

Life in the Wilderness

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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

From the Acting Principal

Brad Snell

Every year, a parent catches me at the gate and asks, gently, a version of the same question. Their daughter is finding the work harder this year. Is it meant to be this hard? Is the school asking too much of her?

I have been at Wilderness for 15 years, and it is still the question I most want to answer well. Some of it, I tell them, is meant to be hard. And no, that is not the same as asking too much. The difference between those two things is the whole of what we believe about how a girl learns.

According to the World Health Organization, wellbeing, or wellness, is defined as the state “in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (WHO, 2014).” Picture a see-saw. On one end are the challenges your daughter is carrying; the essay, the exam, the piece she cannot quite play yet, and the harder things too: the friendship that has gone quiet, the confidence that comes and goes. On the other end sit her resources; what she knows, the skills available to her, how she is feeling, who is beside her, how she is travelling in herself. Psychologists who study wellbeing describe exactly this balance, and they picture it as a see-saw (Dodge et al., 2012). When her resources meet her challenges, a girl is steady. Load either end too heavily and she tips into feeling overwhelmed, or, just as unhappily, into boredom, where nothing is asked of her and so nothing grows.



Figure 1. The wellbeing see-saw, from Dodge et al. (2012).

Here is what 15 years at Wilderness has taught me. A girl does not learn most on the days when everything comes easily. She learns on the days when something sits just past what she can already do. Near enough to reach, far enough that reaching changes her. That “just past” is where our teachers try to live, lesson after lesson. It is a fine and deliberate art, and it is the very opposite of carelessly piling on more work. And this is the part I most want that parent at the gate to hear. When a girl meets something she cannot yet do, there are only two ways to steady the see-saw. We can make the task smaller, or we can make the girl stronger. We almost always choose the second.

Let me make that real, because it is easy to say and harder to picture. I think of a girl who is entirely able to write the harder essay but is quite sure she cannot. The ability is there; the belief is not, not today. The easy kindness would be to let her write the simpler one and spare her the discomfort. The truer kindness is to leave the hard essay exactly where it is, sit down beside her, and give her what she is missing: a model to learn from, a first paragraph we begin together, the plain reminder that she has done harder things than this. The challenge does not move. She does. And when she is finished, when the thing she was sure she couldn't do is there on the page in her own hand, she has gained something no easier task could have given her. Not a mark. A little more of herself.

That is what we mean when we speak of rigour, and it is why the word does not frighten us the way it can frighten a parent. Rigour is not hardness for its own sake. It is keeping the bar where a girl can reach it only by stretching, but with support alongside her. Held that way, challenge is not the enemy of a happy childhood. It is where the best kind of happiness is made: the quiet, durable confidence of a girl who has surprised herself.

This matters more than it might seem. The habit of treating every task as a verdict on her worth, is one of the real threats to a young person's wellbeing. The answer to it is not to lower the stakes, but to help her meet difficulty, and her own mistakes, with kindness. A prevention program developed here in South Australian schools by Dr Tom Nehmy found precisely this: easing the grip of unhelpful perfectionism reduced anxiety and low

mood in the students who took part (Nehmy & Wade, 2015). This is true well beyond the essay and the exam. The same faith runs through the smaller things we ask. This term I have deliberately asked for more of them, not fewer: the uniform worn with pride, the grounds treated as something we belong to rather than something we pass through, the courtesy that greets a visitor or a teacher without being prompted. None of these is really about appearances. Each is a small, deliberate challenge, a bar held a little higher, and each teaches a girl the same quiet lesson the hard essay teaches: that she is capable of rising to what is asked of her. I have asked more of our teachers, too, not less. I am our teacher to expect more, and to stand ready with more support the moment they do.

Let me be honest about the failure that worries me, because it is not the one parents tend to name. It is not that we will ask too much of your daughter. It is that, wanting so much to be kind, we will slowly ask less. Lowering the bar feels like compassion in the moment; and each time it is lowered, a little less is expected, and a little less is what arrives, first for one girl and in time it spreads as mediocrity. A school that keeps softening the challenge is a school that, with the warmest heart in the world, has quietly stopped striving for excellence.

So we will do the harder, kinder thing. We will hold the challenge steady, and we will stand beside your daughter while she rises to meet it. She will rise higher than she believes she can. That is what adventurous learning, met with genuine academic rigour, looks like from the inside. It is not pressure. It is faith: faith that your daughter is capable of more than she yet knows, offered as a refusal to lower what we ask of her, and a promise to give her all she needs to meet it.

