

Principal's Report

Annual General Meeting of the Association – 16 May 2020



This year, in a change from the past several years, I have decided to provide the Principal's Report to the members of the Association in advance of the Annual General Meeting of the Association. I hope that Association members can read this report prior to the meeting and then ask questions during the Annual General Meeting.

I would like to thank everyone reading this report for your interest in and continued support of The Friends' School. I would also like to thank the Association members for your ongoing engagement with the School. I would like to especially thank the Board of Governors for their time, energy and commitment to The Friends' School.

The purpose of this report each year is to provide an update to the Association on the status of the School. For those of you who might not know who the Association is, the Association consists of current and former Board members who are also Quakers. Their membership in the Association is for life or until they otherwise indicate that they no longer wish to be a member of the Association.

The new School year started like any other here at Friends' – with unbounded optimism and joy of the prospect of the year to come. In February 2020, the School was starting with 1265 students from 890 families, while Friends Health & Fitness had more than 1200 members and Friends' Early Learning was full serving approximately 240 families. The only hint of challenges on the horizon on the first day of school (3 February) were two-fold:

1. One of our Chinese language teachers who is from Wuhan was on the last flight out of Wuhan (20 January) accepted into Australia before Australia blocked all flights from Wuhan. As such she needed to serve a fourteen-day quarantine in her home upon her arrival in Hobart, thus missing the first day of classes (3 February 2020). Thankfully she was safe and healthy as are her family in Wuhan.
2. The second indication was that when Australia blocked entry into Australia from China for non-citizens or permanent residents on 1 February, four of our Chinese students returning from their summer holidays were caught unawares and unable to fly into Australia. One was already in Hong Kong ready to transfer onto a flight into Australia and others were on their way to their respective airports. Three of the students are Year 12 students who are accessing their courses remotely at this time. The fourth, a Year 6 student, spent two weeks in transit in a third country and was subsequently allowed to return to Australia in early March. We hope in the near future that the three Year 12 students will be able to join their cohort of friends back at School.

Little did any of us fully comprehend at that time the flow on effect of the pandemic that was yet to come.

The first month of school proceeded rather smoothly. Students and teachers were fully engaged in learning and the extensive co-curricular program was in full swing. Year 7 camps proceeded, as did events like the luncheon for Alumni who finished at Friends' fifty or more years ago. In fact, it was the largest fifty plus alumni event in the School's recent past. There was some awareness of the virus in China, but not much beyond casual conversation and a watchful eye. In fact, on the Board Planning Day on 29 February 2020, the Board discussed its Areas of Strategic Responsibility in detail and all day long. There was little mention of COVID-19 as a possible risk or threat to the School. I would like to share with you some of the key sequences of events from the impact of the pandemic upon the School.

I started to receive emails from a range of parents throughout the first three weeks of March for the School to change the operations of the School. Additionally, there was much discussion in the press and conflicting advice from both political and health leaders throughout the nation regarding the course of action. We repeatedly heard that schools were safe places for students to be (although not much discussion around staff safety at that time) even though there were other social distancing restrictions being put into place. The first action taken by the School on behalf of students was to stop students from rehearsing in music ensembles before and after school. Secondly, we pulled the School's participation in the Head of the River regatta at Lake Barrington after the Chief Medical Officer for Australia announced late in the afternoon on Friday 20 March that there should be no gatherings of more than 500 people at any event. Unfortunately, there were many families who had already arrived at Lake Barrington (a four hour trip north), the site of the regatta. However, a few hours after Friends' cancelled our participation, Rowing Tasmania cancelled the event in its entirety.

After that weekend, pressure continued to build on the School to take further action. The Tasmanian Department of Education announced the cancellation of all camps and excursions the previous week and The Friends' School followed suit. On Sunday 22 March, the federal government announced that all fitness centres and gyms must close until further notice. As a result, the School was forced to shut Friends' Health & Fitness to the public at 12 noon on Monday 23 March. From that day, many families started to elect to keep their children at home for a variety of reasons; uncertainty about the virus and its transmission, living with older relatives who might more easily be impacted by the virus, or living with immunocompromised family members like those who were either in chemo treatment or had just completed it. There was a great deal of fear in the Hobart community. Immediately prior to shifting to distance learning, the School was seeing more than 40% absentee rate for students. Finally, after seeking advice from the senior state leaders in health and education, and in consultation with the Presiding Members Group, on Tuesday 24 March the School announced that we would be shifting to distance learning. Even with distance learning, the School remains open for those students whose parents need to have their children attend School.

