

# Inspired

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ST ANDREW'S  
CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

# From our *Head* of School

Dr Julie McGonigle.



From our Head of School

There is so much that can be captured in a single word. And *Inspired* is one of those words. The etymology of the word, first points to the Latin term *inspirare* and then on to the Greek and Biblical term *pnein*, both of which mean to be filled with the breath of or moved by the Divine.

When you read what comes next, you will realise that St Andrew's Cathedral School is no ordinary school; it is an inspired school.

**In the truest sense of the word, it is a school that is filled with and moved by the spirit of God.**

There is a unique feeling in the School that is hard to articulate. It is the binding force that grows our community, that lifts our heads up, that fills us with joy, that moves our creativity and that makes the education that occurs immeasurable. We call it *'the SACS spirit'*.

In this issue of *Inspired*, all of that is on display; whether its providing an opportunity for students to challenge themselves trekking in Nepal; or student's gaining more resilience in the face of life's challenges through our Wellbeing Programme or, of course, to be taught and inspired by our very talented and skilled teachers, such as music accompanist, Szu Yu Chen (see profile on page 10), and much more!

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# The gift of hard travel to distant places

At the end of 2023, 18 St Andrew's Cathedral School students from Years 8 – 11 and three teachers went on a two week hike through the Annapurna region of Nepal. The group followed the Annapurna Circuit, with views of the Annapurna Range, which is in some places 8,000m high (compared to Mt Kosciusko at 2,228m).

In total, staff and students on the trek covered about 80km of track over steep terrain. Each day involved up to eight hours of hiking in very difficult conditions, including navigating altitude and camping out in sub-zero temperatures.

By Gavin Hanbridge.



The trip had two major components: the sheer challenge and character-building involved in walking the trek itself, and the work and community connection in the village of Lespar.

Leading the tour was Mr Selwyn Wu, Deputy Head of Junior School (Pastoral Care and Educational Admin) who has been teaching at St Andrew's Cathedral School for 23 years.

*One of the key changes in the group dynamic Mr Wu saw, was that the physical challenge of trekking broke down barriers of age and gender.*

"When we first started, students tended to cluster in their different groups but by the end they were truly part of one group," he says. "They became less inhibited and this allowed them to reach out both to other students and kids in the village.

For Zoe Charles (Year 11, 2024), the journey came at a difficult time in her life. She says she went to Nepal just after her grandfather passed away. "I left on the trip when everything had just happened," she says. "I remember one day just crying my heart out. Everyone was so supportive. It was a lot of mental growth.

**"There's a very clear moment that I remember: along the trail, we did a group meditation session and sat in silence on a brick wall looking at the Annapurna Range. I realised then how far I'd come in my studies."**

*Opposite page: Students hiking along the Annapurna Circuit while navigating altitude and sub-zero temperatures. Inset above: Students are provided traditional dress to wear as part of their welcome to the village of Lespar. Inset below: Students take a break on the hike.*

The students spent their time in the village of Lespar, making improvements to the local school by cleaning, painting and preparing vegetable gardens. It was all work that the students had raised money for.

The company that coordinated the tour had a relationship with the village, which was in the vicinity of the trekking trail. So, there was a good basis for St Andrew's Cathedral School to establish its own relationship to support the village.

While it was the first opportunity for our trekkers to visit the village, Zoe says they certainly connected with people once they were there.

*"I was talking to one of teachers of the Lespar school about differences in study techniques," she says. "He tried so hard to overcome the language difference to let me know his thoughts on this topic that he was so passionate about. It was very rewarding because it was a small connection to a very different part of the world."*

"There was a cultural afternoon where the locals showed off their traditional dance and costumes (and our students then did the Macarena!)," Mr Wu says.

So for all the hardship, what did it mean for Mr Wu on a deeply personal level as he led the group?

"It was a big responsibility to be looking after 18 young lives and I was alert to that responsibility every day and night," he says. "But I loved it and I felt very honoured to be tasked with that.

"The trip was a really pure moment of connection, resilience and growth and was too good to be a fluke of nature," he says.



**Read more of this amazing journey and see more beautiful photos in the online edition of Inspired.**

# The heart of wellbeing

By Gavin Hanbridge.

In the Level 7 gymnasium of St Andrew's Cathedral School, a crowd of excited kids are cheering on acrobats. But it's no circus act, it is a performance by Backflips Against Bullying, a group that engages kids with thrilling physical feats – while teaching them about bullying and responses to it. Mrs Bronwyn Wake, Head of Character and Wellbeing (K-12) at the School, is in the thick of it.

