



# Farewell Mr Luke Thomson Principal 2010—2022





# Farewell Mr Luke Thomson

Luke Thomson arrived as Principal at Pembroke School in July 2010. He came to us with extensive experience, having served as Head of Trinity College Gawler (2002–10), Head of Upper School at Frankfurt International School, Germany (1998–2002), and as a key leader at Woodcroft College Reynella (1990–98). Luke's academic background includes a Master of Science in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford, Wolfson College, and a Bachelor of Arts from Flinders University with majors in Theology, Politics and History.

Not long after Luke arrived I remember him saying to me that he thought Pembroke was such a good school, thriving and performing so well by so many measures. It was an environment that required careful, wise and intelligent leadership. The changes Luke would bring to Pembroke emerged gradually; he did not want to simply 'make his mark' in haste. After a period of careful listening and observing, affording him a deep understanding of Pembroke, Luke began to build on the School's existing strengths with his characteristic wisdom and humility. He is a builder rather than a bulldozer. As he has said recently in relation to leading a school, it is important to not attempt to 'transform a school to your own image'. In my view Luke has done much to strengthen the qualities and values of Pembroke that existed on his arrival, always working to ensure that initiatives and refinements were well understood and substantial.

I will not detail all that Luke has achieved in his time as Principal of Pembroke School, but rather highlight a few significant markers. I would say that without question the most ambitious and successful building project in 50 years (roughly) of Pembroke's history is the Shipsters Road building. Naturally this achievement is not due to one person; Board members, Committee members, staff and generous supporters made substantial and pivotal contributions towards the project's success. However, conceiving, designing and constructing such a building requires an organisation that is confident and secure in multiple facets. It is the task of an effective leader to generate that confidence and security in the organisation that they lead. It was Luke's vision for Pembroke to devote this development to Technical Studies, Science and Visual Arts (when many schools were following a narrower Science, Tech and Maths path for similar projects).

There are many other projects that Luke initiated. The Old Watulunga Outdoor Education Centre is a tremendous addition, again generously financed by many in our community. The renovation of the Middle School classrooms was timely and important; the recently completed lift and new stairs for the Girtton Resource Centre has renewed the utility of Girtton; and the transformation of the Boys Boarding House to a co-educational facility for Pembroke boarding has been achieved with modest cost and excellent outcomes.

→ Front cover: Luke Thomson at Old Watulunga in 2021



2010 top: Luke Thomson with wife Stephanie and children Oscar and Sophie-Min. Bottom: Luke Thomson's first whole school assembly in the KCLC. 2011 top: Hayley Thomas and Angus Edwards at the Year 6 Graduation. Bottom: Margaret Bennett Art Award winners: Suzannah Michell, Maddie Mills, Margaret Bennett, Luke Thomson, Tess Wohling and Olivia Stapleton. 2012 top: Cross Country. Bottom: Crows captain Nathan Van Berlo presents Principal Luke Thomson with a signed Crows Guernsey.

Luke has also worked to build Pembroke's financial capacity, not only to develop physical infrastructure but to support a range of scholarships that allow broader access to the quality education that the School offers. We are lucky to have in place a culture at Pembroke where benefactors are willing to donate sufficient funds to establish perpetual scholarships for students. This outcome is due to the work of a whole team, of course—but the team has been guided and inspired by Luke.

Luke has challenged us to identify the spiritual heart of the School. While acknowledging the religious history of its antecedent schools, Pembroke is not tied to a particular church or faith. Our now clear and stated intention to be a school for 'those of all faiths, and those of none' is an ethos that now guides our Chapel and other programs, in significant measure due to Luke's impetus.

I could not write of Luke's time at Pembroke without reflecting on his contribution in the most important role of a Principal, to do all in their power to protect the safety and wellbeing of the students in their care. Luke instigated a strengthening of our explicit teaching in the areas of Social, Emotional and Personal Development, resulting in the introduction of an internally developed and well-considered curriculum. As the first of the 10 Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission in 2017 states, child safety (must be) embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture. Luke's leadership in this area has been central to his service to Pembroke.

