



The Alice Springs Steiner Association (TASSA)

CHAIR'S REPORT 2017

Our Purpose:

To develop and maintain a successful school based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner.

Our Vision

A world class Steiner School in the heart of Australia.

Our Values

The Alice Springs Steiner School celebrates and cares for our community, our children and our place; we do so with integrity and we do so sustainably.

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2017 was the first year of implementation of TASSA's strategic plan to 2022, and it was a strong year in achievements of the school's new strategic vision. The school has been ably guided by the new management team (Principal, Bruce Thurgood and Business Manager, Grenville Hawkins). The school completed the last building in its first master plan, and commenced work on a new master plan to see the school grow into high school. Each year, the school's teaching and support staff grow from strength to strength. It is with great pleasure that we see new positions filled successfully, attracting interest and wonderful candidates nationally and internationally. At the same time, our cohort of established primary and early childhood teachers deepen their skills, experience and commitment to the school with each year.

We are blessed with the care, concern and commitment that our staff (from management, to administration, to learning support and teaching) give the children and families that make up our wider school community. This year, the school's governance consolidated, with observer members of the Board becoming full members at the 2017 AGM. The school is now moving into an exciting phase in its development and growth; while this comes with some trepidation, every step is taken with careful attention to strong principles of decision-making and good governance.

Strategic Plan Implementation

The school's *Strategic Plan 2017-2022* is the key document guiding the direction of the school in the coming years. 2017 was the first year of implementation. The Governing Body is pleased with the achievement of TASSA with the following:

- Completion of a feasibility study for high school, with the decision made in early 2018 to commence a high school incrementally from 2019;
- A new infrastructure master plan for the site, covering early childhood through to high school;
- Establishment of an Early Childhood Coordinator position and work towards an early childhood development strategy;

- Establishment of an Arrernte Advisory Group and introduction of an Arrernte curriculum to all primary years (taught by a local Arrernte teacher);
- Improved marketing and communications related to the school, such as unification of the Facebook sites into one site controlled by a small number of administrators;
- Increase in teacher release time from teaching to allow for more collaboration and development;
- Re-opening of the Library and appointment of a part-time librarian; and
- Completion of an assets register (including depreciation register and asset management schedule).

This is a considerable body of work, all directly articulated in the TASSA *Strategic Plan 2017-2022*. We are on track with delivery of our strategic objectives. The school can be justifiably proud of its efforts to date to implement the plan and demonstrate it's a living planning document that guides our work.

Infrastructure

In 2017, the final building in the primary school infrastructure was completed, being the Music Room and Class 4 classroom (officially opened in 2018). The building was supported by a grant from the Block Grant Authority (BGA) and cash reserves of the school. The Lands and Building Sub-Committee are to be commended for achieving another beautiful building on time and on budget.

It was particularly lucky that this infrastructure was completed, for Class 1 had to re-open back in the movement room following a fire in the Class 1/ 2 building. While many precious teaching resources gathered by the Class 1 teacher were destroyed, the damage from the fire was fully insured and Class 1 and 2 were soon back in their classroom after a term out for fire damage.

Another significant achievement in 2017 was less glamorous but equally important. With the assistance of a grant from the NT Government, the school significantly upgraded and modernised its sewerage system. With the grey water from the new system, and new irrigation, the oval was able to be graded and re-seeded over the summer break. The children are particularly appreciative of the new oval, even if they are none the wiser for how this beautiful grass is achieved!

The success of achieving the first master plan ensured that the Governing Body did not rest on its laurels. By the end of 2017, a new master plan (pending a detailed site survey) had been prepared with the assistance of David Jacobson from Baxter & Jacobson Architects (BJA). The Governing Body also contracted the same company to provide a comprehensive feasibility study for the move to a high school, so that related decisions (such as infrastructure needs) could be fully incorporated into the decision making.

From a child-centred perspective, 2017 also saw completion of the new fort in the middle of the primary playground (opposite the breezeway between class 2 and 3). This project was initially conceived as the building project for class 3 in 2016, but due to its size and complexity took a little longer to deliver. The fort not only provides more climbing spaces for the kids, it also gives a good vantage point to families watching the Autumn festival!

Finances

The school's financial position continues to remain solid, providing a good platform to enable the Governing Body to take decisions consistent with the strategic plan. The Governing Body is very conscious of its important responsibility to ensure sufficient cash reserves to buffer the school, while also taking strategic opportunities to grow the school.

While some decisions may have more inherent risks than others, the Governing Body is aware that the enviable financial position of the school rests on the hard work and dedication of families that

have come before. Many of whom gave much time, effort and resources to the school generously to ensure its current strong financial position. With this understanding, the Governing Body invested resources this year in ensuring that the most significant decision (whether to move to a high school) was done on the basis of a clear understanding of the financial risks and opportunities of this decision. A comprehensive feasibility study was commissioned and the detailed study that eventuated was a key document informing the Governing Body's decision to move to a high school offering on a year by year basis from 2019.

We recognize that there may be some initial investment and 'carrying of the load' in these early years as the high school grows. Nevertheless, we are confident that this decision is one that provides enormous opportunities for current and future families of the school, and will provide real choice in high school education for the community of Alice Springs into the future. A detailed demographic study was a component of the feasibility study, and we are assured that the community has the capacity to support and grow this school into the future. With each new high school child that enrolls, and benefits from a Steiner education, the school attracts more funding and will build its reputation as a world-class Steiner school in the centre of Australia.

