



# FERNBROOK SCHOOL

16 Clevedon Road,  
The Basin, VIC 3154

Annual Report

# 2020



# A Message From The Chair

## Kris Inkster

2020 was a very challenging year for the school on multiple fronts. Having only welcomed our first students in Term 1 2019 we had hoped that 2020 would be a year of growth for the school. However, the first impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic began to be felt mid-way through Term 1 and resulted in the first temporary closure of the school with a shift to remote learning. Shortly after in April we were presented with another challenge when our Founding Principal resigned from her position along with several Directors in the midst of the initial Covid outbreak.

Since its founding there have always been two key objectives for the school, being:

1. Relocation to a permanent campus within a natural setting
2. Obtain approval to teach secondary education (Year 7 and beyond)

Following the challenges of Covid and the departure of former Staff in early 2020 the remaining Directors, Staff and Families persevered with a focus on meeting the key objectives listed above.

In July 2020 we were fortunate to obtain the new campus in the Basin, recently vacated by another school. The Campus was an almost perfect fit for us with more classrooms, larger grounds, an amazing and sizable private natural bush setting and facilities suitable for a secondary school. Approval from the VRQA to relocate our campus was obtained in late 2020 and we moved in ready to teach for Term 1 2021.

While outside the scope of this 2020 Annual Report the School has recently obtained approval from the VRQA to teach Year 7 and 8 in 2022. There are many well established Independent Schools in Victoria who have yet to achieve this feat so for a School so young and still developing this is a huge accomplishment.

Both relocation of the campus and obtaining approval for Year 7 and 8 were not easy objectives to meet due to very limited resources and the ongoing impacts of Covid, but we have now achieved both. Considerable amounts of time and effort were given by the Directors, who are unpaid volunteers, over the last 18 months, while the paid staff all worked a large amount of unpaid overtime. As a community we are very grateful for all their hard work.

While we have seen some staffing changes recently there remains a core group of staff, families and volunteers who are dedicated to the school and making sure that it and the children thrive for many years. There are still many months of Covid impacts ahead of us but looking back over the last 18 months Fernbrook School has built a solid foundation that will carry the school forward for many years.

## Members Of The Board 2020

### Currently Active

Chair / Treasurer:	Kris Inkster
Secretary:	Kelly Winters
Director:	Glenn Faulkner (appointed May 2021)
Director:	Debbie Connelly (appointed May 2021)
Acting Principal:	Di Varner (non-voting member)

### Former Members

Director:	Penny Fisher (resigned May 2021)
Director:	Brad Armstrong (resigned May 2021)
Director:	Lauren Armstrong (resigned May 2021)
Director:	Ben Phillips (resigned September 2020)
Director:	Terry Crane (resigned June 2020)
Director(Former Chair):	Ian Parsons (resigned April 2020)
Director:	Tim Heenan (resigned April 2020)
Fomer Principal:	Jane MacDonald (resigned May 2020) (non-voting member)

We would like to thank all former board members for their contribution to the school.