Luke has led significant developments in student leadership and agency. The creation of the Student Charter, a document written by our students in response to issues such as consent, respect, inclusivity and gender equality, was both conceived and nurtured in the environment of considered and meaningful student leadership actively fostered by Luke. This Charter will now sit alongside the School Aims as a defining document of our culture and values.

Luke (together with Ms Amanda Bourchier) was honoured to receive the Kaurua Cultural League of License in 2022, in recognition for his extraordinary leadership of and commitment to Pembroke's Indigenous Education Program. An honour bestowed on him by Kaurua Ambassador and Narrunga man, Mr Michael Kumatpi Murrutya O'Brien ('Uncle Mickey'), this appointment acknowledged Pembroke's ongoing efforts to listen and learn, to bring about change through education and honesty, and the School's work towards Reconciliation together with First Nations Clans people under Luke's leadership.

There is so much more about Luke on which I could elaborate. He is a terrific educator, a masterful speaker, and a wise and courageous leader. It is tempting to attribute these qualities to a sheer natural ability and that is true in part, but it is his thorough and thoughtful preparation in everything he does that ultimately defines the Luke Thomson we know and admire.

Luke leaves us with Pembroke enhanced and developed in many ways. We are clearer and more confident in what is at our centre. We have new pedagogical initiatives that are well considered and thought through. We have vibrant, intelligent and influential student leadership and voice. We have a strategic direction that charts a possible course for Pembroke's future, and a mature culture and framework that allows us to consider required course corrections.

Leading a school is a complex and demanding task. To have done so with such clear and unfailing integrity, depth, wisdom and intelligence is truly remarkable.

On behalf of the entire Pembroke community, I offer our appreciation and gratitude.

**Mr Kym Lawry**  
Deputy Principal



2013



2014



2015



**2013 top:** Luke Thomson with Ella Jones and Nicholas Williams. **Bottom:** The 2013 Valedictory Service at the Wesley Uniting Church, Kent Town. **2014 top:** Luke Thomson addressing the crowd at the 40th Birthday celebration with London on the screen behind. **Bottom:** History Day, celebrating 40 years of education at Pembroke. **2015 top:** Luke Thomson with boarder Jason Phan. **Bottom:** Tess Ballard, Oliver Maine, Chair of the School Board Elizabeth Game and Luke Thomson at Speech Night, Entertainment Centre.



“Luke Thomson is a very impressive leader not only at Pembroke but also across the fronts of global education. I am aware of his steady leadership in guiding Pembroke to achieve a holistic education that includes both emotional and intellectual dimensions in a shared learning community. I have also been privileged to witness the ways he has brought those same emphases to the International Baccalaureate Organization.”

George Rupp, Chair of the International Baccalaureate Board of Governors

“We have both learnt so much from you about leadership, communication and community and we are so honored to have been able to work with you. Your ability to make students feel included, inspired and listened to is what makes you such a great leader, principal and person.”

Ned Carruthers and Georgie Orchard  
(Head Boy and Head Girl, 2021)

"When I think of Luke, I think of him as a sage man, with deep values; a deep thinker with a powerful intellect. I remember the times when he was a Board member in the IB and he would go against the tide on some occasions when he felt that, potentially, the IB could stray from its mission if a certain decision was made. His arguments would be made gently, but with undeniably good thinking. The IB was lucky to have him serve as a Board member, representing the elected heads of schools from around the world. He was a torchbearer for high standards. I remember, fondly, how his heart was always with and about the students."

