

SPIRIT OF PLAY ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Tabled at the Spirit of Play *Annual General Meeting*, held 6 April 2020.



OVERVIEW

Spirit of Play Community School is a not-for-profit and ACNC registered charity organisation that, in the majority, relies on Federal and State Government grants to provide our Western Australian Curriculum Program.

We value a nature-based holistic approach to Education that is creative, playful and connected to the community and environment of Denmark and surrounds.

Children are encouraged to explore and grow their physical, intellectual and emotional capabilities. Each individual child is unique and learns in their own way. We endeavour to support each child to explore their potential in a safe and supportive learning environment.

We began 2019 faced with an incredibly busy period of growth and development of our school site. After such an extended period existing on short term leases, the School Council were able to sign a formal, long-term lease agreement with the Shire of Denmark to provide security and the opportunity to solidify our position in the community.

It was a year not without its challenges and difficulties, with the departure of Regi Peppin from the teaching staff, the stepping down of experienced and highly valued School Council members in Xanthe Bourne, Rob Castiglione and Matt Sivyer and personal illness impacting on our longest serving Council member, Fred Coombes.

2019 saw the final year of the School's first ever Strategic Plan. This plan focussed on achieving:

1. A secure and growing School
2. Clearly articulated vision for a best practice nature-based school
3. Dedicated leadership
4. Inspirational pedagogy
5. Strong relationships with broader community

Reflecting on these goals, it is clear that the School achieved some of these goals and were still working towards some others. Our clearest achievements was a secure and growing school, underpinned by a long term lease. Our school has started to be seen as a realistic educational alternative for parents seeking an offering that differs from the mainstream system, leading to our expanded school numbers and school funding. This has been achieved through the strong relationships that have been fostered between the school and the broader community. The last three years saw the school focus less on an introverted perspective of community and connect with our wider Denmark community for great gains. The more people connect and engage with our school, the more sustainable and stable the school becomes.

WHAT WE GOT UP TO

The school year was full of many activities, and in line with our seasonal emphasis many of our celebrations highlighted seasonal cycles, the beautiful environment of Denmark, and connections to our diverse community.

Some key events in the 2019 school year included:

- 4th February: School year commenced
- 8th February: Welcome BBQ and Picnic
- 20th March Harvest Festival
- 25th March Denmark Walpole Football Club visit
- 27th March Renewal of Registration visit
- 5th April: Beach Carnival
- 10-11th April: Surfing Camp
- 12th-29th April: School Holidays
- 21st April- 1st May: Finland Study Tour
- 2nd May: Staff Dress up day
- 14th-16th May: NAPLAN testing
- 23rd May: Dolphins Puppet show
- 30th May: Gina Williams and Guy Ghouse workshop
- 31st May: Denmark Festival of the Voice Performance
- 14th-21st June Refugee Ration Challenge
- 11th June Five year registration granted
- 18th June Musica Viva
- 19th June First Aid Incursion
- 22nd June Winter Solstice Celebration
- 27th June AISWA CGA visit
- 2nd July Nocturnal Day
- 4th July Parent Teacher meetings
- 6-21st July School Holidays
- 22nd July Walkabout PD for staff
- 23rd July Finland Presentation for staff
- 15th August Indonesian Independence day celebration
- 20th August Book Week Dress Up day
- 4-6th September Middle Primary Dryandra Camp
- 4th and 7th September Great Book Swap
- 6th September Yirra Yaakin performance
- 17th September Larry Blight Noogar incursion
- 18th September High School Transition day
- 18th September Pre-Primary to Blue Wren Lodge excursion
- 25th September Spring Festival

- 27th September - 14th October School Holidays
- 23rd October Parent Information Session re 2020
- 24th October - Suara Indonesia Dance Group
- 4th-7th November Upper Primary Camp
- 7th November Music Count Us In
- 8th November - Pupil Free Day; Staff training on challenging behaviours
- 12th November - High School Transition day for Year 6
- 20th November - Year 6 Mothers circle
- 21st November - Orangutan Awareness dress up day
- 28th November- High School Transition day for Year 6

KEY GOAL 1: A SECURE AND GROWING SCHOOL

STUDENT NUMBERS

We had several movements in our school community during 2019, with some families moving on and new families joining us.

