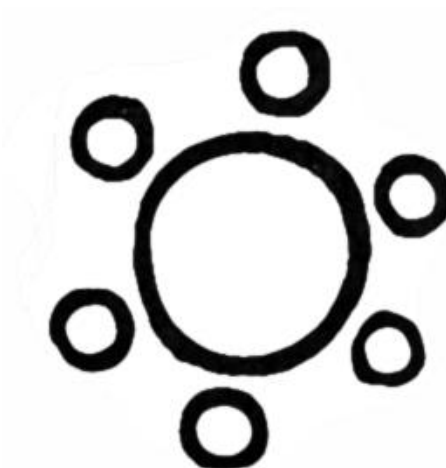




# **Annual Report 2014**

Many schools and organisations would say ‘this year has been a really big year for us.’ At Spirit of Play Community School, this year REALLY HAS BEEN A BIG YEAR!!

At the beginning of 2014, we had about 15 students and by the end of the year we had 41 kids all lined up and ready to attend our little school. (Well, they weren’t actually lined up. We don’t really do line ups at Spirit of Play.) We got the tick of approval from the Department of Education Services in our Registration process and in our bid to add a year level at a time, offering up to Year 6 by 2019. We are creatively using our beautiful space in the Old Post Office, between the river and the bush, and we are actively seeking the next home for our growing school. We managed to keep most of our staff members. Even the one teacher who has chosen to take a year off (in 2015) for family and study has put her hand up to be the chief relief teacher.



This Annual Report is an opportunity for us to look back, celebrate our achievements, then look ahead to our future hopes, dreams and plans.

### **About Us – a bit of History and a bit about the Future**

Spirit of Play Community School was established in 2002 and has provided education for children from Kindergarten to Year One. In 2013 it was granted the Minister’s advanced determination to become a full primary school, providing for students up to Year Six by 2019, with approximately 92 students. This exciting new phase for the school involves expansion on all levels; education provision, buildings, use of surrounding natural environment, and connections with the local community and beyond.



We intend to:

- Keep class sizes small, with an average of eight and a maximum of twelve students per year group
- Keep staff to student ratios high, with a benchmark of 10 students to staff member in the early years (PK – 2) and no more than 20 in the upper primary years (3-6).
- Select and retain exceptional staff who can offer specialist expertise in key aspects of the curriculum promoted by the school (Bush School Program, Music, Permaculture, Physical Education, Environmental Education, Indigenous and Multicultural Learning, Community Engagement)
- Develop a new school site that integrates indoor and outdoor learning and provides space for children to engage directly with their ecological environment every day.
- Create a model school that stretches the concept of sustainable education and nourishes the next generation of adults to become creative, connected and capable of meeting any challenges that the future may present.

## School Values

Spirit of Play values are based around the ethics of:

- Care for people
- Care for the Earth
- Care for things and places

Everything we do at Spirit of Play is about nurturing kids and adults. We do this by connecting with ourselves, with each other, with our community and with our environment. We believe that creative, caring, resilient kids will enjoy their present and be prepared for any kind of future.

## Outdoor Education and Walkabout at Spirit of Play

“The child is the teacher and learner, the practitioner is the observer and facilitator and the environment is the cohesive whole that offers the fabric of the learning and teaching to all involved.”  
Archimedes Bush School

Much of the education at Spirit of Play takes place in the school grounds and surrounding area. As part of the Australian Curriculum Outdoor education provides the opportunity to engage with the overarching Cross Curriculum Priorities of ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Histories and Cultures’ and ‘Sustainability’ and integrates all aspects of the formal learning priorities into concrete experiences. Furthermore, our program is designed to specifically support the five aspects of emotional literacy: Self Awareness, Self Regulation, Self Motivation, Social Skills and Empathy.

Outdoor education is part of every day at Spirit of Play as the children are engaged in their environment within and outside of the school grounds. Teachers plan specific learning opportunities and are responsive to ‘teachable moments’ that arise during the day. The Year 1 & 2 class spend Fridays on Walkabout, learning about the local environment and community, but the walkabout curriculum is embedded in all of our school days, not just on Fridays.