March 26 and 27 were designated as student free days so that teaching staff could plan the shift from face to face instruction to distance learning. This was no easy task. However, since the School has been a one to one Apple computer school for nearly 25 years, both students and staff were well situated to make the shift. Additionally, many on staff had been developing what the School's shift to distance learning would look like well in advance of the

actual transition. Many thanks are in order for staff who enabled the transition to happen: Steve Barratt (Director of Teaching and Learning), Shaun O'Rourke (Deputy Principal) and Richard Lawler (Acting Director of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT)) as well as the timetablers (Jeremy Rackham and Peter Smythe), the Heads of School (Adam Chambers, Lyn Tunbridge, Paul Goodluck, Kim Rowlands, Lou Giudici, Joe Cairns, Mark Febey, Wendy Crow and Fiona Lewis) as well as many of the administrative staff providing incredible support behind the scenes (Susan Buckland – Human Resources Manager, Mark Natoli – Risk and Compliance Officer, Bill Avery – Director of Community Engagement, Shaun Sargent – Director of Business Affairs and Louise Bridge – PA to the Principal). Special mention must be given to Bill Avery, Shaun Sargent and Louise Bridge who drafted and arranged for all of the many communications that needed to be sent throughout the community for consistency and clarity. It required a team to transition the way in which we did with so few hiccups along the way. I thank them all for their dedication and hard work. The School has been frequently complimented by our parent community for the clear level of communication that has been put forward during this crisis.

I also have to add that the entire staff have shown resilience, flexibility and creativity in our new distance learning environment. The School is fortunate to have such a highly skilled and committed workforce.

From 23 March through to the start of term break (9 April 2020) there was a flurry of decisions and communications to update students, staff, parents and community members. Among the most difficult to navigate was that both the state and federal governments were making policy announcements via press conferences expecting institutions like The Friends' School to respond nearly instantaneously. It was nearly impossible to keep up with the public policy announcements.

I would like to make a special mention of Friends' Early Learning. The staff at Friends' Early Learning, lead by Mark Febey and Fiona Zinn, have been remarkable during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have never closed the doors, been in close contact with the children throughout and they are also the ones who deal with a range of bodily fluids on a daily basis. It has not been without difficulties however. Attendance at FEL continued to decline and then suddenly the Federal Government made an announcement that child care would be 'free' for all families for a six-month period starting at the end of March. However, it would only be funded at 50% of the previous revenue. With other child care centres, this rebate in addition to the JobKeepers program the federal government announced, was enough to keep most centres afloat. However, for FEL, it has proven to be disastrous. The centre is currently operating at a loss until the School can better figure out the government assistance.

As one might surmise, nearly all staff energy and focus, since early March, has been taken up dealing with the endurance test with no clear end point that is the COVID-19 pandemic. The full range of possible scenarios have had to be explored.

One important development prior to Term One break was the Board of Governors adopting a COVID-19 Financial Strategy for Term Two. This included devising a special Fees Assistance Fund for families suffering hardship during the pandemic, a commitment to continuing employment for all staff members at the School during Term 2 where there was no direct

government order regarding the operations of that section of the School, and find and implement fiscal savings throughout the School. The Finance and Audit Committee (Craig Stephens, Nick Haddow, Lindsay May, Shaun Sargent and me) recommended a twenty five percent tuition fees reduction on Term Two fees because of the pandemic. I would like to thank the Presiding Members Group (Julian Robertson, Craig Stephens and Natalia Urosevic) also for their leadership during this very difficult period in the history of the School.

Prior to the pandemic hitting Hobart in March, the full range of school business had to be completed. This year, the School is due for its re-registration with the Schools Registration Board. We have been steadily working on re-registration since October 2019 and were able to submit all documentation as required on 31 March 2020. We anticipate the review occurring during Term 2 2020 with a possible visitation happening in Term 2 or Term 3. Re-registration of the School should be conferred by December for the next five years (2025). The School also completed all the documentation to fully join the National Redress Scheme for Historical Sexual Abuse claimants. The School achieved this status in Spring 2019. There have been no additional claims of historical sexual abuse against the School to date. The School also has had to submit its documentation for re-registration as a provider of educational services for international students (CRICOS). We were able to submit the required information by its due date at the end of February 2020. We also await the outcome of that re-accreditation process. There are two additional accreditation processes in train: to be a 'Child Safe' school through an organisation called Child Wise – founded by the Save the Children organisation, and Boarding House accreditation for Walker House. All of these regulatory requirements consume a great deal of time, energy and commitment from both the teaching and non-teaching staff. The School again is very fortunate to have committed professionals to ensure that these requirements are completed with accuracy and honesty.