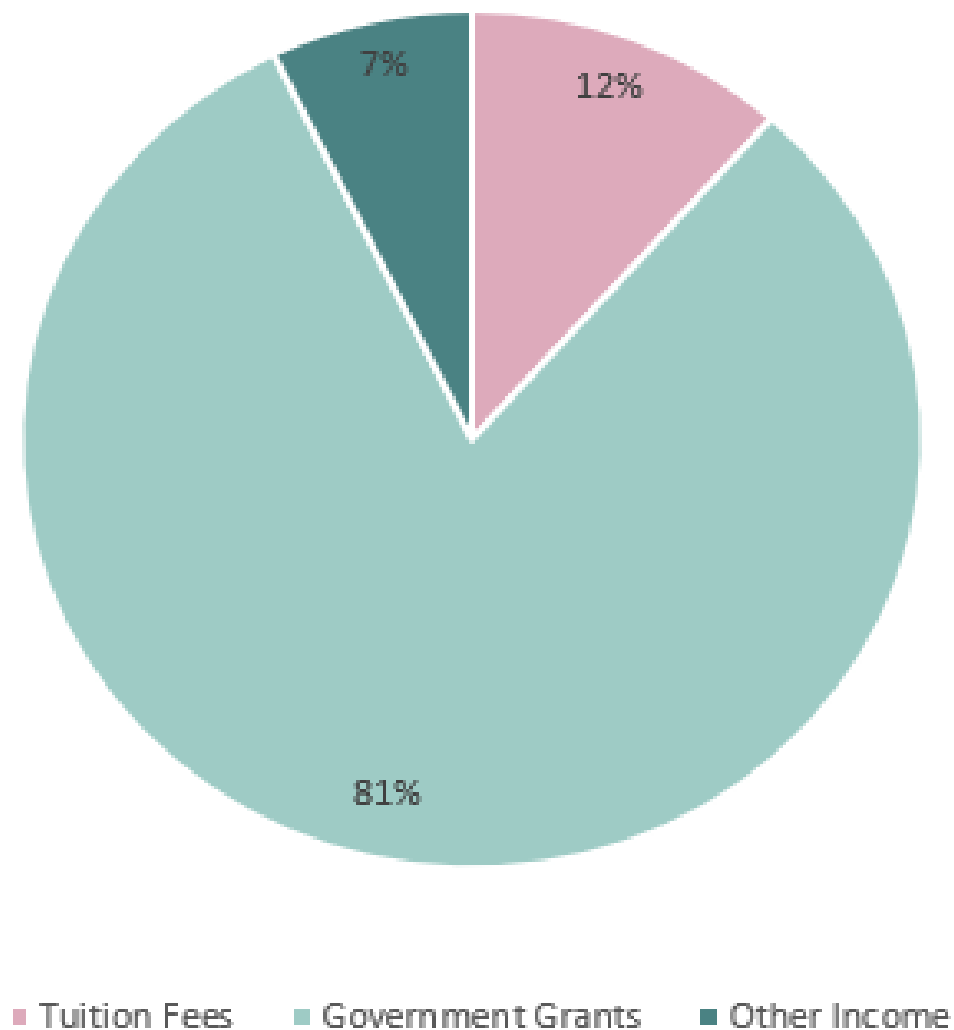
## Financials 2020

### Revenue

In 2020 the majority of revenue was obtained from Government Grants in the form of recurring funding. This funding is calculated annually and is based on the number of enrolments at the school.

Additional sources of funds in 2020 included tuition fees, sub-lease rental income from the on-campus property, State Disaster Funding and Government Cash Flow Boosts as a response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

### 2020 Income



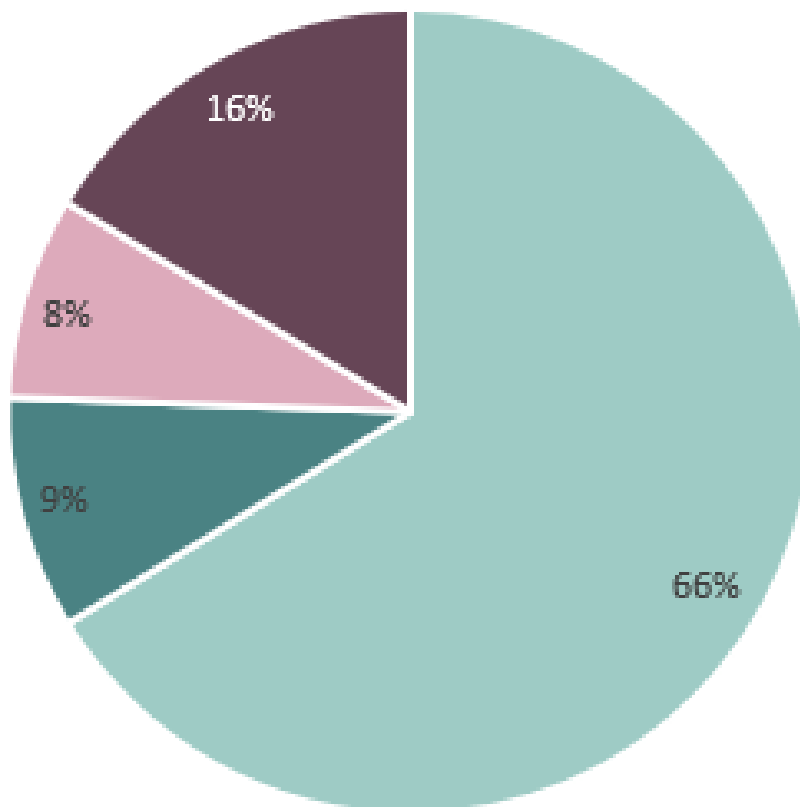
## Financials 2020

### Expenses

Staff Salaries are the biggest expense in schools typically accounting for 60-70% of all expenses. Admin expenses are the second biggest expense after salaries however account for a much smaller percentage overall. Tuition expenses such as classroom materials account for just under 10% of all expenses which is

again typical in most schools. Property expenses are the other main category making up 9% of expenses. Property expenses are largely fixed expenses and will decrease in coming years as salaries, admin and tuition expenses increase with greater enrolments.