## 1. Age Specific challenges



The staff at Spirit of Play structure our Outdoor Education program to create age specific challenges for all of the children at the school. In the early years of Pre-Kindy and Kindy children are held close to the school, venturing out on short excursions within a few hundred metres from the school at most. As the children grow older, in Pre-Primary and beyond, they venture further into the adjacent bushland and along the walk trails that run through the school grounds, and the Year 1 and 2 children visit local places of significance such as the beaches, town, wetlands, adventure playground and other areas within a 30km radius of the school. It is anticipated that as our school grows and the children mature that they may venture even further afield for camps and extended excursions.

As part of this spiralling out the children learn the rhythms inherent in growth, and the cycle through the appropriate places for each season allows them to deepen their relationship to these special places. There is a sense of responsibility and ownership fostered amongst them which is modelled and passed on to the younger kids as they transition into each new area of exploration.

Often we work in multi-aged groups and in these cases the teachers take cues and extend the child's learning responsive to their age and growth, creating activities broad enough to extend each age group in their own way. Our aim is always to create learning experience for any age.

We walk and bike ride regularly, swim occasionally, climb often and sing whenever. We explore the world and look for occasions and ways of giving back to the land, saying thank you and appreciating this beautiful country. The children are encouraged to help those younger or less capable than themselves. We have sharing circles aimed at deepening the connections within the group and strengthening the children's communication and their understanding of the occasions we share. The children have a bush school diary that allows them to keep a record of what we did each week, reflect and share with each other what was good and what was hard. These books provide the basis for further explorations as we go to the library and internet to research any queries or anything that they have been inspired by out in the bush.

## 2. Connection to Nature

"When we as leaders can provide an atmosphere of sensitive discovery and direct experience, nature is able to change peoples lives spontaneously in wonderful ways"

Joseph Cornell

Revisiting special places regularly during the different seasons, allows an ongoing deepening relationship with Country that reflects each child's development. Through reflective review as a group individual learning becomes contextualized, personal and real. The children learn about the history of places through visiting elders of all cultures and inviting cultural facilitators to teach their stories to our children. We connect to others within our community who are linked to these places, and particularly groups such as





GreenSkills and the Denmark Weed Action Group to share knowledge.

Contact with nature is calming, stimulating and healing. By creating things with and from nature children are learning sustainability and creativity. In a world overloaded with virtual distractions the children are then given time and space to come down to earth and engage with the peace and wonder of the real world. Nature is not always calm and soft but it will always offer us the chance to learn about ourselves and the world around us. The guided experiences and challenges our children have in the natural environment nurture the whole child, building high emotional resilience that they can use throughout life. Natural environments offer emotional harmony and visual calmness that can diffuse the stresses of everyday modern life. The open ended experiences presented are affirming and with that framework, all other aspects of development may move forward more easily.



More specifically, a connection to nature allows us to teach the importance of our collective eco-footprint, through actively caring for the places we go to. We teach and learn about each environment and discuss impact of human activity with the hope of creating respectful custodianship. Our three overarching principles remain 'Care for people care for the Earth, and care for things and places'.

### 3 . Developing Independent Learners

“Go to the people, live among them start with what they KNOW.  
And when the deed is done, the mission accomplished, of the best leaders the people will say,  
we did it ourselves.” Lao Tzu.

At Spirit of Play we focus on supporting children to develop the ability to be self-directed in their learning. By providing a more coherent, flexible and enriched natural curriculum, we are advocating children not as sole leaders of their learning but within an equilibrium where children and adults together negotiate the learning experience. This creates a space where children are listened to and encouraged to apply their own logic to any given situation, rather than us trying to impress upon them our adult intellect.

The word respect surfaces often as does consultation, respect for the child as a natural, active learner who should be consulted throughout the ongoing process of learning.

Children need a connection to the learning and should be inspired, engaged and motivated by the process. Adults need to truly listen and respond to children. Children have opinions from an early age on and we as adults should pay credence to them since they enable us to provide a close match in provision.

