Monday June 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2012.

Dear Parents,

Over the past few years we have been developing a strategic plan for the development of the school for the period 2011 to 2015. Parent feedback has been an essential element in this planning, as have staff and board feedback and perspectives. This letter is another way of ensuring that all parents have detailed information about the implementation to date of our work.

**Whole school character and practice:**

Our strategic plan identified the characteristics of our school as:

- Small school - 120 students
- Small classes
- Montessori early years programmes from 0-6 (Playgroup, Kindergarten and Pre primary)
- Mixed age grouping and play opportunities
- Gentle teaching
- Strong links between home and school
- Strong focus on nature-based learning and play
- Sound educational programme giving a solid basis for high school
- Affordable fees
- A focus on social and emotional well being

The following details outline how our strategic vision works in practice, particularly in the senior years.

**Senior class programme.**

As parents of children heading into the transition from middle primary to senior classes at Parklands, this letter provides information about our senior class programme. We are very proud of the stimulating and enriched educational programme we have developed in the senior class. We want to be sure you are fully informed so you can explore the options available as your child approaches their senior primary schooling years.

**Staff – student ratio and senior primary programme.**

We believe the ratio of staff to students in this class to be the lowest in Albany. Whilst Mr Bascombe retains overall responsibility for the learning of all students, on four afternoons a week the children are working in groups of ten. We have been pleased this year to employ Ms Angelina Ross, whose role is to provide a learning programme for students in the year 5-7 group. Ms Ross takes this group for two afternoons per week for Society and Environment and Science while Mr Bascombe
takes the same subjects for the year 4 and 5 students. On the third afternoon Mr Bascombe takes each group for one session for Art while Ms Ross takes each group for Health. Ms Ross takes the whole senior class for Technology on Tuesday afternoons.

**Literacy and numeracy focus each morning.**

Every morning the literacy and numeracy component of the curriculum is taught by Mr Bascombe. He is supported by teacher assistant Mrs Sheena Little four mornings a week and Mrs Gaye Cockran for four half mornings a week. Between them the team provides for the learning needs of the whole group. Students are grouped to move through a range of learning activities including small group focussed teaching, supported group work and independent work.

What this means is that in effect, the student to teacher ratio is 1:10 in both morning literacy and numeracy sessions, and in the more hands on afternoon sessions of Society and Environment, Science, Technology, Art and Health. This allows teaching staff to give more focused attention to the individual needs of each student. All of these programmes are developing independent learning skills to prepare students for middle school and beyond.

**Multi-aged play and learning opportunities.**

One of the most valuable qualities a small school can offer is the opportunity for multi-aged play and learning opportunities. We believe it is one of the things that keeps students so happy and relaxed at Parklands. As a consequence they develop their academic and social learning in a safe environment. This is a factor that seems particularly valuable to students with strong academic abilities. Within the class, the youngest children get the opportunity to experience modelling from the oldest ones and have time to gradually develop conceptual understanding with less pressure. When they are older, students have a chance to do the modelling and ‘teaching’ to other students. In this way students get an opportunity to deepen their own learning and develop collaborative skills.

**Continuity of programmes.**

All of the programmes which began in earlier years of schooling continue through the senior years. These include:

- Weekly Italian classes from Pre primary to year 7
- Weekly physical education classes from pre primary to year 3.
- Weekly choir lessons from pre-primary through to year 7. This is presented by Lou McKenna who is contracted by to run the program. Private singing and piano lessons for students are also offered two days a week in school time.
- Two lunchtime coaching sessions each week in the park across the road from the school. The school has contracted a coach to oversee the sessions with supervision provided by school staff.
- Annual in-term swimming lessons at ALAC from year 1.
- Each class runs two assemblies per year which are an opportunity for each class to showcase what they have been learning. Merit certificates are awarded to all students on two occasions during the year. In pre-primary to year three we follow best practice by recognising the achievements of the whole class at two of their class assemblies each year. Senior students are
awarded their merit certificates throughout the annual programme of assemblies.

**Sport.**
The Senior students enjoy the opportunity for mixed age play with their younger peers, many of them reveling in this freedom which is not often possible in many other schools. However, it is also important that they have opportunity to learn and play together without their younger peers, as this meets other developmental needs for them.

One of the ways we are addressing this need is by including weekly off campus sports sessions for the Senior class. Each Friday afternoon Mr Bascombe takes the whole class for sport in the park across the road where they can exercise their strength and negotiate the rules of games and activities with their peers.

Where possible they also travel to other venues away from school, so they can experience a larger setting, other sporting venues in town and also to experience a wide array of sports. At times Mr Bascombe organizes a specialist to coach various sports, which typically include surfing, golf, tennis, and a range of indoor ball sports.

**Expanded peer and social group.**
In a small school it is important for students to connect with bigger peer and social groups at times. We are mindful of this need and we seek creative ways to link up with other students and other members of our local community. Students are encouraged to join up to sporting, social, musical and cultural organizations and clubs outside of school in order to mix in bigger peer groups and to hone in on their particular interests. This is very much the idea behind our school motto, “learning for life”, as it takes their learning into an arena outside of school.

We believe for a small school we are very proactive in linking up with events and people in the community and we are keen to respond to ideas where we can link real world learning into the students’ curriculum.

Examples of how this connection has been achieved to date follow:

- Ms Ross and her senior class are spearheading our school involvement in the local charity “Relay for Life”. More information about this event will be available soon.
- Mr Bascombe encourages students to take part in inter-school events like the inter-school cross country and other sporting events. Last year one of our senior students was well placed in cross-country event.
- Mr Bascombe coordinates the school’s involvement in the annual *Jump Rope for Heart Skipping* programme and fund raiser. We sometimes invite the Mt Lockyer Leapers school students to come and present their skills to our students.
- Woodbury Boston School often join us for visiting school performance tours.
- In April, students in the middle and upper primary classes visited Great Southern Grammar School’s literacy festival and participated in author workshops.
• In 2011 students from year 3 and up participated in the ‘Vibe 3 on 3’ basketball development day at the Albany Leisure and Aquatic Centre. This day supported sport and cross-cultural connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the Albany region.

• We will participate in the inaugural Albany Music Festival in August. This involves schools from the region showcasing their school choirs with a performance at the Albany Entertainment Centre. Ms Lou McKenna will coordinate our participation.

Peer support leadership programme.
This year we are implementing a peer support programme. This is a new initiative aimed at fostering and training leadership in our senior students. The programme involves two full days of training for the nine most senior students early in term 3. Later in the term all students from years 1-5 will be allocated to a peer support group with two of the newly trained student leaders. With the support of class teachers, the student leaders will provide a weekly programme focusing on health for each of the peer support groups over the remainder of term 3.

This leadership role for senior students will become a regular part of the school programme each year. In this way students can look forward to a formal recognition of their role both as senior students and school leaders. This will provide invaluable leadership training prior to leaving primary school. More information about this initiative to come shortly.

I hope this gives you an insight into the exciting and stimulating education programme provided at Parklands. I’m hopeful you share my confidence and excitement in the wonderful learning opportunities provided for our students in the senior years.

Please feel free to come and talk with me if you have any questions you would like to ask.

Kind regards

Marg Pontin