wellbeing. I'm very proud of the effort and achievements of all students this year. I'm sure you will have been delighted to read of individual progress in the end of year reports.

The Minerva staff, as always, have been the most resilient, enthusiastic and professional team. If you were to ask any staff member why they do what they do, you would soon discover that it's all about the kids. Every day the staff here go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure our students have the best opportunities and experiences. Throughout the year our staff have engaged in relevant professional learning to develop their own personal best practice. Some topics of interest have been: Trauma Informed Care, CPR and Anaphylaxis, Sensory Processing Disorder, Vicarious Trauma, using ProLoquo2Go and working collaboratively to produce a web based resource for mainstream teachers around the topic of student wellbeing.

Throughout the year there have been many opportunities for parents, families and community to be involved with the growth and success of Minerva School and it has indeed been a busy year on the fundraising front. Our successful Bunnings BBQ, Mother's Day and Father's Day stalls and the major event - our Comedy Night, have raised significant funds which next year will enable such projects as our Community Garden and the establishment of a gymnasium. We thank our hard working parent volunteers who support us through working at the school, fundraising and regular feedback and positive communication. We also thank our long standing community volunteer, Mr Harry, who this term was awarded the Scott Morrison Cook Community Award. The Commonwealth Bank, the Cancer Council, the Como Jannali Rotary Club, our local IGA, the CWA St George Sutherland Branch

and many more of our local businesses continue to provide outstanding support which allows us to provide rich and rewarding opportunities and resources for our students.

This week we farewell six young men as they graduate from Year 12 at Minerva School. Jake, Sebi, Adam, Alex, Bailey and Michael - we are so proud of the young adults you have become and we wish you and your families success and happiness as you move forward into your post school lives. We have learned from you all as each of you have shown us different ways to see and engage with our world.

Next year we will welcome new families and new students and we look forward to building strong, involved and collaborative relationships as we work together to support and build on our students' abilities.

I hope you all enjoy a peaceful, relaxing and fun-filled holiday break. I intend to indulge in as many Ruby (Granddaughter) cuddles as I can, perhaps eat one or two fruit mince tarts and settle in for some good summer reading.

See you all in the New Year - bright eyed, bushy-tailed and ready for action.

Sara Swift



Check out class **Waratah's** special Christmas reindeer cookies! We have been practicing mixing, spreading, arranging and, mostly importantly, cleaning up!



Class **Bottlebrush** has been busy completing Christmas activities in term 4. They have had lovely time making their advent calendars and counting down the days till Christmas. After a great year the students are looking forward to a well-earned break. Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all the staff and students in Bottlebrush.



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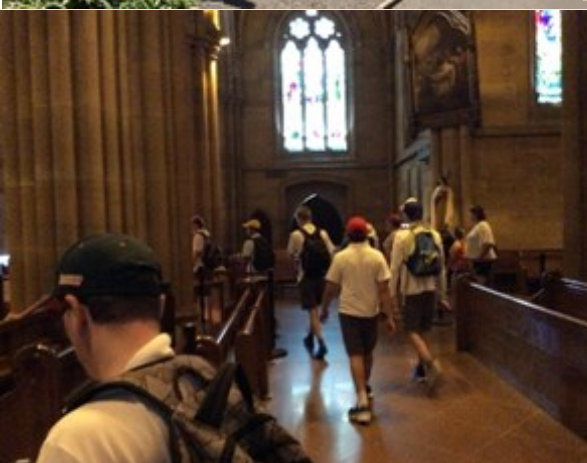


