



Principal's Report

Annual General Meeting of the Association – 15 May 2021

Nelson File, Principal, 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 and interstate Quaker members of Board committees who are current members of The Religious Society of Friends. 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 Association serves as the 'owners' of The Friends' School.

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.

Before progressing any further, I would like to acknowledge the land on which the School operates:

The Friends' School community acknowledges Tasmanian Aboriginal Peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of this island lutruwita / trowunna.

As a learning community, we recognise the value of continuing Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practice, which helps inform our understanding of history, culture and country.

We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of all of Tasmania's First Peoples and we walk alongside them respectfully bearing witness.

Normally I do not pay much attention to the Australian of the Year events, but this year Craig Stephens (Presiding Member) mentioned to me that I should listen to Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann's acceptance speech as Senior Australian of the Year 2021. She is from the Daly River region of the Northern Territories. She spoke of the importance of Dadirri – the act of deep listening and meditation. She said that in their tradition, the concept of quiet meditation on the land is used to find out who they really are, their purpose and where they are going. She stated in an ABC interview "...Dadirri can help you slow down, stop, and help you realise who you are, what you're about, where you're going, where you belong." From an essay on her website, Miriam Rose goes on to write that "Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for." In her acceptance speech, she spoke further about how many of our young people in Australia get lost along the way and she feels Dadirri would assist them.

The parallels between that concept and spiritual nature of Dadirri, Meeting for Worship and the purpose of Gathering at School are obvious. That has been and always will be at the core of The Friends' School - to help young people on their way – to assist them with understanding who they are, and what their place in the world can be, so that they can fully develop and mature into positive, contributing members of society. We as an organisation fully endorse and accept that Gathering plays a central role in that journey of maturation. It is reassuring to learn of the spiritual link between cultures.

This year, while the spectre of COVID 19 remains, the usual rhythms of a School year – students engaged in learning in, and out, of the classrooms, co-curricular activities, camps, sporting events, etc – have by and large returned to The Friends' School although public health directives still impact on usual school life. Some aspects of the School remain on hold – the presence of international GAP students that add so much richness to the School, international and interstate student and staff trips still have restrictions and certain COVID requirements remain in place for student performances and exhibitions. The School opened in February 2021 with 1230 students enrolled, and as of the writing of this report there are currently 1231 students attending The Friends' School. This is the same number of students as when we completed 2020.

Last year the pandemic and subsequent public health measures introduced a variety of stressors to the School in terms of student learning, student and staff wellbeing, the delivery of the School's rich curricular and co-curricular program, the financial viability of Friends' Early Learning and the successful operation of Friends Health & Fitness. What remained core was the School's commitment to our Quaker values and the implementation of the *Purpose and Concerns*. The School responded to each of these challenges through its obligation to process within the framework of the deeply ingrained values that permeate the organisation. Fallout from the nation-wide financial impact of the pandemic was front of mind as well.

In reflection, the School responded well to each of these circumstances. I thank and acknowledge the staff for the School's response to the challenges the pandemic imposed. I would especially like to mention the support of Shaun O'Rourke (Deputy Principal) throughout the entire year.

As far as student learning, staff and students, quickly adapted to the six week period the School employed distance learning with a rich and engaging program that many parents also participated in. Student and staff wellbeing systems were tested and enhanced to support those who were not interacting with each other face to face. These supports remain in place. Even weekly Gathering sessions persisted as core to the program for many students during the distance learning period. Once back on campus, adjustments had to be put into place because of the public health requirements in order to resume and continue Gatherings all year long.

Among the most challenging aspects of the School's response to the pandemic was the government mandates regarding fitness clubs and child care facilities. Friends Health & Fitness, because of the government mandates, had to close for an extended period of time and reduce the staff to a skeleton crew of just two people. The government mandates placed enormous personal and professional strain on those working to keep Friends Health & Fitness functioning. The School felt deep remorse at having to stand down staff members during its shut down period. Belinda Lewis (former FH&F Centre Manager), Tanya Watson (former FH&F Assistant Manager) and Shaun Sargent (Director of Business Affairs for The Friends' School) are to be applauded for their focused work during this difficult time.