For the past several years, Mrs Wake's role has been designing and implementing the Wellbeing Programme in the Junior School to assist students in things like Character Strengths, emotional management, attention and awareness, positive relationships, coping and habits and goals. Backflips Against Bullying is a really engaging way to explore positive relationships with our youngest students.

**It is an example of the way in which the Wellbeing programme finds strong points of engagement, assisting children in these important areas of growth and development.**

This year her role has expanded to head up Wellbeing across Years K-12. The Programme is about students understanding their individual character and identifying and creating a sense of belonging in order to positively relate to those around them and serve our world.

Mrs Wake says the benefit of the programme expansion is that the wholistic approach to wellbeing can be consistently implemented from Kindergarten to Year 12 in age-appropriate ways as students progress to graduation.

"The character development and learning that is an essential part of wellbeing takes time," she says. "The expanded programme means that students have the time for the concepts to be deeply embedded over the course of their school life. It enables them to shape who they are as people."

**The School's Christian foundations are the basis of the Programme and this shapes the Positive Psychology approach taken throughout.**

Across K-12 the core elements of the Programme don't change, however the content and activities reflect the developmental stage of the students. So, in terms of positive relationships, Junior School students learn about healthy friendships whereas Senior College students, for example, learn also about consent and romantic relationships.

In the several years that Bronwyn has been at St Andrew's Cathedral School, the Wellbeing Programme has developed in a variety of ways including the initial introduction of the Character Strengths programme (including Character Strength illustrations that are evident throughout the School), the Wellio classroom programme and further tailoring of content to better suit students and the ethos of the School.

The 15 Character Strengths are a key part of the School's approach to Character Education. Students are encouraged to consider their individual and group strengths, and how they can apply them across a number of contexts in the School community, such as service, leadership and social responsibility.

As an International Baccalaureate World School, approaches to learning skills (ATL) and IBDP learning dispositions have been incorporated into the School's Character Strengths, backed by research and Christian perspectives, systematically building skills and character, setting students up for success.



**See more about our engaging Wellbeing Programme and beautiful photos of the Backflips Against Bullying sessions at the School in our online edition.**



Top image: Mrs Bronwyn Wake at the Backflips Against Bullying performance. Lower images: Students having fun as they learn important lessons about bullying.



# Gawura: a diverse community

By Gavin Hanbridge.

Now in its 17th year, Gawura makes a real difference in closing the gap between educational outcomes of First Nations and non-Indigenous students.

Gawura is a highly regarded model for First Nations education, offering students a supportive, nurturing space where they feel secure, are surrounded by culture and language, and have access to some wonderful educational opportunities. In 2020, Gawura was named the Australian School of the Year at the Australian Education Awards.

**Surrounding Gawura is a strong network of support for students to succeed, including from parent support to corporate support and many from across the community, volunteering in reading groups.**

Mr John Ralph, Head of Gawura, says community is at the heart of Gawura.

*“We’re a relational school, especially when it comes to our parents,” he says. “Without that relationship we can’t build the trust at home so necessary for the deep engagement and ongoing success of our students.”*

This is shown in the Gawura Parent Advisory Committee (GPAC) which is an opportunity twice a term for parents to come into the School and be updated on all things “Gawura” – and also give advice on matters relating to school, community and culture.

Mr Ralph says a really good example of this is the review of the School’s Acknowledgement of Country.

“Parents reflected that while it acknowledged the traditional owners of the coastal lands on which the School sits, they wondered if it could

also reflect the inland areas from where many of our families are from,” he says. “It was changed accordingly, which has made an already good Acknowledgement, even better.”

Aunty Sharon Minniecon is the Co-Founder of Gawura with her husband, Pastor Ray Minniecon. She speaks of an even wider community engagement with both extended family groups and community service providers.

Gawura students and families are mostly from inner Sydney where Aunty Sharon and Pastor Ray have been long term residents and community workers, and so have existing community trust and knowledge.

Aunty Sharon says that the relationship with, and understanding of, families is key.

**“Once you know what’s happening with families, you can approach with care and assist in a culturally appropriate and flexible way – and work at each families pace,” she says.**

Ms Cranwell, Donor Relations Manager for Gawura says that when people see what Gawura does and the community it represents, they want to actively get involved.

“A great example of that was the strong turnout of non-Indigenous St Andrew’s Cathedral School parents to the recent Gawura Cocktail party fundraiser. It really was about people showing up to stand with Gawura in support,” she says.



**Get to know more about the amazing Gawura community in our online edition.**



Top to bottom: Dr Julie McGonigle with Pastor Ray Minniecon; Ms Marita Cranwell; Yarning Sessions with Friends with Aunty Sharon Minniecon on right; Mr John Ralph.



# Creative contemplation: reflecting the personal through the arts

By Gavin Hanbridge.