If you see me at the gate, stop me and tell me how she is going. I will always make the time.

It is, in the end, simply another way of being *Always True*.

References

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EARLY LEARNING

Nothing Without Joy

[Rebecca Williamson](#)

It is often said within our school that a visit to the ELC will lift your spirits. And it is true. There is so much joy here. As Loris Malaguzzi, the educator whose thinking helped shape the Reggio Emilia approach, reminds us, there can be “nothing without joy”.

For the Annie girls, joy has been found in expanding worlds: in new friendships, in the freedom of the ‘big girl’ playground and in visits to the Coach House, where even a shared drawing lesson becomes an opportunity to add something unmistakably their own.

For the Mamie girls, joy is often found in places adults might pass by. The locker room becomes the setting for games returned to day after day, familiar stories are learned by heart and then delightfully reshaped, and the eyes of a new Mamie reveal the wonder of discovering just how much one day can hold.

Joy is present, too, when the girls reach for their family photographs, name the people they love and invite us into the stories of their lives. It is found in the connections that begin through a shared game, a familiar story or the discovery that something in one lunchbox is much like something in another.

These moments may appear small, but together they tell us something significant. When a child moves confidently through her ELC home, returns eagerly to familiar play, shares the people she loves and begins to find her place alongside others, she shows us that she feels safe, known and connected.

In our ELC, joy is belonging made visible.





JUNIOR SCHOOL

Building Habits for Learning and Growth

[Liz McCarthy](#)

What an extraordinary privilege it was for our Year 5 and 6 girls to travel to Saint Peter's College yesterday to hear from Katherine Bennell-Pegg, Australia's first qualified astronaut and the first woman to be trained as an astronaut under the Australian flag. Ms Bennell-Pegg graduated from the European Space Agency's rigorous astronaut training program in 2024, having been selected from a field of more than 22,500 applicants, and was named 2026 Australian of the Year for her work inspiring the next generation into space and STEM careers.

She spoke candidly with the students about the long and often difficult road that led her to this point: the years of study in engineering and physics, the physical and psychological demands of astronaut training, and the setbacks she had to work through along the way. What stood out most for our girls was not the glamour of spaceflight, but the discipline behind it; the years of preparation, the willingness to keep learning and the resilience required to keep going when things got hard.

Our girls left the session buzzing with ideas, questions and, I suspect, a few new career aspirations. It was a timely reminder that the habits we value and strive to build in Junior School - curiosity, persistence, and the courage to attempt hard things - are the very same qualities that carried Ms Bennell-Pegg into astronaut training and, ultimately, history. We are so grateful to Saint Peter's College for hosting this inspiring event and giving our students the chance to hear from such a remarkable role model.

You may have noticed a renewed and deliberate focus in the Junior School this term on our uniform, manners and the routines that shape how our girls move through the school day. This initiative has been driven by our Acting Principal, Brad Snell, who has asked

every area of the school to sharpen its focus on these fundamentals, and we in the Junior School have embraced it wholeheartedly. This is not simply about tidiness or tradition for its own sake. It is grounded in something we know works, both from experience and from research into how children learn.

Cognitive load theory tells us that working memory, the mental space we use to think, reason and learn, is limited. When children have to spend that mental energy working out where to line up, what to do when a lesson ends, or how to greet a visitor, there is less capacity left over for the actual business of learning. Predictable routines free up that thinking space. When a child already knows how the day works, their mind is not cluttered with logistics and they can direct their full attention to what matters: the learning, the connection, being present in the moment in front of them.

Researchers describe this as reducing “extraneous load”, the mental effort spent on things that are not part of the learning itself, so that more capacity is available for genuine engagement and growth. Clear, consistent expectations around uniform, manners and movement around the school work in exactly this way. They are not restrictions, they are scaffolding. A well-known routine, practised until it becomes automatic, lets a child walk into a classroom, an assembly or a new situation already knowing what is expected, so their energy goes into thinking, connecting and being curious rather than second-guessing.

There is a second, equally important reason we hold these standards high. Predictable, consistent expectations build a shared culture, one where every girl knows she will be treated with courtesy, where kindness is the norm rather than the exception and where success is something the whole community works towards together. Manners and routines are, in this sense, an expression of care: for ourselves, for each other and for the adults who guide us.

We know our girls thrive within clear, warm boundaries and we are proud of how they have responded to this renewed focus. You may well hear your daughter come home talking about a teacher holding a firm line on something; a routine followed a little more precisely, an expectation repeated a little more insistently than she is used to. If so, please know this is not incidental to one classroom or one teacher. It is a deliberate, school-wide focus that every member of our Junior School and indeed our whole, staff is consistently applying. That consistency is exactly what makes it effective: the more predictable and unified these boundaries are across the school, the more quickly they become second nature for our girls and the more mental and emotional space is freed up for learning, friendships and fun.

