



Principal's Annual Report – AGM 2020

Due to understandable reasons, the majority of people in the world will forever negatively reflect on 2020, an annus horribilis. Conversely, for me professionally, 2020 was an amazingly positive experience. Moving west to continue my commitment to pure Montessori education in a well-established school, nestled in a stunning location, within a remarkable community was nothing short of a dream. I was given the challenge to help the school to realise its full potential. Following my initial visits, I was delighted with the community spirit of the school and I feel a warmth amongst all its members. Similarly, the commitment, skill, and goodwill of Staff and School Council was and continues to be very impressive.

During this time, sadly, we have seen many school communities; locally, interstate, and overseas suffer. Some schools have shut or reduced their offerings; educators and support staff have lost their jobs; students have been forced into circumstances that were previously unforeseen. The uncertainty of what was to transpire and what continues to plague our unsettled world is indeterminable.

Before COVID-19 became the focus of school operations, much of Term 1, 2020 was concentrated on the final stretch of achieving re-registration. In her final great parting act for The Montessori School Kingsley (TMSK), after 27 years of service as an Administrator, Teacher, and Principal, Mary Anne D'Souza oversaw the school achieve an astonishing five years of reregistration. The work undertaken by staff and school council was impressive and ensured the school can focus on the various issues at hand, operationally and strategically.

COVID-19 forced the upgrade of IT resources so our school would be ready when we needed to run our programs remotely. We also had to run our first online Open Day. Staff rallied to prepare packs for students to work offsite. Procedures were put into place to ensure the safety of the community during this period; extra cleaning, temperature testing, altered operations, sanitising, sanitising and sanitising.

Once it seemed that the pandemic was being managed well across the state, other concerns within the school were examined. The low and unsustainable enrolment numbers, including student retention, became a focus. Classes took on several trial students, a weekly principal's tour was introduced, successful information mornings were held and an increased interest in Montessori education has gradually built and we maintained our student population throughout the year. Interest from families already involved with other Montessori programs or other educational environments such as home-schooling and Steiner has been a welcome addition. Unprecedented student retention at the conclusion of 2020 has led the school with a level of security to build upon into the coming future. Last year we only saw two students complete their studies at our school. It is hoped with the current numbers; we will eventually have more students complete their entire education at our school.

The School Council/Board is made up of impressive and professional individuals. Their expertise and commitment are second to none. The work done is always admirable and in the best interest of the school. It has been a pleasure getting to know and work with them. Last year we held the first strategic planning day, which will be a regular feature in the calendar. Shortly, we will start work on the school's next strategic plan. Unfortunately, we have a couple of people stepping away from the board to focus on other commitments, Julie Gravel and Rob Carruthers. Both are stepping away with the sentiment that they are comfortable with the current direction of the school. I would like to thank Julie and Rob for the work they have done and their support personally.



As with all the members of the School Council/Board, volunteerism is crucial for the school. So many individuals in the community help and help often. The Board is ably supported by a number of sub-committees and they are always open to new membership:

The Capital Planning sub-committee, chaired by Warren Miller, oversaw some small projects. Despite the uncertainty of what was to come, the school resolved to proceed in building the much-awaited upgrade of the undercroft, to be used as the new lower secondary space, upgrades to the car park and bin shed. Designed to encourage flexibility of use with one multipurpose usage area, the 'new' undercroft has two breakout rooms, kitchen, toilet facilities, and an external courtyard. To coincide with this, we also commenced the upgrade of Mrs. Dyker's house to improve administration facilities and allow for the renovation of the Shammai to house the IB Common Room and reinstate the staff room. However, much of Semester 2 was spent planning the redevelopment of the Shammai. The plan is to install a double-story modular building for the IB programme and the creative arts. The spaces have been designed for flexibility of use. Further designs to replace the house, which is experiencing rising damp and several other concerns, have been developed. The plan for the existing house is; to replace it with a library and three classrooms. This would allow for a 0-3 program to recommence at the school.

Closely monitoring these developments and keeping abreast of the school's finances is the Finance subcommittee, chaired by Hannah Zhang. This committee meets often to make crucial decisions to enable the school to run. This committee also looks at policies to enable the most efficient ways of operation from the financial point of view.

