



# Tunable Falls Community School

## Annual Report 2015

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### From the Committee

It has been a very special year with some exciting developments and events.

To begin with, we designed and started building the new classroom funded by our successful 2014 application for an Australian Government BGA grant. The site of the new building is at the edge of the playing field. The building was designed to fit into the existing school style and complement our beautiful setting. Jason White, of Jazz Construction, started construction mid-year with completion planned for early 2016.

To provide much-needed space in the interim before the new classroom was completed, we completed the renovation of the old 'tea bails', a building on the Coordination Cooperative's land (which encloses the school) adjoining the school. Planning for this began in 2013, with the work taking place in early 2014. The new room was ready to use by mid-year 2015, and became our dedicated music room.

We held a morning tea to celebrate the transformation of a ruin into a beautiful space for the children and the Co-op to use into the future. One of the original community member's came along and gave a talk on the history of this building, which was fascinating for all who attended.

As part of the new classroom project, extensive work was carried out to redefine the parking area next to the school. This resulted in designated drop-off and pick-up area, speed reduction measures, improved road surface and school zone signs to keep the area safe for children.

In term 2, the school successfully went through the registration process with the well-earned result of being registered for another five years. The preparation for this began in early 2014 and demanded a great deal of time from everyone involved but the benefit of it is that our policies, procedures and practices are more streamlined and effective.

In addition to our three classroom teachers, we had three part-time teacher's aides. We continued with our contracted music and circus teachers, each working one day a week. Support staff were maintenance (one day), library (one day), admin (three days) and additional admin (one day).

Due to injury and family illness, two teachers needed extended time off in term 3 and 4. We hired two short-term relief teachers to cover these absences. The relief teachers slotted into our school community very well and admirably kept the classes on track until the teachers were able to return.

The committee had two long-term members leave after many years of hard work and devotion. The committee remained strong and functional in large part due to the clear direction in which they left it. The new members have brought a renewed enthusiasm and ideas to the school management.

The committee again held two team building days with staff to foster a strong, happy and unified working relationship. Additionally the committee and staff met for two day-long meetings to focus on strategic planning and operations respectively.

Student numbers have remained strong throughout the year. We have enjoyed welcoming new families into our school community.

The teachers organised a bumper year of excursions and activities, in addition to the ongoing curriculum. The children enjoyed a billy cart derby, cross-country competition, NAIDOC day celebrations, visiting the Northern Star Newspaper office, the Snake Man's assortment of creatures and lantern making for the Winter Solstice celebration.

The lower primary class enjoyed a few days camping at Flat Rock, while the upper class went to Koinonia for their much-anticipated rope-swinging and rock climbing camp. The whole school went on the annual staff, students and families camp at Stradbroke Island. These camps are always a special part of the school experience for everyone.

All together, we've had a very positive and productive year and we look forward to the coming years with much optimism and enthusiasm.

Tracey Gardiner  
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 (aged 5-12) in three classes. Our paid staff include: three teachers, three 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 have a formal evaluation process to measure parent, student and staff satisfaction, conducted in term 3 each year. Student surveys were carried out 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 stayed stable 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 50 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 2015, we had 38 students enrolled throughout the year. The gender balance was 40% girls and 60% boys, with three 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 2015, students attended from Lismore, 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

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

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.

When children develop poor patterns of attendance, we work with the family to identify the issues behind this. We initiate a series of letters and meetings to address these and to educate the families on the many benefits to regularly attending school.

## Standardized testing

For student NAPLAN 2014 outcomes, please refer to the Australian Government's *My School* website at: <http://www.myschool.edu.au>

## Professional learning and teacher standards

In 2015, we had three permanently employed teachers and three 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 2015 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) and the KidsMatter programme.

## Policies and procedures

Our policies are compiled into two manuals: (1) Safe and Supportive Environment and (2) Management and Employment, which were available from our office upon request.

In particular, we have specific policies on attendance, complaints, bullying, behaviour and discipline, which are distributed to families, as well as being available in the school office for review.

The comprehensive review of our policies was completed early in the year in preparation for registration, however we have implemented an ongoing schedule of reviewing our policies and procedures to ensure they remain relevant and reflect practice.

## Priority areas for improvement

We identified the following areas as priorities for 2015:

### **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.

### **Continuing improvement in student achievement**

Priority areas for student learning

1. Quality Teaching and Learning Programs reflecting new syllabus requirements
2. Student well being
3. Student Attendance
4. Parent, Teacher and Community participation in collaborative planning

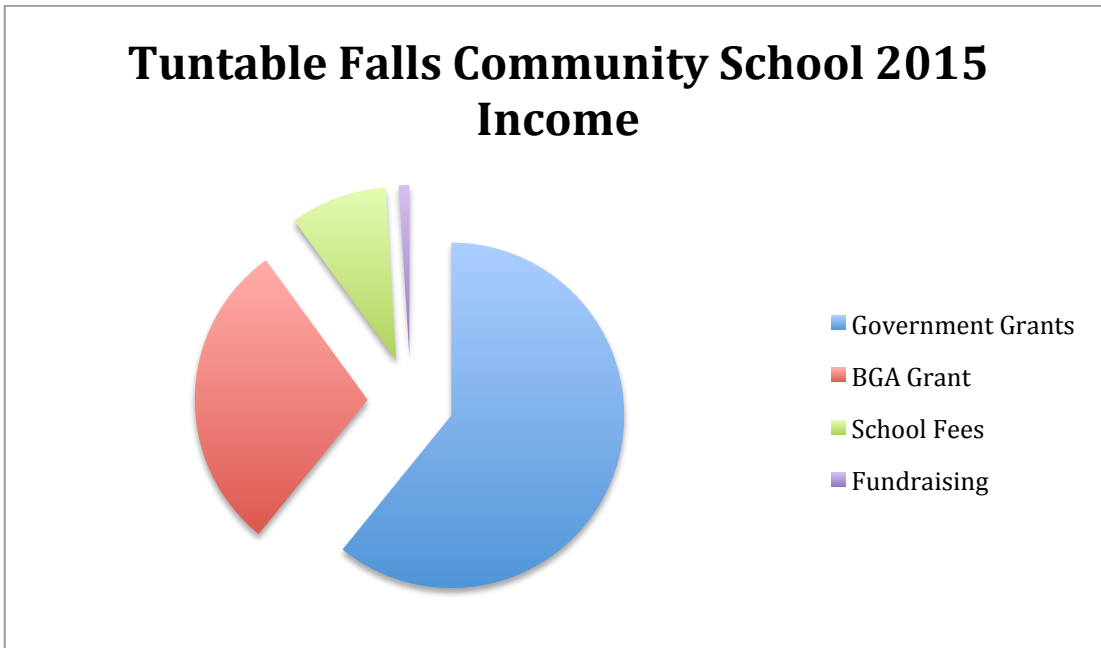
### **SEE plan – a specialised learning program to integrate with local environment and garden**

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

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