We encourage children to take responsibility, as ownership increases their engagement and their right to communicate. We teach to the knowledge of the children and add strategies to document their learning.

Through Outdoor Education and our Walkabout program learning occurs for both the adults and the children within the context of a real-life situation. The children are seen as both teachers and learners, collaborating with each other in their learning journeys. The teacher takes on the role of facilitator and observer, supporting and interpreting the experience where needed but allowing the environment to speak directly to each child's imagination.

#### Assessment

At our school, it is important that we keep the *spirit of play* in our assessment and reporting strategies. Parents want to know how their kids are going, what they are doing well and where they may need some extra help. Assessment and reporting can be playful, informative, AND involve the kids.

Assessment at Spirit of Play is an ongoing part of learning and takes many forms, both formal and informal. Teachers are assessing the kids when they:

- Work with the whole group in morning circle time
- Listen to individual students read
- Play games
- Watch children interact in the 'outdoor classroom' or playground or surrounding natural 'bush'
- Take photos
- Observe
- Look at work samples
- Ask questions
- And many other every day experiences.

Some of the more formal assessment strategies include:

- Written observations
- Checklists
- Literacy and numeracy skills assessment
- Marking progress on developmental continua
- Portfolios
- Class floor books
- Individual books.



The information gathered in ongoing assessment helps the teachers to plan for future learning opportunities and to adapt their long term teaching and learning plans.

Our kids are too young to do the NAPLAN testing. Their first year of participating will be in 2016. We will then use our NAPLAN results as one of the many ways of learning about the progress and achievement of the kids at our school.

### **Funding Sources**

In 2014 we benefited from the small schools grant so our funding ratios differed to previous years. Our funding ratios were approximately 71% from the federal government, 12% from the state government and 17% from fees, donations and fund raising. We are grateful for these various funding sources that make our little school possible.



### **Our staff**

#### **Teacher qualifications**

We have a combination of graduate and experienced teachers, bringing their wealth of knowledge, experience, enthusiasm, creativity and research to Spirit of Play. Their qualifications can be found on the public register of teachers. <http://www.trb.wa.gov.au> All staff at our School have Working with Children clearances. Our multi-cultural staff reflect the many different cultures we attract to our school.

#### **Staffing 2014**

Principal

Admin Assistant

Teachers

Education Assistants

Cleaner

Ingrid Jansen-Neeling

Katie Bewley

Regi Peppin

Oliver Watkins

Sarah Pozzi

Angela Dickinson

Serena Kirby

Maren Heckel

For us, continuous improvement is important and we are guided by the National standards.

For the principal these standards are around:

- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing self and others
- Leading improvement, innovation and change
- Leading the management of the school
- Engaging and working with the community



The teacher standards are around:

- Knowing the students and how they learn
- Knowing the content and how to teach it
- Planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning
- Creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments
- Assessing, providing feedback and reporting on student learning
- Engaging in professional learning
- Engaging professionally with colleagues, parents / carers and the community

### **Staff Retention**

The Principal, two Teachers, Admin Assistant, Education Assistants and Cleaner remained on staff throughout 2014 and intend to continue to work at our school in 2015. One teacher, Sarah Pozzi, is taking a year off in 2015 to continue with her studies but intends to do relief at our school and hopes to join the team officially again in the future. The school has also employed Patrick McCarthy for 2015.

### **Student Attendance**

In pre-primary this year the attendance rate was 81% and in Year 1 it was 84%. These rates are not really a true reflection of the story at Spirit of Play though. Kids love attending our school and most attend more than 90% of the time. With such small numbers, overall percentages are greatly affected by long-term absences of just one or two children. We remind parents, both in the parent handbook and verbally, that family holidays should be taken during the school break, whenever possible. When this has not been possible for family reasons, we keep in touch with absent families through our online tool, Educa. Children are able to share their stories and see what their friends are up to at school. Parents understand that when their children are regularly missing school, it can have a negative impact on their education. If students are regularly absent from school, we will first speak informally with the parents and move to a more formal 'case management' involving a meeting and written plan to increase attendance.





