



Entrance to school campus, Avondale School
Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

Avondale Schools, Australia 1980–2019

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The Avondale school is a modern educational institution from preschool to year 12 operated by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. It is a fully operational and registered school catering to the needs of the immediate community and the surrounding area. It is not to be confused with Avondale College of Higher Education, which is a tertiary institution. The location of the school is 119 Avondale Road, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. Cooranbong is located within the network of towns and communities on the western side of Lake Macquarie, New South Wales.¹

Establishment of the School

The Avondale school was established in 1897 as an integral part of the Avondale School for Christian Workers. It

later became known as the Australasian Missionary College and then Avondale College.² The establishment of the Avondale school and its philosophy were based on the principles espoused by Ellen White in her writings with respect to the school. She emphasized the importance of “harmonious development,” and a balance between the mental, physical, social, and spiritual “faculties.”³ This educational philosophy is still maintained.

A primary school was operating on campus by mid-1897 and was taught by Mrs. H. C. Lacey.⁴ The primary school was moved around during the next several years. At the end of 1898 it was reported that “the primary department is taught by Miss Annie Walker, who was for several years a teacher in Sydney. Heretofore the children have been occupying small and inconvenient rooms, poorly and scantily furnished; but during this term they have been moved into the large east room over the kitchen, which is being furnished with beautiful new desks, the gift of W. C. Sisley, of Battle Creek.”⁵ By 1910, with an enrolment of between forty and fifty children, the school classrooms were two large rooms on the ground floor of Bethel Hall.⁶

In 1912 it was decided to construct a building dedicated to the needs of primary school children. The new building built largely over two Sundays with the help of scores of volunteers was dedicated on October 12, 1912.⁷ It was reported that the new schoolroom measured “forty by twenty-four feet, with an eight-foot verandah extending across the front. . . . The neatly painted structure presents a very pleasing appearance, and is felt by all to be a most desirable addition to the college facilities.”⁸ However, by 1916, numbers had so increased that it was necessary to double the area by an addition on the back of the building.⁹

No secondary schooling was being provided as yet. But in 1932, with the beginning of intermediate classes, consideration had to be given to providing space for the growing post-primary section. Consequently, a high school unit was planned for 1934, to be built alongside the

Avondale church on a site donated by the Australasian Division. As a result of generous donations, this school was opened debt-free. George Currow was the principal at the time.¹⁰ That same year saw the first student to pass the leaving certificate, Miss Jean Easthope.¹¹

In 1948 the central school, as it had been known up until that time, was officially named the “Avondale High School.”¹² Also in 1948 the college board decided to move the two top classes into the college to give better opportunity to young people of mature age, who needed the leaving certificate to qualify for college courses. At the end of 1969 those classes, now the fifth and sixth forms, were retransferred back to the high school.

On May 14, 1961, a hostel was opened on campus to accommodate children of missionary parents who were attending the high school. The top story provided accommodation for forty young people—twenty boys and twenty girls. The lower floor provided accommodation for the family of a preceptor.¹³

A new high school building opened on the college campus on July 2, 1972. The plaque was unveiled by George Currow, who had been a teacher and principal of the school for 31 years.¹⁴ However, over a relatively short period of seven years it was recognized increasingly that the growing needs of the tertiary institution and the lack of space for the growing primary and secondary schools precipitated a search for a new location for those schools. After consideration of a number of sites it was decided that forty acres at the northern end of Avondale Road near the airport was the most appropriate. The new campus was called Avondale Schools. It had both a secondary and primary school faculty and facilities and a principal administering each.

A New Self-contained Campus (1980–1990)

The school commenced operation on the new site in February 1980, with Cyril Hill as the principal of the primary school and Ernie Krause as principal of the high school.¹⁵ Students were drawn primarily from a Seventh-day Adventist background, with a small minority coming from the wider community.

In the decade that followed, the emphasis was on consolidation. While the basic layout of the physical buildings remained relatively the same, attention was given to improvement of the extensive grounds.¹⁶ Resources increased as computers were introduced for teachers and emphasis was given to improving academic standards. The integrated faith and learning approach to education in a Seventh-day Adventist framework was firmly established.¹⁷

The physical well-being of every student was maintained by sport and physical activities. At first there was a degree of reluctance to enter into competition with other independent schools, but this slowly changed as the school entered the Hunter Region Independent Schools competition and the benefits of this interaction began to accrue.¹⁸ Students were able to participate in well-organized competition, to share the SDA philosophy of education, to gain confidence in themselves, and to develop physically.

Both schools remained an important resource in the training of teachers for Avondale College. A significant proportion of classtime was provided by the school to enable education students of the college to gain experience through observation, advice, and practice teaching. A number of teachers from the school were also engaged in the curriculum education at the college.

