

Dear Whitsunday Anglican School,

This is an open letter from the Writers and Performers who took part in Whitsunday Voices Youth Literature Festival 2017.

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Thank you for inviting us to your beautiful school.

We are all so delighted and moved by the experience of the past few days. We want to ensure that the students and the staff, the volunteers, the sponsors and the entire Mackay community know just what an extraordinary event you have created. And how thrilled we are to have been part of it.

We have all been nourished by being at a school that so deeply values books and ideas and the power of the imagination.

Here are some responses from the writers:

“Something that really touched me was how this festival gave rural students from far and wide an opportunity to celebrate (or be introduced for the first time) to a love of the arts, and more specifically storytelling; seeing their eyes light up, hearing them laugh, and then pulling out their books in pride to show me. “

“For these two days it didn't matter if you were bad at sport, the prettiest in the class, how much money your parents earned or how smart you were. If you could use your imagination, listen, tell your story or read one - you were very special indeed.”

Madeline Römcke, Shake and Stir Theatre Company.

“My favourite thing about the festival - apart from the joy of meeting readers - is the generosity of the Whitsunday community in sharing this opportunity with such a big group of students from surrounding areas; it's no wonder there's such a great atmosphere in a school community like yours.” Fiona Wood

“I loved the fact that the school created an atmosphere of fun. The school campus was thronging with kids. There were bands and barbecues. The readers and thinkers were the cool dudes. We writers were treated like rock stars. The school engendered the idea that being a reader, being smart,

engaging with big ideas and dreams was the stuff of life. The power of the future. How brilliant is that!" Hannie Rayson

"I loved meeting kids from Bowen and from other far flung schools who had travelled for hours on buses and were just so excited to be at Whitsunday Voices festival to meet their favourite authors.

I loved being made to feel so welcome by kids, teachers, parents and the whole Mackay community.

But one of the cutest highlights was getting a letter from a young student called Ayden from Swayneville State school, with a drawing of me with all the kids, saying "Thanks. I luv you. We all love you."

Awwww!!!!

Belinda Murrell

"Whitsunday Voices! A big thank you to all the students and staff for such an awesome festival. The dancing, the singing, and of course the kids 'DABBING' was second to none.

A young girl named Grace came up on stage in front of 500 students and took over the show. At just 6yrs old, she danced like a true professional. I remember asking Grace to bop her head to the rhythm of the guitar and drum. She just gave a cheeky smile before replying, *'I already know how to do that thank you'*. Everyone clapped her on and before you knew it, I was now the support act 😊

I was particularly impressed by the manners of the students. I was always greeted with a smile and asked if I needed any help. This goes for the staff as well. The vibe all round was great. Thank you for making my festival experience one to remember."

Lucas Proudfoot

All of us were so amazed by our student "support staff" and the student technical staff.

"O frabjous festival! What fun I had. Thank you to my sweet minders who managed to shepherd me and all my lost bits and pieces so kindly and efficiently through the days without once losing their tempers with me!"

Isobelle Carmody

"I just loved my author support team. They told me my schedule, without me needing to ask, carried my bag, dealt with my dirty plates and took my rubbish

away. It made the whole thing easy. The sound crew were totally professional and solved problems smoothly as they arose.” Ailsa Wild

“A big shout out to Lize and Ethan for their kindness, patience and in particular for their fitness as they were made to run across the campus for my forgotten water, bag, USB, microphone (all on separate occasions mind you.) They were kind enough to tell me - through panting breaths - that, ‘honestly it wasn’t any trouble at all.’ They either have a very good drama department at Whitsunday Anglican School or my support people are genuinely the nicest people I’ve had the pleasure of working with.” PJ Tierney

Highlights:

“Seeing Mr Cameron rap on stage.” Charlie Thomson

“Watching kids try to work out if Stephen Munchin was serious as he proposed a poo-catapult to fertilise our national parks.” Jack Heath.

“The food was scrumptious- the vegetarians thank the splendid imaginative cooks who treated us like real people!” Isobelle Carmody

“It was so great to see the students teching every session so competently. Another example of what an inspiring school this is.” Hannie Rayson

“I can honestly say that Whitsunday Voices was one of the best literary festivals I’ve ever been to.” Belinda Murrell.

“There are many kid lit festivals around the country, but Whitsunday is my favourite! It is flawlessly run by passionate and dedicated people who know how important it is to bring kids and books together. I LOVED the kids, the staff, my gorgeous helpers, Brittany and Melinda, and spending two whole days with people who know how important it is to share stories. Special thanks to Tonia and the committee for allowing us the opportunity to raise \$1000 for Room To Read, so we can bring even more books and kids together in countries not as fortunate as ours. A very special moment for me was during the Maltese community event when I met a woman who came to Australia on the same migrant ship as my father. She and her family had never seen a photo of the ship and we were all moved to tears when I showed them. I'm still buzzing with gratitude for having been invited. Thank you a million times over.” Deborah Abela

Hannie Rayson, Isobelle Carmody, Belinda Murrell, Deborah Abela, Charlie Thomson, Stephen Mushin, PJ Tierney, John Danalis, Lucas Proudfoot, Fiona Wood, Jack Heath, Ailsa Wild, Shake and Stir Theatre Company.