

Life in the Wilderness

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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

From the Acting Principal

Brad Snell

My daughter is almost two. Right now, her hardest problem is getting a shape into the right hole in a plastic bucket, and she will not let me help. She pushes my hand away, turns the piece over herself, tries again, and again, until it drops in, and then she looks up at me as if she has just solved something enormous. She has, in her own way. Nobody handed her the answer.

I think about her when I read the research on generative AI and thinking. In fifteen years, she will be sitting in a classroom not unlike the ones at Wilderness, and whatever grown-up version of that bucket and shape she meets there, the tools around her will be able to make it disappear in half a second if she lets them. I want her to have the chance to push the hand away. That is what has been sitting underneath the policy work we have been doing this term on AI and academic integrity, and it is what this piece, following on from my last one on the see-saw of challenge and resource, is really about.

Cognitive offloading is one of the most ordinary things a mind does. Researchers define it as “the use of physical action to alter the information processing requirements of a task” (Risko & Gilbert, 2016): in plainer words, letting something outside your own head carry part of the mental work, so that a task demands less of you. We do it constantly, and mostly it is a good thing. A shopping list, a calculator and a diary all reduce the load so the mind is free for something else. When we let a search engine hold facts for us, we tend to remember where to find them rather than the facts themselves (Sparrow et al.,

2011). The purpose of offloading is precisely to make a task easier. The question is never whether we offload, but which difficulty we are removing.

That question is the whole of it, and it is why a tool as capable as generative AI deserves careful thought. Some difficulty is merely friction, and worth removing: the long arithmetic that stands between a student and the physics she is really trying to learn. But some difficulty is the learning itself. When the effort of thinking can be handed over completely, the challenge that would have built the mind can be cleared away alongside the challenge that was only ever in the way. In my last piece I described learning as a see-saw, balancing the challenge a girl meets against the resources she can draw on, with growth living just past the edge of what she can already do (Dodge et al., 2012). Offloading, by its nature, lightens the challenge side. Used well, that frees her to reach further. Used without noticing, it can flatten the see-saw altogether, so that the “work is done” and yet nothing has been asked and nothing has grown.

This is what learning scientists have long understood: in learning, the difficulty is not in the way; the difficulty is the mechanism. Elizabeth and Robert Bjork call them desirable difficulties, the effortful, slower, uncomfortable conditions that feel like failure in the moment and yet leave understanding deeper and more durable (Bjork & Bjork, 2011). Retrieving an idea only half-remembered, ordering an argument that resists you, sitting with a problem that will not yet yield. These are not obstacles to a mind being formed. They are the sensation of it being formed. As the Bjorks put it, “optimising learning and instruction often requires going against one’s intuitions” (Bjork & Bjork, 2011). The uncomfortable truth is that the experiences which build a mind are exactly the ones any of us would most like to skip, and a tool that lets us skip them is one to use with care.

The costs of removing that effort are beginning to be measured. In 2025, researchers at the MIT Media Lab recorded the brain activity of people writing essays. Those who used ChatGPT showed markedly weaker neural connectivity than those who wrote unaided; many could not quote a single sentence from the essay they had just produced, and felt little ownership of it. When they later wrote without the tool, the weaker patterns lingered. The researchers called this accumulation “cognitive debt” (Kosmyna et al., 2025). It is a small, early study, not yet peer-reviewed, and it should be read with care. But its direction echoes a wider literature: a survey of knowledge workers linked heavier use of generative AI to less critical thinking and reduced mental effort (Lee et al., 2025), and a study of over 600 people found that heavier reliance on AI tools was associated with lower critical thinking scores, with cognitive offloading the apparent link between the two (Gerlich, 2025).

None of this is an argument against the technology. Our girls will grow up alongside these tools and will need to be fluent, confident and discerning in using them; a school that pretended them away would be preparing students for a world that no longer exists. The task is discernment: learning to tell the difference between offloading that frees the

mind for harder work, and offloading that quietly removes the very challenge the mind needed. There is a time to let a tool carry a load and there is a time when the struggle is the entire point, when the rough first draft, thought and written by hand, is the very thing forming the mind. At those times, the tool is best left closed. Holding that line is the new frontier of the rigour I wrote about last time. It is simply keeping the challenge where it belongs.

In practice, this means we will often ask our girls to think first and reach for the tool second: to make the rough, effortful, imperfect draft before any machine polishes it; to use AI to test their thinking rather than to supply it. It means our teachers are designing assessments that requires challenging cognition. It means talking with your daughters, at home and at school, about the quiet value of the hard way, so that reaching for the difficulty becomes something they choose, and in time something they prize. The desirable difficulty.