Nearly equally challenging was the Government's mandate to keep child care centres open, make them 'free' to parents, and yet provide only 50% of the fees that were anticipated to keep Friends' Early Learning operational. As a result of this new, overnight practice, Friends' Early Learning was no longer financially viable. I was able to communicate the School's concerns with the authorities. In the end, the government provided the support that was required for Friends' Early Learning to at least 'break even' during the free child care period. The staff of Friends' Early Learning under the leadership of Mark Febey (Head of the Primary School) and Fiona Zinn (Deputy Head of the Primary School) are to be commended for their commitment and diligence during this very difficult time.

As in previous years, I will provide a brief update on the Board of Governors' priorities and the anticipated outcomes set by the Board in June 2020. Newly revised short term (one to three years) outcomes will be discussed at the June 2021 Board meeting.

The aspirational goals for each strategic area remain the focus of the School.

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.

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 stated earlier in my report, much of the School's Teaching and Learning in 2020 was framed by the COVID 19 pandemic. Even though Tasmania and Australia were spared the ravages that the pandemic imposed on student learning in other parts of the world, students, staff and families suffered from the stress and strain of the pandemic nevertheless. Attending to staff and student wellbeing throughout the year consumed a significant portion of the School's energy. Students and staff responded very well, student learning remained on track and the external academic results (TCE and IB Diploma) were as strong as ever. Students and staff should be commended for their work.

Many of the outcomes for Teaching and Learning from the Board's Strategic Priorities were put on hold during 2020. In addition to the fallout from the pandemic, the Director of Teaching and Learning, Steve Barratt, finished his time at Friends' in October 2020 to return to Germany to resume his career in international education as the principal of the primary school of the International School of Dusseldorf. As a result of Steve's departure, The Friends' School was very fortunate to hire Phil Rogers in the role of Director of Teaching and Learning. Phil brings with him a wealth of school experiences most recently as the principal of the secondary school of the International

School of Shekou. Phil has been able to dive right into the work here, reviewing and examining many curricular areas – foreign languages, outdoor education and the School’s library services.

The School was unable to form a Working Group last year to investigate the organisational learning structures at Friends’ as requested through the strategic outcomes. A Working Group has been initiated this year. A large part of the impetus behind the Working Group is Tasmania’s initiative to implement a Year 9 through Year 12 program across the state. We are investigating the possibilities for all of the School’s year groupings E-12 as a result. A recommendation will be made to the Board of Governors before the end of 2021 for implementation from 2023 onwards.

Another important change implemented this year based upon the revision to the School’s enrolment practices implemented last year has been the consolidation of the School’s Learning Support area. Catherine Gray has been hired into a new position this year – Director of Learning Support E-12. The purpose of this position was to have better oversight of the entire Learning Support systems across the School as well as to more effectively utilise all the resources that are allocated to Learning Support. The School is fortunate to have Catherine join us this year.

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.

In 2020, the Quaker Values Committee was unable to convene on campus. As a result, the query of how does The Friends’ School implement the *Purpose and Concerns* through the science curriculum was put on hold until this year’s current visit. The School welcome’s the Quaker Value Committee’s visit this AGM weekend.

One Working Group that was able to constitute and convene during 2020 was focused on developing a Climate Impact Policy and Practice statement for the Board of Governors to consider. Nicola Anderson (’96) who serves as the 7-12 Head of Science Faculty, has assumed the leadership of this Working Group. The Working Group consists of staff members, parents, students, alumni and a

Board member. The Board of Governor's looks forward to receiving the recommendations from the Working Group by the July 2021 Board Meeting.

Another area that the School continues to make progress in is with regards to obtaining accreditation as a 'Child Safe School'. The School is working with a group named Child Wise to assist with this process. It is hoped by December 2021 the School will attain full accreditation.

