

Riverstone Schooldays

Wendy Biddle

This speech was delivered by Wendy Biddle at the Riverstone Public School's Official Consolidation Ceremony, Tuesday 5th November, 2002.

The Honourable John Aquilina, the Honourable Alan Cadman, the Principal and Staff, and, most importantly, the students of Riverstone Public School:

Forty-five years ago I had the honour of being the School Captain who, along with the Boy Captain, Neil Johnston, cut the ribbon to officially open the new building. The then minister, the Honourable R.J. Heffron, was most impressed with the school and surroundings, as it was one of the best in the district. The school had been open for approximately twelve months, but it did close for a short time, due to the presence of snakes and their danger to the students.

School was very different to what our children have today. Our 6th Grade Class had approximately 45 students who were disciplined and expected to toe the line in all aspects of their schooling. For the naughty kids there was the fear of the cane that was handed out in the little office at the rear of the 6th Grade classroom. We could all hear the whip of the cane and I'm sure that some of the teachers stood on a chair to get a little better swing, or that is what it sounded like when you were 11 years of age. The poor child would come out biting their lip so that none of the other children would call him or her a sissy. So you can see how lucky you are that you do not have to endure such pain.

Being a new school we no longer had to ring the bell as we had the hooter to summon us to class. To be the bell ringer was a very important position. We sat in the sun for school assembly, no shade, and on most days we had to practise our marching in team formation for the annual sports' day which we all loved. We had a flagpole and sang "God Save the Queen" on a regular basis. We had no school canteen so we either brought lunch or rode our bikes home. You had a peanut butter sandwich and then came back again. I remember one day someone took my bike and I ran all the way home to tell my mother rather than tell the teachers.

School Excursions were a non-event. In fact I only remember going to one. That was to the theatre in Richmond to see something about Shakespeare. None of us could understand what it was about. No trips to Canberra or the snow then!

We learnt the 3 Rs – Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, read from the School Reader and we had a good overall base to carry us through to high school, which was another adventure. As many of you will do, some of the students went on to have very responsible positions in society.

In 1957 we were fortunate to have a tennis court on the grounds and the then Headmaster liked his garden, so we spent many hours pulling out weeds, rolling the court, or planting trees. One thing though, we didn't have to mow the grass!

So, my final words to the students are – enjoy your schooldays, try very hard to achieve good results and life will be good to you. But, you have to put in your effort. You have an excellent education system to help you. I have been very honoured to attend today's proceedings and it has brought back many memories of my own schooldays. Thank you ever so much.