There have been numerous events postponed or cancelled this year, but chief amongst them is the Peter Underwood Peace and Justice Lecture. The focus this year was on *Reconciliation*. This coincided with the Friendly Conference designed by the Clemes students. Patsy Cameron, an Aboriginal elder from North East Tasmania and Tim McCormack, the Dean of the University of Tasmania Law School were to deliver a joint lecture to the Years 10, 11 and 12 students in early May. Sadly this has had to be postponed until 2021. Additionally, the Quaker Values Committee visit that traditionally corresponds with the AGM weekend has also been postponed. The QVC found a useful model of assistance to practice last year. In 2019, the QVC asked the Physical Education and Health Faculty to prepare a presentation on how the School's values as articulated in the Purpose and Concerns were practiced in their discipline and co-curricular activities. The subsequent day long School visit by the Committee focused on seeing that presentation in action. Reports from both the Faculty and the Committee found the exercise extremely helpful and informative. The exercise enabled the Faculty to better realise all that they do to bring the *Purpose and Concerns* to life. While the initial task was thought to be challenging, the result allowed for those within the Faculty and the visiting Committee to clearly see ideals put into action on a daily basis. Following suit, this year the Quaker Values Committee had requested if the Science Faculty K-12 could perform a similar exercise. This too has been put on hold until 2021.

The world's current predicament has brought into realisation that now more than ever the School should be reflecting upon the following set of questions:

1. Why does the School exist?
2. How does the School behave?
3. What does the School do on a day to day basis?
4. What does success look like?
5. What is important right now?
6. Who is responsible for doing what within the School?

If we can work hard to get these six critical questions correct and reflect upon our way in achieving them, then I believe we will be a long way in enacting our stated outcomes of the *Purpose and Concerns*.

In order to realise the answers to these questions, the Board last year developed a set of Strategic Priorities and aspirational goal statements. They are as follows:

1. Teaching and Learning: We will advance the growth and development of students through a shared responsibility for leadership, exemplary teaching and engaging learning experiences within the aims of the Purpose and Concerns.
2. Culture and Values: We will ensure that Quaker practices and values are embedded in the School's culture and that all decisions are guided by the Purpose and Concerns.
3. People: We will engage and support our people and provide a safe and inclusive environment that promotes professional growth and positive well-being.
4. Community: We will actively build social capital and ensure meaningful engagement with students, parents, staff, Old Scholars, Quakers and the local, national and global community.
5. Physical and Organisational Structures: We will ensure that the physical and organisational structures of the School are developed to transform and promote learning and well-being.
6. Finance: We will adhere to fiscally responsible and ethical decision-making processes in order to ensure the School's long-term financial sustainability.
7. Governance: We will ensure governance best practices: incorporating listening closely for discernment, speaking constructively and seeking unity.

These aspirational goals have guided the work of the School until the onset of the pandemic. I will provide a brief highlight of work done in each area from May 2019 to March 2020.

Teaching and Learning

We will advance the growth and development of students through a shared responsibility for leadership, exemplary teaching and engaging learning experiences within the aims of the Purpose and Concerns.

As this area is the heart of the School a great deal of work has been completed. The School has developed and implemented a new online reporting and feedback system of student learning for parents and guardians to access the progress of their child or children. The School also developed and adopted a new student Learning Support philosophy statement and subsequent policy E-12 to provide better consistency throughout the School in

supporting student learning. The School also completed a thorough review of its Enrolment Practices (more than 18 months in the making) and the Board of Governors adopted it for operational practice as of January 2020. The School continues to work on an E-12 Social and Emotional Learning program for proposed implementation in February 2021. Since the School has shifted to distance learning, the skills required to assist students to learn in this new format has forced all staff members to think differently about their pedagogical practices. For 2020, the School has started a review of several of its curricular areas including Foreign Languages and Outdoor Education K-12.

Culture and Values

We will ensure that Quaker practices and values are embedded in the School's culture and that all decisions are guided by the Purpose and Concerns.