An additional Working Group has been formed this year in order for the School to complete its Reconciliation Action Plan in conjunction with Reconciliation Tasmania. Last year, a staff learning community was able to recommend to the Board of Governors an acknowledgment of country for the School to adopt. It is the one I wrote previously in this report. It was decided that a complete Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group would be established under the leadership of Tracie Acerman, a teacher in the High School. Staff members and a Board member make up this Working Group.

On 29 April, the School hosted Auntie Patsy Cameron and Professor Tim McCormack as the joint Peter Underwood Peace and Justice lecturers for the Year 10, 11 and 12 students. The topic of the lecture was "Trick or Treaty" with regards to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community. The personal connection of Patsy Cameron to history and the atrocities, betrayal and unfulfilled obligations of the Colonial Government to Tasmania's First Nations People and Tim McCormack's incredible legal insights provided for a very engaging event. This lecture served as the keynote address in preparation for Clemes' Friendly Conference on the theme of Reconciliation. Students had the opportunity to interact with a range of experts on Aboriginal concerns. A special thank you to Adam Chambers (Head of Clemes) in organising both the Peter Underwood Lecture and the Friendly Conference.

In an attempt to assist students with the concept of 'spirituality', I led a session with all Year 10 students on "Wonder and Awe". I realise that spirituality conceptually is frequently very difficult for students to access. I remain guided by a quote from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschal from his book *God in Search of Man*. In it, he states that "our goal should be to live life in radical amazement... get up each morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal... To be spiritual is to be amazed." How can

we all help students see the world around us as a phenomenal place where wonders abound?

Our People

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

The main area of focus over 2020, and now into 2021, has been the working on the latest iteration of the teaching and general staff enterprise bargaining processes. The nominal date of expiry of the previous agreements was December 2020. The School and the teaching staff engaged in very productive and congenial rounds of discussion regarding the 2021 to 2023 enterprise agreement. It was voted on by the teaching staff and passed overwhelmingly in December 2020. The Fair Work Commission affirmed the agreement early in 2021. The general staff agreement process has been a little more complex this round due to the amalgamation of the general staff, Friends Health & Fitness and Friends' Early Learning enterprise agreements into a single agreement. Moving forward, the School will only have two agreements to work on instead of the usual four every three years. While the process with the new general staff agreement has not yet been completed as of the writing of this report, the School will pass along the offered wage increases as a sign of good faith at the same time the new teaching staff wage increases go into effect. We anticipate the new general staff agreement to be completed in the next two months. To date, the discussions and processes have also been very collegial and productive.

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 Friends' School community responded wonderfully as we would expect during the COVID 19 pandemic during 2020. The new iteration of the Old Scholars' Association, now called Friends' Alumni Community Group, got up and running under the guidance of the School's Development Manager, Lucy Loney ('88) and Director of Community Engagement, Bill Avery. One goal of the

year was to gather alumni stories and publish them in School publications. This was accomplished and now is part of the fabric of the School's Community Engagement Office. Although not an expected Board outcome, the Community Engagement Office initiated 'wellbeing' phone calls and cards to former staff members and older alumni who might have become more isolated due to the pandemic public health directives. Board members, staff members and students engaged in these 'connective' activities and they were widely well received. In fact, the current Head Boy and Head Girl (Riley Curtain and Aaliyah Walker) both decided to continue with these sorts of activities into 2021. This year, cards have been written using the artistic skills of Year 2 students combined with the card writing skills of our more senior students to reach out to various older alumni.

Another focus of the Community Engagement Office has been the work they have been doing in preparing and actioning fundraising for the redevelopment of the Commercial Road campus. Construction has started on the new sports hall and once that is completed, work on the transformation of the WN Oats Centre into general classroom and office space will be underway. Fundraising plays a large role in developing the type of facilities that will help to transform our students.

Before I close this section, I must report on the fantastic support provided by our community during the height of the pandemic here in Tasmania. The Board of Governors' established a COVID 19 relief fund to assist families that had been impacted by the public health regulations in order that their children could remain at Friends'. As a result, more than \$43,000 was donated by community members to this fund to assist more than 35 families. The School thanks all those families who opened their hearts to assist others here at School. I must also thank Bill Avery for his many and varied contributions and leadership over the course of this past year.

