



Margaret Overs (Mansfield State High School)

'You don't have to reinvent the wheel'

Margaret Overs has been organising and participating in field camps for music students at Mansfield State High School for 22 years, and has overseen incredible growth in this program. So it was with great pleasure that we interviewed Margaret for this first edition of Teacher Talk

Margaret advised us that, not long after her arrival at Mansfield State High, the Principal of the day sought a growth model for students in the music program. A key component of this model was to take students on retreats. This was designed to combine groups, provide focussed training with guest experts, and to build relationships. Staff were also encouraged to undertake professional development with the experts whilst they were on site.

The results were outstanding! When they started this program there were 60 students. In 2015 there are now 700 students engaged. In May this year they took 265 students – 3 bands, 3 orchestras and 3 choirs to Alex Park.

When asked what has been the most important outcome of her camps Margaret replied that it brings the students and staff together, allowing student – staff bonding outside of their formal settings, and it also encourages students to express themselves. *'The students look forward to the camp. They plan their costumes well in advance and their outfits for bowling. For many it is the highlight in the year. For me it provides opportunity to chat with the students and to sit and eat a meal with my staff'*.

When asked what has been the most challenging aspect of field camps Margaret was quick to reply that it is the legalities and paperwork. An important strategy in the face of this she says is attention to detail.

It was on these challenges that Margaret provided her most valuable comment - *You don't have to reinvent the wheel*. Her advice to novice field trip coordinators was do not struggle alone, but seek assistance from experienced staff. Yes it is time consuming and challenging first time out, but it quickly becomes more of a routine and is well worth the effort in the long term.

We would have to agree with that. Taking student numbers from 60 to 700 in the program speaks louder than words.

