



Friday 30th October, 2009.

Letter From The Alpine School Campus (Altitude 1585m).
Light showers in the mountains.

Dear Parents, Guardians and Families.

Hello again from the community of the Alpine School Campus! What a busy term we have had already. The first expedition groups have headed-out and returned already. They donned backpacks and hiking boots and bushwalked down along the Victoria River, which rises as a spring in Dinner Plain, camping out in tents about 5km downstream at a place called Malcolm Plain. The students were well prepared and so full of excitement, apprehension, "coolness" and worry, all mixed into one! We know, however, that what they will learn through their undertaking will put them in great stead. One of the concepts we use in designing our type of education experience is to move from the known to the unknown. In moving to, and living at, the Alpine School Campus, students initially are in a very unknown environment (socially, physically, emotionally, geographically and so on), which they soon become comfortable and familiar with. It is a very deliberate part of the process of learning both leadership skills and to be enterprising.

Some of your letters from your sons and daughters may indicate that, while things are different at the Alpine School Campus, it is still hard work and fun. If that is so, we are delighted! We believe learning is hard work and should still be enjoyable. Real learning challenges what we believe and know. It is not much use us re-learning what we already know! However, *how do we know what we don't know?* That is the hard part of what students learn here. To be able to unlock the potential of knowing what we don't know (we call it becoming *autonomous learners*) is an enormous skill! Students should approach this or indeed achieve this towards the end of their Alpine School experience and in their reintegration period when they are at home next term and during the year. This is what will set them ahead of their peers! Our research suggests this is one of the key things students of this age should be undertaking, more so than perhaps Maths or English (which they often do in the Learning Projects anyway). Past students are indicating to us that after a settling-in period at home and school and in friendship circles that, as well as everything else they have learnt here, their experience here has dramatically improved their academic ability. We do know that the period of readjustment is similar to the period of separation...so, the Spring holiday period may be a challenge with light at the end of the tunnel.

The visiting weekend is next weekend by the time you receive this, and we look forward to seeing you again. Can we stress that it is a family occasion, for parents' benefit, and should be limited (on the Sunday return) to immediate family members? Pick-up times are between 10am and midday on Saturday 7th November, and join us for a cup of tea or coffee on Sunday 8th November between 3pm and 4pm. **We ask that you return with your son or daughter by 3pm and depart by 4pm.** Some families may wish to arrive and leave earlier due to the travel involved or family commitments. The school will be staffed from Midday on the Sunday. We always have the potential of poor weather even at this time of the year. Please allow extra time for these driving conditions and the winding road. If any families are unable to attend, or wish to seek alternative arrangements, please let us know as soon as possible and we are able to assist.

We are advocates of the use of email facilities, as long as they can positively add to the Alpine School Campus experience for your sons and daughters as well as parents, families and friends. Can we also add that it is pretty normal for students' emails to be increasingly brief, and that brevity will more than likely become more common; the letters will probably get shorter rather than longer! There is the risk of what we call the "tyranny of technology" and "cyber proximity"! When emailing, please be aware of the effect some comments and conversations can have on your son/daughter up here, and we message the same to your sons/daughters. It is difficult for parents when one receives an email extolling how terrible and homesick a son/daughter is when you are often so far away and most likely feeling helpless. Please try to avoid supporting "chat" about homesickness. Use terms like "we know you will do well" and "we know you can do it", or "it is only 2 days until we see you and they will fly". Also, perhaps avoid sharing too much of your own anxiety. Tell them "we look forward to sharing the stories in only two weeks" or "we now know how much work you do around home" (if that is the case!). Comments about how sad and distressed you are, even if it is the case, are sometimes unhelpful. I hope these are useful hints?

Students are allocated a "download" limit, which also affects their email usage. If students choose to download large images or other (lets hope they are permitted downloads) files, they will use their limits more rapidly. At the end of the month they may find themselves logged-out of their address. Sometimes we can easily assist with cleaning-up files and in-boxes for example. It may be that they have to hand-write you using "snail-mail". Oh well!

Visiting weekend can see a return of "separation anxiety" for both families and students. At times, students have indicated their reluctance or insecurity about the visiting weekend. They are not really saying they don't want to see you. Moreover, they are saying they can do it alone; they wanted to and have tried that independence they all strive for at this age. However, for some this may not be so! It is a critical component of our program, and they DO need you to support them in their considerable endeavor at the Alpine School Campus. The weekend will allow you as parents to have a better-shared understanding of the Alpine School Campus experience. This will help in the reintegration, when your son/daughter comes home, so you can perhaps better understand the people and places being spoken of and the experiences undertaken. It may also be the first time your son/daughter will show YOU around THEIR home! There are times when the whole building seems like one big adolescent bedroom, you know the place? Well, it is their home after all and no student in our 1600 or so who have been here suffered serious injury as a result of their bedroom being a mess. We try to remember to keep things in perspective and choose the battle when working with adolescents.

We will, however, place a bit of leverage on them to tidy the place for the visiting weekend!

Some behaviors we may see after the visiting weekend may include even fewer letters or correspondence home after the weekend and an anxiety of the experience finishing too soon, before students are ready for it to end! Sometimes there are just apparently irrational feelings that manifest themselves in all kinds of behaviors. As I have mentioned to you in the past, we are experts at creating and dealing with these emotions and they are normal and individual. We also recognize that the manifestations of these emotions are different for every person and treat every issue individually; there is no book of cures at our disposal.

