

# BEECHWORTH MONTESSORI CHILDREN'S GROUP INC

## PRINCIPALS' OPERATION REPORT FOR AGM 18 MARCH 2015

2014 saw the launch of the Vision and Values document which outlines the strategic vision for the school over the period 2014-2017. The focus areas for the strategic planning period as determined by the Committee of Management are:

- Complete our initial building and landscaping works and raise funds to secure grants for the construction of a multipurpose indoor facility for whole school gatherings and specialist classes.
- Move quickly towards pay parity for our teaching staff to ensure we are able to secure and maintain Australia's best Montessori teachers.
- Maintain our position as one of Australia's lowest fee charging non-profit Montessori Schools, allowing Montessori to be accessible to a large section of the community.
- Not exceed our enrolment cap of 112.
- Keep pace with the current CPI of 5.2% in the education sector to ensure financial sustainability.

This report will provide a summary over the key areas for the 2014 school year.

### **Key Area 1 – Educational Program and Practice**

At the time of census, enrolment numbers in the primary school were at 93 students. This is the figure that funding is based on. We ended the year with enrolments of 94 students, spread across 2 x Prep classes (in the Cycle 1 program), 2 x Cycle 2 classrooms and 2 x Cycle 3 classrooms. In the funded kindergarten program there were 21 students. Children turning 3 were enrolled in the Transition program prior to entry into the Cycle 1 rooms and this program operated 3 days a week at times during the year. At times this number the Transition Program operated two mornings a week due to the number of children who were entering into the Cycle 1 rooms. After session care operated 5 afternoons from 12 noon – 3.15pm for children enrolled in the Cycle 1 programs but not yet staying for long days. The Tiny Tots program operated two mornings per week but numbers were lower than previous years.

Staff developed a three year curriculum plan to assist with the delivery of the curriculum and the entry and exit points for children in the cycles.

### **Key Area 2 – Children's Health & Safety**

Policy development and review continued throughout the year. Staff participated in professional development in Restorative Practices and implemented this with the children. This practice complemented the use of non-violent communication and supported children to repair relationships. The first year of a two year agreement to implement the bluearth program with students commenced. The program was successful and will continue in 2015.

### **Key Area 3 – Physical Environment**

This is the biggest area requiring time and energy in an attempt to keep the physical environment development moving along – garden and landscaping remains a priority but requires a plan to enable a cohesive and thoughtful design. The Block Grant application commenced for the second stage of the refurbishment for the establishment of a multi-purpose space. Success in an Early Years Grant meant that with a contribution from the school from capital reserves the installation of marmoleum in Emerald, Amethyst and Ruby rooms could be completed over the Christmas break. Due to delays in the production of the floor covering, Amethyst will occur now over the Term 1 break. The installation of a shade structure in Cycle 1 stalled due to issues with the builder and a budget blowout in costs. This is still on the agenda for completion asap.

### **Key Area 4 – Staffing**

Staffing in 2014 was relatively consistent with some unexpected changes occurring throughout the year. A Cycle 2 assistant resigned and a new appointment was made to commence during the year. There was strong interest in the vacancy. This is a change from previous years. Another Cycle 2 assistant required extended leave due to family reasons and return to her role later in the year. We are fortunate to have a committed relief teacher who fills such vacancies.

At the end of 2014 one specialist staff member resigned and this vacancy was filled prior to the end of the school year. For 2015 two staff members require study leave to enable them to complete their qualifications to remain in their job. A new staff member was appointed in the Early Years in a job share arrangement. She is Montessori trained and experienced.

As reiterated publicly previously I have the greatest admiration for the amazing team of educators at this school. Their passion and commitment to Montessori education cannot be questioned and they continue to give far beyond the expectations of their employment.

### **Key Area 5 – Relationships with Children**

As a means of meeting some particular needs as a need for greater physical expression and to provide a male presence for the children we engaged the services of bluearth for fortnightly sessions. The program compliments the Montessori way and enables staff to become trained in bluearth. The year ended with children having teaching contact with 3 male teachers in specialist roles within the school.

Commenced the operation of student groups to enable students to be actively engaged in their school. It was difficult to co-ordinate as staff support was required and eventually the groups ceased functioning. The Events group did organise a disco and supported some small internal fundraising and the landscaping group undertook some work in the external environment.

Staff participated in restorative practices training for two days and we utilised the professional services of the facilitator to assist us with restoring relationships where there was conflict. Students not only became confident in engaging in restorative conferences where conflict arose but also in creating agreements to create the type of environment they wanted to see in the school.

### **Key Area 6 – Collaborative Relationships with the Community**

The majority of social and fundraising events were carried out by a small number of parents. Whilst these were successful in bringing our community together there is the danger of burn out for these parents from carrying the load for the whole school, over the course of the year. Ideally there would be a larger group contributing a smaller amount of time and energy. It is hoped that this can be changed in the coming years.

Events held internally within the classrooms were many and varied and included the science fair, Harmony Day celebrations, Peace Day celebrations, excursions, mother's and father's day nights, parent information sessions, THRASS parent sessions, restorative practice parent session, lamb lunch, Easter Parade, Anzac Day, Remembrance Day, carols by candlelight, lemonade stall, loads of clothes market, gardening and working bees, pancake breakfast, family BBQ, Peace Day soup kitchen, graduation dinner, graduation assembly, 2014 school concert, end of year BBQ ... amongst the many other events, cross classroom and mixed cycle events that are held quietly within the day to day function of the school in the delivery of a rich, holistic curriculum. This list doesn't include the much appreciated parent help in the classrooms through supporting the curriculum work with the specialist knowledge or skills of such a diverse group of parents. I'm sure that this list does not include all the other happenings that have occurred quietly and without ceremony.