Two of the things that are core to St Andrew's Cathedral School, is the focus on the whole student – and the pursuit of creativity. In art, writing, design and music, students excel in this area and reflect something very personal about themselves.

**We talked to former and current students about the journeys they travel through in their creative works to better understand themselves, their families and the world around them.**

Olivia Phoon's (OA2023) series of beautifully blurred images titled Hazy recollections had the honour of being selected for ArtExpress last year. The artwork is based on faded stories and memories of her grandmother's life. Olivia was one of 27 St Andrew's Cathedral School students nominated for HSC Showcases last year.

She was drawn to creating this work by her interest in feminist perspectives of women in families but also by how much she didn't know about her paternal grandmother's life.

"The blurring effect used throughout this series of images represents this obscured connection. Most of the photos were taken in Singapore, but I'm not sure as my grandmother moved around a lot."

*For Olivia, while the journey began with the album and family story, it extended out to be a more universal reflection on the recollection of family history and how that memory fades.*

Finnian Agnew (OA2023) also focused on a connection with his grandmother when he created his wearable art piece. It paid homage to his grandmother's hometown, Patonga on the NSW Central Coast. Finnian understood that sustainability was a major concern for the

area and so he focused on the development of sustainable fabrics that displayed the intricate aesthetic qualities of Patonga's fishing nets and geological formations.

**Finnian's project was not only nominated, but also selected to be featured at the 2024 SHAPE Exhibition, another HSC Showcase.**

Finnian says, "This project celebrates the natural beauty of the town of Patonga. Practicing growing the fabric under different conditions was definitely a labour of love, but the result was better than I could ever have imagined!"

Bronte Critchley (OA2023) has always loved Greek mythology and feminist literature and found a way to incorporate them both into her English Extension essay. It told the first-person story with Circe, the mythical daughter of Helios, the sun god, and the ocean nymph Perse, critiquing how under-represented she has been in history and literature.

*Through doing the work, Bronte reflected on the struggles women have faced to gain more freedom, recognition and a more recognised role in society.*

"Just as Circe journeyed, so did I," Bronte says. "The patriarchy back in the day used to be really oppressive but now there's a way through it – and that's very inspiring to me."



**Read more for personal student journeys through the pursuit of creativity.**



Top to bottom: Olivia Phoon with her artwork, Hazy recollections; Finnian Agnew with his wearable art piece dedicated to Patonga; Bronte Critchley, whose written piece was about Circe, from Greek mythology.



# A lifelong love of performance

By Gavin Hanbridge.

**You will have seen her at St Andrew's Cathedral School musical performances and if you're anything like me, you will have marvelled at her talents on stage, accompanying our students with an extraordinary repertoire. For Szu Yu Chen, being an accompanist has been a lifelong vocation accompanying musicians and singers on the piano.**

## How did you start playing music?

I grew up in Taiwan and started playing music at aged five. Then at school when I was six my teacher asked me to accompany 50 of my fellow students who were doing a singing performance. I really enjoyed doing that.

## What has been your career path to come to be working at St Andrew's Cathedral School?

I graduated from the Peabody Conservatory at John Hopkins University in the USA and I also graduated in both music performance and teaching in Taiwan.

I toured Australia to perform with a choir and met my future husband. When I started my life here, I gained a scholarship at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I then worked at Newington before working at St Andrew's Cathedral School.

## What is important in your role as accompanist?

In this role, I wanted to build relationships with students. To make good music together, it's important to build trust as an accompanist. If students trust you, they take feedback better.

Some musicians don't like the role of accompanist because it means playing the same piece over and over again, especially with younger students. But for me, each of those sessions is about inviting students to enjoy the music.



See more of Szu Yu's fascinating story of her vocation as an accompanist and all-round musician.



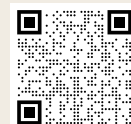
**Below**  
St Andrew's Cathedral School accompanist Szu Yu Chen.

# The Captains' Dinner

By Lyn Jarvis.  
Director of Community Engagement

## Below

*The Captains' Dinner gathers School Captains' past and present each year for an evening of inspiration and connection. This year, Captains shared anecdotes of their most memorable speeches.*



Read more of why the annual School Captains' Dinner means so much to School Captains past and present.

**The Captains' Dinner is one of the warmest and most enjoyable events we hold here at St Andrew's Cathedral School. It brings together former and current student leaders for an evening of friendship, fellowship, and inspiration.**

Started by Dr Collier in 2014, what began as a small, and quite honestly slightly awkward event, has evolved to a wonderful night of camaraderie and connection. It is also "a precious opportunity" to see how the skills learnt as a student leader can be applied in all future endeavours, according to Cleo Gavagna, 2023-24 School Captain.

