

# Students from far, far away

NSW education regions changed last year and as a result, for the first time in Southern Star's 14-year history, schools from throughout the state were invited to participate.

When the applications started rolling in there was great interest from schools in the Southern and South Western Sydney areas, as the management committee had expected.

What wasn't expected was the application from a little school in the Far Far West.

Bourke Public School's creative and practical arts coordinator and teacher Bree Mowbray said she saw an opportunity for her students and grabbed it with both hands.

"I was so excited when I saw the expression of interest put out by the Southern Stars team," Ms Mowbray said.

"Because we are so isolated, we don't really get a whole lot of opportunities for our students.

"I saw this and though we'd give it a shot."

Twenty students from years 3 to 6 made the 12-hour bus journey to Wollongong with Ms Mowbray, their principal and teacher's aide.

"The distance isn't as daunting as you think for us," Ms Mowbray said.

"It's not a big deal for us to travel four hours each way to play school sport against another school, so 12 hours, while being a long way away, is worth it for us to give our students this one of a kind opportunity.

"They are a lovely group of students - very happy-go-lucky and very easy-going, so we are having a lot of fun.

"Some of the girls have never seen the beach before, so that has been really exciting too.

"Our whole school and community has been



Bourke Public School students enjoy the novelty of visiting the beach while in Wollongong. Picture: KIRK GILMOUR

so supportive and helped us to fundraise so that we could get here. I think they are as excited for us as we are to be here."

Ms Mowbray said it was quite an experience for the students, considering there are more students in the show than people living in Bourke itself.

"There are about 2000 people in the whole town, so performing with 2800 other students is quite overwhelming for the girls, but they are taking it in their stride," she said.

The Bourke students will be involved in all the mass dance numbers as well as *Spice Up Your Life* and *Absolutely Everybody*.

Other first-time schools to join the Southern Stars family include Campbelltown Performing Arts High, Caringbah High School, Connells Point Public School, Hammondville Public School, Liverpool Girls High School, Mawarra Public School, Strathfield High School, Sylvania High School, and Young High School.

## Alumni return favour



Matt Geronimi

MANY of the choreographers working on Southern Stars #webelieve2014 are alumni of the show and are determined to pass on the same great opportunities as they received when they were in the show.

Matt Geronimi, best known for his stint as a dancer on *So You Think You Can Dance* season three, is no exception when it comes to his involvement with the show, which stemmed from his experiences of performing in Schools Spectacular in his high school years.

"It's important to give back

when you can," Matt said.

"My experiences in performing in School Spec was my first real taste of performing on such a large scale and I wanted to give kids coming through today the same opportunities."

It is the second time Matt has been asked to choreograph a routine for Southern Stars, working with the Southern Stars Performing Company high school dancers. With a strong background in ballroom dancing, two years ago he wowed with an intense Tango routine for the featured dancers.

This year Matt has

choreographed a routine to the song *Oh So Quiet* (Bjork), sung by rising musical star Siena Elchaar, and is in the segment which deals with teenagers and what they believe in.

"I really wanted to pay homage to the original film clip for the song," Matt said.

"This piece is about teenagers and their mood swings - being up and then the next moment being down and the next up again!

"There is a fury of motion at times and then some almost slow motion sequences and a lot of light and shade.

"We are working around and with a vocalist in this routine, and that adds extra elements when developing choreography."

Matt said he was lucky to be given such a great group of students to work with for the item.

"They are such a select group of dancers," he said.

"I'm spoiled for choice because all of them are so good. They can not only dance they can flip, do aerials, anything I ask of them.

"It's really a pleasure to see how they have developed since two years ago when I worked with them. They are amazing kids."

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