We started 2019 with **67** students attending in term 1, down from 71 at the end of 2018. Over the course of 2019 this increased to **74** students by the end of the year. We saw our first batch of graduates leave our school and head off for high school. There was an immense amount of work that went into preparing their transition over a period of 18 months that saw the school form a strong relationship with the Denmark Senior Highschool. Our students were fortunate enough to attend the High School campus several times during 2019 to prepare them for 2020.

One of our challenges as a Council is balancing the demand to increase fees against the ability of our community to meet those increases. We commenced our school fee review in May 2019 and examined our fees across the past few years, our budget expenditure and the economic climate at the time. After an extensive review, the School Council voted to freeze school fees for 2020, introduce a fairer levy system that directly related to what camps and excursions students undertook in each year level, and to enact additional fee-relief for health care card and pension card holders to ensure that our school is accessible to all families. These were all in addition to our strong Bursary Relief Program.

REGISTRATION

2019 saw the Department of Education perform their registration visit in March. Keith Newton and Owen Kelly attended the school for a day to perform their site visit of our operations and conducted a comprehensive document review.

The Department of Education informed us in June that our registration was approved for a period of five years until 2024. A five year registration is unprecedented for our school and a true testament to the enormous amount of work that the administrative team put into this registration process and the organisation of the school as a whole. To achieve such a long registration period is a true indication from the Education Department that the school is on the right track, after a long succession of one and two year extensions to our registration.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

School Council undertook a massive amount of groundwork alongside the administration team to bring our hopes and dreams for our current site into reality after the signing of our lease in February.

The School successfully held a competitive tender application for the building of our new classroom and after navigating an administrative minefield that included changes to planning, the necessity for fire planning, extensive stakeholder negotiations and public consultation; the School Council was able to commence the building of our newest classroom. Steve Maddaffari, won the tender process, and was able to follow on from his work with the school extending the tree-house classroom in 2018 by building our new classroom, and also successfully tendered for our multi-purpose room facility that commenced building in 2020.



In 2019 we were able to finally move our fence to free up more space in the school for children to play and explore. We also had two development applications accepted after extensive public comment. We delivered major civil works to upgrade both the power supply and car-parking facilities for all users of the Railway Heritage Precinct. The school self-funded this project and has paid to increase the power supply for the Denmark Lions and Denmark Machinery Restoration Group in a clear demonstration of our community focus.

The School was also able to win a competitive AISWA Capital Grant Association grant to fund the building of our new multi-purpose facility. This required a large amount of work by both the Council and the administration and a site visit by the AISWA Grants committee to meet with the Principal, administration team and the Chair to analyse the project and the application in great detail.

The school also won a competitive WA Government Low-Interest Loan to assist with both buildings. This LILs loan took significant planning and work from the administration team and the School Council and provides financial security to the school while it completes a large build project.

KEY GOAL 2: CLEARLY ARTICULATED VISION FOR A BEST PRACTICE NATURE-BASED SCHOOL

A common issue during our strategic reviews, registration visits and feedback from an organisational consultant was our lack of clarity as an organisation. Many great people can tell us what the school “is not” - but articulating what the school “is” is a far more difficult challenge. A major focus for Council in 2019 and beyond has been solidifying how we work as an organisation to ensure that we are sustainable, effective and able to provide great education.

The development of a clearer strategic document is a small part of this. Greater community involvement is another component. Professional development of staff is also a key area to continue to work on. Ensuring a supportive environment for staff where strengths and differences are celebrated and nurtured by parents and the school also plays a part. This is an area the school continues to work towards and was not achieved during the strategic plan period.

Another important element of ensuring that our school vision is embedded in everyday practice is to review school policies on a regular basis. In 2019, the Spirit of Play School Council and management specifically reviewed, and amended as necessary all the policies we are required to hold as part of our Registration Requirements, and additional policies that relate to who we are as a school specifically.

Reviewing policy, risk registers and Bushfire Management Plans are not the most exciting part of School Council business, when compared to lease negotiations and building designs - but it is a critical part of what School Council gets up to and a large part of our meeting schedule. We were lucky in 2019 to have a team of Council members who were diligent regarding both policy development and review, which made this challenging process as streamlined as possible.