One means to determine the extent the *Purpose and Concerns* is being understood and taken on board by staff new to the School and implemented was through surveying newly appointed staff. A survey was conducted in July 2019 and the responses overwhelmingly indicated that the School was driven by the Purpose and Concerns. This information and confirmation brought great comfort to me, the senior leadership team and the Board of Governors. Another means of determining the extent of the acceptance and integration of the Purpose and Concerns is through the annual visit of the Quaker Values Committee. As stated earlier, there was affirmation of how the Purpose and Concerns informs the Physical Education and Health curriculum as well as the co-curricular sport program. Another source of information regarding how the School's values have impacted alumni over a long period of time came through alumni responses to the biennial survey. Anecdotal evidence, as shared at last year's Yearly Meeting session held in Hobart, from the surveys demonstrated the impact of the School's values on many alumnis' lives over decades.

Our People

We will engage and support our people and provide a safe and inclusive environment that promotes professional growth and positive wellbeing.

In 2019, the School developed and implemented an integrated Wellbeing program for all staff. Enabling staff to access a range of wellbeing programs allows for a sense of belonging and care. One such recent example at the start of the COVID-19 crisis was that the food technology staff made vegetarian soup for lunch for all staff during the first two weeks the School shifted to the distance learning program. This simple activity enabled staff working on campus to feel connected at a time that isolation was being imposed from the outside. The School has also worked hard over the past year to design and implement a new Professional Learning framework for all staff that more closely aligns with the School's stated goals. I would like to thank Susan Buckland, Steve Barratt and Shaun O'Rourke for leading this important work.

Community

We will actively build social capital and ensure meaningful engagement with students, parents, staff, Old Scholars, Quakers and the local, national and global community.

The work completed in this area is largely the responsibility of Bill Avery as the Director of Community Engagement and his team. Since Bill arrived at Friends' in 2017, the entire

connection between and amongst our community members has been revamped. There are many examples of what has happened in the past year – a redesign of *What's On*, the weekly newsletter sent home to all families, the development of *The Rose and Waratah*, a quarterly document sent via email to all of the email addresses on file, and finally the development of a new communication called *The Torch*, named after Cracker Morris's poem celebrating the 75th year of the School's existence. *The Torch* is largely targeted to the School's alumni group and shares Development Office activities, led by Lucy Loney (Ogilvie '88). Bill also takes a large role with all School communications that are frequently sent under my name. Bill and Lucy have also worked hard to revise alumni relations with the School by laying down the Old Scholar Association and developing in its place a new organisation called the Friends' Alumni Community Group that more broadly invites others with long term ties to the School to reconnect. There is still much work to do in this area, but under the leadership of Bill Avery and Lucy Loney, we should all be confident that the School is well on its way to enriching our community connections. I should also add that during the pandemic, the School community has responded generously in continuing to assist the School. I am confident everyone would join me in thanking all those community members for their sustained belief in and benevolent support of The Friends' School. This will continue to be an important growth area that will enable the campus to transform the positive educational experience for generations of students to come.

Physical and Organisational Structures

We will ensure that the physical and organisational structures of the School are developed to transform and promote learning and well-being.

The work in this area was full steam ahead for much of the year after last year's AGM meeting. Plans for the Campus Redevelopment Phase 1 (a new Sports Hall and renovation of the WN Oats Gymnasium into a student learning centre) have continued. A development application has been submitted to Hobart City Council as of March 2020. Whether or not the School proceeds immediately after the development application phase is still undecided depending upon the severity and depth of the COVID-19 crisis. The School also took the step to fully renovate the Design and Technology building on the High School campus during the summer holidays. The \$600,000 renovations allow for much improved safety features and additional teaching and work spaces.

More exciting than the completed and planned physical renovations of the School grounds was the further integration of Friends' Early Years into the instructional structure at Morris. The newly integrated early childhood program has been renamed Friends' Early Learning. The School is working to integrate the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme with our youngest learners on campus. This integration has resulted in a new leadership model at Morris with Mark Febey having oversight of EL through to Year 6 supported by Wendy Crow as one Deputy Head of Morris in charge of curriculum and the PYP program for Years 2-6 and Fiona Zinn as the second Deputy Head of Morris in charge of the FEL to Year 1 programs. The School is incredibly fortunate to have Fiona join our staff this year as she is a world-renowned early childhood learning specialist with a focus on the PYP program. In recent years, Fiona has consulted around the world with international schools' early learning programs. I must add here that FEL has encountered much difficulty since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As many of you might be aware, the federal government has restructured child care across Australia promising 'free' child care to all families. While

this is an excellent initiative, the government is only paying 50% of what was previously paid to FEL. As such, it is uncertain how much longer the School can support FEL given the significant financial cost of running the program. The government changed the model of how child care centres were funded overnight with very little recourse or ability to provide feedback on the impact their new funding model is having upon some not for profit institutions like The Friends' School. There is no final resolution as the government continues to adjust their snap policy decision.

