



# From Lismore to Leadership

*John Stewart takes on the role of headmaster at Tudor House*

Sliding into the headmaster's chair at the prestigious Tudor House in the Southern Highlands of NSW, a school with time-honoured traditions, could be a daunting task for some educators but not for John Stewart: traveller, educator and author.

In fact, when 18th century English poet, Joseph Addison, wrote: "What sculpture is to a block of marble, education is to a human soul", he could have been talking about Tudor House – a school where students from Kindergarten to Year 6 roam 70 lush hectares in the footsteps of Tom Sawyer.

Established in 1897 by Wilfred Inman, the school's philosophy is to allow 'boys to be boys' by giving them the space, challenges and active learning they need to build 'confidence without arrogance'. Past students include Malcolm Fraser, James Packer and Noble Prize winning author, Patrick White.

The aim is to 'educate the whole boy' in a 'caring and supportive open environment' so these young men can one day serve their community with honesty, integrity and courage. The advantages are obvious and the students all say the one big difference between Tudor House and other schools is the freedom.

So in the green hills of Moss Vale near Bowral, at this preparatory school for boys, tree climbing, camping, kite flying, bike riding, boating and making and racing billy-carts, are just as important as scholastic studies.

When *Education Today* asked John Stewart how he was settling into his new position, he



*From top: John Stewart believes that boys should be taught with an emphasis on energy and fun; bottom; idyllic Tudor House*

said he felt enormously privileged to be leading one of Australia's best-known junior schools and was looking forward to working with the Tudor House community to write the school's next chapter.

A living example of his passion for life-long learning, Mr Stewart has a Bachelor of Education from Southern Cross University, a Diploma of Teaching from the University

of New England and a Master of Education at Cambridge University.

That might be chievement enough for a 42-year-old lad from Lismore on the North Coast of NSW, but he has also co-authored, with Dr John Irvine, the book *Thriving at School: a practical guide to help your child enjoy the crucial school years* and published an electronic text book for developing writing skills called *Write Online*.



His career path to date is also impressive. After he graduated from Southern Cross, he worked for Brainstorm Productions in a dream job that saw him travelling up and down the NSW coast and hinterland, presenting a healthy lifestyle and conflict resolution theatre to primary-aged children.

In the evenings, he presented cabaret shows to adults but after two years, he craved something more and decided to backpack around Europe and discover the world.

"I try to experience life and am not a person who likes to be sedentary," Mr Stewart said. "The more you travel the more you see everywhere has wonderful places."

Three months into his 12-month trip, Mr Stewart missed his future wife, Sophie, so much, he begged her to meet up with him in London.

She agreed and Mr Stewart then gained a position as a games teacher until "suffering from the cold in Hyde Park", he was appointed English teacher at Hill House International School – a large preparatory school in London, founded in 1951, and still owned and run by Richard Townend and his family.

He was soon appointed Head of Section and from Hill House, Mr Stewart moved on to St John's College School in Cambridge, becoming Head of English.

Its child-centred curriculum also promotes 'increasing knowledge, skills and competence', while improving a student's 'self esteem, personal responsibility, social competence and intellectual curiosity'.

While working as the school's Director of Studies, studying for his Masters in Education at Cambridge University and also creating his Write Online book, Mr Stewart also found the time to father four children.

Finally, after 10 years abroad, he then moved his family back home to Australia – three of his children were born in the UK and one in Australia.

"My wife and I wanted to give our children the experience of an outdoor lifestyle living close to their grandparents," he explained. "I also think it's good for children to experience change because the world is ever changing."

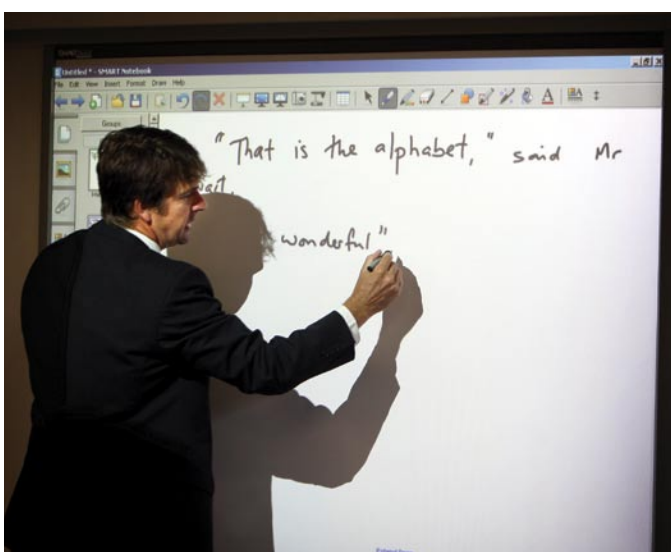
Once in Australia, Mr Stewart taught at Barker College on Sydney's North Shore before finally becoming Head of Junior School at Central Coast Grammar.

Five years on and he now looks out over the grounds of Tudor House, as excited as ever to be taking on yet another new challenge as its headmaster.

Typically not sedentary, Mr Stewart also teaches creative writing, drama, class support, PE and science.

"I'm doing too much," he admits, with a laugh. "But I love it!"

And the move has not dampened his enthusiasm for discovery. Mr Stewart looks forward to bringing the school forward into the context of learning for life and is brimming with



*From top: John Stewart uses every tool at his disposal to deliver interesting lessons, including interactive whiteboards; bottom: students enjoy increased freedom as they mature*

ideas like; breaking free of the 'age cage' and teaching students at their academic level rather than branding by their birth year, and developing an agriculture project where volunteer senior citizens can work with students in the school's garden so food grown there can be served in the dining room.

"We want children to know the structure of a community, to see learning as a lifelong process and mix with people with wisdom as well as knowledge," he explained.

One of the school's strategies to enhance this concept is Colour Families: where boys are structured in vertical groupings from Kindergarten to Year 6.

"It offers vertical connectedness of social and emotional domains to create children who are adept at learning," Mr Stewart says. "It's also about breaking down barriers in school by providing an opportunity for all boys to connect with different minds."

And given the wealth of his experience, connecting with different minds sounds like something Mr Stewart is probably rather good at and this makes the future at Tudor House seem exceptionally bright.

For information about Tudor House visit [www.tudorhouse.nsw.edu.au/](http://www.tudorhouse.nsw.edu.au/)

