



Tunable Falls Community School

Annual Report 2014

From the Committee

This was a year of growth for our school as we increased enrolments, resources and staff numbers. We met many of the objectives we had set for ourselves and continued to focus on consolidating our educational standards.

The Stephanie Alexander Garden Kitchen program became deeply embedded in the school community and curriculum. Thanks to the tireless work of a group of volunteers and our dedicated staff, the children experienced a wide range of activities and learning based around growing and cooking garden produce. The garden was integrated into all Key Learning Areas (KLAs) throughout the year.

We had three classes with the youngest being the kindergarten-only class which again was welcomed and appreciated by parents. The school remained committed to keeping this class sustainable into the future.

A long standing teacher resigned at the start of the year due to health issues. The school community began the year with an event to thank him for his deep commitment to the school over the previous eight years.

In his place, we welcomed a former pupil of the school and Co-op resident to teach lower primary. She brought a burst of energy and enthusiasm which enabled her to both fit in well and to bring a new vibe to her class.

We added a second teachers' aide to provide support as student numbers increased. As a qualified teacher, the new aide also provided relief teaching support as needed. Both aides, together working 9 days per week, were vital in delivering assistance and one-on-one support for students.

Our new admin officer for 2014 proved to be very effective in her position, organising our office and creating calm out of the general chaos. Her warm and welcoming manner has been embraced by all of our school community.

We hired an additional office support person to work one day a week reviewing and preparing policies and procedures ahead of registration in early 2015. This huge job was comprehensively and thoroughly tackled to ensure that we would be ready.

Preparation for registration also dominated the teachers' time throughout the latter part of the year. We hired a regular relief teacher so that the senior teacher could devote Fridays to this task.

It became clear that the school needed a dedicated paid maintenance person rather than parent volunteers. A father of one of the students took on this role and not only ensured that the buildings and grounds were well maintained but was also instrumental in developing emergency plans and greatly contributed to the building planning processes undertaken throughout the year.

Despite some changes, the management committee continued competently and cohesively to direct the school. One member resigned but continued to lead strategic planning meetings through the year, and a new parent joined in March. She quickly became a powerhouse of energy and efficiency in many areas.

The committee again held two strategic planning meetings and two team development days during the year with notable positive impact on team cohesion and long term planning.

Formal staff appraisals were introduced mid-year with positive feedback from all involved, with the aim that this will be an ongoing annual procedure.

After a concerted effort on behalf of committee and staff, the school was successful in an application for a BGA grant to build a new learning centre in 2015. The new building will provide an extra classroom space meaning the children can be divided into four classes – one of the school's key objectives.

The committee also began planning and organising funding for the renovation of the old 'tea bails', a derelict structure on co-op land near the school. In a long term arrangement with the co-op, the school agreed to renovate the building to use as an extra classroom space with long-term use and ownership remaining with the co-op. The building work was scheduled to begin during the 2013-14 summer holidays.

The school office upgraded to a large free-standing colour A3 photocopier/printer that greatly eased the production of teaching and other materials.

As a result of careful budgeting and steady/increasing enrolments, the school was able to build upon existing savings to end the year with a healthy bank balance. Some of this was already allocated to the tea bails renovation and new classroom building planned for 2015.

The students experienced many wonderful learning events during 2014. In addition to regular visits to NAIDOC day and the Byron Bay lighthouse, the students went on an excursion to the Bentley anti-CSG mining blockade outside of Lismore. This timely and topical event provided an excellent opportunity to discuss an issue that was dominating the lives of many in the broader community.

Other excursions and activities were a trip to Brisbane, lantern making with LightNup and a visit from the Garden Guru Phil Dudman. In addition, the school hosted a successful fundraising information night and dinner for Sea Shepard.

The committee and staff continued to focus on keeping attendance rates high with the result that levels remained strong. The attendance and discipline policies, completed in October, provided clear guidelines on how to respond to problems as they arose.

We formally became a KidsMatter school with the objective of creating a safe and respectful place for all children.