### 2020 Expenses



■ Salaries ■ Property Expenses ■ Tuition Expenses ■ Admin Expenses



# Acting Principals Report

## Di Varner

Term 1 2020, started uneventfully and somewhat optimistically at Maxwell Creative School. We had two new teachers (Krystina and I), had grown from a fledgling school of 19 children in 2019 to a school of 29 children and, working with the founding Principal Jane MacDonald, were taking the school into its second year of operation. It seemed like every other start to every other school year except for small rumblings in the media about an epidemic in Wuhan, China. Before the term had even concluded some ten weeks later, our entire school community would find ourselves and our everyday lives in a very different place.

Within the space of just two months, our school was closed, an epidemic in China was now a global pandemic and staff were confronted with the logistics of how to deliver a previously unimagined teaching methodology called 'remote learning'. Within a couple of weeks, came the sudden and unexpected resignation of the Principal. It was at this time that I took on the role of Acting Principal and working collaboratively with the staff, began the process of mapping out the path forward. This was not the start to the year that any of us expected.



18th March, 2020

The start of remote learning in response to the quickly developing Covid-19 situation, in Victoria and Australia.



28th January 2021

The first day of term at our new campus in The Basin after relocating during the Christmas Break



Emerging from Lockdown in mid-May and back into perceived normality, we once again forged ahead only to find ourselves forced back into Lockdown less than two months later. This was a time of bleakness not only for our school community, but also for the global community. The staff soldiered on with remote learning and always at the forefront of our planning and delivery, the best interests of our children and families. It was also during this period that Eliza Phillips (staff member and parent) decided to leave the school. Despite this very difficult time in our school's short history, it was also a time of reflection, collaboration, growth and optimism.

## Acting Principals Report cont.

During this three-month period of Lockdown, many positive things occurred. The revisioning of the school's philosophy was undertaken, a review of the existing teaching methodology and pedagogy, an overhaul of the physical learning spaces, the purchase of new resources and most unexpectedly of all, finding and securing our current school site at The Basin. Most importantly of all, this new site afforded us the opportunity to establish a secondary school, a significant component of the school's original vision and one not able to be realised at the Cockatoo site. Despite the darkness of 2020, there was light at the end of the tunnel.

Emerging from Lockdown in late October, the children returned to an invigorated and highly motivated staff, a new learning program and carefully considered and well-resourced learning spaces. In term 4 we began our very first Learning Cycle on 'Place Making'. It engaged the children in a way that we had not seen before and was evidenced by their wonderful Learning Exhibition at the end of the year. 2020 ended with staff, children and parents bidding the Cockatoo site (and the name of Maxwell Creative School) a bittersweet goodbye. It had nurtured our school in its foundation years but could not grow with us. And so, in 2021 we moved to our new site to re-emerge as Fernbrook School, where our journey continues.

### STAFFING

#### Teaching Staff 2020

Jane MacDonald:	Diploma Education Post Grad Dip Education	Principal
Rhys Thomas:	Bachelor of Arts Bacelor of Education	Yr F-6
Eliza Phillips:	Bachelor of Fine Arts Grad Dip Education	Yr F-6
Krystina Fisher:	Bachelor of Architecture Grad Dip Ed (Middle Yrs)	Yr F-6
Dianna Varner:	Diploma Teaching (Prim) Post Grad Dip Teaching	Yr F-6 Principal

#### Learning Support Staff 2020

Rochelle Benning: Classroom Learning Support

#### Administration Staff 2020

Sarah Hawthorne: Office Administration

### NAPLAN

Due to the constraints imposed by Covid, the ensuing Lockdowns and the disruption caused by remote learning, NAPLAN was not undertaken by any Victorian students in 2020.



## Acting Principals Report cont.

### Assessment & Reporting

In 2020, a significant evaluation and revision of existing assessment methods was undertaken by the staff. It was felt that there was no systematic and consistent assessment schedule in place and relied heavily on the individual teacher, rather than a whole school approach. Additionally, it was also felt that a comprehensive schedule of assessment was required to enable teachers to identify children at risk, in order for specific and targeted learning interventions to be implemented. The schedule comprises a combination of summative assessments (PATmaths/PROBE analysis of Reading Comprehension/SA Spelling Test) together with formative/diagnostic assessments (writing samples/portfolios/teacher observations). This allows for a twice yearly 'snapshot of learning' to monitor students' ongoing progress.

