

## A story of a school

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On 5 February 1963, a special group of students from the Kew area reported for school at East Kew Central to begin their new school year. Since 1923, this Kitchener Street school had provided the first eight years of state schooling for local children. What was different in 1963 was that the students in Forms 1 and 2 were now to be known as students of Kew High School. They would become the founding classes of a school that would serve its community well for the next sixty years.

The decision to establish Kew High in the early 1960s was part of the massive expansion in secondary education in Victoria, which occurred between 1946 and 1970. In these years, Australia experienced a significant increase in its population as a consequence of an increase in the post-World War II birth rate and a massive migration program. During this period, Victoria's population grew from 2.04 million to 2.95 million. The challenge was to provide schools for a rapidly expanding secondary school population. A massive building program began, and in Victoria, from 1960 to 1970, thirty high schools were opened. Their underlying philosophy was that they should be secular, inclusive and be an important part of local communities.

In the post-war decades, whilst students east of Burke Road were served by Camberwell High School, Balwyn High School (after 1954) and Greythorn High School (after 1958), west of Burke Road there was a dearth of state secondary schools. In 1960 a group of concerned parents under the leadership of Dr. Geoff Goding formed the Kew District High School Project Committee to press the Education Department to build a high school in Kew. There followed much Education department dithering about where to site such a school.

Eventually, in 1962, a 6.5-acre irregular-shaped site at the junction of High Street and Burke Road was purchased from the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board. Glass's Creek ran across the western end of the land which was severely encroached upon by the part of the former Model Dairy site, which had been purchased by BP (for use as a truck depot) the year before. Despite the irregular shape and smallness of the site, Kew Council assurances that the school would have the use of the adjacent Stradbroke Parklands for playing fields, enabled the school to be built.

Thus, at the end of 1963, the school was able to finally leave the Kitchener Street location that had been shared with East Kew Primary while the new three story 'L' shaped building, necessitated by the cramped site, was constructed.

Since 1963, Kew High School has reflected at a local level, the changes that have occurred in Australian society as a whole. Its original students were mostly Australian born (though many were children of post war migrants) but over ensuing decades the school adapted and responded to the influx of different migrant groups: Italian and Yugoslavs in the 1970s, Greeks in the 1980s, Hong Kong-Chinese and Vietnamese in the 1990s, and more recently people from India and China.

The school has also welcomed students from neighbouring suburbs such as Richmond, Collingwood, Ivanhoe and Hawthorn. These suburbs did not have

their own co-educational high school in the 1960s, so the availability of public transport via the High Street tram and the Burke Road bus made Kew High an attractive option.

During their formative years in the 1960s, new high schools, such as Kew High, adopted the organisational culture and conventions of existing state and non-state schools: prefects, house captains, assemblies and an emphasis on academic success. Kew High, in particular, was challenged by the many private secondary schools in Kew. From the outset, Kew High provided a sound traditional curriculum along the lines of the English grammar school model, aiming to prepare its students for occupations, which then had clear predictable career pathways.

Late in the 1960s, a challenge to the prevailing orthodoxies of school life began to emerge. The Women's movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and mass youth culture influenced the thinking and priorities of students and teachers alike. Young people began to challenge authority, generating debate over the ways schools should be structured and function. In many schools across the state, innovative and alternative ideas about the purpose of schooling were discussed and often embraced. At Kew High, this was reflected in curriculum innovation and a decision in 1979 that senior students would no longer be required to wear school uniform.

During the 1980s, the aging of the Kew community meant that the population of the school shrank from a high of 1034 in 1971 to 370 in 1991. In response to these changing demographics and government policies, some neighbouring high schools such as Banyule, Greythorn and Richmond, that had served their communities well since the 1960s, were closed.

Since 1990, the impact of the Information Technology revolution and the rise of the IT skilled 'Generation Y' students (born after the mid-1980s) has meant that schools have had to respond to change in order to prepare students for a world in which many former traditional occupations and certainties are no longer relevant.

When the school was established, its motto, *Loyal Service*, with its emphasis on secure pathways in employment and in life, reflected the orthodoxy of the time. However, in the early 21st century the motto was changed to *Aspire, Strive, Achieve*, reflecting the more individualistic world in which the school now operated. As we reflect on the school's first half-century we can be proud of its achievements in providing sound, if traditional, learning experiences for its students. It has had the loyal support of local families, some of whom have had three generations attend the school, and of many excellent teachers and support staff.

Today Kew High School, despite trials and tribulations over the decades, is a thriving local institution with a cap on its growth of 1,000 students, and a waiting list of students hoping to gain entry.

Valerie Bourke is a co-author of <i>Aspire, Strive, Achieve: the Kew High School Story</i> (2013). The article is based on the preface of the book, which is available for purchase at Kew High School.
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