I commend the 2017 audit of the school's financial position to TASSA members. In doing so, I note that in 2017 the Governing Body made the decision to go to market to ensure that auditing services were good value for money. Following this, TASSA engaged new auditors, Basso Newman. The new auditors were very thorough and professional. The auditors have drawn to our attention that the decision to change auditors should have been made at AGM, or special AGM, by member agreement. If any members are concerned by the decision to move to new auditors, I encourage you to raise this for discussion at the AGM on 30 May 2018. In the future, the Governing Body will ensure that any change to auditors only occurs following an AGM, as per the TASSA Constitution.

Our Cash Reserves at December 2017 were \$614,825. This is a decrease of \$264,368. This reflects the impact of the school's co-contribution for the Class 4/Music room building, the refurbishment of the dividing wall in the multi-purpose room adjacent to the office, the walkway between the library and the music room, and the financing of the master plan and feasibility study. It was pleasing to note that the consultant tasked with preparing the financial aspects of the feasibility study commented in particular on the very low 'debt per student' ratio that the school manages. Many other similar sized schools have a far greater debt ratio. The low debt ratio is a significant indicator of the school's strong financial position that gives us confidence to move to expanding the school's offering into high school. The number of funded students has also grown to 159 as at the time of completing this report; this is another positive indicator of the school's ongoing stability and ability to attract and retain students.

I would like to extend particular thanks and appreciation to Harshini Bartlett, who is stepping down from the Governing Body after many years of volunteer service to the school. Harshini has been the Treasurer on the Governing Body for the past 4 years and has given many hours of volunteer work to this role (including chairing the Finance Sub-Committee). Harshini has also put in considerable work in developing a governance manual and resources for the Governing Body that has substantially contributed to the professionalism of our governance. We owe a great deal to Harshini for her volunteer work for TASSA and while it's sad to see her go from this role, we know she will continue to give generously to other projects that benefit us all as a community.

Governance

Michael Tuckwell commenced as the Chair of TASSA at the March 2016 AGM. While the Governing Body was sad to bid farewell to Libby Prell, who steered the school through challenging times into a strong period of growth, Michael has ably filled her shoes since then. Michael has brought a new depth of experience and commitment to the role of Chair, and in 2017 has guided the school and Governing Body through a significant change in senior staff and then implementation of the new strategic plan. The members of the Governing Body would like to record their thanks and

appreciation to Michael for his dedication to the role of Chair, the hours of volunteer time spent between meetings, and his calm and capable handling of all aspects of the role.

Elected at the 2017 AGM were Marli Banks and Stephen Schwer. Marli and Stephen initially joined as observers to the Governing Body, and it was with great pleasure that their full membership of the Governing Body was confirmed by their election. The Governing Body continues to welcome interest from other TASSA members who may be keen to give their skills and energies to guiding the school in the years ahead.

Fair

With the support of parents and carers, 2017 saw another beautiful Fair delivered for the students and community as a whole. The Fair spaces moved into the new building verandahs, bringing the Fair more towards the stunning embrace of the ranges. Kellie Vermolen stepped into the role as Volunteer Coordinator following the resignation of Zoe Fisher, and ably picked up the reins to deliver a Fair that continues to delight all who attend. Kellie has been a dedicated parent volunteer for many years, along with many other parents (an honourable mention goes to Kaye Heenan for her role in logistics).

The Fair committee continued to develop the new structure of Fair coordination that came from the 2015-2016. The 2017 Fair maintained the more streamlined approach of the previous year. While there was less imperative to raise funds, the Fair continued to be an outstanding fundraising event raising similar funds to the previous year! The Governing Body congratulates all who put their heart and soul into making the 2017 Fair the wonderful success it was.

Staffing

Bruce Thurgood and Grenville Hawkins commenced their first full year with the school in 2017. They have proved to be a strong team, complementing each other's skills well. Bruce has a depth of experience as a Steiner school teacher and senior leader over many years. The school is indeed very lucky to have attracted a Principal who can give of his experience and depth of knowledge, from all things anthroposophical through to practical matters associated with teacher recruitment and attraction. Grenville is a very experienced business manager and has progressively worked through all aspects of the school's administration to improve the school's business operations (while at the same time capably managing building projects and grant applications).

Unfortunately, our Class 2 teacher (Trudi) had to leave for family reasons. While we sadly waved goodbye to her, we were very pleased to be able to recruit a very experienced Steiner teacher, Cath, from interstate to fill her shoes. We were also very pleased to have a number of great candidates apply for the Class 1 teacher position at the end of the year, demonstrating that the school is a place that can both attract and retain high quality staff. Welcome to Lucy as she takes on this journey with her class in 2018. At the end of the year, the decision was also made at an operational level to expand the number of teacher assistants, so that an assistant is now available for each of the early childhood and primary classes. We now have a number of new staff who are providing excellent support to the children and, importantly, all class teachers.

As the school moves into its 21st anniversary year in 2018, we reflect humbly on the many achievements that a single year brings to the community that we are all a part of growing. I commend this 2017 Report to you.



Sophie Staughton

Acting Chair, Governing Body

25 May 2018