What I want for our girls is simple to say and precious to hold: that they leave Wilderness able to stay inside a hard problem long enough for their own minds to do the work, having felt the difficulty and chosen it. That capacity is among the most valuable things an education can give, and it is exactly what an easier path can quietly erode, in all of us, if we let it. It is worth protecting, gently and deliberately.

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

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EARLY LEARNING

Wonder, Stories and Science

[Rebecca Williamson](#)

The past two weeks have been particularly special in our ELC, with Science Week and Book Week bringing so much enthusiasm to the girls' learning.

Science and literature are such natural fits for early childhood. Young children are already curious about how things work, eager to test their ideas and endlessly interested in stories. These special weeks gave us the chance to build on that curiosity and make these areas of learning especially visible.

During Science Week, Miss Sophie and Miss Danielle put on their laboratory coats and goggles and presented a science show for our ELC and Reception girls. The excitement continued as the girls worked together in small groups to conduct experiments of their own. Throughout the week, they returned to walking water and rainbow experiments, watching closely, noticing changes and offering their own explanations for what was happening. The ELC play provocations also gave the girls the opportunity to step into the role of scientist themselves.

Book Week was equally joyful. The girls loved reading and discussing the Early Childhood Book of the Year shortlist, while our Annie girls made bookmarks and created books of their own. The Book Week Parade was another wonderful highlight. We are enormously grateful to our families for the effort that went into helping the girls take part. We were so proud of the confidence with which our youngest Wilderness girls paraded in front of the older students and families. Seeing sisters, buddies and other familiar faces made the morning even more meaningful.

These celebrations also extended into Playgroup, where Miss Danielle brought both Science Week and Book Week to life for our youngest children and their families. It is one

of the lovely strengths of our Playgroup that these children can already begin sharing in the experiences and traditions of the ELC, building familiarity, connection and a sense of belonging well before their school journey begins.

We are very grateful, too, to the staff across our school who welcomed the girls into the Library and Science spaces and shared their knowledge with them. Experiences like these do more than extend the girls' learning. They help them become familiar with the people and places beyond the ELC and strengthen their sense that they belong to the wider Wilderness community.

What stood out most across these two weeks was just how engaged the girls were in every experience. They asked questions, shared ideas, experimented, created and talked endlessly about what they were discovering. Science Week and Book Week may have provided the focus, but the learning itself felt very true to early childhood.







JUNIOR SCHOOL

Growing through Stories and Adventure

[Liz McCarthy](#)

What a joyous few weeks it has been in the Junior School, filled with colour, imagination and adventure, from the pages of our favourite books to the wide open skies of the Coorong.

Book Week: Celebrating a Love of Reading

Book Week is always one of the highlights of our Junior School calendar, and this year was no exception. Beyond the costumes and the fun, Book Week gives us a chance to pause and reflect on why we do what we do every single day in our classrooms and our Library: building strong literacy foundations and, just as importantly, nurturing in our girls a genuine, lifelong love of reading.

Literacy is the foundation upon which all other learning is built. When our girls learn to read fluently and with confidence, doors open: to knowledge, to empathy, to imagination and to the ability to understand and shape the world around them. But we want more for our girls than competence alone. We want them to love books, to lose themselves in a story, to seek out a favourite author, to see reading as a source of comfort, wonder and joy long after they leave our care. That is the deeper work of Book Week, and of every English lesson, library visit and bedtime story shared along the way.

Our annual Book Week Parade itself was, as always, an absolute delight. Watching our girls stride, twirl and giggle their way through the hall as their favourite characters, some brave, some funny, some a little bit magical, is one of the most heart-warming sights of the school year. It takes a village to bring a parade like this to life, and I want to extend my sincere thanks to our wonderful staff for their creativity and organisation, to the girls for embracing the day with such enthusiasm and to our families for the time,

effort and love that went into every costume. Events like this remind us what a special community we belong to.

Adventures at Crawford: Year 5 Camp to the Coorong

Recently, our Year 5 girls travelled for the first time to Crawford, our campus at the Coorong, for their Outdoor Education camp, and what an experience it was. Along with outstanding behaviour, I was so proud to hear stories of the courage, curiosity and spirit of adventure our girls brought to every activity, whether they were navigating new and challenging activities, caring for the rare plants we propagate at Crawford or embracing being away from their families and out of their comfort zones.

I could not be prouder of how our girls approached the camp. They met each challenge with bravery, good humour and genuine determination, discovering in many instances just how capable they are.