This year saw the school grow and become not only a wonderful place of education, but also a sustainable one.

Tien Tyndale
Management committee secretary

About our school

We are a small parent-run independent school situated amidst the lush rainforest of the Tuntable Valley, 10 kilometers east of Nimbin, in northern NSW.

The school was opened in 1981 by a group of families living on the Tuntable Cooperative Community. These parents were committed to providing their children with an education consistent with their values, which at the time were considered alternative to the mainstream. Some of those values included the importance of an environmentally sustainable lifestyle, the need for a closely integrated relationship between family, community and school in a child's education, the value of each child's gifts and their own unique learning styles, the value of independence and the flexibility this offers the school in being able to support a child's journey into adulthood. These values continue to be at the core of the school's value base.

We offer classes from Kindergarten to year 6 in three classes. Our paid staff include: three teachers, two teachers' aides, an administrator and part-time maintenance person. We also have two specialist external teachers providing music and circus classes. The parent body forms the majority of a volunteer work force, who perform the other duties involved in running the school.

Teaching staff report directly to the management committee, which consists of parents of students, who run the school as a cooperative. This is one of the ways in which the link between the school and its community of families is unified. The committee meets every two weeks during term time, and additionally for strategic planning and team building sessions throughout the year.

The school's physical environment and the children's freedom to interact with their natural surroundings are fundamental elements of the school. The children swim in the beautiful Tuntable Creek at lunchtime and after school, building dam walls, skimming stones and managing the cat fish. They climb trees and play games running through the bushland grounds, build cubbies, and create villages in the large sandpit.

The size of the school and its independence allows the teachers to respond to events quickly, integrating them into the children's learning program. Parents and committee members are encouraged to share their skills. There is an incredible diversity amongst the school members and within the surrounding community, often with a creative bent and a refreshing degree of free thinking. There is a strong sense of positive 'can-do' encouraging the children to reach for the sky and follow their dreams.

Respect and responsibility

We have a positive approach to guiding behaviour. This builds children's confidence and self-esteem and is based on the development of caring, equitable and responsive relationships between parents, educators and children.

We regularly address and review the children's wellbeing using the *KidsMatter* Framework. Our goals within this are to:

- create and foster an environment in which children experience mutually enjoyable, caring and respectful relationships.
- help children to understand how their behaviours and actions affect themselves and others.
- support children to communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.
- role model positive ways to relate to others.

Our three guiding principals are:

1. The right to be safe.
2. The right to learn
3. Treat others in a way that you would like to be treated.

All boundaries and agreements stem from these principles and are related to students on these issues.

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction

We implemented a formal evaluation process to measure parent, student and staff satisfaction in term 3. Student surveys were conducted in class and written surveys were distributed to staff and families.

While the results were overwhelmingly positive, the suggestions for improvement still provided useful ideas for discussion. These were taken to the strategic planning meetings to be evaluated and incorporated into the long-term vision for the school.

Other indicators backed up the results of the surveys in showing overall satisfaction is high.

Student enrolments continued to increase throughout the year. Regular school functions were well attended and had a positive atmosphere of commitment and support.

Parent meetings, which provide parents with a formal opportunity to communicate with the management committee, were held each term. Issues raised were addressed to the satisfaction of all.

Parent/teacher meetings were also held through out the year, with the focus being on each student's academic progress. Any issues raised in these meetings related to individual situations and did not express overall negativity about the school.

Enrolment policy

We have an upper limit on enrolments of 40 students. Within that, there were constraints within particular age groups due to classroom space and size.

To enroll, families are asked to complete an enrolment application and then to meet with members of the committee. As a parent-run school, it is vital that new families understand, and are committed to, the level of involvement that will be expected of them.

Student body

In 2014, we had 40 students enrolled throughout the year. The gender balance was 40% girls and 60% boys, with two students self-identified as Indigenous. The majority were Anglo-Australians with English as a first language.