Staff also trialled a new Reporting format based on a continuum of learning referencing ACARA learning outcomes in both Literacy and Numeracy. It also incorporated general comments about student progress in Contextual Studies and our learning cycles, which link together all ACARA domains in authentic and meaningful ways. Feedback from parents indicated a preference for the new reporting structure as it gave a clear and concise indication of their child's skills, strengths and challenges. Unlike the 2019 reporting format which was highly subjective and at times 'vague', the new format incorporated evidence/data from assessments, teacher observations and student/parent feedback. The continuum format also specified skills attained (in a six month timeframe) and identified new skills to be acquired.

In combination, the revised assessment and reporting format encourages a cycle of ongoing, evidence-based, and reflective teaching and learning.

## Marketing

At the beginning of 2020, the majority of the parent cohort who had enrolled their children at Maxwell Creative School, had located the school via marketing methods which were comprised of online advertising (Facebook/website) and word of mouth (via various home-schooling networks). In late Term 3 2020, and in preparation for our relocation to the new site, marketing strategies were diversified. These included a new website, a pamphlet letterbox distribution to all suburbs within a 10km radius of The Basin and a poster/pamphlet distribution to all kindergartens within a 10km radius of the new site. The new strategy proved reasonably successful and was largely responsible for securing 11 additional enrolments for 2021.



# Acting Principals Report cont.

## Parent Surveys

During 2020, parent feedback was sought in three online surveys. These were:

### 1. Parent Values Survey:

In order to clearly articulate the school's philosophy, parents were surveyed about which specific values they felt, underpinned the school. 90% of parents responded and we were able to clarify and express with clarity, the five main values that represented Maxwell Creative School. These were acceptance, tolerance, inclusiveness, holistic learning and diversity. These core values formed the basis for the revisioning of the school's guiding beliefs, educational philosophy and learning program.

### 2. Remote Learning Survey:

Between Lockdowns 1.0 and 2.0, parents were surveyed to gauge their responses to the effectiveness/challenges of our first remote learning program. Responses from 85% of parents provided staff with valuable feedback into how best to modify and improve our remote learning program, the input being utilised for Lockdown 2.0

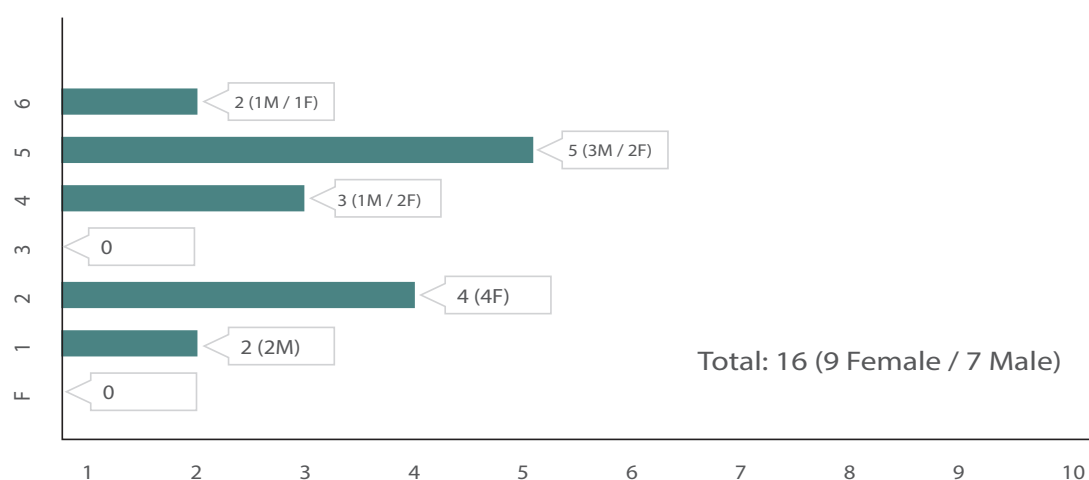
### 3. School Name Survey:

During Term 3 2020 and with the new site at The Basin secured, a survey of the parent community was undertaken to establish if a change of school name would be well received or opposed. It had been felt that Maxwell Creative School was too personally linked to the founding Principal and might not necessarily be appropriate in moving forward. This view was supported by many of the original parent community. It was felt that the new name should perhaps reflect the physical environment of the new site, particularly the small creek which runs through a glade of ferns, across the lower section of the property. A community poll indicated that Fernbrook should be the new name for the school.