Siva Kumari, Director General of the International Baccalaureate



2016 top: 40th anniversary of the Hearing Unit. Back row: Ms Esther Douglas, Peter Singleton, Gabrielle Slade, Mrs Ondine Caon. Second row: Mr Alastair McEwin, Isaac Furniss, Alexander Nicholas, Andrew Singleton, Mr Luke Thomson. Front row: Talitha Fiora, Ellie Moschakis. Bottom: Mr Luke Thomson, Michael Yunupingu, Binnila Yunupingu, Richard Yunupingu at the inaugural Indigenous Round football match. 2017 top: Matthew Robertson presenting Principal Luke Thomson a Pembroke Rowing cap at Head of the River. Bottom: Mr Luke Thomson with Mrs Feng Tam at the Gala Ball. 2018 top: Areeba Ahmad describing her CAS project to Luke Thomson and her grandfather Imtiaz. Bottom: Principal Luke Thomson explaining the Shipsters Road Project on Grandparents/Grandfriends Day.

# From the Chair of the Board

Mr Luke Thomson is a kind and decent man. A Principal is often required to deal with the most demanding situations you can imagine, and Luke has always done this with the utmost care and concern for students, staff and their families.

Luke as a leader has the courage and strength to do what is right—even when this is not easy. At times he has chosen paths that have been challenging, but his finely tuned moral compass has steered Pembroke on a course that is right and in accordance with our School Aims.

Luke's leadership extends well beyond what he has demonstrated at Pembroke. He is a deep thinker with huge intellectual capacity to process problems and opportunities across the educational landscape of Australia and beyond. He is a deeply respected and sought-after educationalist. This has been an incredible resource for the School Board in developing the strategic vision of Pembroke. It is appropriate to reflect on Luke's significant contribution to education on state, national and international levels:

- During 2013–18 Luke was a member of the IB Heads Council (the peak body for Heads of Schools running IB programmes around the world). He chaired this key group during 2016–18 and was a Board member of the International Baccalaureate Organisation for the same period.
- From 2006 until 2010 Luke chaired the Board of the Association of Independent Schools in South Australia (AISSA).

- During 2007–10 he was a Board member of the Independent School Council of Australia, the peak body lobby group for the sector in Australia.

- Luke has been a member of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools, Australia (AHISA) from 2002 until the present.

- He was member of the South Australia IB Heads Group during 2010–22 and chaired this group from 2016 until 2018.

- In 2022 Luke was awarded the Alby Jones Gold Medal Award by the South Australian branch of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders.

At Pembroke Luke has humbly seen his leadership as service, and has inspired others to do the same. His leadership style is authentic, open and honest, including when things haven't gone to plan. He has exceptional integrity.

The relationship between a school governing body and a Principal can be complex. This has never been the case with Luke. His collaborative and considered approach to the governance of the School generated a partnership that has been open, productive and one of mutual confidence.

Thank you very much, Luke.

**Jane Miller**  
Chair of the Board



**2019 top:** First day in the Shipsters Road Building. **Bottom:** Shipsters Road Opening. **2020 top:** Meg McClare and Lachlan Skeates (both 2021) working with Mr Thomson on the Principal's Bursary Fund Appeal video. **Bottom:** Luke Thomson with Uncle Mickey O'Brien at the opening of the Tracey Moffatt Exhibition in the R.A. Cook Chapel. **2021 top:** Luke Thomson, Life Members Jean Zhang, Neil Balnaves AO, and Jane Miller at the 2021 School Board Dinner. **Bottom:** Ms Amanda Bourchier and Mr Luke Thomson on the first day of school sausage sizzle in the Senior School.



“You were fantastic as a principal when I was a student at Pembroke, but as my boss, you have been amazing. Thank you so much for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to be part of the Pembroke family. Because of you I have purpose and meaning in my job which has also given me a sense of belonging. I hope you realise how much I appreciate your efforts in welcoming me to the staff way back in 2013. I hope you enjoy your retirement and have lots of time to play your music.

Thank you again for everything you’ve done.”

Morrison Lygo (2012)



2021: Anzac Day Ceremony, KCLC

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