In the past, the majority of students lived on the Tuntable Cooperative Community, however as our reputation has spread, our students have been drawn from a wider area. In 2014, students attended from Jiggi, Stony Chute, Nimbin, Mountain Top and the Tuntable valley.

Typically students come from families with an average to low income, with about a third from single parent families.

Attendance

We continued to target student attendance levels with a thorough review of our attendance policy and procedures. This was distributed to families and discussed at teacher-parent meetings.

Through this we identified three children with poor attendance and through implementation of the procedure we initiated a series of letters and meetings to address the attendance issues early on.

Following this policy, we un-enrolled one student because of poor attendance.

Standardized testing

For student NAPLAN 2013 outcomes, please refer to the Australian Government's *My School* website at: <http://www.myschool.edu.au>

Professional learning and teacher standards

In 2014, we had three permanently employed teachers, one regular relief teacher (on day per week in term 4) and two teachers aides. All permanent and relief teachers were fully qualified with Bachelor of Education (Primary) degrees, or equivalent, from approved higher education institutions. All of our teaching staff in 2014 were female and identified as non-Indigenous.

Our teachers attended additional professional development training delivered by Australian Independent Schools (AIS) covering the new curriculum in all Key Learning Areas (KLA).

Policies and procedures

Our policies were compiled into three manuals: (1) Student safety and welfare, (2) Health, safety and environment and (3) Administration and staffing, which were available from our office upon request.

In 2014, we began a comprehensive review of our policies ahead of our registration in 2015.

Priority areas for improvement

We identified the following areas as priorities for 2013:

Kindergarten specific class

We maintained our kindergarten specific class, which had been trialed in 2013 and proved to be a successful learning program for the youngest children in the primary school system. Not only did the outcomes for the children improve as a result of having a separate class for this age group, the overall number of student enrolments also steadily increased since its inception.

Professional development for new curriculum

Teaching staff continued to complete professional development to prepare for the implementation of the new curriculum. Scope & Sequences and programming for the new syllabuses were developed. This process would continue into the next year.

Continuing improvement in student achievement

Priority areas for student learning

1. Building Numeracy through authentic learning
2. Building Quality Teaching & Learning
3. Student Attendance
4. Parent, Teacher and Community participation in collaborative planning

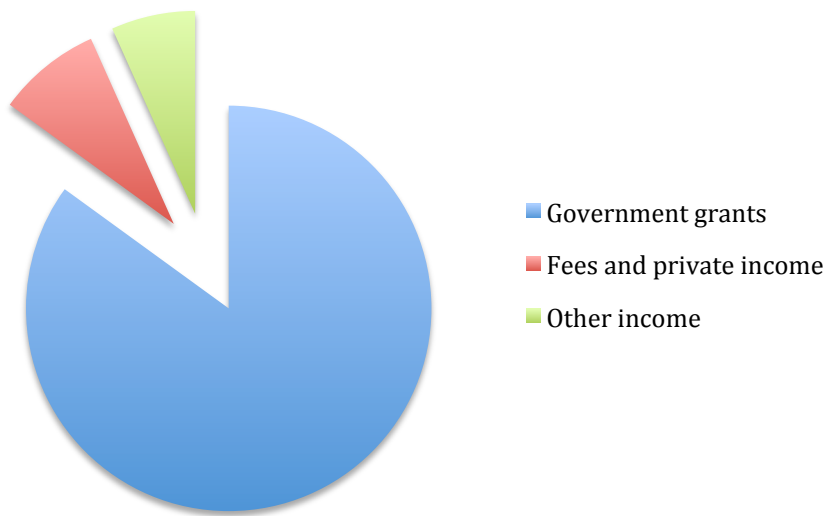
SEE plan – a specialised learning program to integrate with garden

The Sustainable and Environmental Education (SEE) plan is a specialized learning program to be integrated with the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden.

The integration of this into classroom planning and programming continued to be a priority area throughout the year.

Summary of financial information

Recurrent / Capital Income



Recurrent / Capital Expenditure

