

## Calwell High School Rock Eisteddfod “Kokoda”

By Emma Ward

Calwell High School has experienced and gained much over the years by being involved with the Rock Eisteddfod competition, and this year is no exception. Their entry, ‘Kokoda’, based on the themes of Mateship, Courage, Endurance and Sacrifice, won both the ACT and the NSW Grand Finals. The moving tribute to our diggers marked Calwell’s 4<sup>th</sup> straight ACT Grand Final win. They also created history by being the 1<sup>st</sup> Canberra school to take out the NSW title.



*The musical in action*

From a parent’s perspective, with three very different children attending Calwell High School, the opportunity for students of all abilities to engage in such a comprehensive performing arts curriculum is wonderful indeed. Our sons have attended ten schools all over Australia (part of being a RAAF family!). One consequence of frequently moving has been that they have never had the opportunity to participate in a music program. At previous schools, the boys didn’t meet the prerequisites to join in music - until Calwell High! Here, students with no musical background can start in the beginner band (one of three

bands), undertake private lessons at school - all at a very nominal cost - and learn the universal language of music.

Another highlight at the school is the dance program, which encourages our young men and women to enjoy the physical and social benefits of dancing as part of their curriculum. The “Boys in Dance” component, has seen an ever-increasing number of males signing up for dance. To cater for this, there are now 2 ‘boys only’ classes with a total enrolment of over 60. This has been an exciting development, one which has placed the school in the forefront of boys’ dance education in the ACT. The dance program leads to many performance opportunities, including invitations to a variety of community and government festivals, events and functions as well as the Rock Eisteddfod.

Staff, students and parents work together to realise this huge artistic project. It certainly creates a community atmosphere which promotes the importance of social capital to everyone involved. People can contribute through sourcing the materials, building the sets, sewing the costumes, creating the routines, choreographing the dance, editing the music, applying the make up, setting up the lights and stage, coaching the participants, attending training and rehearsals, booking equipment and transport, raising the funds, communicating events and travelling to the competitions and venues to actually perform the final product! Such a team effort is a positive testament to the school community coordinating it and all those involved. Calwell’s winning performance with



*Diggers attend the performance*

“Kokoda” is a fabulous outcome to honour those efforts and honour the theme.

At a preview to the finals in Sydney, the school invited of the Returned Servicemen's League to experience the event. We were truly thrilled to enjoy the legendary company of many of the ACT RSL members, including the National President, Major General Bill Crews, President of the Woden sub-branch, Mr Neil Horn and Kokoda Veteran Mr Les Cook. In a moving letter to the school, Mr Cook, commented on how the production had brought together two seemingly diverse communities in a spirit of camaraderie. It made him proud to see that the Calwell staff & students had recognised the importance of the Kokoda story and retold it with such honesty and integrity.

After the performance, the students, veterans and their families enjoyed each other's company at morning tea, exchanging generational wisdoms and encouragement for the finals in Sydney the next day. This community gathering of role models and future leaders provided inspiration and determination for the students to do justice to the legacy of Kokoda and the diggers whose endurance, mateship, courage and sacrifices defended our nation.

*Editor's Note: This article was intended for the 2007/2008 Summer edition.*