



# Avoca Advocate



**LET'S DANCE:** Performances are part of life for many at Avoca Beach PS.

## Strutting their stuff

By **EBONY THOMSON**  
and **DALLAS YOUNG**

FOR 15 years the children of Avoca Beach Public School have been showcasing their talents in the performing arts.

Each year a musical involving anywhere up to 100 students is held before a packed audience.

This year it will be *Matilda*, taken from the Roald Dahl book of the same name.

In this year's play, Lauren Tindale and Mychal Allanson play the role of Matilda.

"It's hard learning all the lines, but I really enjoy playing Matilda," Lauren said.

The first performance will be in September, so the cast, dancers and choir are working hard, with the help of the teachers of years 5 and 6.

Each year the school vies for a place in the Central Coast Dance Festival and this year is optimistic that two of its entries will be successful.

Two performances, titled *Ablutions* and *Cinderella Story*, have been choreographed by teachers Mrs Davies and Mrs Gillett.

"I like the theme this year because it's different to ones that have been performed in the past," said dancer Kasumi Jolley.

*Ablutions* will feature moves similar to those performed by the prestigious Sydney Dance Company.

The school also boasts a jazz rock band, which regularly entertains school and community audiences and is becoming even more popular among students.

# Small school suffers

By **SARAH LEONARD**  
and **JESSICA KING**

CENTRAL Coast School for Children with Autism at Terrigal has 29 students with varying degrees of autism.

The school is having continued difficulty finding the money for aids, such as machines that help children who are unable to speak.

"Even a new playground is needed for the growing number of children," said Leonie Leonard, a parent with a child at the school.

"The existing two playgrounds need to be relocated to make room for new buildings so more students can come to the school."

Amanda Pitchford, who has taught at the school for seven years, said the school had been running out of space for a number of years.

"The last blow was when the garage that normally houses the school's bus was transformed into a makeshift classroom," Ms Pitchford said.

"The school has continued to raise funds by having raffles, dinner dances, multi days and selling coloured wrist bands.

"The school is supported by the government but more support is always needed. The needs of autistic children are complex and difficult to meet in mainstream classrooms."



**SUPPORT NEEDED:** Children at the Central Coast School for Autism during an art lesson.

Ms Pitchford said students at the Central Coast School for Children with Autism were taught the same subjects as students in mainstream schools.

The differences lie in the way the school dealt with a range of student behaviours and levels of communication.

The school has a Parent and Friends group that aims to provide fellowship and support to all mem-

bers of the school community, which are the students, families, carers and staff.

In its desperate struggle to receive funding the school has just received a donation worth \$20,000 from the Primary Club of NSW.

This money will be used to build a new climbing frame, called a spider, and other playground materials.

Janet Millhouse, the school's principal, said the school was very

grateful for every donation.

"Newcastle Permanent has kindly donated a whopping \$50,000 towards the new buildings," Ms Millhouse said. "These donations from the community will help enormously in providing a better education for children with autism of the Central Coast."

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**IMPERATIVE:** Students working to rejuvenate the bush.  
— Picture by Kaitlyn Matuscha

## Education through bush regeneration

By **CAITLIN HAMILTON** and **KASUMI JOLLEY**

A BUSH regeneration program has been operating at Avoca Beach Public School for 13 years.

Beside Avoca Beach School lies an area of bush and thriving wetland, blossoming with wildflowers and green trees.

Liz Fennel, the school's science teacher, said she regularly used the area for nature walks

with her students.

"During the walk I teach the children how to identify weeds and native plants," Mrs Fennel said. "Together we remove the weeds. This allows the native plants to thrive and consequently native animals have an improved chance of survival."

Penny, a bush care supervisor, accompanies students into the bush and teaches them how to recognise weeds and how best to eradicate them so they are not

demolishing native plants.

Penny's assistance and the continuation of bush regeneration are possible due to grants from Gosford City Council.

"The support from the council is very much valued," said Mrs Fennel. "I believe bush regeneration is imperative because it teaches the children awareness of their natural environment, and it helps the children's knowledge of the plants and weeds."



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# Living with autism

## Editorial

By JESSICA KING, SARAH LEONARD and BRADLEY McCLOGHRY

AUTISM comes in many different forms such as autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome and atypical autism. Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong disabilities that affect the way people communicate, socialise, learn and behave. They affect individuals and the people around them.

Some of the types of behaviour are repetitive in nature, such as tantrums and restrictive behaviour. Most people suffering from autism also go through phases that are obsessive, such as favourite topics or movies.

Some children diagnosed with autism cannot attend mainstream schools or classes. Many Central Coast children with autism attend The Central Coast School for Children with Autism at Terrigal.

The parents of these children have to deal with the stresses of autism on a daily basis but they have an added stress - working towards raising funds to ensure the students attend a school that has adequate playground and classroom facilities.

