



**Ben Laws**  
**Deputy Principal, Bracken Ridge State School**

*"Involve the parents"*

For this issue we had the pleasure of interviewing Ben Laws, Deputy Principal of Bracken Ridge State School in Brisbane.

Ben has been on field trips and field camps with Year 6 and (the previous) Year 7 classes for 15 years. Like many other Year 6 groups heading out Ben ensures that they engage in both leadership retreats and adventure retreats, with the former usually held in the earlier part of the year and the latter towards the end. Group sizes are commonly 45 – 60 students.

Working at a Brisbane city school Ben achieves both leadership and adventure experiences for his students by taking them into the surrounding regions. For example, the Alexandra Headland Surf Life Saving Club on the Sunshine Coast provides an excellent program incorporating leadership and adventure activities into a well appreciated surf awareness program. *Their programs are simple but provide great outcomes* said Ben.

In our discussion Ben elaborated on student perspectives. In any student population he said students have a diversity of needs, not all of which can be catered for in house. Thus well run field trips and camps are most valuable. Ben spoke on the improved behavioural standards that emerge. *New friendships are created amongst students, more tolerance of diversity is expressed, and unknown skills are revealed and applauded bringing new self-belief, amongst other benefits.* Whilst some of these behavioural changes are not permanent Ben says that he enjoys them whilst they last.

Ben disagrees with the perception that field trips and camps are difficult to organise or run especially if you involve the parents from the beginning. Basically he argued that it comes down to how well organised you are and how well informed the students are about the forthcoming experience. To this end he heavily involves the parents ahead of the trips by providing them with background and educational materials that they can discuss with and use to encourage their own children. This parental interest and involvement markedly improves the attitude of the group departing, as well as the eventual outcomes and learning experiences. Indeed this is just one strategy that Ben encourages amongst his staff to ensure that novelty effects (see this issue) are minimised and learning outcomes enhanced.