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 Present and Future Facilities Committee of the Board of Governors had a massive year in 2020 leading into 2021. The long planned for construction of

the new sports hall got underway during Term 1, 2021 after years of planning. It is exciting to look out the back windows of Pendle Hill (the Principal's residence) and see the diggers hard at work excavating the former tennis courts in preparation for the installation of the sports hall. The current master plan for the School was initiated in 2015 envisioning the changes that are currently taking place.

In line with the physical restructuring, and as stated before, the School has also initiated a Working Group consisting of staff members and a Board member, looking at the current organisational structure of the School. The State of Tasmania has been focusing on Years 9-12, whereas the Working Group is also deeply considering what educational program of Years 7 & 8 (and possibly Year 6) should be. The Working Group is also further considering what the lower primary section of the School might look like into the future as well. A recommendation to the Board is anticipated by October 2021 with possible implementation slated for 2023.

I would like to mention that Friends' Early Learning last year had completed its structural re-organisation for it to be more closely under the care and supervision of the Head of Morris – Mark Febey. The School has already seen so many positives coming from this strategic reorganization – more continuing enrolments into kindergarten, pedagogical professional learning for Early Learning staff and International Baccalaureate training for Early Learning staff are to name just a few.

The final note for this section of this Strategic Priority has to do with land in Orford that was donated to the School in 1995 by the Steane family. The bush land they donated more than 25 years ago is now surrounded by growing suburbia instead of other bushland that was once there. The local council has been placing increasingly stringent regulations on the land that the School had promised to retain in a natural state. One of the more puzzling requirements was for the School to pick up every stick, leaf and dry bit of grass that might pose a bush fire hazard on the nearly 50 acres of land. That, in addition to local community members taking firewood from, and riding 'dirt bikes' over, the land has led the Board to realise that it is no longer feasible for the School to maintain the gift from the Steane family. As a consequence, the School is in the process of 'gifting' the land to the Tasmanian Land Conservancy as they are better placed to help protect the land as bush land into the future.

Finance

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

When the pandemic first struck many worries went through our collective thinking. High amongst them was the financial impact of the pandemic on the School's community (families and individuals) as well as the possible impact upon the fiscal structure of the School in 2020. The extent of the possible fallout from the pandemic was an unknown last year at this time. However, the considered advice that Lyndsay Farrall provided asked how the School could be as generous as possible with its community (staff and families) while at the same time protecting its financial existence into the future.

The Board of Governors headed that advice. The School offered a 25% fee relief to all families for Term 2, 2020 fees, established a COVID 19 Emergency Fund for families seeking assistance, and kept all staff members employed, except where the government had mandated a shut-down of the facility (Friends Health & Fitness). As a consequence, the School and our community seemed to have weathered the financial storm of the pandemic.

During the course of the year, the School also initiated the selling of Far South Wilderness Camp, as well as instituted reforms within the financial services section of the School. The latter seeking greater efficiencies through improved use of the School's software services and reorganisation of staff.

The end result of the year was that the School's financial position ended up being better than the worst case scenario prediction of May 2020, but significantly less than the anticipated budget of January 2020.

I would like to thank many people for their efforts during this trying time last year. Chief amongst them is Shaun Sargent, Director of Business Affairs, in overseeing the financial health of the School.

Governance

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

The pandemic of 2020 had many challenges for the Board of Governors. However, through the leadership of the Presiding Membership Group (Craig Stephens, Presiding Member; Natalia Urosevic, Deputy Presiding Member and Mary Beadle, Deputy Presiding Member) the Board successfully navigated the many unknowns that were presented during the year while still making progress through the strategic priorities as illustrated above. Craig took on the Presiding Member role in the midst of the COVID 19 emergency with Julian Robertson resigning from his service to the School at last year's Annual General Meeting. Craig and his wife Jane's association with the School started in 2006 when the first of their three children started at Friends'. Craig was first asked to join the Finance Committee, and then in 2011 he was asked to join the Board of Governors. Even though their youngest, Kate finished in 2015, Craig has remained on the Board of Governors and now serves as the Presiding Member. Thank you, Craig, for your continuing service to the School and the wise counsel you have provided over these many years.