Thank you, as always, for the way you reinforce these standards at home. It makes a genuine difference to what we can achieve together at school.



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Celebrating Achievement, Connection and Community

[Rhannon Giles](#)

Maths – The only subject that counts

Thank you to Mrs Davies and the Maths Department for the various activities throughout Maths Week held this week including escape rooms, puzzles and lunchtime games. Congratulations to Ada Qian, Yazhini Dhachina, Lucy He and Amber Trappel who all received recognition at the recent Hamann Schools Maths Competition Presentation Evening.

Middle School Social – Just Jeans

Last week the Middle School SRC hosted the annual Middle School Social. Boys from Price Alfred College and Saint Peter's were invited to join the girls in the Gym. All proceeds of the event will go to Round Square initiatives including the construction of birthing kits. Thank you to all the Wilderness Staff who volunteered to help with supervision of the event and the Year 12 SRC who helped throughout the night.

AMEB Exam Results

Recently, Skye Aung in Year 7, completed her AMEB Comprehensive Grade 7 Violin exam and was awarded a High Distinction. Congratulations Skye.

Legacy Public Speaking

Congratulations to Year 8 students Hannah Fang, Radhe Ramson and Kaitlyn Tran and Year 9 student Jessica Mah, who represented Wilderness at the Legacy Public Speaking competition at the end of last term.

Legacy is an Australian not-for-profit charity that supports the families of Defence Force veterans who have died or become seriously injured when serving in war, peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations. Across South Australia, Legacy provides ongoing care and

support to more than 3,500 families. The Legacy Junior Public Speaking Award is a national competition that aims to enhance students' communication skills and to help people appreciate the ideals of Legacy.

The four girls each delivered their five minute thought provoking, prepared speeches with remarkable maturity and confidence, followed by a two minute impromptu speech on the topic 'What human quality do we need more of?' Themes of hope, empathy, gratitude, remembrance and social justice were woven throughout their presentations.

The standard was incredibly high and after winning her heat, Jessica Mah has earned selection to the Legacy State Final in August. We wish her all the best for the competition later in August.

2026 SA ICGS Student Event - "Dream Big: Girls Who Dream, Change the World".

This week a group of Year 9 and 10 students had the opportunity to attend the 2026 SA ICGS Student Event at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College and hear Katherine Bennell-Pegg speak about her journey to become the 2026 Australian of the Year and Australia's first astronaut. Her messages were truly inspiring to all in attendance. She encouraged our girls to dream boldly and pursue opportunities without limits. Katherine spoke about her experience as a student in an all-girls environment and how it provided her with the confidence to take responsible risks and follow her passions through wide contributions in both academic and co-curricular programs.

Supporting the Search for a Cure for Type 1 Diabetes

By Scarlett Drew Wallman

On 25 February this year, I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune condition that currently has no cure. Since then, life has changed in many ways, with daily routines now involving constant planning, monitoring, and managing my health. While diabetes has become part of my everyday life, it has also shown me the importance of resilience, support, and hope for a future where no one has to live with this condition.

To help make that future possible, my family and I will be taking part in the Breakthrough T1D Adelaide City Plunge on 28 August, where we will abseil 70 metres down the InterContinental Hotel in Adelaide to raise funds for vital Type 1 diabetes research.

Our team is aiming to raise \$850, with every dollar supporting Breakthrough T1D's work to fund research, improve treatments, and bring us closer to a cure. If you are able to support our fundraiser, no matter the amount, your generosity would be greatly appreciated. Even if you are unable to donate, sharing our page and helping to raise awareness of Type 1 diabetes can make a real difference.

Thank you for your kindness and support.

[Donate here](#)





SENIOR SCHOOL

Stewardship in Action

[Kate Hanson](#)

There is something distinctive about this stage of the term in Senior School. As one cohort begins to look towards life beyond Wilderness, another starts to imagine the opportunities and responsibilities that come with being our senior students. It is a term marked by growth, reflection and preparation, with opportunities for students to develop as learners, leaders and members of our community.

Our Year 11 Retreat was a highlight of the fortnight, centred on the themes of stewardship, teamwork and leadership. Throughout the program, students were challenged to consider how they can make a positive difference to those around them and the legacy they hope to leave as they prepare to become our Class of 2027.