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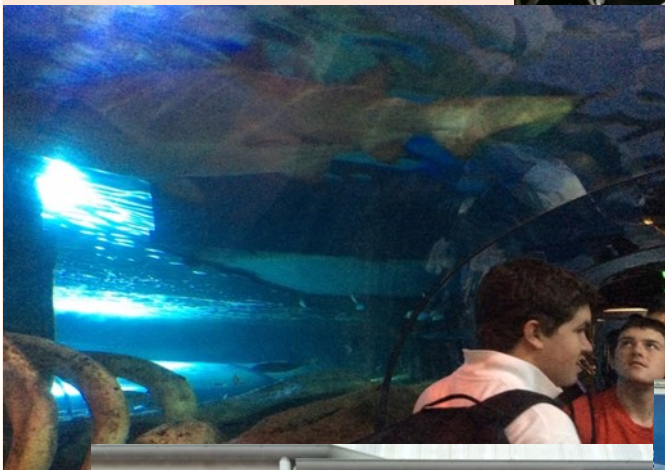
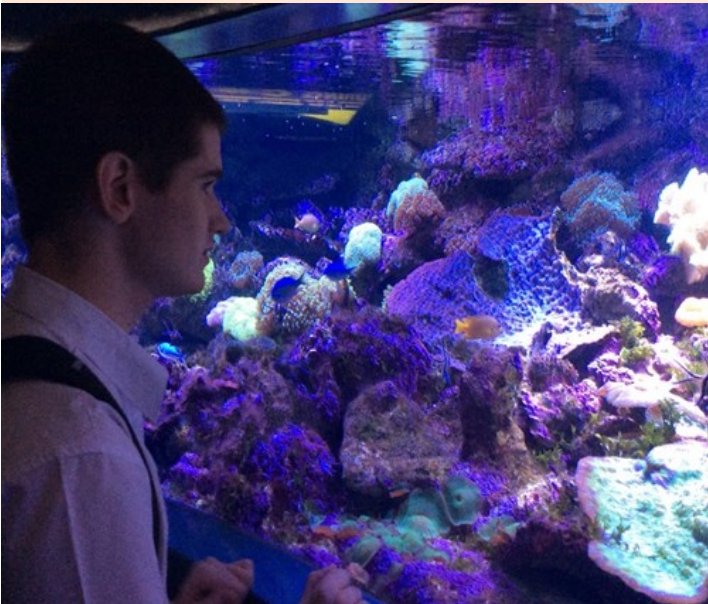




Class **Wattle** went on an excursion to the city as a reward for their hard work this year. We went to the War Memorial, St Mary's Cathedral, Art Gallery of NSW, Botanical Gardens and finished with lunch at Circular Quay. The whole class had a wonderful time. Well done!





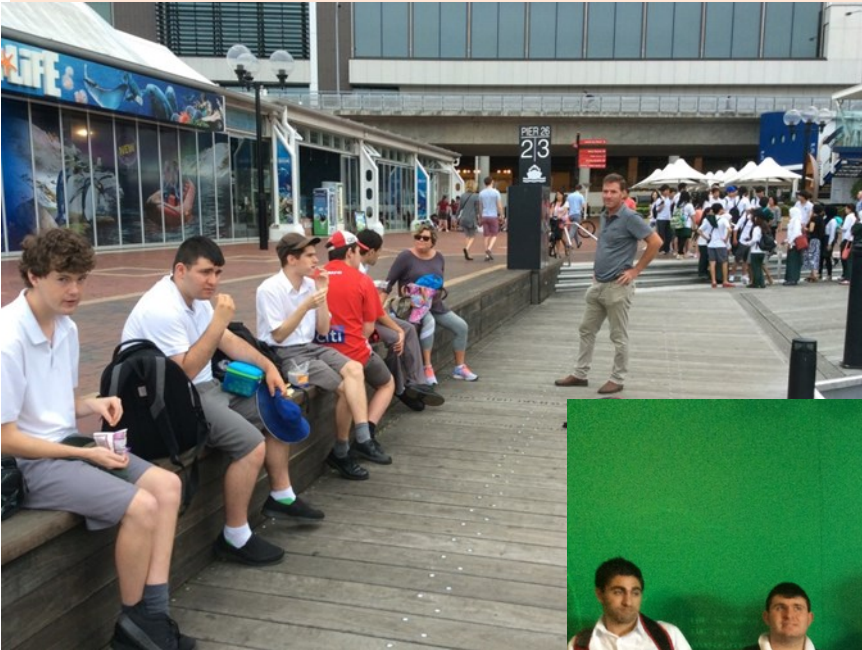




**Banksia** class went to the Sydney Aquarium as a reward for all their hard work throughout 2016 making Squeezy Cheesys for everyone. We saw lots of fish, lungfish, tropical fish, sharks, jellyfish and dugongs. Did you know that a dugong can eat up to 50 kilos of cos lettuce a day? We had our photo taken and then had a lunch of chicken nuggets and chips. Thank you parents, students and staff for your kind donations and support throughout the year.