The Bushland subcommittee, chaired by Laila Miller, continued its great work of maintaining our bushland. Obtaining grants, running busy bees, watering the plants, and educating our students in native flora. This committee always needs extra pairs of hands to complete some of the manual work.

Our Parent Participation subcommittee, now known as the Engagement and Communication subcommittee is overseen by Annette Advani. This group also works with the classroom reps, who support the teaching staff. Most importantly the group planned and delivered wonderful community events such as the ever successful SciTech night along with the curry night, and disco. The main work of this group is to bring the community together. An offshoot of their work is fundraising for the school, especially for the playground.

The Communication and Marketing subcommittee, chaired by Rob Carruthers, had a major project in the works. The much anticipated new look website! Along, with the rebranding, championed by Alex Zavros. A rebrand is not straightforward, however, what we now have is an authentic representation of the look and feel of our school. Beyond the aesthetics of the logo, we also have a completely new style guide to assist the school.

Further to the much-needed and ongoing improvements in the IT area. TMSK launched, for the first time, into the area of social media. The Facebook page being the first and most popular. Less so the Instagram account, YouTube channel, and the LinkedIn profile. Future plans would be to expand our presence on our Google account and develop our Wikipedia page. The last two online companies being founded by former Montessori students.

As my time progressed during 2020, many students, staff, and parents expressed the need to expand opportunities in the creative arts and physical activities. During Term 3, the school trialled an external program with NetballWA. The response was overwhelming, as TMSK hosted the biggest NetballWA program in the state, bigger than any has been experienced in the state for many years. This was the



impetus to expand the Physical Expression and Creative Expression programs in the Primary School and gradually grow the offerings in the coming years.

Many other firsts occurred at the school in 2020; the Chess Club for all students; Honkey Nuts Café was launched (for the parents and staff); the initial rollout of air conditioning; lower secondary Farm program and partnership with Landsdale Farm; lower secondary exhibition; upper primary sleep over; expansion of upper primary music; pre-primary junk play; book week; morning tea with the principal; interactive whiteboards were installed in classrooms; regular external IT support; initiated a new phone system, and as part of a cost saving exercise we replaced our contractors with a dedicated groundskeeper.

The school has every reason to be proud of our staff and wonderful students. Every member has unique gifts which they bring to the school. In tough times, all staff have supported each other and our students remarkably. In order to support staff who may have suffered beyond the call of duty, the school introduced an Employee Assistance Program, where staff may access confidential counselling, if needed.

Staff were also offered the opportunity to undertake leadership projects. The project could be one developed according to the needs of the school or one of passion that is in line with the school's direction. An academic reporting project was undertaken and will come into full operation during 2021. There are plans to further develop leadership and succession planning.

To thank the staff for the work undertaken, the Council/Board held the first board/staff social event at Hillary's Boat Harbour.

Mary Anne D'Souza concluded her 27-year service to the school at the end of Term 1, 2020. Her integrity, humility, methodical approach, and professionalism are a legacy that will always be valued by the school. Mary Anne has gone about exploring other adventures and she is enjoying this next phase of her life.

The conclusion of Term 1 also saw former co-principal Jane Coffey close her 40-year connection with the school. Initially as a parent then teacher, leader, and council member of the school. Jane also leaves an astonishing legacy of quality Montessori education behind her. Her remote connection and commitment to the school are still evident in the work she still does on behalf of the school.

Sadly, after 24 years of service to TMSK Kamel Guirgis decided to slip into retirement. A great celebration was held at this residence to recognise and thank him for his efforts. After an unwavering commitment to the school, Kamel now spends much of his time pursuing a little talked about passion he harboured, painting and art.

Bernice Oellermann who also has had a long and committed connection with the school moved to another Montessori school to pursue a full-time opportunity. Bernice continues to connect with our staff and is fully across the goings-on at our school.

While 2020 certainly presented its challenges for The Montessori School Kingsley, the school enjoyed a level of success and progress, which was unexpected in a time of a global pandemic. With the securing of enrolments (currently we have waiting lists), developments in the building program, current and planned improvements to the program, upgrades in technology, the playground along with the existing supportive culture the future for the school community looks bright to deliver a pure Montessori experience for our most important people, the students.