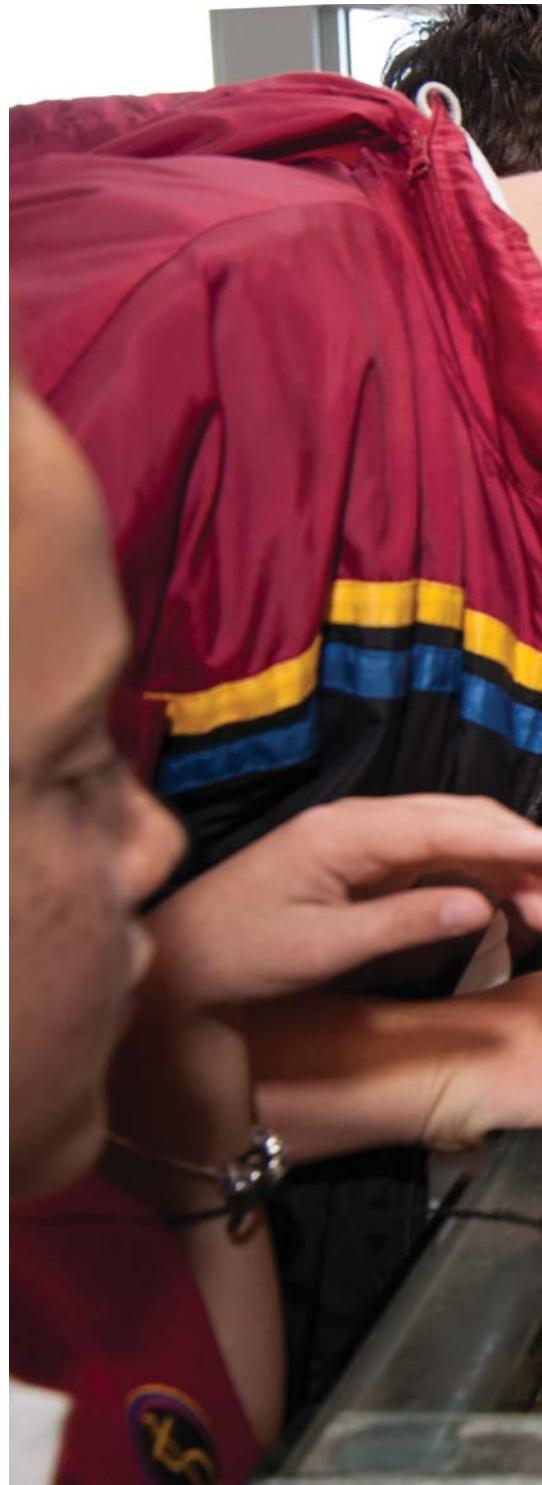


# A school on the seashore

Williamstown High School takes full advantage of its Port Philip site



Of all the many and varied school settings in Australia – inner city, suburbs, small towns, country – the Bayview Street Campus of Williamstown High School would have to be one of the more unusual; a 100-metre gravel path that meanders through tussocky native grasses and around reed beds separates the school from the shore.

There are, in fact, only two waterfront areas around the top of Port Philip Bay that do not have a road to cross to get to the water's edge... and the other is a pocket of breathtakingly expensive real estate in Brighton on the south eastern side of the city.

The school, on the former Point Gellibrand Girls School site, was completed in 2007. It was one of six educational facilities in Australia to be used as a pilot project for the Green Building

*This unspoilt wetlands area is a haven for coastal and marine life*

Council of Australia Green Star Education Rating Tool, receiving a 5 Star Green Star rating in March last year.

The school's Green Star credentials extend beyond the perimeter fence to the next-door housing development where rain harvested from the roofs feeds into five ponds in the school grounds, supplementing the school's rainwater to keep the sports oval green.

Taking advantage of its location, the school has a working marine biology centre and includes marine biology studies in the Years 7–9 Science curriculum. Marine biologist Garrett Drago

heads the program, working three days each week at the school and two at Melbourne Zoo.

The centre, which doubles as a Science classroom, features a row of large seawater tanks along one wall that contain thriving specimens of the fish, crustaceans, plants and marine life native to Port Philip Bay. There's even a tank of unwelcome flotsam and jetsam – bottles, plastic bags and the like that are washed down the storm drains and into the bay. Trays containing rock pool specimens that can be closely studied and touched are laid-out on workbenches.

Jawbone Marine Sanctuary, named after its shape, protects 30 ha of coastal waters. The little promontory, to the west of the school, was fenced off from the rest of the world for over 80 years by a rifle range. This unspoilt wetlands area is a haven for coastal and marine life. Being a sanctuary, the



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#### Williamstown ICSEA value

Distribution of students	Bottom quarter	Middle quarters	Top quarter
School distribution	15%	20%	31%
Australian distribution	25%	25%	25%

school can't actually collect samples for the tanks, but between the high and low tidelines is a pristine marine ecosphere to be measured, monitored and in summer explored by snorkelers.

Campus Principal Darryn Kruse credits the senior school's strong science program to students' marine studies in the middle school years. He says: "the students really enjoy marine studies, it builds their interest in Science and we see this carried through when they move on to the Pasco Street campus to start Year 10."

#### *The students really enjoy marine studies*

The school's catchment area is defined by a line that extends east to west from the centre of Williamstown. This takes in the cream of what has become, over the last 20 or so years, very expensive real estate but also includes the Housing Commission towers that dominate the original Victorian era streets that front Hobsons Bay. The ICSEA data underscores

this evolution, with the school's ICSEA value standing at 1069 against the average 1000.

With no room to expand on the Bayview Street campus, the school can't grow beyond its present 750 students.

Kruse says: "I would not want it to be any bigger. Leaving aside our academic curriculum, we also have very strong music, debating, chess, drama, agriculture and sports programs.

"We have done a lot of work in recent years on where the students 'are' and where they are 'going.'



*Few places are available for children living outside the catchment area*

Unsurprisingly, given the quality of what the school has to offer, few places are available for children living outside the catchment area. And there's a historic reason for this too. When Williamstown High merged with Point Gellibrand Girls School, it was agreed that two classes would be reserved for girls. As well, there's an accelerated learning class so three out of the 10 classes in each year run separately but in parallel to the main stream.

It's an approach that works well and is valued by the community, with more demand for the girls-only classes than there are places, though it does result in a gender imbalance that shows up in the combined middle and senior enrolment total of 1431 of whom 799 are girls and 632 boys.

Kruse again: "Having taught boys classes, I know that there is no one best way. Some children do better in mixed gender classes, others in single sex. In the girls' English classes, for example, the novels studied tend to have strong female protagonists."

"I have learnt that our young people are so varied and diverse in so many ways, and that celebrating and catering for individual difference is an important goal for schools. Providing a broad range of opportunities is one way of catering for that difference."

### Darryn Kruse

Darryn Kruse was appointed as Campus Principal of the Bayview Campus (Years 7-9) in the middle of the 2010 school year. He taught at Fitzroy High School from 2004 through 2010 where he "loved team teaching." [www.educationtoday.com.au 2012 Vol 12 (3) Term 3]

He commenced his teaching career at Broadmeadows Secondary School in Melbourne's West; moving on to the Northcote Schools Network; and then Buckley Park where he was curriculum coordinator and acting assistant principal. He taught, for a short period, at Deakin University. He has also worked part time as an educational consultant, including assignments in South Africa and work in the USA.

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