Experiences like Crawford matter enormously, and not only for the memories they create. Outdoor education offers something our classrooms, for all their strengths, simply cannot replicate. Away from routine and screens, in the company of their peers and the natural world, our girls build resilience by facing genuine challenges and working through them. They develop a real sense of their own capability, discovering that they can do hard things and often more than they thought possible. They learn to trust themselves and each other, to solve problems creatively, to lead and to follow, and to find quiet moments of reflection in the vastness of the Coorong landscape. These dispositions – courage, independence, teamwork, adaptability and a willingness to give things a go – will serve our girls well far beyond their time at Crawford and, indeed, far beyond their years at school.

Book Week and the Crawford camp might, on the surface, seem worlds apart. But both, in their own way, speak to the same aspiration we hold for every girl in our Junior School: that she grows into a curious, courageous and capable young woman, equally comfortable lost in a good book as she is with sand between her toes and the wind in her hair.







MIDDLE SCHOOL

Celebrating Talent and Contribution

[Rhianon Giles](#)

Year 9 Drama – *The Grove*

Congratulations to our talented Year 9 Drama students on their wonderful production of *The Grove*. Their creativity, commitment and collaborative spirit were evident throughout the performance, with students demonstrating confidence and impressive theatrical skills on stage. We are very proud of the hard work they put into bringing this production to life and thank the Drama Department and everyone involved in supporting such a successful performance.

Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize

We are delighted to celebrate the achievements of our students who entered the 2026 Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize, a prestigious competition open to Year 9 and Year 10 students across South Australia.

The judging panel, comprising representatives from South Australia's three education sectors, the History Teachers Association of South Australia, Virtual War Memorial Australia and the Returned and Services League of South Australia (RSL SA), were highly impressed by the quality of submissions received this year.

We are pleased to announce that Adelaide Grosser has been shortlisted for an interview, representing the next stage of the selection process. Being shortlisted is a significant achievement and recognises the quality of her submission. We look forward to hearing the results of the process.

Congratulations also to Jessica Mah, who received a Participation Award for her contribution to the competition.

We congratulate both students on their involvement in this important opportunity to explore and reflect on Australia's wartime history and the significance of the Anzac legacy.

Music Achievements

We congratulate Skye Aung on her outstanding musical achievements this year.

At the Adelaide Eisteddfod 2026, Skye achieved excellent results across both flute and violin, receiving:

- First Prize in the Flute Solo Grade 5 section
- Second Prize in the 12–13 Years Violin or Viola Solo section

These achievements reflect Skye's dedication, skill and commitment to her musical studies across multiple instruments.

We also congratulate the Wilderness Senior Quartet, of which Skye is a member, on receiving a Highly Commended award at the Adelaide Eisteddfod.

We are proud to celebrate Skye's success and the continued achievements of our student musicians.

SAETA Young Writers Awards

Wilderness School students achieved outstanding success at the SAETA Young Writers Awards on Friday evening, receiving awards, prize money and a copy of the 2026 anthology in recognition of their exceptional writing.

Congratulations to:

- **Maryam Cedra Sawad**, recipient of the **Elizabeth Butler Prize** for her poem The Weight of Symmetry.
- **Noor Jilaihawi**, awarded **1st Place in the Years 7–8 Poetry** category for You Call Him Refugee.
- **Kaitlyn Tran**, who received a **Highly Commended** award in the Years 7–8 Poetry category for Australia's Velvet Curtain.
- **Lulu Jilaihawi**, awarded **3rd Place in the Years 4–6 Poetry** category for Whole Galaxy.

A special mention goes to Maryam Cedra Sawad. The Elizabeth Butler Prize is

traditionally awarded to senior students, making her achievement particularly noteworthy. In their comments, the judges described The Weight of Symmetry as a “stark and confronting poem about the effects of racism in Australia” and praised the “fearlessness” of Cedra’s writing.

The judges also commended Noor Jilaihawi’s winning poem, You Call Him Refugee, describing it as “a deeply moving depiction of the refugee experience in Australia written with a lightness of touch and evocative scene-setting”.

These results are a wonderful recognition of the talent, creativity and insight of our young writers, and we congratulate all four students on their achievements.

The Weight of Symmetry

By Maryam Cedra Sawad

She sits in second row,
hands together,
knees together,
proudly wearing the headscarf
she spent half an hour pinning in place.

The photographer —
ginger bearded,
looks up from the camera,
tilts his head.
Something’s not right.