Best wishes to Jake, Seb, Adam, Alex, Bailey and Michael, our year 12 graduates in their future endeavours.

**Merry Christmas to all.**

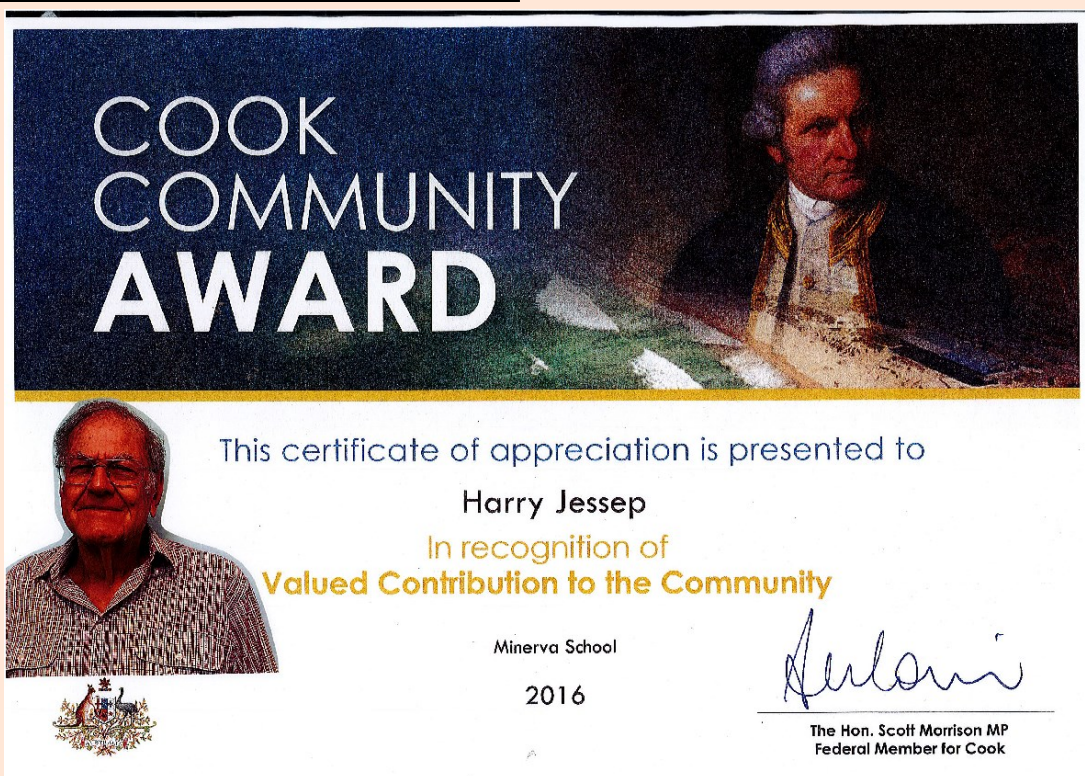






## Happy Birthday

To the following students for November and December Flynn, Perry Bailey, Alex, Ethan, Jaidyn and Warwick.



Our favourite volunteer Mr Harry, was the recipient of the Cook Community Award in recognition of his valued contribution to the Community. This award is presented each year by the Hon Mr Scott Morrison MP—Federal member for Cook. As you know Mr Harry has been volunteering at Minerva for many years. He is loved and respected by both staff and students.

Congratulations Mr Harry.