As the event has grown, so has the relationship amongst the participants. The tradition each year for the captains to share a little about their life after school, means that they have shared each other's journeys from study and evolving professional lives.

Rama Chadda Harmer (2023-24 School Captain) attended the 2024 dinner and commented on the warmth: "despite never meeting most of the other people present, it almost felt like a big family reunion...".

In 2021, the 'final' gathering of Collier's Captains took place – or so we thought. Over a balmy dinner on the rooftop, as each captain shared their favourite memories of their time at school, it soon became clear that the captains did not want this to be the last dinner.

And so it was agreed to hold one more dinner – this time with the captains sharing with Dr McGonigle what made St Andrew's Cathedral School so special to them.

And again ... the captains did not wish it to be the last dinner. And so, Collier's Captains became the Captains' Dinner.

Natalie Cooney (nee Moss, OA2005) reflects ... "there is a sense of pride in meeting the leaders who have helped shape the school's spirit to what it is today ..."

School Captains are the heartbeat of our school, embodying its spirit, values and aspirations. Our captains care not only about the past but are passionate about the present and our future. They play a pivotal role in shaping our school community.



**JOEY WATSON**

**Joey Watson (OA2014) arrived at St Andrew's Cathedral School as a fresh-faced Year 7 in 2009 and quickly rose to prominence though his talent for Drama and English. He had several lead roles in the School's Drama productions, including in our 2013 musical *Beauty and the Beast*. Joey finished his journey at the School as Head Prefect in 2014.**

Joey made a particular mark on St Andrew's Cathedral School when he was the first male to ever address the UN International Women's Day Breakfast as a Year 11 student. In his rousing speech, he called on men to challenge the cultural notion of manhood and violence, replacing it with empathy and compassion. His speech was met with widespread acclaim and was congratulated by other keynote speakers including Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

After leaving the School, Joey joined the ABC, first as a chaser on Radio National, working his way up to become a long form features producer by 2018.

In 2022 Joey began working at The Guardian to help create the chart-topping series *Ben Roberts-Smith vs The Media*. Joey's Inside Australia's secretive torture survival course for elite soldiers was nominated for a Young Walkley award in the long form feature category in 2023.

Nowadays, Joey is the creator and host of *Secrets We Keep S2: Nest of Traitors* podcast.

By Richard Hansen.



Read more about Joey's career as a journalist.



Listen to Joey's podcast *Secrets We Keep S2: Nest of Traitors* podcast.



Read more about Alex's fascinating career journey.



**ALEXANDRA GRANT**

**Alexandra Grant (nee McDermott) (OA2003) arrived at St Andrew's Cathedral School in Year 10 in 2001, in one of our first coeducational cohorts. She showed great promise in the classroom in English and History and outside the classroom in debating and hockey. Alex became School Captain in 2003 and was only the third girl to hold the office.**

After finishing Year 12, Alex took a gap year at The King's School Gloucester – a fellow choir school - and travelled Europe before studying economics and politics at the University of Wollongong.

She started her career at The Treasury and then served across the Australian Public Service, private, and not-for-profit sectors, including roles at the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office, Foreign Affairs and Trade.

She has represented Australia at APEC and the G20 in Brisbane and St Petersburg and helped establish the National Skills Commission.

Alex is the Chief Operating Officer at Camali Group – an Australian consulting firm specialising in government relations, defence, economic and social policy. In 2023, she delivered an address with UNICEF, World Bank and Saudi Government at the Human Capability Initiative in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

By Richard Hansen.

Stay *connected* with our schools

STAY IN TOUCH WITH WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AND WHAT'S COMING UP AT ST ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL SCHOOL AND GAWURA.

News

Discover the breadth of activities occurring across St Andrew's Cathedral School.



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Upcoming Events

Find out what school activities and events you can get involved in.



Visit our website

Old Andreans Association

The OAA connects former students with the School and each other by organising reunions and social gatherings.



Follow us on Instagram

Gawura News and Events

Discover all the events and activities happening in our Kindergarten to Year 6 First Nations school.



Follow us on Facebook



# Courageous

Fear is often our greatest teacher – be brave.

**FRONT COVER** | STUDENTS TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE OF TREKKING IN NEPAL IN A JOURNEY THAT PROVIDED CHARACTER-SHAPING EXPERIENCES.  
**BACK COVER** | STUDENTS SUMMONED THEIR TALENT AND COURAGE TO STEP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT IN OUR MAJOR MUSICAL, THE LITTLE MERMAID.



**ST ANDREW'S**  
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Read about the magic  
and beauty, fun and  
inspiration of our *Little  
Mermaid* production.