

# How Warrandyte Scored a High School

Warrandyte High School celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2008. Secondary education wasn't handed on a plate to this community. Editor of The Warrandyte Diary, remembers those long, hard years of campaigning for a secondary school in the area.

Once there was only one school in Warrandyte. Warrandyte Primary on its present site at the top of the Forbes Street hill. Children reaching the end of Grade 6 travelled by bus to Norwood High School in North Ringwood.

The Warrandyte Primary School committee took up the battle in June 1972. Disturbed by overcrowding at Norwood, designed to accommodate 600 students and then overcrowded with more than 900, they approached local state MP Mr J.W. Manson, who agreed to "take up this important matter" with Education Minister, Lindsay Thompson.

## February 1973

By February 1973, parents were also concerned at overcrowding at the primary school. They believed more portable classrooms were not the answer.

"Playground space is already severely over-taxed," a committee spokesperson said. "The difficult terrain gives the staff enough problems, without any more (portable) classrooms being built to further restrict playing areas."

Local parents were deeply concerned that month when Warrandyte children were refused admission to Norwood, due to overcrowding. Maroondah High School in West Croydon reluctantly agreed to rescue the Warrandyte "refugees", accommodating them--temporarily-- in a tent!

A new high school had been announced for Doncaster East and it was stated that Warrandyte children would be able to attend that school. However many parents believed that "the only final solution will be the building of a state secondary school in Warrandyte".

It was also hoped that overcrowding at the primary school would be addressed with the "strong possibility that a second primary school would be built at the west end of the town".

The local education crisis was on the front page of The Warrandyte Diary the following month. Warrandyte children were being taught in a tent at Maroondah High School and the Education Minister had responded negatively to a request for a secondary school in Warrandyte. "The Ringwood district has had particular attention in recent months," his reply stated, "but it is considered that an additional secondary school is not yet required in that district."

A reader's letter in the same issue of the Diary suggested that a community technical school, specialising in teaching arts and crafts, would be ideal for Warrandyte. This new approach to secondary education was picked up in the June 1973 issue. "We have a good thing going here in Warrandyte," the spokesperson said. "Our community spirit is something of which we are all very proud. A new concept in secondary schooling, designed to cater for our particular needs, could help us to retain it." The idea of a community technical school was being seriously investigated. About 80 Warrandyte parents met with Mr W. Bradshaw, Principal of Diamond Creek Technical School, to discuss the establishment of an annexe of that school in Warrandyte. It was believed such an annexe could be up and running by February 1974. By November 1973 the area had a new state member. Mr Norman Lacy, MP for Ringwood, pledged strong support for the establishment of a secondary school annexe in Warrandyte. Mr Lacy was to play a key role in the provision of a secondary school. He said he noticed there was considerable fragmentation of the local school population at secondary level. The Warrandyte School project steering committee was formed and Mr Lacy pledged his support.

## March 1974

But by March 1974 the proposal for a secondary annexe had been officially rejected, this despite a petition with more than 1000 signatures, several public meetings and strong support from local MPs.

By this time more than 250 children were travelling out of Warrandyte each day to state secondary schools. Many were leaving home as early as 7.30am and not returning until 5.30pm. Richard Morton, president of the Warrandyte Primary School Committee, stated, "Surely the Education Department can't fob us off any longer. The evidence in support of our case for the establishment of a secondary school is overwhelming, and we will continue to fight for it."

Meanwhile, the case for a second primary school in Warrandyte was proceeding apace. The Education Department had purchased a site for a school in Harris Gully Road. Mr Lacy wrote to the Education Minister seeking a specific date by which the new school could be operating.

Still the issue of a local secondary school was far from resolved. Doncaster and Templestowe Council entered the fray. Warrandyte Ward Councillor, Robert White, said at a public meeting: "It appears that the Education Department is of the belief that children living in Warrandyte and Park Orchards will either never reach secondary school age, or when they do, it will be extra hard for them receive secondary schooling. Such a situation is to me as astounding as it is ludicrous."

That same month a proposal for an inter-denominational secondary school was being formulated by representatives of the Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in Warrandyte and Park Orchards.

## The Campaign continues

The first real victory in this long-running campaign was achieved in July 1975 when the government included a new school in Harris Gully Road on the building program for the next financial year. The school was promised for the first term in 1977. It was still being called "West Warrandyte".

Meanwhile, the campaign for a secondary school for Warrandyte and Park Orchards continued. Then, in September 1976, the good news finally arrived. A new secondary school was to be built in Warrandyte and was expected to take its first students at the beginning of 1978. Believed to serve Warrandyte, Park Orchards and Wonga Park, it was anticipated that the school would be built in South Warrandyte, possibly on land at Five Ways, near where the Shell service station now stands.

Steering committee president, John Curry, told the Diary it would be very much a "school for the community".

By December 1976 the "West Warrandyte" primary school was proceeding "on schedule". However, the local community had one more problem. The new secondary school was not designated for a site in South Warrandyte, but was to be built in West Warrandyte, "between Pound Road and Andersons Creek Road".

Thus the concept of one school for Warrandyte, Park Orchards and Wonga Park--communities sharing common aspirations--had been jettisoned. The local committee believed "the Education Department was clearly giving priority to relieving pressure on the East Doncaster High School".

But all was not quite as it seemed. Local MP, Norman Lacy, was now Assistant Minister for Education and one morning we awoke to find we were not getting one high school, but two! Plans were announced that a high school would be built on Tor-tice Drive, North Ringwood, within easy reach of Park Orchards, Wonga Park and South Warrandyte.

Meanwhile, the new primary school in Harris Gully Road was up and running in its unique octagonal buildings specially designed for newly fashionable "team teaching".

The community applauded its name: "Andersons Creek Primary School", evocative of the original government school in the area.

## February 1978

Warrandyte High School opened in February 1978 in a new, improved version of the old "portables", known as "relocatables"

But the school's troubles were far from over. "Not so much a school as a shambles", The Diary headlined. The buildings and grounds were not ready. Principal, Murdoch Neilson, told The Diary the school was simply not fit to be opened. "Warrandyte people have had a very bad deal with schools," he said. "And this is a classic example of how not to start one."

Fearful for the safety of students, Mr Neilson gave parents the option of taking their children home or leaving them at school. Two-thirds decided to take their children home.

The new school was underway on its own site. Beginning at the beginning, the school's initial enrolment was 43 Form 1 students.

Plans for permanent buildings progressed slowly, but on April 11, 1987, the new buildings were officially opened by Education Minister, Ian Cathie.

The school, with a low key and approachable style of teaching and a strong sense of democratic principles, was already establishing a wide reputation for excellence, especially in the fields of graphic and performance arts.

Set in gardens created by parents under the guidance of local garden designer, Bev Hanson, the beautiful new school, designed by a team of top educational architects, reflected many of the principles of community education first formulated by those Warrandyte parents who had decided to take on "the powers that be" 15 years earlier.

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Cliff Green, The Warrandyte Diary,  
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