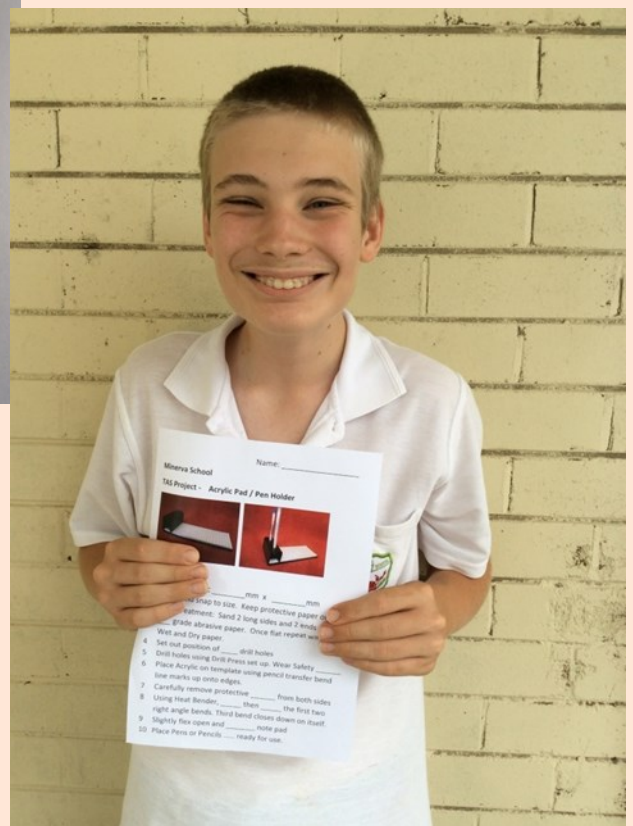
## 2016 Ultimo Directorate Awards

Our School Administration Manager Trish Palmer, was nominated by our Principal Sara Swift for the SASS Administrative and Support Staff Award in significant achievement. Trish was presented with her award by Mr Garrie Russell, School Education Director for the Woronora River Network. Congratulations Trish.





Class **Grevillea** completed their Red Christmas Pen & Paper Holders





## Class Protea



Many smiles are shared on our class outings!





Hey Eucy boys ! As the year draws to the end we reflect on our achievements, our friendships and the fun we have had along the way. We also wish Sam all the best as he starts at his new school in 2017. Sam is a gentle and affectionate soul. He will be missed and remembered for his infectious smile and great sense of humour. Well done **Eucalyptus** class and happy holidays to you all.



## Como—Jannali Rotary Christmas Party.

On Friday 9th Dec we were very fortunate to have the generous people from Como—Jannali Rotary put on a wonderful bbq for students and staff. We also had a visit from Santa with many students taking the opportunity to have a photo with him. Santa even joined in with our staff vs students newcombe ball game. The students were once again the winners in a very close match.





**Black Dog  
Institute**

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**Presentation: Navigating  
Teen Depression**



20% of teens will endure  
teen depression before  
they become adults.

Everyone at some  
moment in their life will  
experience depression

**Tuesday 11th October 2016  
10.00am-11am**

Guest Speaker from the Black Dog Institute  
speaking from experience.

Menai Community Centre  
34—40 Allison Crescent  
Menai NSW 2234  
RSVP: 1300 327 434 by 10th Oct 2016




## The Australian parenting website

Children's brains have a massive growth spurt when they're very young. By the time they're six, their brains are already about 90-95% of adult size. But the brain still needs a lot of remodelling before it can function as an adult brain. How teenagers spend their time is crucial to brain development. So it's worth thinking about the range of activities and experiences your child is into - music, sports, study, languages, video games. How are these shaping the sort of brain your child takes into adulthood? This website has a lot of information out how children's brains develop, what behaviours are typical for teenagers and helpful advice about strategies to encourage good behaviour and promoting thinking skills.

