HISTORY

On the 11th September 1923, in the presence of a large crowd that included 600 children, the Hon Sir Austin Chapman, Federal Minister for Trade and Customs declared Telopea Park School officially open. The school was so named because of its location, the area being known as Telopea Park in Walter Burley Griffin's plan of the city. Telopea “speciosissima”, the botanical name for the New South Wales waratah, formed part of the original school badge.

Telopea Park School opened with a staff of two, a headmaster, Mr. Cecil Henry and one assistant. Fifty-eight pupils were enrolled in the first two days. By the end of the school year, the student numbers had risen to 120. In December 1925, eleven teachers catered for the needs of around 400 primary and secondary students and the first students sat for the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. As the school population grew, the school building was extended in 1926 and again in 1929. In May 1927, the school closed for nine days over the period of celebrations for the opening of the Parliament House during which time it was used as a temporary hospital. Later that year it was recognised as a secondary school and given the status of District School. Telopea became host to an Adult Evening Continuation College. In 1929, the school was made an Intermediate High School, a title it retained until 1938. In 1930, Canberra University College, forerunner of the Australian National University, opened in the school premises after hours.

A new era began in August 1939, when the high school classes were finally transferred to the newly built Canberra High School in Acton. Primary classes remained at Telopea Park School. The following year, under the selective system introduced by the New South Wales Department of Education, secondary classes were formed at Telopea Park School for students who did not gain places at Canberra High School. This arrangement continued until 1955, when Telopea Park School was classified as a high school and the name changed to Telopea Park High School Primary school classes were later removed to the newly established Griffith and Forrest Primary Schools. Between 1959 and 1976 further additions were made to the existing buildings, including extensions to the front foyer, the construction of a three-story block of classrooms and the building of a new library and canteen complex. The Assembly Hall was built in 1960.
The 1970s and 1980s also brought considerable changes in the management and curriculum of the Telopea. In 1974, the administration of the school was officially transferred from New South Wales to the ACT Schools Authority and two years later, with the advent of the College system in the ACT, Telopea Park High School became a 7-10 high school. By the early 1980s, dwindling enrolments and the threat of possible closure led to considerable debate about the school's future.


The French-Australian School at Telopea Park School commenced operations in 1984. The school now consisted of a Kindergarten to Year 6 bilingual primary school and a neighbourhood high school, where students could either continue their bilingual studies to Year 10 or study a normal ACT high school program.

At the time of writing, Telopea Park School is thriving. It has a large enrolment and student places are eagerly sought in both the primary and secondary sectors of the school. The French-Australian program is firmly in place and has received interest and praise from many different quarters. Former and present Telopea Park students continue to achieve great success in academic and non-academic fields. Since that memorable opening day in 1923, much has happened at Telopea Park School. The initial enrolment of 58 students on the first two days of operation rose to 1,400 students in the 1950s and is currently close to 1,100. Some of the present students are the children and grandchildren of former students.

Over the years, the initial building of four classrooms has been greatly extended. The most recent addition, a gymnasium and suite of class rooms, opened only this year. For most who attended the school, the early section of the school with its large high ceilinged class rooms and the famous “brick corridor” remains a focus for nostalgia. It has become a symbol of permanence and security in a constantly changing city.

Australian staff members, teaching in English, are employed through the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services. French staff teaching in
French are trained and qualified by the French National Ministry of Education, Paris. They are seconded to work at Telopea Park school.

The school is led by an Australian Principal, Trish Wilks, with assistance from Jean Isidro, the Head of French Studies (“Proviseur”)

The school is administered as part of the Australian Capital Territory Government school system. It is accountable to the French and Australian authorities as well as to the ACT Department of Education and Training.

In the primary section, the school provides a bilingual education in the English and French languages from Kindergarten to Year 6. All students study a harmonized French/Australian curriculum, receiving instruction in French and English in different proportions according to each year level.

In the secondary section, the Bi-lingual program continues with a separate French stream (EFS) providing instruction for the Brevet examinations in Year 9. Students study four subjects in French and three in English. The Australian stream provides an educational program meeting the requirements of ACT comprehensive secondary education. A wide range of electives is offered. All students are also expected to study at least one other foreign language of which six are offered.

All students are eligible to attain an ACT School Certificate at the end of the forth year of the secondary school (Year 10).

Students can continue to Narrabundah College for Years 11 and 12 to study for the French Baccalaureate, the International Baccalaureate or the ACT Year 12 Certificate and qualification for university entrance.