### **Key Area 7 – Leadership and Service Management**

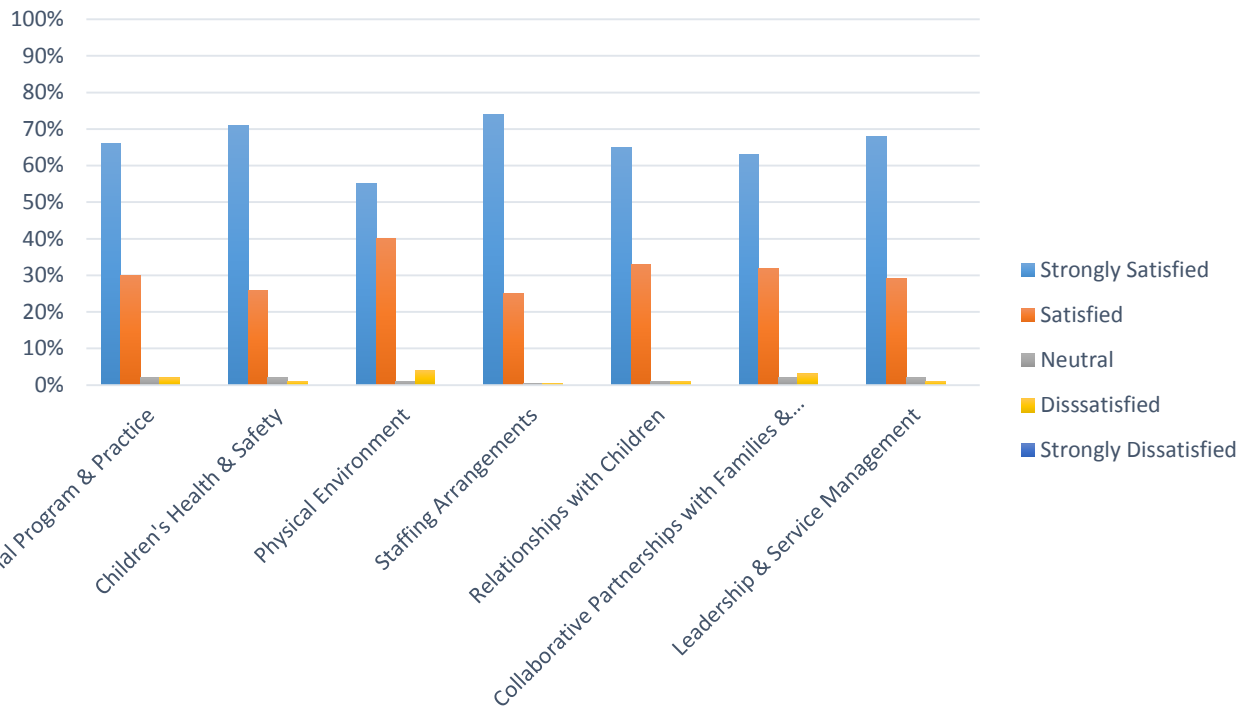
Heather attended professional development with Independent Schools Victoria on strategic planning and school improvement planning that lead to the Vision and Values document and the development of the strategic planning materials that the CoM will now use as the working materials.

The Vision and Values document has been placed at the IGA in conjunction with an advertising board. This document is being regularly replenished so it appears that the wider community are at least "having a look" at what we do and how we do it.

Relationships has been strengthened this year with meetings and visits from Montessori Australia Foundation members, Independent Schools Victoria key management and attendance at an Independent Schools Roundtable with the member for Indi Cathy McGowan.

Satisfaction surveys – we received 34 responses to the Satisfaction Surveys that were distributed to all families in Term 4 2014. The graph below represents the percentage of satisfaction in each of the key areas of the operations of the school in 2014. Satisfaction amongst those that returned the surveys was strong with no responses recorded for strongly dissatisfied. Only a small minority responded with dissatisfaction in any of the key areas.

## Parent Satisfaction Survey Results 2014



Thanks to Committee of Management – it has been a pleasure to work with a team of people (some long termers and some new to the CoM) who are committed to seeing this organise consolidate, grow and thrive. I have appreciated their willingness to support me in my role as Principal and to take on board the ideas that I have put forward so that we can all move forward in the one direction. I wish you all well in the future and thank you for what you have given to the school not only in 2014 but in the past. Having been a volunteer in the past I can truly appreciate what commitment and sacrifices are made by those who work on the Committee of Management of Beechworth Montessori School.

Whilst it is not very “Montessori” to single out individuals I feel compelled to do so in the case of Rachel Bohm. Rachel has worked side by side with me in the area of the Physical Environment key area and her support has been greatly appreciated. Rachel has the intimate professional knowledge of the building and the funding process to get to where we are and I would be lying if I said I wasn’t a little nervous at not having her here to work with me in 2015. I hope however that nowhere in Australia feels like home and that your journey brings you all back to us.

In summary 2014 was an incredible year of consolidation – much needed after many years of growth in sometimes trying circumstances. There are many reasons to celebrate the successes and milestones of our small Montessori school.