“Take that thing off – it’s ruining my symmetry.”

Symmetry is sacred.

Faith is sacrilege.

The camera demands compliance,
reverent congruence.

Even eight-year-olds must blend in,
unobtrusively be the same;
mingle in.

Silently
submit
to the melting pot.

Unuttered uniformity
is soundlessly celebrated.
Uniform.

It is the 11th of September:
she doesn’t comprehend

the silent accusations,
the shadowed whispers,
the eyes that weigh her every move.
“I must be doing something very bad.”
The guilt of the guiltless.
Condemned. Vilified. Pilloried.
And yet, she’s only eight.
Blame blooms best in the young,
nourished in the fertile care
of guilt, of hatred.
It’s an innocent truth:
In the storm of human condition,
homogeneity is a comforting shelter,
built on the altar of difference.
Alas.

Year 9 Duke of Edinburgh Service Learning

As part of their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award, our Year 9 students have been engaging in meaningful service-learning experiences that allow them to contribute to the community while developing empathy, leadership and a deeper understanding of social responsibility.

Each Form has partnered with a different organisation, providing students with valuable opportunities to learn about community needs and the work of local charities and support services.

Students in 9 Cedar participated in an incursion with the RSPCA, learning about animal welfare and the important role the organisation plays in caring for and advocating for animals.

9 Carob visited Puddle Jumpers, gaining insight into the support provided to children and families experiencing disadvantage and exploring ways they can contribute to positive outcomes for young people.

Through an incursion with KickStart for Kids, 9 Antholiza students discovered how the organisation supports vulnerable children through breakfast programs and other practical initiatives that help students thrive at school.

Finally, 9 Sparaxis welcomed representatives from Anglicare, who shared information about the wide range of services they provide to support individuals, families and communities across South Australia.

These experiences have encouraged students to think critically about the needs of others and the positive impact that service can have on the community. We look forward to

seeing our Year 9 students continue to develop their commitment to service as they progress through their Duke of Edinburgh Award journey. Thank you to the Outdoor Education Team and the teachers who made these experiences possible.

Here is a short reflection from the 9 Amaryllis Form Representatives, Millie Duncan and Olivia Hooper, on their experience:

"As part of our Bronze Duke of Ed School Service, Amy Form visited The Village Co to help pack care bags for mothers and their newborn babies who may not be able to afford essential items before giving birth. We packed bags with items such as shampoo, conditioner, nappies and other important baby and personal care products. As a Form, we also wrote cards and collected donations from Middle School students before attending The Village Co. It was a rewarding experience that allowed us to support families who may be going through a hard time. We enjoyed working together and knowing that our time and effort would make a positive difference to others!"

Middle School Social Photos

Social photos are now available. Register via the QR code below to purchase photos from the event.

Photo Registration

**Wilderness Middle School
Social 2026**

- **Please scan this QR Code to register for photos.**
- **Take a clear selfie of just your face to enable us to allocate your photos to your personal online gallery.**







SENIOR SCHOOL

Looking Ahead with Purpose

Kate Hanson

The past few weeks of Term 3 have been rich, with interschool events, winter sport and SRC elections. Intercol was once again a highlight, bringing with it a wonderful sense of school spirit and collegiality. It was terrific to see our girls supporting one another so enthusiastically, both in competition and from the sidelines.

As the days begin to lengthen, our attention also starts to shift towards the year ahead and the opportunities that 2027 will bring.

For our Year 10 and 11 students, recent weeks have included important decisions about their academic pathways. Through our Pathways Evening, information sessions and individual course counselling, students have been encouraged to consider their strengths, interests and future aspirations when making their choices.

For our Year 12 students, Term 3 marks an important stage in their final year of schooling. With many significant assessment tasks due before the end of term, the weeks ahead will require focus, perseverance and careful management of competing demands. At this point in the year, balance matters enormously. Making time for rest, exercise and genuine breaks from study will help students sustain their energy and perspective as they move towards examinations and the final milestones of their school journey.

Leadership has also been a strong focus for our Year 11 cohort as they prepare to become the Class of 2027. Following their leadership speeches and voting, students have been considering not simply who will hold formal positions, but the kind of Year 12 culture they want to create together. Their reflections on service, stewardship and responsibility have highlighted the many ways leadership can be demonstrated across

a year level. It is exciting to see them beginning to take ownership of the contribution they hope to make to our Senior School community.