[http://m.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain\\_development\\_teenagers.html](http://m.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers.html)



LIBRARY



Congratulations Waratah Class for receiving your library Orbit Licence. They can all navigate the new library system. Well done

JIBJAB FUN - Links below

[http://www.jibjab.com/view/Ftml\\_QsCRjmIBaGAFIZWYQ](http://www.jibjab.com/view/Ftml_QsCRjmIBaGAFIZWYQ)

<http://www.jibjab.com/view/x2nYXHFgSBYqPLOUGnKTVg>

[http://www.jibjab.com/view/eFFmC6\\_nQnC4wRLw1S\\_V\\_w](http://www.jibjab.com/view/eFFmC6_nQnC4wRLw1S_V_w)







## Minerva SSP – Building on our strengths

In 2015 Minerva School began exploring Mind Matters as a means of focusing on and improving the mental health and wellbeing of our whole school community – students, families and staff. Working with and supporting students with special needs and their families can be challenging, rewarding and exhausting. Central to successful student wellbeing outcomes is collaborative planning towards individualised and holistic learning opportunities. Mind Matters provides a research based framework which has been incorporated across many mainstream schools and we thought it could be adapted and modified well to suit the context of a special school. We have used a combination of resources and survey tools from both Mind Matters and Kids Matter Primary, as this has allowed us the flexibility to differentiate resources based on the needs of our students and community.

*"At Minerva School we thought that the focus on mental health and wellbeing was right for our school community. There are a significant number of young people with intellectual disability and with co-morbid mental health issues. We need to be better able to support these young people and to build on the protective factors that nurture mental wellbeing. A Mind Matters approach has helped us build on the strengths of individuals."*

***Sara Swift, Principal***

### **Start with some data**

At the beginning of 2016 we conducted the Mind Matters staff survey, the Kids Matter Primary parent survey and we collected some data on student health and wellbeing from within the school. The collated results informed the starting point for our Mind Matters journey.

**Staff** could see the importance of developing an explicit social and emotional learning program for students with special needs – this focus comes from Component 2 in the framework. We have built this focus in across all our classes based on the SRC Good Choice of the Week. Each week our SRC runs a **student led** assembly which reflects on one of our core PBL (Positive Behaviour for Learning) rules – We are Safe, We are Caring, We are Learners. They devise an explicit social and emotional learning focus which is discussed and promoted across all school environments during the week. Each week one class 'wins' the SRC award for their positive work around the Choice of the Week. The award is highly motivating – it is a week's worth of Wii use during free time!

### ***Have a look at our SRC in action:***

**Parents** voiced that they wanted more involvement in the school. The nature of special schools often means that because students are dropped off and picked up from school by Assisted Transport, parents don't have the opportunity to meet and mix with other parents at the school gate. Our parents really expressed an interest in opportunities to network with each other and to find out more about school programs, parent support networks and



mental health issues. After collating the results of the parent survey it was clear we needed to focus on Component 3 - Parents and Families. We decided to implement Parent Coffee and Chat sessions each term. These are designed to be informal opportunities for parents to attend the school for a relevant information session and to share morning tea with other parents. Our parents have been asked to suggest ideas for discussion topics and so far we have had guest speakers present sessions on Sensory Processing Disorder and the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Next term we are sourcing a speaker from Headspace to talk about specific mental health issues which may be faced by many young people in our community.

*“Thank you for providing Minerva families with a wonderful opportunity to further our understanding of sensory processing disorder. We were encouraged to ask questions and given practical activities to help our children. What became apparent is that Minerva school has adapted best practice ideas and use these principles on a daily basis to support our children through use of the sensory room, sensory garden, trampolines, bikes, sports programs, sip and crunch to name a few! The session finally concluded with a delicious morning tea. Hope to see more faces at the next coffee and chat morning!” Christine Damcevski (Minerva parent)*

Our Component 3 focus for next term involves setting up a designated Parent Resource Room. This is basically a 'meet and greet' space for parents within the school: a small room with a library of resources on a wide range of topics relating to mental health, parenting courses, support agencies, NDIS, respite services and more. We will offer a photocopying service, a space to read and research and some comfy chairs to sit and chat. We are excited about this initiative and think it will only continue to strengthen and improve the positive mental health culture in our school.

Parent feedback so far has been extremely encouraging and what we are doing here at Minerva with Mind Matters can also really help to support students with special needs and their families in a mainstream school environment. We have a way to go on our Mind Matters journey but we can honestly say that it is a great framework to work with. It gives us a coherent, structured approach to building on our students' strengths.