## Acting Principals Report cont.

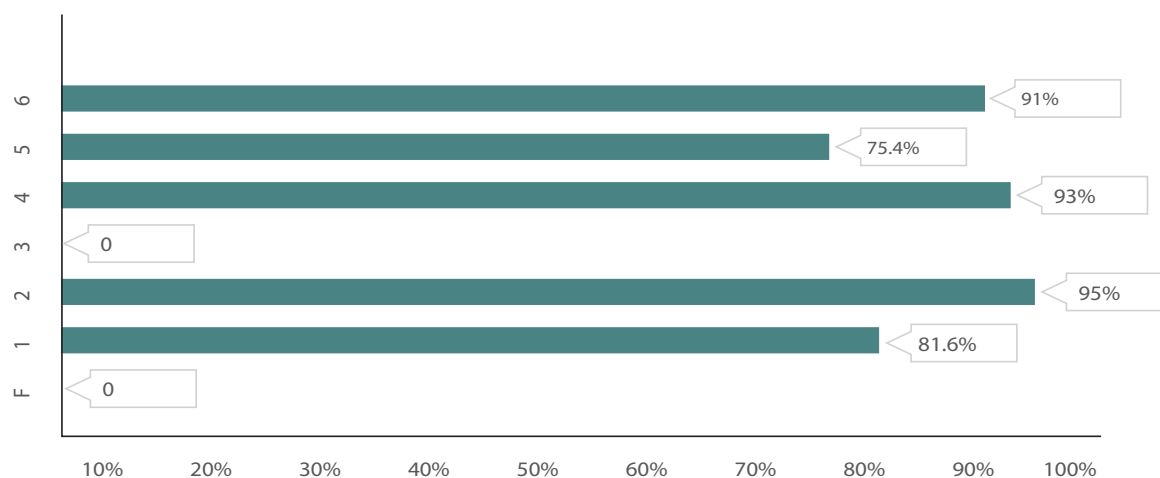
### Student Enrolments

2020 proved a tumultuous year for enrolments. Beginning the year with 29 students, we lost one (in response to the resignation of the Principal), one for financial reasons (due to Covid) and two more due to the departure of a parent who was a staff member. The biggest drop in enrolments however, occurred when the relocation to the new site was announced (30%). For those families living in close proximity to the Cockatoo site, the 45 minute journey to the new site at The Basin, was prohibitive. Though we experienced a significant drop in the number of enrolments, the relocation also provided us with new enrolments from families living in suburbs surrounding the new site. By the end of 2020 we had retained 16 of the original 29 children with 11 more enrolled for the start of the 2021 school year. At the end of term 4, the enrolments were as follows:



### Student Attendance

2020 also provided challenges with attendance, particularly in relation to periods of remote learning. Attendance rates (by year level) were as follows:



The inconsistencies in attendance rates (particularly in Year 5) can be attributed to children who can best be defined as 'school refusers'. Additionally, Covid and remote learning presented new challenges in recording attendance, especially when parents/children did not check in or upload completed work to Dojo on a daily basis.

# Acknowledgements

Whilst 2020 proved to be a difficult and challenging year, it also provided new opportunities for the growth of our school, the staff, the students and the parents.

It taught us as a community, how to be more resilient and to how to cultivate and develop more positive habits of mind. Change, it turns out, is not always a thing to be feared. Whilst Jane's unexpected resignation seemed at the time, to be catastrophic, it provided the opportunity for reflection, reversioning and transition. Covid, though challenging, has encouraged everyone to think differently, to look for silver linings and has given us time to contemplate the big questions in life. It has simultaneously created stress and has also highlighted the importance of family. In our busy, busy lives, it put the brakes on everything (and that's not always a bad thing).

To all the parents, who had faith, who 'hung in there' and trusted that things would be fine, thank you. Because of your commitment, we now have a growing, thriving school. To the Board, who have worked tirelessly and selflessly behind the scenes, thank you. Because of your commitment, we now have financial stability, a fresh start and the very real possibility of a secondary school for our children. To the staff, who navigated unimagined challenges and taught in new and unexpected ways despite the constraints of this new Covid world, thank you. Without your commitment, Fernbrook would not be the school that it is.

Though Covid has presented many new and often difficult and unexpected challenges, Fernbrook is still here, quietly flourishing and growing, despite the storm clouds all around. Fernbrook is the result of the collective commitment of our entire community. Just being here is a reminder to all of us, that wonderful things can happen in the most trying of times.

Di Varner (Acting Principal)