The SRC for 2027 are:

President

Gabby Chisholm

Vice President

Manha Abaid

Secretary

Mihika Kanhere

Amaryllis House Captains

Holly Fong

Zara Rocca

Antholiza House Captains

Lucia Rayner

Poppy Dawes

Carob House Captains

Sophie Cardone

Eshal Rauf

Cedar House Captains

Eva Baggio

Francesca Day

Sparaxis House Captains

Caitlyn Ooi

Nikoo Rasekhi

Boarding House Captains

Indy Holman

Anna Rasheed

Careers Representative

Akshaya Thiru

Round Square Representative

Seraphina Sun

STEM Representative

Shaya Ismail

International Representative

Meira Lam

Library Representative

Chloe Herbert

Media and Magazine Representative

Hannah Elsbury Sun

Music Representative

Annika Ganesh

Sports Representative

Madison Tait

Student Foundation Representative

Sarah Mah

Year 12 Representative

Nicole Nguyen

Katherine Bennell-Pegg

Earlier this term, we were given the opportunity to listen to Katherine Bennell-Pegg, 2026 Australian of the Year, speak about the experiences and training that led to her successes, including becoming the first astronaut to qualify under the Australian space flag and the first Australian woman to receive official astronaut wings.

We learned so much from Ms Bennell-Pegg, including details of her training, from scuba diving and medical procedures to learning to speak Russian. We also learned about the experiences of astronauts travelling to space and the impacts that a lack of gravity can have on their bodies.

She shared the experiences of astronauts who have been to space and gained a new perspective on the importance and fragility of our planet, and our responsibility to look after it.

One thing that stuck with us was that there were points in her journey when she thought she didn't deserve what she had achieved, but she proved to herself that she was just as capable as those around her.

Ms Bennell-Pegg is an example of what people can do when they work towards what they believe in, and we are immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from her.

Nidhi, Sirui and Ameya (Year 10)





BOARDING

Community at the Heart of Boarding

[Carolyn Matthews](#)

Term 3 has certainly been a busy and rewarding one in the Boarding House, with our girls embracing the many opportunities to connect and contribute to both boarding and the wider School community.

A significant highlight was our annual **Boarders' Fashion Parade**, which once again brought together current and past families, Old Scholars, staff, students and friends of Wilderness for a wonderful evening. Our boarders embraced every aspect of the event, from modelling and assisting behind the scenes to welcoming guests and helping ensure the evening ran smoothly. We were also delighted to welcome students from Saint Peter's College to join us on the catwalk. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of our community, the event raised **\$14,070 for Bhadaure School in Nepal**. We remain very grateful to the South Australian fashion labels, businesses, families and individuals who supported the evening through garments, donations, auction items and sponsorship.

Our boarders have also enthusiastically supported **Intercol**, enjoying the opportunity to participate, cheer from the sidelines and celebrate the achievements of their peers. Victories in Hockey and Soccer were particular highlights, but equally pleasing was seeing the girls turn out to support one another and embrace the spirit of the week.

Term 3 has also provided opportunities to connect with our boarding community beyond Adelaide. A visit to the **Cleve Field Days on the Eyre Peninsula** was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with current and past parents, Old Scholars and prospective Wilderness families. Our informal gathering at the Cleve Hotel was another lovely opportunity to reconnect with members of our regional community and strengthen the relationships that are such an important part of boarding.

We have also recently celebrated the appointment of our **2027 Boarding House Captains, Indy Holman and Anna Rasheed**. Following speeches and a vote by the Boarding House, the girls were announced to their peers and warmly congratulated. We look forward to seeing them grow into their roles and lead our Boarding House community next year.

Alongside these larger events, it is often the everyday moments that make boarding special: shared meals, weekend activities, conversations, laughter and girls from different year levels spending time together. As we move through the remainder of Term 3, it has been wonderful to see our boarders continue to support one another, embrace opportunities and contribute so positively to the vibrant community that is our Boarding House.





OSHC

October Holiday Fun at OSHC

Bec Vandermoer

OSHC Holiday Bookings Now Open

October School Holiday bookings are now open.

Bookings are now available through our **FullyBooked** link:

<https://wildyoshc.fullybookedccms.com.au/family/>

We have so many exciting activities planned for your girls and their siblings to enjoy throughout the October school holidays.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please don't hesitate to drop into the **OSHC room** or give us a call on **0427 561 738**.

Looking ahead to the Christmas holidays

For forward planning, please note that **OSHC will close at 6.00pm on Friday 18 December 2026 and reopen on Monday 11 January 2027**.

We hope this helps families plan ahead for the Christmas and New Year period.

We can't wait for a fun-filled October and an exciting end to the year.