Finance

We will adhere to fiscally responsible and ethical decision-making processes in order to ensure the School's long-term financial sustainability.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the goals achieved in the Finance area were focused on ensuring there was enough funding available for the redevelopment on the High School campus. We were well on our way to reaching that goal. However, a closer look at the School's finances will have to be conducted after the pandemic runs its course. The School has sufficient cash reserves to weather the pandemic crisis. The School continues to seek to sell Far South Wilderness Camp. We are hopeful that the Far South property can be sold in 2020.

Governance

We will ensure governance best practices: incorporating listening closely for discernment, speaking constructively and seeking unity.

The Board of Governors welcomed three new members in 2019 – Sam Ibbott ('90), Mary Beadle and Ann Zubrick (as the new Presiding Clerk of Australia Yearly Meeting). All three are familiar with the School. Sam is an alumni and current parent, Mary is a long serving staff member who retired from teaching at Friends' in 2015 and Ann had previously served on the Board as a member from Western Australia Regional Meeting. Like Ann, Mary also previously served on the Board as the staff nominee. All were thoroughly inducted to their Board duties according to the Australian Institute of Company Directors guidelines.

Additionally, as you have become aware at today's meeting, there is a change in Board leadership. As you have heard, Julian Robertson has laid down his service as the Presiding Member of the Board effective from the end of today's Annual General Meeting. Craig Stephens has agreed to become the new Presiding Member. To join Natalia Urosevic as a Deputy Presiding Member, Mary Beadle has agreed to join the Presiding Members Group in that role. I work quite closely with the Presiding Members Group seeking their counsel on issues between Board meetings. I am very thankful to them for their support and guidance. I would especially like to thank Julian for his guidance over the years and as Presiding Member. Julian has served The Friends' School and Quaker education since he joined the teaching staff in 1988. He has held many roles – class room teacher, assistant director of boarding, Quaker Community Coordinator, Board member and Presiding Member. Additionally, he was Presiding Clerk of Australia Yearly Meeting. I am confident everyone will join me in thanking Julian for his decades long commitment to The Friends' School and Quaker education.

I would also like to mention staff members who have demonstrated a long commitment to The Friends' School. Christine Armitage, Marie Burrridge, Lisa Di Venuto, Wendy Fiddaman,

Paul Kershna, Jeanine Taylor, Tim Whelan, and Sandra Wiggins will complete 15 years of service to the School this year.

Additionally, Lindy Gannon and Jane Smith have completed 20 years of service to The Friends' School.

Lyn Tunbridge and Kathy Fazackerley have completed 25 years at Friends'.

Jane Wilcox and Gina Colhoun have completed 30 years and Jenny Wood is in her 50th year of employment at Friends'. We give thanks to all these staff and others for their continuing commitment to the Purpose and Concerns through their work here at Friends'.

This year, more than ever, I have been reminded of the creativity and resourcefulness of all staff as the School was forced to 'pivot on a dime' to a new way of conducting our professions. I thank all staff again for their continued willingness and good natured approach to tackling this pandemic as best we can within our sphere of influence.

Challenges do remain for the School this year – when will we be able to resume face to face instruction, what will that look like, how long will we have to continue the physical distancing practices, what impact will the economic crisis have upon our community, what will the School look like in 2021 are to name just a few. But, I know we all enter this period with hope and resolve. One apt quote was recently shared with me: "In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to." Dave Hollis.

I am confident The Friends' School will survive. Its ideals have driven the School since its founding in 1887. Thank you all again for your continuing support. The focus of the School since its beginning has been to educate succeeding generations in order to assist them to develop into positive, contributing members of society grounded in the values and dispositions articulated in the School's [Purpose and Concerns](#). When hardships and crises arise, we know deep down that we will rely upon those values and dispositions to find strength and a path forward. This is needed today more than ever.

Nelson File
May 2020