Music was recognized by both schools as an integral part of the program. Although music was taught in both schools, in class and privately it found its greatest expression in the school band. It was commenced in the early 1980s under the direction of Fred Cracknell.¹⁹ The band became widely known as a feature of the Avondale Schools experience and remains well known in the wider community.

Period of Expansion: 1990–2000

Expansion of the physical facilities began with the opening of a specialized building for the teaching and performance of music in the late 1980s. The building was located between the primary and secondary school classrooms and contained a relatively large facility with theater-type seating. This building heralded the need for the primary and secondary campuses to combine their resources for greater efficiency.

Students of the secondary school entered public state examinations in the school certificate and higher school certificate examinations. Achievements by schools were continually above the state average, with many individuals achieving excellent results. These were supported by various competitions to enable students to assess their individual skills. With the airfield and Avondale Flying School located beside the school, interested students over the age of 16 were given the opportunity to obtain a pilot's license.²⁰

The use of computers increased considerably during the period in both schools. Teachers had the availability of computers for their own use as well as use in the classroom. Various computer rooms became available in both schools with specific subject matter introduced at all levels and including the higher school certificate. New library facilities were provided for the secondary school, and a new complex dedicated to the teaching of art increased the capacity of the school in the fine arts curriculum.²¹

Rapid Development Phase: 2000 Forward

During the next phase of development changes came rapidly. In 2003 the completion of an early learning center gave Avondale School the capacity to provide education for students from preschool to year 12.²² Originally built with two major rooms, it was extended to three rooms with the addition of a specialty room. The center offered long day-care and a specific preschool program. The building was in close proximity to the kindergarten classrooms to enable close collaboration between the preschool and kindergarten staff. A fourth room was added to the center, and is utilized for after-school activities. The addition of the facilities and programs of the early learning center has proved to be an asset to the stability and growth of students as they move into primary school.²³

With the completion of the preschool, a significant administrative change occurred in 2003. Preschool, primary, and secondary campuses were all brought under one umbrella with one principal. While each section had their own director, overall administration was now under one principal.²⁴ The aim of this change was to enable a more efficient and effective use of resources for the school.

In March 2007 a multipurpose center was opened on campus. The opening of this complex followed a 5 percent increase in student numbers in 2006–2007, to a total of 940.²⁵ The center contained a large auditorium for sport and assemblies for both schools. It housed a large commercial kitchen used for hospitality and dinner functions. Students were now able to complete a recognized course called "Certificate II in Hospitality."²⁶ Other specialized rooms included a large exercise/weights room and learning support room. A secondhand uniform shop was also part of this complex. The center also hosted a church congregation each Sabbath. The Gateway Seventh-day Adventist Church moved into the complex on February 16, 2008, just a few weeks before it was officially opened.²⁷

The center has been the hub of the alumni program. Annually the Avondale School Friends Committee has been responsible for the reunion of past students.²⁸ During this period an Assistance Fund has been set up to assist needy students, which has enabled past students and other school supporters the opportunity to assist the school financially.²⁹

Then on May 31, 2011, an integrated information technology center and library was opened.³⁰ It was located in a central position between the two campuses. The center has provided for computer rooms for both classwork and individual work. There were a multiple variety of specialized areas, such as study rooms, copying, media rooms, etc. The center also housed the school archives.³¹

On May 18, 2012, a new administration center was opened in a central position of the school campus.³² The office housed all the main financial and clerical functions for the school. The facility also houses a large canteen for all the school.

Also in 2012 the North New South Wales Conference (NNSW) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church brought the Toronto Seventh-day Adventist School under the administrative responsibility of Avondale Schools. The Toronto school had been operating independently since the early 1980's under the control of the NNSW Conference. In 2019 it reverted back to being the Toronto Seventh-day Adventist School and administered independently.³³

The Avondale Schools has its Christian philosophy as an internal part of the school program. It is given expression through the teaching of Bible, both in classroom activities and in religious service. The multipurpose center has provided a venue for the Gateway church, involving both students and the community.³⁴ This need for spiritual growth has also been recognized in the work of a full-time chaplain and counsellors to assist students in their growth.³⁵ It has also encouraged students to reach out to their community by conducting a series of Family Fun Days and Christmas Carol services at the end of each year.³⁶

In 2009 the South Pacific Division Education Director, Barry Hill, inspected Avondale Schools. He wrote: "At our Avondale schools I noted a program run after school for teenage girls to help them discover their uniqueness and value, and learn the impact of feelings, friendships, and respect. I felt the vibrancy of the chaplaincy program, and

saw how both primary and secondary students learn genuine spiritual leadership through connection with God and serving others. I felt His touch daily in Bible-faith stories and weekly classroom worships. I saw evidence of the schoolwide systematic values-teaching strategies and noted high school leavers planning to go to Cambodia to serve others.”³⁷