The retreat drew on the experience and wisdom of a number of Wilderness staff. Students heard from our Heads of House, Mr Snell, Mrs De Blasio, Mr D'Aloisio, and Mr Mittiga, each sharing their own perspectives on leadership, service and personal growth. Alongside a range of collaborative activities and team challenges, these sessions encouraged the girls to reflect on the fact that leadership is not defined by a title, but by the way we support others, take responsibility and contribute to the culture of our community.

That same spirit of connection was evident in our annual Year 12 Friendship Night, this year hosted by Seymour College. Bringing together students from both schools, the evening was filled with laughter, healthy competition and opportunities to build new friendships. Themed 'Battle of the Bands', the girls were in mixed-school teams and tackled rounds of trivia spanning history, popular culture and general knowledge. More importantly, the evening reminded us of the value of stepping beyond our familiar circles

and embracing opportunities to connect with others.

Looking ahead, Week 4 centres around the Year 10 and Year 11 course counselling process. Choosing subjects for the following year is an important milestone and we encourage students to approach these conversations with curiosity and an open mind. The most successful pathways are those that reflect each student's own strengths, interests and future aspirations. We look forward to partnering with students and families as they make informed decisions about the opportunities ahead.

Our attention will also soon turn to the 2027 SRC nominations process. Leadership at Wilderness takes many forms, and we encourage every student to consider how she might make a positive contribution to our community. Whether through a formal leadership position or through the quieter, everyday acts of encouragement, inclusion and responsibility, every student has the capacity to influence the culture of our school in positive ways.

Finally, a reminder about the importance of the routines that underpin a successful school day. Arriving punctually to Form each morning, dressed correctly in school uniform, demonstrates respect for our community and ensures students begin the day settled and ready to learn. These seemingly small habits contribute to a culture of pride, belonging and shared responsibility, qualities that sit at the heart of life in the Senior School.





BOARDING

A Busy Start to the Term

Carolyn Matthews

The past three weeks have been a busy and productive start to Term 3. It has been wonderful to see the Boarding House come back to life following the holiday break, with the girls settling back into routines so quickly. The house is once again filled with energy and wonderful sense of community.

Our Year 12 students have approached the start of the term with determination and focus, particularly throughout their recent trial examinations. Their commitment to their studies has been commendable, and we are proud of the resilience and positive attitude they have demonstrated during this important stage of their final year.

Alongside their academic pursuits, the girls have been keeping busy with winter sport, co-curricular activities and all that comes with a full school term. It has also been lovely to reconnect as a boarding community through the return of our Thursday Family Dinner nights, providing a welcome opportunity for everyone to come together, share a meal and enjoy each other's company.

Excitement continues to build as we prepare for tonight's Boarders' Fashion Parade. Every boarder has contributed in some way to bringing this event to life, whether behind the scenes, assisting with preparations or modelling on the catwalk. We are looking forward to a wonderful evening while raising valuable funds to support the Bhadaure School in Nepal.

This week, I had the opportunity to attend Sheepvention in Hamilton, Victoria, with our Enrolments Manager, Alana Tippins. There was strong interest in Wilderness School and the many opportunities available to students choosing to study in South Australia. It was a pleasure to meet prospective families, share the many benefits of boarding at

Wilderness and promote the exceptional educational experiences our School has to offer.





OSHC

A Wonderful July Vacation Care

[Bec Vandermoer](#)

What a busy but wonderful July Vacation Care period we had!

All the girls, along with their siblings, spent the holidays learning, playing, creating and celebrating together. It was fantastic to see everyone building friendships, trying new experiences and making lasting memories throughout the break.

Some of our highlights included the beautiful weather we enjoyed for our Kuitpo TreeClimb adventure, where everyone embraced the challenge high among the trees. It was wonderful to see the older children helping the younger ones throughout the day. Our older children also had an exciting time go-karting, while the younger ones put their creativity to the test at the Plaster Fun House.

Throughout the holidays, we also enjoyed sports skills sessions, cooking challenges, STEM activities, ice skating and, of course, put our detective skills to work in some fun escape room challenges. There was never a dull moment, with so many exciting activities to enjoy together!

Thank you to all our families for being part of such a fun and memorable Vacation Care program. We can't wait to do it all again next holidays!

Here are some photos to show you what we got up to.

If you have any ideas or suggestions for activities you'd love to see in our next Vacation Care program, we'd love to hear them! We're always looking for new and exciting experiences to share with the children, so feel free to let us know your ideas in the comments or by chatting with our team.

Our next school holiday program will be released on Monday of Week 5.



