

From boys to men, free from stereotypes

A tailored program is affirming students on their journey into adulthood, writes

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A new program at Brighton Grammar School aims to support boys in their transition to manhood over the crucial development period through years 9 and 10.

"It's a bit of a cliché, the term 'a good man', but we really believe it's incumbent on us as a boys' school to tackle that head on," says headmaster Ross Featherston.

After successfully piloting parts of the boys-to-men (B2M) program in 2017, Brighton Grammar has been rolling it out in full this year. The program includes outdoor educational journeys, local, national and international service programs, and social and emotional development seminars.

"It's a coherent program that has a range of experiences across the two years," Mr Featherston explains. "It uses outside expertise, uses internal expertise, and also engages families and the community as part of that journey from boyhood to manhood."

The school partners with a small number of external experts, including the organisation Tomorrow Man, which runs workshops over both year levels exploring what it means to be a good man in today's society.

"They have conversations with the boys, and a lot of it's based on trust," he says. "The guys take some time to get the boys' trust and the boys, over a period of time, open up and share their own experiences."



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Brighton Grammar headmaster Ross Featherston

Tomorrow Man have committed to partnering with the school over the long term, which Featherston notes makes a difference. "I try to avoid the fly-in, fly-out approach, which can tick boxes, if you like, but my experience of that is that it doesn't lead to long-term, significant change."

As well as the workshops, there are a

variety of outdoor education experiences available to the boys, from a 12-day journey across south-west Victoria to expeditions along the Snowy River.

Students also give back to their community by participating in Connor's Run, a charity fun run held in honour of former Brighton Grammar student Robert

As part of Brighton Grammar's B2M program, which supports boys on their transition to young manhood, a group of students walked the Kokoda Track in 2018.

Connor Dawes, who died of a brain tumour aged 18 in 2014. All boys either participate in the run or help with fundraising or event support.

Capping the program off at the end of year 10, the final experience the school offers is a Rites of Passage camp, where each boy goes on a hike with their father or another significant male in their life.

"The idea is that they go out there and when they return to our Brighton Grammar community, we now treat them as men," Mr Featherston says.

The aim is for boys to recognise within themselves parts of the "four archetypes" – Magician, Warrior, Caregiver and Sage – that were created by senior students after the school researched what its community thought made a 'successful man'.

"What I'd like for the boys to be when they finish the program is comfortable in their own skin," Mr Featherston says. "They don't feel the need to conform to a particular stereotype about what a man is, and they're happy to be themselves and accept difference."

Ultimately, the aim of the program is for the boys to develop not just individually, but within a wider context.

"More broadly, they see that they're part of a community, and that they have a role to play in not only making themselves better people, but making the people around them better as well."