PARENTS AT ROSE BAY SECONDARY COLLEGE

Come with us on a tour of Rose Bay Secondary College. We can stop and grab something to eat first, if you like, at the canteen. The canteen has been transformed over the past few years, switching sausage rolls for tandoori chicken wraps, and replacing soft drinks with juices. Students and staff can choose from about fifty different lunch options across the week. On Monday it might be Summer Pesto Salad; on Tuesday, comforting Shepherd’s Pie if the day is chilly. All food, hot and cold, is made freshly on the premises. And business is booming.

This is happening because a couple of years ago, the P&C leaders re-organised the finance system of the canteen, and began working with the canteen staff to change the type of food on offer. It now makes a healthy profit.

Similarly the uniform shop, which is run by a parent, was revamped by the multi-skilled P&C, both financially and physically, with an expanded shop fit-out.

The P&C is able to put the profits from the canteen and uniform shop to various uses, but the priority has been the oval. Let’s head down to the oval. You’ll see it’s in a sorry state—an uneven surface and patchy grass, left like that by contractors several years ago, after being used as a base for the building construction work.

Now a major, $100,000-plus upgrade is about to begin, with funds that seemed out of reach twelve months ago. As well as the P&C funds, the school was awarded a joint-funding grant from the State Government. More was needed, so fundraising continued.

The Sports Committee, a combined parent and teacher group, is busy organising new sporting teams for community competitions, and funding coaching. For the oval, the sports committee also found time to cater for the NSW Bands Festival, and host a Trivia Night in the school gym. There were nine tables of ten teachers at that event, each teacher paying $20 per ticket. With that sort of contribution from teachers, parents were spurred on to attend, and donate.
From these various sources, the oval funding target was reached. A parent undertook the extensive research and organisation of surveys required, and tenders are now being analysed. The rehabilitated and newly turfed oval is expected to be ready for students to run, sit and lie on before the end of this year.

If you were here on a Monday or Thursday afternoon, we could visit the **Homework Centre**, in the library. This initiative, in which former high-achieving RBSC students, now at university, are paid to tutor school students, free of charge, was quietly started last year by one of the deputy principals, Ms Andre.

It was popular but only with a small group. When last year’s dux of the school, who attained an ATAR of 99.4%, attributed some of his success to the tutor he had in the Homework Centre, parents organised some publicity. The resultant media coverage [http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/homework-a-breeze-as-pupils-become-masters-20120213-1t23a.html](http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/homework-a-breeze-as-pupils-become-masters-20120213-1t23a.html) [to be embedded], plus an increased awareness within the school, has resulted in the centre’s expansion from one day to two. The extra tutor fees are paid by the P&C.

If you went into the library on those days, you’d see between 40-60 students, who’ve first been given biscuits and cordial after school, working and talking quietly. Tutors – now including last year’s dux - are on hand, and half a dozen teachers are around, dropping by in their own time to assist anyone who wants help.

On many afternoons the faint strains of music you’d hear from across the plaza would be a concert band or stage band rehearsal. The **Music Ensembles Program (MEP)** is a strong core of Rose Bay SC’s extra-curricular culture, providing a structured artistic outlet. It was founded by, and is run by, a parent committee, which meets with the music teaching staff and external director of the MEP to plan performances, budgets, repertoire and tours.

Since it’s Friday afternoon, we can go and see the **debating** group. Debating was instigated by a parent three years ago, with the school’s encouragement, and is still co-ordinated by that parent. Experienced debating tutors are funded by the P&C, and teachers again give their own time. The group has tripled in
size since it began. Teams have been very successful in inter-school debates, and in the Premier’s Debating Challenge.

Off-site, parents work on the school website, when they have a moment. Using the Department of Education and Communities’ template, they enter information and updates, and exchange ideas – either face to face or electronically – about how to improve the site, liaising with school personnel who also contribute to the site. So you won’t see those people, but if you care to hang around the school at night, you’ll inevitably find parents in a meeting somewhere.

There’s the School Council, which, with looks at policy and overall direction. And the School Engagement team, comprising five parents and a deputy principal, Ms Featherston. This group last year reviewed merit awards and behaviour management systems, and undertook extensive group consultations with students, creating a useful, and at times, moving, dialogue.

The Academic committee also meets at night, considering ways in which the school can continue to build its academic reputation and culture, and ensure that all students are reaching their ‘personal best’.

At a recent P&C meeting, you could have heard the principal, Mr Linton, read a funding wish list from teachers. The P&C treasurer suggested there was $20,000 available for spending that night.

So, there and then, the meeting voted to fund half a dozen projects. They included new Mac computers and music software for the music department; electronic projectors for the science department; and materials for the Year 11 Vocational Education and Training (VET) Construction class to build a shade structure over the BBQ, and do some paving at the entrance to the hall.

Teachers happy, parents happy, students happy. The bottom line is, a parent with an idea, and the willingness to spend some time with the school, is rewarded with a genuine two-way partnership.