This year, three Board members are finishing their terms of service to the School. Karen Davis and her husband Peter first became members of The Friends' School community when their children joined the School in 2005. She was soon asked to join the Present and Future Facilities Committee and then the Board of Governors in 2010. Karen has convened the Future and Present Facilities committee for many years and has freely shared her expertise as an architect with the School, bringing to fruition many major capital improvements. Chief among these was the inspiration and completion of The Farrall Centre, as well as overseeing the School's current revitalisation program on the Commercial Road campus. The entire School community owes a debt of gratitude to Karen for her and her family's extended commitment to the School.

Robert Pennicott is also completing his term of service to the School. Robert was co-opted to the Board in August 2012 and has served on a range of committees during his time. The School is incredibly thankful to Robert for his commitment to the School, especially during a time when his own business placed incredible demands upon his time. Robert and Michaye started their family's connection with Friends' in 2011 with the enrolment of Mia ('16) and Noah ('19). The Board of Governors always turned to Robert for his insights with regards to current conditions within Tasmania, his passion for Tasmania

and optimism about what lies ahead. Robert was especially helpful with the strategy surrounding the sale of Far South Wilderness Camp.

Sally McGushin was also co-opted onto the Board in 2012 as a Tasmania Regional Meeting Nominee to the Board. However, as a past and current parent, and as an alumna herself, Sally's association with the School started long ago in 1968 as a Year 5 student. Sally's connection to the School was reinvigorated when she and her husband Gerry enrolled their eldest, Thomas ('04) in 2003. They went on to support their four other children at the School, with Israel currently in Year 8. The School is incredibly thankful to Sally for her service and look forward to her continued contributions as Sally has agreed to remain as the Convenor of the Fees Assistance Committee.

I thank the entire Board of Governors for their continued service to the School and the community, and I especially thank those that are completing their terms on the Board. Without thoughtful Board members, the School would not be in its current place as the premier school in Tasmania and one of the finest in the nation. I am particularly grateful to the Presiding Members Group of the Board of Governors (Craig Stephens, Natalia Urosevic and Mary Beadle) for their thoughtful counsel especially during this past year as the School navigated its way through the pandemic.

While I am thanking and recognising people, I like to mention staff members who have demonstrated a long commitment to The Friends' School. Joni Chuter, Yuko Nakagawa, Mark Allen, Chris Wood, Jessica Pilkington, Natasha Sharpe, Katrina Agnos, George Graham, Colette Gallacher, Lynette Weeding, Jeremy Rackham and Joe Boyer have completed 15 years of service to the School this year. Last year, I inadvertently left Karina Churchill off the list of those staff completing 15 years of service to the School and I apologize for that oversight.

These staff members and their partners along with last year's 15 years of service staff members, have all been invited to the Board Dinner this evening in recognition of their commitment to The Friends' School.

Additionally, Yvonne Woodward and Shaun Sargent have completed 20 years of service to The Friends' School.

Julian Bugg and Aidan Hibberd have completed 25 years at Friends’.

Miriam Berkery and Kathy Bunton have completed 30 years and Jenny Wood has now completed her 50th year of employment at Friends’.

We give thanks to all staff for their continuing commitment to the *Purpose and Concerns* through their work here at The Friends’ School.

2020 stress tested not only the School but all of us in many ways. The School met that test by relying upon deeply held values and culture, and by focusing on what is core to the School – the students, the staff, teaching and learning and supporting the wider School community. By remaining clear in commitment to our culture and values, and by sticking with time tested processes, the School withstood all that 2020 presented.

In Friendship,

Nelson File

May 2021