

Pioneering spirit in Alice Springs

St Philip's College started as a boarding house, now it has worldwide links



Headmaster of St Philip's College Alice Springs Chris Tudor

"There is time enough for everything in the Never-Never" from Jeannie Gunn's novel We of the Never Never

Academic success

St Philip's College in Alice Springs has proved that geographic isolation is not a barrier to excellence. Three of its Year 12 students took top spots in the Northern Territory's 2008 results. Edward Tikoft was the NT's top student; Luke Smyth and Ethan Barden were in the top 20 and Larissa Gamertsfelder, an Indigenous student, has gone on to study Medical Science at Flinders University

Established in 1950 by Reverend Harry Griffiths as a boarding house for children who lived in remote areas and needed access to schools, the College's main objective was to break the bonds of isolation.

In the 1960s, the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches expanded the concept and built St Philip's on eight hectares of

bushland, bordered by Charles Creek and Todd River and backing on to the Telegraph Station National Park.

When Headmaster Chris Tudor took over in 1986, St Philip's was still a residential college for outback children, who boarded there and attended schools in Alice Springs during the day.

When Tudor arrived in January that year, there was lots of work to do but by March he was wondering why he was sending all these kids off to other schools every morning. "I got the idea of opening a transition school because at the time most of our children came from large outback stations and had only ever attended School of the Air. Many of the little ones were homesick," he explained.

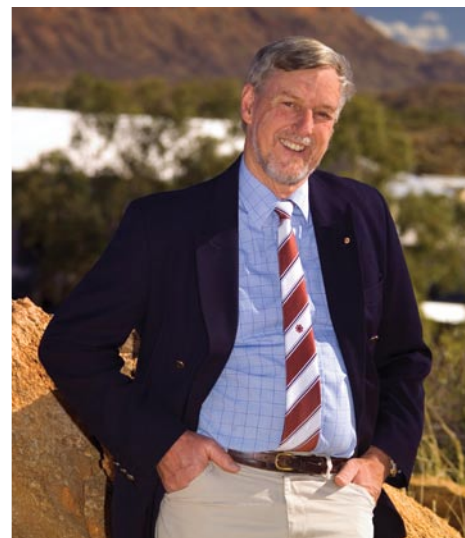
The chair of the school council, local station owner, Mrs Jan Heaslip, embraced the idea with enthusiasm. She had chaired the panel that had interviewed Tudor and had convinced him, after initial doubts on his part, to accept the job. Jan Heaslip is now the College's Life Governor.

"There's this pioneering approach in the Northern Territory that just doesn't stop," Tudor told *Education Today*.

Just six weeks after the decision to open an interim school, he thought 'Why not just open a school for Years 7 to 10'. The process took two and a half years and in 1989, 145 students from Years 7 to 9 were enrolled. Within the first year, it was decided to open a school catering for Years 11 and 12 too. The first Year 12 students graduated in 1992.

For Chris Tudor, it was an aim from the very beginning to beat isolation with a world-and Australia-wide vision. International school exchanges began in 1992 and St Philip's had a sister school in Indonesia by 1994. In 1996 it became a member of Round Square, a worldwide fraternity of schools intent on building better relationships internationally.

With sister schools now all around the world, 25 to 30 per cent of the Year 10 students at St Philip's find themselves in Oman, Columbia,



Clockwise from top left: St Philips offers students excellent facilities; Chris Tudor; high achievers Luke Smyth; Ethan Barden and Edward Tikoft



Peru, Japan, England, Kenya, Canada, USA, Germany, France or South Africa for a whole term. Last year, one of the College's indigenous students, from a community 120 km from Alice Springs, went to northern India on exchange.

The Australasian region is not forgotten and Year 8 students also go off for two-week exchanges to Australian schools, as well as to Thailand, Singapore and New Zealand.

Community service is also a big focus at St Philip's and Year 9 students tackle community service initiatives in Alice Springs, while older students serve overseas. Staff also get to participate in these far reaching projects and one teacher is currently in British Honduras.

There are 550 students at St Philip's, of whom 45 to 65 will be boarders at any one time. While he admits it is extremely difficult to attract teachers to the outback, Tudor says the College works hard to make the school an attractive option. He says dedicated staff is one of the keys to a great school and is proud of his 50 keen teachers.

"We also have a strong sense of community within the College and encourage leadership qualities in senior students. Our Year 12 students are very serious about their responsibility to the College, its younger students and the broader community of Alice Springs," he said. "I discuss goals with College captains and College leaders

weekly – they are given real jobs to accomplish. For instance, assembly is run by the College captains and there are lots of activities after school."

St Philip's is also a place of innovative ideas and creativity. It fosters spiritual development, sport, academic excellence, creative and performing arts, appreciation of the environment and a deep understanding of the international world.

"We are always trying to make the College exciting and provide opportunities, with challenge and adventure an essential part of the St Philip's experience."

Tudor's love of St Philip's, teaching and the outback has rubbed off on his children. Two are teachers at the school and one is a teachers' assistant. During her university holidays, his youngest daughter works as his personal assistant. His wife is also a principal.

St Philip's website: www.stphilips.nt.edu.au