

Drivers and drama at Swan View Senior High

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In 1829 when the Swan View area of Perth was established, settlers were granted land in accordance with the assets and labour that they brought with them to the new British colony. As with most handouts, there was, however, a catch; according to the Swan View Community Association website, full ownership of the land was only ceded after the occupant had improved every acre to the value of “at least one shilling and six pence”. The expectation was so rigorously applied that even the first Governor of the Swan River Colony, Captain James Stirling, had to give up his land allocation for failing to make adequate improvements when he resigned his post.

Yet more than 190 years later the tradition of striving for improvement lives on at Swan View Senior High School. The school has made strong progress against the four priorities identified during a review in early 2011: academic rigour; student attendance, attitude, behaviour and effort; staff consistency with policies and protocols and school pride, promotion and community perception. Notable achievements include a jump in the regular attendance percentage from 42.9 per cent in the first half of 2011 to 61 per cent in the first term of 2012, and a significant increase in Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) scores between 2010 and 2011.

The school offers a range of programs and pathways to cater for its diverse student population. Two popular options are the *MotorV8* program and a specialist drama program known as *The Fame Academy*.

Implemented in 2011, the *MotorV8* program was developed to engage younger students by allowing them to apply their skills and knowledge in a practical and inspiring way. “We realised that students in upper school were already building beach buggies, chopper motorcycles and go-karts as part of their engineering studies. Collectively staff recognised there was an opportunity for lower school students to also participate in engineering studies at a more basic level as well as to link engineering studies between the lower and upper school,” explains Toni Lane, Swan View Senior High School’s Program Coordinator, Operations.

Students need to apply to be a part of the program, which is offered in Years 8 and 9, and they pay an annual fee to participate. The course is divided into four broad phases. In the *Build It* phase, pairs of students work together



to design and build their own go-kart in class, while *Customise It* allows students to tailor their creation “Monster Garage style”. *Maintain It* involves learning about vehicle maintenance. And of course the *MotorV8* program would not be complete without *Drive It*, a chance

for students to race their machines against classmates.

Skills including fabrication, welding, machining and automation are developed throughout the program, which leads many participants into a Certificate 1 and 2 (Pre-

apprenticeship) Engineering course in upper school. Lane also highlights the emphasis the school places on preparing students for the workforce. "Industrial Studies students in upper school wear an industry standard uniform to school, their workplace and TAFE which further prepares them for work readiness and helps them to build a sense of team as is needed in a workplace. We believe that presentation skills are as important as wood work and practical engineering skills and give them an edge in finding employment."

Community involvement has been another positive feature of the MotorV8 program. Unused land at Swan View is currently being revitalised as a kart track, complete with road signage, that students can use to safely race their creations. The plan is for the facility to be open to the community. For example, local primary schools could use the track to teach and practise road safety in a protected environment. The school is also looking to strengthen links with local engineering companies. Lane explains that for students displaying potential in the field this can offer a definite career path. "If they maintain high standards in the practical and theory skills as well as their effort, behaviour and attitude, they will gain immediate employment into the organisation," she says.

Implementation of the MotorV8 program has been relatively smooth, with both staff and students embracing the idea. According to Lane, "Teachers are enjoying the project and finding the students engaged and excited in class. Primary school students, particularly the boys who learn well by 'doing' are attracted to the program and student enrolments are growing." The main stumbling block for the initiative has been finding the time to attract adequate support to fund the expansion of the program into areas such as the development of the kart track.

For students with aspirations of a more theatrical nature, Swan View offers The Fame Academy. The course was developed about four years ago to build on the school's strong drama traditions. With more than 15 years of whole school and smaller productions under their belts, and solid community support, teachers felt that it would be worthwhile offering a more specialised program for students with talent and an interest in drama.

To be accepted into The Fame Academy, students have to be nominated by a parent, teacher, agent or drama coach. An audition process then takes place, involving workshops in voice, movement and improvisation, as well as a small group performance. Around 75 per cent of applicants are selected for the program, which begins in Year 8 and runs through to Year 10. The school also offers regular workshops to prepare younger students for the auditions. "Students from Years 5 to 7 are encouraged to attend as it demonstrates a commitment plus the skills they learn form part of the selection process," explains Lane.

Once in the program, students are given



the opportunity to explore both acting and production skills. In addition to experiencing live theatre through incursions and excursions, students also work with industry professionals and can become involved in public productions. In Years 8 and 9, students have four drama lessons a week, including two periods of extension drama, and learn anything from stage fighting to makeup application from a range of specialists. In Year 10 they can complete the 1A and 1B Drama course of study, which counts towards their Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE).

Lane says that students are generally committed to the course and retention rates are high. "In upper school students can study the standard WACE courses for stages 1, 2 and 3 Drama and in addition students can also select the Certificate 2 in Live Production Theatre and Events. It is generally expected that a Fame student would select both streams in their upper school studies."

Fame Academy students have pursued a variety of performing arts related careers including TV, print journalism and radio

broadcasting. They have also undertaken further study in both production and acting courses at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, as well as a wide variety of TAFE courses including sound, lighting, technical and fashion design.

Swan View has put a great deal of effort into ensuring students are offered a range of appropriate courses. In addition to the MotorV8 and Fame Academy programs, there are also specialist Media-Arts-Design and basketball programs, a *Follow the Dream – Partnerships for Success* program to mentor Indigenous students, and connections to tertiary institutions such as the University of Western Australia Aspire program. While it would be difficult to apportion a dollar value to the opportunities that Swan View Senior High is offering, students certainly have the chance to gain their "one shilling and six pence" worth of improvements and then some. **ET**

Further reading

Swan View Community Association Inc *History of Swanview* Retrieved 18 June 2012 from: <http://www.swanview.org.au/>