We have, for the last few terms, been undertaking parent and student surveys after the Alpine School Campus experience. We will burden you with these in future! One aspect of feedback that is clear to me is that we have not adequately conveyed the nature of our "reporting" system to parents. We do not have a **report** in the traditional school report sense. Students do not *receive* a report when they leave. At The Alpine School Campus, they develop it themselves. Instead they are required to present their individual growth and learning in the forms of metaphor, a passport and presentation of learning and completion of their CLP (which their community judges...). Here are some examples and background. Names have been fictionalized and dates altered to protect the privacy of the original student author.

James' Alpine School Metaphor

"My Alpine School experience has been like climbing a huge mountain. You start off at the bottom not knowing anyone. As you start to climb you make new friends. Then the mountain gets steeper as you face new challenges. No part of the mountain is the same; every day is different with new challenges. As you climb you are always learning new things and by now you've made friends that will stick with you for the rest of your life.

You climb a bit further till you reach half way. It's dead flat here and your Alpine School experience has halted for a while, but you get to see your parents. After two days you say goodbye to your parents as you start to climb again. Climbing and climbing, you near the top. You look back down and you can just see the bottom. You realise how far you've come since that first day when you started climbing. After a few weeks of climbing you finally reach the top. It has been a great journey but also a tough one. It's time to say goodbye to The Alpine School and all your friends for now. It's been a long journey but it had to stop. It's time to leave The Alpine School and start climbing back down the mountain. A few weeks later your life is back to nearly what it used to be. You're a new person and life will never be the same."

James, Alpine School Campus, 2008.

Passports address the following areas:

- **My Personal Approach to Life** - examines student's personal philosophies beliefs and values and achievements up-to-date.
- **Me as a Team Player** - examines team roles, student strengths and areas of improvement, team skills, and the value of working as part of a team.
- **Me as a Leader** - examines the concepts and characteristics of leaders and the leadership roles students have taken on.
- **Me as a Thinker and Learner** - examines diversity of learning and thinking styles and their impact on individuals.
- **Me as an Enterprising Person** - examines students' skills in communication, planning and organising, solution finding, moving out of their comfort zones, having initiative and drive, and monitoring and evaluating.
- **My Goals for the Future** - examines how students plan to use their learning in the future.

The Passport encourages students to reflect on their learning in both formal and informal aspects of the Program. Reflection sessions are structured into the Program on a daily basis to assist with this process. The format of passports is the individual student choice and has included Web pages, PowerPoint Presentations, Visual Diaries, Folios, and C.V.s.

Example of Passport excerpt:

"Goals are important because they give you something to focus on. They are what you hope to achieve. Goals can take place with the smallest thing to the biggest thing. I think it is important with goal setting that you use steps to help you reach big targets. I also think your goals should be realistic; something you think you could be able to achieve in the near future or the future. I think there is a difference between goals and dreams. Dreams can be goals but to me goals that we set and really believe we can achieve are plans, therefore they have steps.

When I set goals I like to have a reason to set them. I do not think you should set about to do something that you are not inspired by. I start by thinking about the end result of my goal and then think of the smaller steps, which I can use to make it happen."

Anita, Alpine School Campus, 2007.

Personal Progress Interview & Presentations of Learning

Mid way through the program and at its conclusion, students are required to first undertake a personal progress interview, and then later a more formal presentation of their learning to a small panel. This encourages students to identify, clarify and articulate their learning orally and supports their written passport. It also prepares students for the task of showing what they have gained from The Alpine School experience to their family, friends, school and wider community. Students are given guidelines and suggested activities to assist them in preparing for this.

An example of a student Presentation of Learning follows:

Dear Panel Members,

...When I first looked at myself to see how I have changed I thought that there weren't many differences to when I arrived. But when I look deeper I see that I have changed...

One of the main things The Alpine School has taught me is that if you want something to happen, you have to use your initiative and just go and make it happen for yourself. An example of a time here when I have used my initiative was when I helped organise a hike to Carmichael's Falls.

Another big thing I have learnt from The Alpine School is to set goals for everything you do. Before I came here I never used to set goals, so many things never got done. But here I set goals all the time and so I am always saying to myself, "Now remember your goal and do this or do that". One of the goals I have set since being here is to improve my public speaking, by speaking up and expressing my opinion. Back home in class I hardly ever said anything unless I had to, and I know up here I am fairly quiet but I have been telling myself to speak up more when I have something to say...

Finally I would like to say that The Alpine School has taught me that we are capable of doing whatever we want, as long as we have the motivation and drive to put in the hard work. The story of the twelve year old boy who started the Save the Children campaign really made me realise that just because we can't vote or drive or don't have a fulltime job, doesn't mean we can't make a difference in the world. I have always thought about things like child labour and starving third-world countries as a problem too big for us to do something about but now I know that that's not true. Any individual who believes they can do something can, even if it does involve a lot of hard work. Although people have told me this my whole life The Alpine School has really made me believe it through all the things we can get just by organising them, writing a proposal....So I think even if on the outside many of the changes in me are not very noticeable, inside there have been some very big changes.

Daniel, 2007

All this information is available on our website. Go to <http://www.alpineschool.vic.edu.au/alpine-lessons/> for more information. We ask you as parents and guardians to **insist upon seeing, hearing or having presented to you any or all of these "reports" when your son/daughter returns home.**

The Alpine School experience is ultimately a very personal one for parents and guardians, students and families and each experience is slightly different. We thank you for being a part of our community. We look forward to seeing you on the visiting weekend and hearing from you in future with any feedback that might assist us in ensuring our program continues to be the best of its type.

With every good wish.



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Principal.
On behalf of the School Staff team.



Russell Shem
Campus Principal
Alpine School Campus