

School set for big upgrade to Reptile Room 18/10/2019



Sarah Corstorphan of 11F with Cerberus the Frilled-neck lizard, Emily Barling of 11K with Quinn the Centralian Carpet Python, Jayden Clarke of 11G with Mr. Lacey the Lace Monitor and Staff Member Marcus Whitby with Lofty the Mary River Turtle.

Picture: ROB CAREW

Lilydale High School is in the planning stage of constructing a new Zoology Learning Centre that will provide a huge boost to the school's Reptile Room program. Teacher and Reptile Room Coordinator, Marcus Whitby said that when constructed, the new facility will be a better environment for the animals, an upgrade from the remodelled portable classroom that has housed the animals since 2001. "It will be a massive improvement, especially for teaching and learning. But it's better for the animals too. Obviously a purpose-built building will be better insulated and a more stable environment," he said. "We're hoping to replicate what you see in the natural environment... It's not just about the animal but the habitat, environment and ecosystems that they come from." The current plans for the facility are being constructed with the potential for the school to accommodate small crocodiles. "Yeah, we're looking at that at the moment. We're looking at designs; obviously there is an element of risk with those animals, so we'll have to design those sorts of enclosures well. "But there is definitely some potential there for some crocodiles in the future. "I pinch myself occasionally. It's sort of hard to believe that a really unique program that started with a few enclosures in the back of a portable classroom to now become a significant building and program of the school. "It certainly validates all of the hard work that the students and the staff have put into it... It gives a lot of potential for the future. "The students work really hard day-in day-out, even giving up their holidays... We're hoping and planning to make this zoo standard and industry standard enclosures."

Mr Whitby said that the school's strong relationship with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has allowed confiscated reptiles to be brought to the school instead of facing euthanasia. Mr Whitby is hopeful that the building will be able to incorporate different bioregions that will house groups of animals from similar environments together. "Say if we have animals from north eastern Australia, we'll be able to keep them all together... It will give the kids a better feel for where these animals come from."

But it's not just the cold-blooded creatures that have been forced from their usual enclosures, as some of the teachers had to make way by moving out of one of their staffrooms to temporarily accommodate the reptiles throughout the construction period.

The school is also set to construct a new administration office building, included in the project, which is currently in the tender process. The project was designed by Harrison and White architecture firm. Lilydale High School received \$5.8 million in funding under the state government's Lilydale and Upper Yarra Education Plan.

Mr Whitby provided an update from an incident where thieves targeted the reptile house earlier in the year. Four snakes and three lizards were stolen from the school in May. He said that police were able to recover one of the stolen snakes, but the other animals remained missing. Some of the animals had an estimated value of up to \$3000.

By Jed Lanyon

Concept plans for Lilydale High School's Zoology Learning Centre.

Picture: Harrison and White.

