Knox boarders’ swish lodgings

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Education

Boarders at Knox Grammar celebrate a milestone in the school’s history today with the opening of a centre to house 118 boys.

NSW Governor Marie Bashir will open the centre, which has taken almost two years to build and replaces three houses dating from the late 1800s.

Ewan House, once owned by the Traylor brewing family, will become a learning centre for year 5 and 6 pupils.

The impressive boarding centre was designed by Drew Dickson Architects to complement and enhance existing buildings, with bricks and feature windows suggesting original character and form.

Interiors are contemporary, with kitchens sporting CaesarStone benchtops, bedrooms like hotel rooms and recreational areas with widescreen TVs.

Country boarders Lachlan Kemp and Doug Laurie had a sneak peek at their rooms on Tuesday and their excitement was palpable.

“It’s fantastic,” Lachlan said. “We can’t wait to move in.”

The boys, from the NSW towns of Merriwa and Mongar, said board ing was everything they had expected. “It’s fun, we have loads of friends and are motivated to work,” Doug said.

But while Knox Old Boys may think the 21st century centre will be too comfortable, Lachlan and Doug said leaving home was always likely to be tough.

“Doing your own laundry, washing up and making sandwiches – just the little things your mum used to do, you miss,” Doug said.
Focus on life skills, privacy and

From such little acorns big trees grow

BOARDING at Abbotsleigh began in 1866, when the school entered for just 20 children in a small terrace in North Sydney.

Thirteen boarders and 10 day girls followed founding headmistress Marian Clarke to Wahroonga in 1908. From 1926 to 1938, the number of boarders grew from 64 to 121.

Abbotsleigh now has 170 boarders in years 7 to 12, with 86 per cent from regional NSW. The most senior students live in the most modern accommodation, Wheelidon House.

Built in 2006, it is named after ninth headmistress, Judith Wheelidon (1946-2000).

PYMBLE Ladies’ College has three houses for 135 boarders. Marden and Lang opened in 1946, and the school was founded and Goodlet in 1929. In 2000 the three houses were renovated, retaining their historical families.

Boarders comprise 10 per cent of the senior school population.

The 1916 prospectus listed boarders’ requirements as including a tennis racket, serviette ring (with name in full), framed dressing gown, a brush and two combs and Presbyterian Church hymnary.

KNOX Grammar School was founded in 1904 with 40 boarders, including six boarders. The 1939 Grampianian editor said: “The boarders are well housed and are given every comfort.”

“They lived, ate and were taught in Gillies House (formerly School House). A new boarding centre opens today.”

BOARDSING at Hornsby is on the North Shore was once marked by painful initiation ceremonies, overcrowded dormitories, stodgy food and tedious communal showers.

But today’s boarders are nurtured and cared for with world’s best standards, and many are gaining distinct lifestyle and academic advantages over day students.

Knox Grammar School’s director of boarding Scott James says students are engaged in leader- ship and “whole-of-life” programs, learning how to clean a bathroom, cook, do the washing and set a table.

“There’s a real focus on life skills, so that they grow from boys to men when they leave they are productive,” he says.

Boys are treated as individuals within the boarding community.

“They have their own study space and bathrooms. There’s a respect for privacy.”

Homework is strictly enforced and boys have access to coaching.

nurturing for today’s boarders

SPACE: Abbotsleigh Year 12 boarder Hallaiai’i Dowsett.

RENOVATED: Pyrmble Ladies’ College boarders in Marden House.

after hours. “The routine of boarding does give them an advantage,” Mr James says.

“They have structure. They have access to resources after school like specialised tutors. That’s a major advantage day boys don’t have.”

The lives of Knox boarders have been much enhanced this year with the construction of a multimillion-dollar centre opening today and the addition of female house managers to the traditional male team.

“Each house manager is a mum who wakes them up and gets them ready, inspects the bathrooms and takes them to breakfast,” Mr James says. “They greet the boys in the afternoons and get them settled with afternoon tea.”

He says the new initiative designed to deliver “a softer touch” was modelled on UK boarding school programs.

Abbotsleigh’s head of boarding Rochelle Jenkins says in this age of technology, boarding keeps a lid on the time teens spend on laptops and mobile phones. Technology disappears when lights go out and Facebook is limited to Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights.

“They can communicate with their friends, but they are not spending their lives on it.”

While boarders follow many rules, Ms Jenkins says they enjoy so much more freedom than their forebears and parents can access their children when they want.

“It’s much more a partnership today,” she says.

Food is another aspect that has changed dramatically, with menus prepared by dieticians and catering for a range of cultures.

“Ours is a 1939 menu girls needed a clockbox for midnight snacks because they were starving,” Ms Jenkins says. “They slept on cold verandas. Essentially, as long as they were safe and had a blanket they were OK.”

Pyrmble Ladies’ College boarding director Bevan Tiller says boarders enjoy exciting weekend recreational activities and enhanced study opportunities.

“We have an obligation and responsibility to remain abreast of the social, physical and intellectual worlds our girls are facing and need to show them that we are fully aware of these aspects of their lives.”

Do you have a boarding school memory to share?

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