The Avondale Schools have had over the years the advantage of many dedicated and diligent people to maintain its operation. It has confronted challenges and difficulties, as had any school in this modern age, with tenacity and optimism. The dedication and diligence of the staff, parents and administration has enabled the school to fulfill and maintain its mission. A statement of purpose, written in 2018, stated: “To know what is right, to have opportunity to practice moral values, to achieve a personal best and have the opportunity to experience a relationship with Jesus in a safe supportive community—this is clearly the mission of Avondale Schools.”³⁸

Sample Enrollment

| | | |
|------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1981 | Primary School Secondary School | 375 230 ³⁹ |
| 1993 | Primary School Secondary School | 385 367 ⁴⁰ |
| 2018 | Primary School Secondary School | 479 483 ⁴¹ |

Primary School Principals

C. J. Hill (1973–1980); Fred Cracknell (1981–1985); Mel Olsen (1986–1995); Leon Miller (1996–2002); Len Farquarson (2003)

High School Principals

Ernie Krause (1980–1984); Bob Spoor (1985–1987); Dennis Reye (1988–1992); Dennis Tame (1993–1998); David Faull (1999–2003)

Combined Schools

David Faull (2003–2016); David McClintock (2016–)

SOURCES

“A Dedicatory Service.” *Australasian Record*, November 4, 1912.

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———, “Enrolments,” June 17, 1997. Avondale Schools Archives, Cooranbong, NSW.

———, March 10, 2003. Avondale Schools Archives, Cooranbong, NSW.

“Church on Campus.” *Record*, March 15, 2008.

Currow, G. A. “A Brief History.” *Australasian Record*, August 28, 1972.

“Family Fun.” *Record*, October 18, 2014.

Hill, Barry. “What Matters Most.” *Record*, August 2, 2009.

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Miller, G. R. “Re-built Avondale School Dedicated.” *Australasian Record*, August 28, 1972.

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NOTES

1. Much of the information in this article comes from the personal knowledge of the author, who was a member of the teaching staff from 1989 to 2008, specializing in history.?
2. For the history of Avondale College during its first 80 years of operation when the secondary and primary schools were on the college campus, see Milton Hook, *Avondale College of Higher Education*. See also Milton Hook, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora* (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 1998).?
3. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), 13.?
4. G. A. Currow, "A Brief History," *Australasian Record*, August 28, 1972, 9.?
5. W. C. White, "The Work at Avondale," *Union Conference Record*, December 15, 1898, 121.?
6. *Ibid.*?
7. "A Dedicatory Service," *Australasian Record*, November 4, 1912, 3.?
8. *Ibid.*?
9. Currow, 9.?
10. G. R. Miller, "Re-built Avondale School Dedicated," *Australasian Record*, August 28, 1972, 8.?
11. Currow, 9.?
12. "Recently Avondale was honoured . . .," *Australasian Record*, November 22, 1948, 8.?
13. W. G. Turner, "Official Opening of the Ellen G. White Memorial Building and High School Hostel," *Australasian Record*, June 19, 1961, 1, 2.?
14. Miller, 8.?
15. Barry Wright, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, March 2018.?
16. *Ibid.*?
17. Personal knowledge of the author as a teacher at Avondale schools from 1989 to 2008.?
18. Graham Head, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, August 27, 2018.?
19. Fred Cracknell, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, October 24, 2018.?
20. Jenny Litster, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, August 24, 2018.?
21. Michael Alt, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, August 2, 2018.?
22. Avondale School Board minutes, March 10, 2003, Avondale Schools Archives, Cooranbong, NSW; "Avondale School is now . . .," *Australasian Record*, March 22, 2003, 3.?
23. Fiona Butler, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, March 27, 2018.?
24. Personal knowledge of the author as a teacher at the school in 2003.?

25. "Church on Campus," *Record*, March 15, 2008, 4.?
26. Donna Neville, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, August 27, 2018.?
27. "Church on Campus."?
28. Terinaq Mesaric, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, June 25, 2018.?
29. Ibid.?
30. From the plaque attached to the building: "Avondale School I Centre: Official Opening, March 31, 2011."?
31. Jenny Lister, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, August 24, 2018.?
32. From the plaque attached to the building, "Avondale School Administrative Centre: Official Opening, May 18, 2012."?
33. Personal knowledge of the author.?
34. "Church on Campus."?
35. R. Sparke, interview (author).?
36. "Family Fun," *Record*, October 18, 2014, 12.?
37. Barry Hill, "What Matters Most," *Record*, August 2, 2009.?
38. "School Enrolment Package November 2018," Avondale Schools Archives, Cooranbong, NSW.?
39. Fred Cracknell, interview with author, Cooranbong, NSW, October 24, 2018.?
40. Avondale School Board minutes, "Enrolments," June 17, 1997, Avondale Schools Archives, Cooranbong, NSW.?
41. Avondale Schools Board minutes, "Enrolments," February 11, 2008, Avondale Schools Archives, Cooranbong, NSW.?

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