KEY GOAL 3: DEDICATED LEADERSHIP

At Spirit of Play we value our human capital and aspire to the following attributes:

- *Responsible governing body members*
- *Enthusiastic and experienced teaching staff*
- *Caring and involved support staff*
- *Dedicated administrative staff*
- *Engaged parent body*
- *Inspired students*

GOVERNING BODY

Throughout 2019 we had a number of people serve as on our School Council, including:

- Diane Harwood
- Fred Coombs
- Xanthe Bourne
- Carl Heslop
- Rob Castiglione
- Matt Sivyer
- Julia Scriven
- Marie Kerr

We would like to acknowledge the hard work of all of our School Council members who are dedicated to the strategic direction of the school and to working for the good of the organization as a whole.

TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF

In 2019 the School employed 20 staff, with wages representing 83% of the School's operating budget.

The teaching staff are the beating heart of a school, and we are very fortunate to have such skilled and passionate teachers at Spirit of Play.

In 2019 had the following teachers:

- Early Childhood (PK and K): Melanie Trenow
- Pre-Primary: Sarah Pozzi and Simone Barrow
- Lower Primary (1 and 2): Natasha Rubie
- Middle Primary (3 and 4): Elaine West and Renee Schipp
- Upper Primary (5 and 6): Olly Watkins

In 2019, Regi Peppin continued to take Music and Walkabout sessions with the classes, and Serena further enhanced the literacy early intervention (LEAP) program. Our teachers were also supported by our wonderful EAs: Kanae, Angela, Jess, Mez.

We also maintained our specialist teaching staff for Art, which was undertaken by Jess Dyer and our playgroup was led by Merome Darvill; while Jasmine Heslop and Alistair Dickson joined to teach Indonesian and Digital Technologies respectively.

This year we said goodbye to Regi. Regi's work with the school when she returned as a teacher in 2012 has been incredibly important, from her work with the children to her turn as acting-Principal in 2016. When Regi has not taught at the school in the past, she has always maintained a connection and the School community hopes that remains the case.

EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Our Principal, Rance Boog, was instrumental in overseeing the work that helped the school achieve its five year registration. This achievement, without conditions, demonstrates the large amount of administrative work that has been achieved by Rance and the Executive and Administrative team to bring our practices and policy up to a standard that reassured the Department of Education that we are operating in a way that does not require such regular check ups.

Prior to this five year registration, the school had been operating on yearly or second yearly registration visits - a massive administrative load and distraction from focussing on curriculum delivery and educational matters. The role of a Principal at any school is a lonely one, and School Council thanks Rance for his dedication to the school during a year that saw him balance complex family needs and distance with his role at our school.



2019 saw several changes to the administrative team with Oona Mansour and Katie Bewley leaving the school and moving on to other opportunities. These departures were felt by the school community, but I would like to highlight the amazing work done by the two staff members who joined our school in their place

Rene Proctor joined the school as Bursar, bringing a wealth of experience in other school systems. Rene has been sensational at assisting the Council in the financial management of the school and the quality and professionalism she has brought to the team has been really appreciated.

Sandra Brandao has brought wonderful care, warmth and skill to the administrative front of house team and has quickly formed connections with our students and wider school community. On behalf of the Council, I welcome and thank Rene and Sandra.

We also recognise the tireless and dedicated work of Zoe Car in securing the future of our school and chasing loose ends in terms of loans, leases, building and development applications. It has been critical work and Zoe's contribution to our school goes far beyond what is expected of a staff member. The work that has gone into bringing the school from where it was in 2012 through to today has been on the back of this hard work.

KEY GOAL 4: INSPIRATIONAL PEDAGOGY

The development of an advanced scope and sequence while being a fully operational school searching to develop its physical resources is a massive challenge. We are not alone in this, with other schools in our region trying to develop their school's physical resources while working on the guiding resources and our conversations with those schools have helped reassure us that we are going ok.



Without developing the scope and sequence there is the challenge of maintaining your focus as a school while not developing the environmental and physical aspects of the school means that you are not sustainable and able to continue functioning.

From an administrative point of view several things have explored but not fully formed and developed. This is not new and something that as a school we have not fully focused our time and energy on.

A challenge for the school moving forward is to define ways of focusing the attention and the energy that goes into running the school into developing long-term educational frameworks that allow new parents, new students and new staff to truly understand and embrace what the school is in its essence, and how it does things.

