



Tunable Falls Community School

Annual Report 2017

From the Committee

Working as a team is paramount in an environment like the one at Tuntable Falls.

Our committee has grown over the year with many enthusiastic and motivated individuals becoming members and helping with the decision making and running of the school. The tireless efforts ensure that the endless and very various needs of the school are met.

Strategic planning days have provided opportunities for open dialogue and group work to discuss what we would like to see our school achieve. These days enable us to find a focus and enable our vision to become a reality.

In 2017 the biggest changes have involved staff, with a favourite teacher, Ginger O'Brien, taking maternity leave from Term 4, 2017. Her replacement teacher, Jessica McCaul, is a young woman from the Northern Rivers who brings with her a very friendly and enthusiastic personality. She has settled in extremely well.

We currently have several extremely suitable teacher's aides who work alongside our teachers on a daily basis to support the learning of our students. They demonstrate a remarkable warmth and nurturing spirit. Our highly organised administration office, Kirrily Owen, has created many systems that have ensured the smooth day to day running of the school.

Our experienced Kindergarten teacher Deborah Rose continued to focus on offering a nurturing and caring transition from Preschool to Primary school.

In Term 1 2017, Akash Pett joined the school as Upper Primary teacher, having moved back to the Northern Rivers from Melbourne, where he had worked in a school with a similar ethos. Together, with parent Brodie St. John, a successful application for a STEM grant enabled the purchase a 3D printer and the refurbishment of one of the sheds into a maker's space for creative science activities, all ready for 2018.

Parents continue to come in on roster days to utilize their skills. This has included bike workshops and lessons, art classes, science lessons and reading support. Parents also continued to assist with the cooking of healthy lunches in the Stephanie Alexander kitchen. With some produce coming from the garden, fresh lunches are cooked and prepared each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The school doesn't have a canteen and provides lunches that promote healthy eating and little waste. The Stephanie Alexander garden is maintained by the children and parent volunteers, led by our dynamic SEE teacher Nicola Apps. Parents also helped with the maintenance and planting out of the Ethnobotanical trail.

Coming together as community is what we do well. 2017 was no different with family, friends, staff, the preschool next door and community members joining us at our annual fete, winter solstice celebrations and Sea Shepherd fundraiser. These days and evenings involved team work, sitting together to share meals and raising valuable funds for both the school and organisations we believe in.

We are very lucky at Tuntable to have so many dedicated and committed people looking out for the best interests of our students, the school, the wider community and the environment.

About our school

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

The school was opened in 1981 by a group of families living on the Tunttable 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.

The school's physical environment and the children's freedom to interact with their natural surroundings are fundamental elements of the school.

We offer classes from Kindergarten to Year 6 (aged 5-12) in three classes. These classes are made up of one Kindergarten class, a Year 1,2,3 class and a 4,5,6 class. We continue to have confidence in the need for a Kindergarten only class, as this is the year that they start school and need specialized support. It was initially trialed in 2013 and proved to be very successful. Outcomes for the children continue to improve as a result of having a separate class for the six children in this age group. The Kindergarten children attend 4 days per week for this introductory year.

Our paid staff include: three classroom teachers, one environment and sustainability teacher, four teachers' aides, an administrator and part-time maintenance person. We also have four specialist external teachers providing music, science, Karate and circus classes.

The parent body forms the majority of a volunteer work force, who perform the other duties involved in the running of the school. Parents want to be present on their child's learning journey and encourage the idea of a tribe or community, with grandparents, younger siblings and extended family all welcome and encouraged to have daily involvement.

Teaching staff work with 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 week during term time, and additionally for strategic planning and team building sessions throughout the year.

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.

Sustainability is our specialty. It is demonstrated through every aspect of our daily school life in the use of classroom supplies and on excursions. With regards to all classroom and school purchases we always choose paper, cardboard or wood alternatives over plastic regardless of price. We avoid one use product and avoid laminating unless necessary. For any school purchases we ask and find the answers to these questions before purchasing....

Is it organic?

Is it local?

Is it fair trade?

How much power does it use?

What is its environmental impact?

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.

In our holistic educational program, we value emotional intelligence just as much as literacy and numeracy. As adult role models and care givers, we foster this through a sensitive, aware, well informed and nurturing environment. We ensure that there are a range of books available for families and staff to borrow in relation to education on this topic, providing information by the latest research.

Core Values

Communication Skills: Fostering clear and open communication with a focus on self-expression, knowledge sharing and interpersonal skills.

Environment & sustainability: Embodying deep respect for the natural environment and acting for future generations.

Relationships: Nurturing empathy, positive relationships and socio-cultural awareness.

Empowerment: Giving voice to individuality to encourage freedom with responsibility

Respect: Valuing respect for self, others, community, and the built and natural environments.

Physical & Emotional Wellbeing: Developing emotional intelligence, mindfulness, resilience and healthy living practices.

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

The school uses a variety of methods to gauge parental, student and teacher satisfaction with school operations. The school understands the importance of regularly reviewing approval and satisfaction levels. Last year the following formal and informal opportunities allowed the school to test reaction to decisions, policy and school procedures.

