

Re: Bushfire Management & Evacuation

Dear Students, Parents & Carers,

You would be aware that it was deemed necessary yesterday to evacuate the Tuncurry Site which houses Great Lakes College Senior Campus, TAFE NSW and GLC Tuncurry Campus. The purpose of this communication is to provide you with, firstly a Rationale explaining the uniqueness of the Senior Campus, a statement of our agreed Bushfire Plan, an account of what happened yesterday and finally a couple of commonly asked questions and answers.

In the coming days we will have a debrief of yesterday's evacuation and we would welcome any written suggestions from you as to how we may improve our processes.

Rationale – The Senior Campus:

The Senior Campus is not like any other school or Year 7 to 10 campus where all students start the school day at, say, 9 am, finish the day at, say, 3pm and are under constant supervision for all the time between.

On any given day students at the senior campus commence the day at the time of their first timetabled lesson. This may be as early as 8:40am or as late as 2pm. The school day for Senior Students can finish as early as the end of their last timetabled lesson or as late as an after school tutorial. As well as having different starting and finishing times a pathways student may have several hours between an am lesson and a pm lesson. Supervision is provided for all students on site and it is fair to say that with parent consent, on any given day many Senior Campus students come and go from school.

Bushfire Plan – The Senior Campus

The Senior Campus bushfire plan was established by the Senior Campus in conjunction with Great Lakes Rural Fire Control and it is reviewed annually.

When a bushfire presents a reasonable risk to the school, the Senior Campus will liaise with Great Lakes Rural Fire Control and follow their advice.

If a fire presents a significant risk to the school Great Lakes Rural Fire Control will advise the school to commence its management plan.

At this point the school will evacuate all students and staff to the internal evacuation point outside the Senior Campus Cafeteria. As soon as the evacuation alarms are initiated it is mandatory for all students, teaching and non-teaching staff to leave their work station and proceed to the evacuation point. From this point students, (and staff), lose their ability to come and go from the school.

At the evacuation point students and staff will be briefed on the events and kept together for safety and communication purposes. The school will remain in contact with Emergency Services until such time that the risk becomes more or less serious.

In cases where the risk to the students and staff is increased, emergency services will enter the school and take control.

Emergency Services will determine if it is necessary to evacuate the school and if so it will supervise the safe removal of students and staff to the agreed offsite evacuation point which is dependent on

the direction from which the risk is coming, (under most situations the off-site evacuation point will be on the vacant block behind the Oasis Service Station).

The events of Wednesday, September 13, 2017

At approximately 1:15pm yesterday the Senior Campus contacted Great Lakes Rural Fire Control and was advised that emergency services were dispatching 3 fire trucks to the bushfire behind the Tuncurry Golf Course. We were advised that at that point the fire was not under control but was not a significant risk to the school. Initial advice was to monitor, stay in communication but not act.

At approximately 2pm NSW Police entered the school and were briefed on our Bushfire Management Plan.

Shortly after 2pm NSW Police gave us the direction to initiate our evacuation plan. The Senior Campus was immediately evacuated to the internal evacuation point.

Communication protocols were put in place with NSW Police and at approximately 2:10pm NSW Police commenced evacuating and supervising the evacuation. NSW Police were stationed at all exit points of the school. They deemed it safe for TAFE and Senior Campus students who drove to school to leave under police direction, they controlled traffic to ensure the safety of all motorists.

NSW Police then managed the evacuation of Year 7 to 10 students to the vacant block behind the Oasis Service Station as well as the evacuation of Senior Students who normally walk to school, and live in the opposite direction to the fire. Then they managed and supervised the evacuation of all remaining senior students and staff.

Forster Buslines and Eggins Coach Students from both campuses were supervised at the Oasis until they were picked up. Ambulance staff were on site if required.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the support and professionalism of the 3 emergency service organisations that worked with us yesterday.

The local fire brigade who worked tirelessly to ensure our safety.

Great Lakes Rural Fire Control who from initial contact were brilliant in their assessment and management of the risk and NSW Police. The police response was even greater than anticipated. They took control of the situation, provided more than adequate staff to safely manage the process and impressed all with their care of our students.

Some Commonly Asked Questions.

Q: In an evacuation can I come to the school and pick up my sons and daughters?

A: This will depend on the police. I would suggest that if the risk of being at the school is great enough for us to need to evacuate then no, you should not drive into that risk.

Q: If I cannot come to the school where can I pick them up from?

A: Let us and Emergency Services get students to safety, then come to the safe evacuation point to pick them up

Q: Why can't I ring the school?

A: Work Health and Safety regulations mandate that when we implement an evacuation all staff must immediately leave their work station and proceed to the internal evacuation point.



Bob Henry
Principal
Great Lakes College
Senior Campus
14/9/17