In the new 2020 strategy, there is a focus on the development of a scope and sequence for each year level in all key learning areas, with a focus on nature pedagogy, inquiry-based learning for early years and project based learning for middle and upper primary classes. This ties to the values of growth and exploration and will be a key deliverable for School Council and Administration into the future.



KEY GOAL 5: STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Strong connections to our community have been critical in the school finding a way to navigate the perilous position that it was in in 2017 and 2018 and being able to turn this into the strong physical situation it finds itself in in 2019 and onward into 2020.

Through the necessity of negotiating a new lease, new Connections and new relationships were formed. A strong strategic relationship has been developed with the Denmark Men's Shed, and we have provided letters of support and letters of agreement to them to help secure their funding for a new facility in our precinct. Forward to this facility being built and for finding ways for us to share it together for the greater good about community. We continue the strong relationship with the Denmark Weed Action Group, regularly joining them on assaults on weed patches in our nearby bushland. We've formed connections with art and dance groups, with sporting groups and facilities, and have looked for ways to bring the Denmark community into our school - and for ways to bring our school out into the Denmark community.

A beautiful demonstration of this was the development applications our year 1 and 2 class presented Councillor Peter Caron in 2019. This simple activity and a simple action of inviting one of our Shire councillors to speak to one of our youngest classes lead to this school activity being the talk of the shire offices for that week.

The feedback from The Shire CEO who saw his staff sharing the development applications amongst themselves, and getting a great deal of enjoyment from our students' work was excellent. This sort of activity and connection would not have been possible in 2017. For a Shire Councillor to come to our school and spend time with our students, and for the shire CEO to call our Chair to discuss the joy the activity had brought to his staff; demonstrates how far we have come in terms of connecting with our community and building relationships that are important to securing the schools future.



Early in September 2019, the School Council started working on the Strategic Plan for 2020 and beyond. Our objectives when embarking on the process were to:

- Examine a new name for the school;
- Clarify the vision of the school in the form of a clear vision statement;
- Develop a core set of values to underpin all that we do as a school and guide us into the future;
- Look at how we could embed *nature*, *nurture* and *knowledge* within the school’s pedagogy, mission statement and values; and
- Provide clarity to the school community on the school ethos and future direction of the school.

The School Council spent a considerable amount of time reflecting, collecting information, analysing huge amounts of internal documentation, past surveys and workshop documents to develop this. The School Council looked for common thematic elements within these documents that are grounded in what is within our Constitution and the School’s previous planning documents and values. Our goal was to create a simple and impactful plan that is meaningful to our students, staff and community members. The School Council wanted to make it very clear that we did not want to depart from the concepts of nature, nurture, knowledge – but instead act to embed them within values that encapsulate some of the core themes of our school.

The School Council developed the following strategy to guide the direction of the school in the future. The strategy also forms the basis of the Principal’s work plan for their contract extension. The School Council’s hope is that by distilling our vision statement into a succinct sentence that links clearly to our previous values: nature, nurture and knowledge, it will become far easier for staff, students and parents to connect with our vision, our mission, our values and our direction.

Motto	<i>Nature, Nurture, Knowledge</i>			
Vision	<i>Nurturing confidence, courage and knowledge through nature, exploration and play</i>			
Our mission is to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture children to grow in confidence, courage and knowledge. • Encourage children at our school to be respectful, kind and empathetic. • Deliver the WA Curriculum with an approach that is holistic, creative, playful, grounded in nature, and connected to the community. • Provide a supportive and engaging learning environment that ensures each child can explore and fulfil their unique potential. 			
Values	RESPECT: Respect for each other, nature, the community, history, our school and learning.	COMMUNITY: Our community is sustained through kindness, empathy, commitment and communication.	GROWTH: Confidence, courage and knowledge is cultivated through opportunity, perseverance and support.	EXPLORATION: We are playful, creative, observant and adventurous in our learning.

THANKS

The Spirit of Play School Council would like to heartily thank all the many individuals who devote their time, passion, energy and effort to make this school possible.

These include all the

wonderful kids,

passionate parents and families,

inspired teachers and EAs,

dedicated staff and management,

diverse community groups,

the Shire of Denmark, and

committed volunteers...

... who all make our school so great.

It truly takes a village to raise a child, and we are fortunate and grateful to have the beautiful community in Denmark to help raise our next generation within the Spirit of Play Community School.