- We have a formal evaluation process to measure parent, student and staff satisfaction, conducted in Term 3 of 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 meeting to be evaluated and incorporated into the long-term vision for the school.
- 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.
- Fortnightly committee meetings provided all parents and staff with an opportunity to attend or provide agenda items to be discussed.
- 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. There is also an open door policy where parents can speak with teachers on a more informal basis.
- Staff appraisals were performed in Term 3. This process involves teachers, office administration staff and teachers' aides completing a self-assessment that requires questions to be answered regarding satisfaction levels, main achievements for the year, aims for the following year, training and suggestions to improve the school and school operations. Committee members request feedback and observations from other members of staff, committee members, parents and students. A meeting is held, and the appraisal discussed. Information is then taken on board at committee meetings so that important items can be addressed and followed up.

Student enrolments stayed stable throughout the year. School functions were well attended and had a positive atmosphere of commitment and support and parents continued to support the school through the use of roster days.

Enrolment policy

We have an upper limit on enrolments of 50 students. Within that, there are 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.

A copy of the enrolment policy is located in the school office or can be accessed on the school's website. The School Enrolment Policy explains enrolment procedures.

Student body

In 2017, we had 34 students enrolled. The gender balance was 44% girls and 56% boys, with two students self-identified as Indigenous. The majority were Anglo-Australians with English as a first language.

The following table indicates the student enrollment characteristics:

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
Male	4	4	2	2	3	3	1	19
Female	2	4	2	2	3	1	1	15
Indigenous	-	1		1				2
EALD	-							-

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 2017, students attended from Lismore, Mt Burrell, Rose Rd, Nimbin, Mt Nardi and the Tuntable valley.

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

Attendance

For students to reach their full potential it is important that they attend school regularly. Whilst it is the parents' legal duty to ensure their children attend school regularly, our staff as part of their duty of care monitor attendance each day. The Class Roll is marked every day with absences being followed up immediately by office staff via a phone call, where parents can provide an explanation for the absence. The committee is made aware of sustained student absences. 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 families on the many benefits to regularly attending school.

Prolonged periods of absence occur from time-to-time for various reasons. In these cases, students and their parents apply for exemption from attendance, stating the reasons and period.

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 information is regularly distributed to families via our newsletter and discussed at teacher-parent meetings.

Standardized testing

Our School offers the National Literacy and Numeracy testing to Years 3 and 5 each year, as required by the Commonwealth Government. In 2017, one of the two Year 3 students participated and three of the four Year 5 students participated with two families filling in the consent for exemption and withdrawal.

For student NAPLAN 2017 outcomes, please refer to the Australian Government's *My School* website at: <http://www.myschool.edu.au>

Professional learning and teacher standards

In 2017, we had four permanently employed teachers and three teacher's aides. All permanent and relief teachers were fully qualified with Bachelor of Education (Primary) degrees, or equivalent, from approved higher education institutions. We had a balance of 3 female: 1 male teachers in 2017 and all identified as non-Indigenous.

All teachers have been involved in professional learning activities throughout the year. These activities are designed to develop the professional skills and understandings of staff so as to improve student outcomes. Professional development can take many forms including whole-staff development days, subject specific in-services, meetings and conferences.

Our teachers attended additional professional development training delivered by Australian Independent Schools (AIS) covering the new curriculum in all Key Learning Areas (KLA), the Kids Matter Program, and First Aid.

Additionally, staff attended either individually or in groups a range of professional development opportunities including:

Activity	Date	Staff Numbers or names	Presenter
Math's Assessment SENA	2/3/17	Akash Pett, Ginger O'Brien Deborah Rose	AIS
Kids Matter Implementation Mtg	8/3/17	Ginger O'brien	Kids Matter
Mandatory Child Protection	27/3/17	Kirrily Owen	DEC
First Aid	29/3/17	Deborah Rose, Cath Smith, Simon Adam	Safety Corp
English Textual Concepts	11/5/17	Deborah Rose, Akash Pett, Ginger O'Brien	AIS
Kids Matter Component 4	7/6/17	Deborah Rose	Kids Matter
Whole School Approach to Numeracy	8/8/17	Deborah Rose, Akash Pett, Ginger O'Brien	AIS
NAPLAN Online Training	18/8/17	Amanda King	Naplan
Providing Mental Health First Aid	30/8/17	Akash Pett	MHAA
Schools Leading Learning	12/10/17	Deborah Rose, Akash Pett	AIS

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.

Currently an ongoing review of policies and procedures is underway to ensure they remain relevant and reflect practice.

Priority areas for improvement

We identified the following areas as priorities for 2018:

- Introducing and developing a STEM program which involved hiring a specialist teacher to work in collaboration with teachers. This program engaged the students curiosity, engagement and scientific understanding.
- Further embed the SEE program within the curriculum.
- Professional development particularly in Maths.
- Revisiting our core values

Financial report

The Annual audit for the year ending 31 December 2017 was conducted by Rochdale Accounting and Business Advisory.

For the year ended 31 December 2017 audited financial statement shows that the school again finished the year in a healthy financial position. The annual turnover was \$621,835 and did make a loss of \$6497.

The main income for the school in 2017 was Government grants, school fees and fundraising.

Wages and teaching costs accounted for 65% of operating expenses. Other than wages, the overall operating expenses were almost the same as last year, which is positive.

The enrollment numbers have decreased to 34 but overall the Tuntable Falls Community School remains in a viable financial position.