## Surveys

We surveyed parents about various aspects of our school. Overall the parent body had a great deal of positive feedback to give to the school, and when asked what they particularly liked were effusive in their praise. Specifically the strengths of the school were seen in the emphasis on Indigenous culture and music, the nature-based and playful integration of the Australian Curriculum, the exceptionally caring staff, the individualised approach and the opportunity for community involvement.

Here are some of the comments from these surveys:

“The individualised attention is really working, love the small school, small class sizes”

“I love Regi’s holistic approach to learning, the Noongar cultural emphasis is fantastic and music is very important to our family.”

“Our child likes it here. We like the Educa app for communication.”

“Music is really important, allows the spirit of the kids to flow, they can let go through getting into music (especially drumming).”

“We like the multi-age grouping, meeting the kids where they are at and the fact that a broad range of abilities being catered for.”

“The focus on music is really important to our family”

“I feel the strength of the school is primarily in the nurturing environment provided for the little ones and emphasis on nature play. I like the fact that everyone has a voice and feel that being involved as parent is important.”

“I love the family multicultural days”



"We love the creative learning approach, the love received by the children and the individual support."

"We love the community involvement and parent involvement and the fantastic Noongar cultural education."

"We find the teachers very approachable and appropriately concerned for the individual child, we like the good strong values which are in line with those at home."

"We came here because it is a nice supportive environment"

"The Indigenous learning aspect is something that has educated the whole family, a really important aspect of the curriculum. We love that the kids are engaged in nature, learning. The teaching staff are exceptional. Music is important, we like the rhythm of the day with circle in the morning, bushwalks etc. We feel our children are engaged, like to learn and are excited to go to school."

"Everything Regi does is amazing. Would like to say 'Thank you Regi!'"

"Absolutely happy, 110%! No concerns, love everything. Really happy that we are here".

" We love the multi-age environment, the community, the indigenous stuff, the gentle way that the Australian Curriculum is integrated into the children's play."

"My child loves coming to school. All going great"

"We particularly like the casual pick up and drop off, nature based learning and Indigenous stuff. We also like the newsletter frequency and style."

"We like the nature based approach, the teachers, the balance and integration of mainstream curriculum into the play based approach, the music, the community and the Indigenous stuff. The teachers are amazing."

"The schools strengths are being at the cutting edge educationally, resisting mainstream trends to over formalise and compartmentalise learning. Let's keep it fun, energetic and inspirational for our children."

There were mixed responses when we asked about the literacy program, as shown by the two very different responses below:

“Early literacy is reasonably important to our family, I feel that because my child is engaged that this has flowed naturally. I feel the reader system has worked really well, my child is reading well, I like the involvement of the parents in this process and the one to one support of the teachers that I have seen at school.” (Year 1 and Pre-Kindy)

“Early literacy is not a priority for us, I do not feel it needs to be too structured, I am happy in the way it has been presented this year, and into the future I would like a less structured approach than the mainstream.” (Pre-Kindy)

Student engagement and love of language are ongoing priorities at our school. Parent support and involvement are important factors in early language development and working together with parents is very important to us. We encourage parents to *enjoy* reading with and to their kids, and to do it often.

With staff, the discussions around the different standards of the National Quality Standards have been a great opportunity to discuss what we do well at the school and where we could improve. Some of the things that the staff love about our school include the high staff to student ratio, small classes, focus on the health and wellbeing of children, staff and parents, the beautiful environment, and the positive relationships. In 2015 we will be increasing our communication with the broader community and sharing the story of our little school with the Denmark community and beyond.

We would like to thank Jeff Atkinson (previous Chairperson) and all of the School Councillors, parent and community volunteers and staff members who have worked hard and played hard to help to grow our little school. We look forward to another year of joy, challenges and learning.

Think outside.

Ingrid and Zoe

Ingrid Jansen-Neeling  
Principal

Zoe Car  
Chairperson



Logo designed by Jess Gloede.