Living with autism can be difficult. Families struggle with anti-social behaviour and limited communication, which can place enormous stress on family units.

Parents have to pay school fees at The Central Coast School for Children with Autism. The specialist school offers the support of a councillor and speech therapist. But some parents are unable to afford the fees and have to send their children to mainstream classes.

The government should increase the help given to families and The Central Coast School for Children with Autism.

These children deserve the best education possible and their families are worthy of assistance.

Satellite classes exist in mainstream schools and are stepping stones to regular classes.

Children with autism initially attend a mainstream class for brief periods. These periods are gradually increased with the aim of total integration.

Placing a child with autism into a mainstream class without doing it gradually is most likely to be fraught with complications, affecting the child and other students.

The concept of satellite classes has proved successful and more are needed. Teachers also need gradual integration.

The government needs to continue the investment they have made to support children with autism and their families on the Central Coast. Community support will continue to be welcome.

Parents and teachers of children with autism have enough to contend with without devoting time and energy to raising funds to supply basic infrastructure.



QUAINT: The Avoca Theatre, where a variety of movies are shown.

# Paraplegic proves great inspiration

By LAUREN TINDALE and KAITLYN MATUSCHKA

IN 2003, when Sean Macgugan decided to defer completion of his engineering degree to pursue his love of surfing and travel overseas to Samoa, he didn't know that his trip would end in tragedy.

Three months into his trip, Sean encountered what he thought was a perfect wave. Suddenly he was up-ended and driven head-first into a flat coral reef.

"I've hit hard," was Sean's first thought.

He tried to feel his wound but found he couldn't. He was paralysed. Fortunately a friend surfing nearby rescued him.

When Sean awoke he found he had been airlifted to Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital.

Four years later, Sean continues to travel. He is a paraplegic who lives life to the fullest.

Long-time friend of the Macgugans and teacher/resident at Avoca Beach, David Hooper, described Sean as an inspiration.

"His cycling trip around Europe, his solo kayak ventures on the Hawkesbury River, plus being awarded high distinctions in engineering at Sydney University make people without a disability look at themselves," Mr Hooper said.

"I'm proud to know Sean and it was a delight to have taught him at Avoca Beach."

# About Avoca

By HOLLY FABILA and JOSHUA EDWARDS

AVOCA Beach is a quiet, seaside holiday destination with a friendly village atmosphere, located just an hour from Newcastle and Hornsby.

The area offers a variety of pastimes for people of all ages.

The patrolled beach features stunning coastal scenery, great surf for the enthusiasts and a rock pool for the kids.

"Accommodation is readily available and varies from caravans to luxury beachfront houses and apartments that command a \$1000 a night in rental," said David Canton, from Ray White Real Estate.

Mr Canton said summer was the busy holiday period and people needed to book early.

The beach is not the only attraction. Avoca Lake provides opportunities for canoeing, sailing and fishing. Paddle boats and canoes can be hired from the lakeside.

Roxanne Davies, a regular visitor

to Avoca Beach, enjoys her stays.

"It is fabulous when it comes to family catering and a good walk around the rocks," she said.

In the evening, the old-world Avoca Beach Theatre shows blockbusters seen at multiplexes as well as a variety of foreign feature films usually seen only in Sydney.

A regular theatre patron, Lyn Hardy, said the theatre had a charming atmosphere. "I love the wacky films shown there," she said.

Avoca Beach restaurants serve food including fish and chips, Thai, Chinese, Indian and Italian, and some offer first-class dining areas overlooking the beach.

The hotel and bowling club cater for families, with outdoor dining available.

For those seeking retail therapy, Avoca village has quaint galleries and clothing shops. Ten minutes away at Terrigal designer labels can be found, and a further 10 minutes on lies Erina Fair, an enormous shopping centre.

# Safety at the beach

By BRAD McCLOGHRY and JOSHUA GIRVAN

ON the Central Coast alone, 847 people this year have been rescued from the surf.

In NSW, more than 58,000 surf lifesavers from 129 clubs protect 1590 kilometres of coastline, from Fingal Beach in the north to Pambula in the south.

Each year voluntary life-guards spend more than 270,000 hours patrolling NSW beaches.

The president of North Avoca Beach Surf Life-

saving Club, Rick Parsons, said that people's problems in the water could stem from poor swimming skills, children not being properly supervised, a lack of knowledge about the surf, and bad luck.

A rip current is one example of a serious danger at the beach. A rip is formed by water seeking its own level, usually as a result of large sets of waves rushing back out.

"The more you understand about the dangers of the ocean the safer you will be," Mr Parsons said.



DECEPTIVE: Avoca Beach on a calm day. Rips can catch people out.

- Photo by Brad McCloghry and Joshua Girvan



- Illustration by Dallas Youles

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