

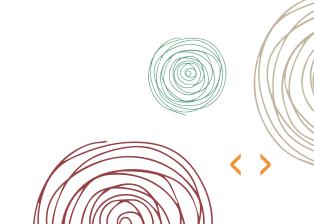
Annual Report 2021

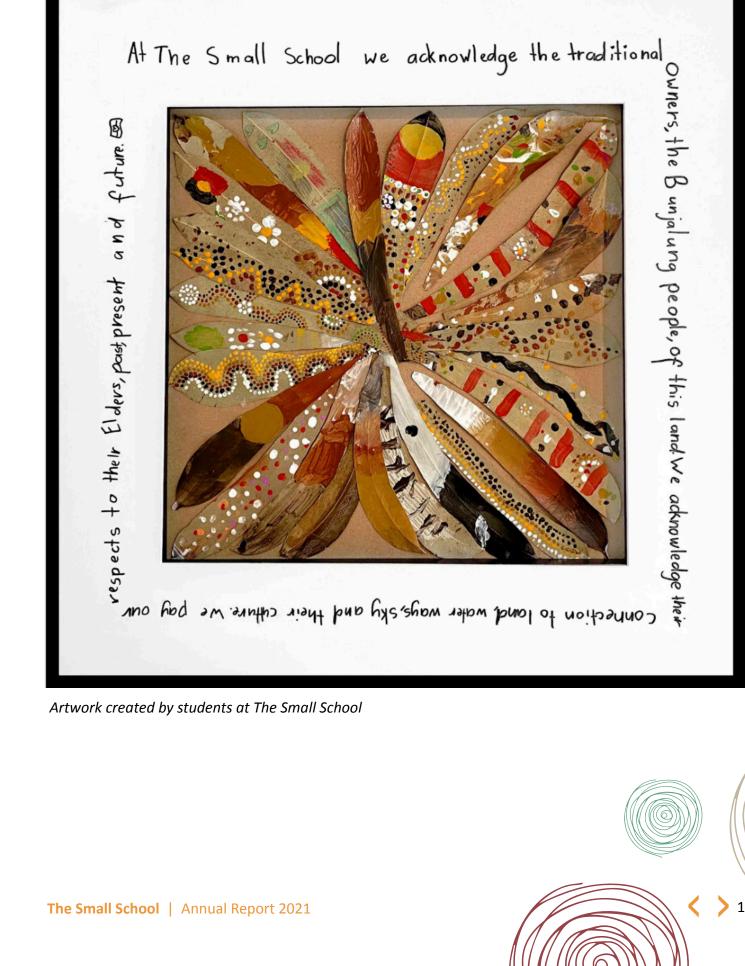


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1

A message from key school bodies

Message from the Chairperson, School Board

I would like to start by offering my heartfelt thanks and ongoing admiration to Rachelle Longstaff and Carla Wilson who have served on the board alongside me in this past year and publicly thank Sara Hicks, Kristy Shore and Kate Ferguson who after having contributed so much time and energy to the board have decided to continue supporting the school from outside of the boardroom. You have helped shaped the school and it is indeed a better place because of you all.

When I sit and review the past school year it's hard to encapsulate 12 months of term-time as diverse and challenging as we've experienced in just a paragraph or two. Societal strains around vaccine and mask mandates meant the school was put under pressure not previously felt to navigate ethical waters outside of our main purpose of educating children. Many families felt the need to examine and consolidate deeply held beliefs around health issues and create a position for themselves that could be explained simply, when oftenthese complex emotions don't boil down to a black and white answer. It was our close knit group of teachers whose selflessness shone bright and served as a beacon of hope and stability when many communities were being torn apart. These beautiful humans showed not only amazing solidarity in the face of mandates but also committed to protecting the most vulnerable members of our school by always putting the children first. These inspiring ripples are still being felt now and I continue to applaud our entire team on a journey conducted with grace and strength.



The unsettled waters of schooling during an ongoing pandemic were also felt by families, when parent volunteers could not contribute to school life on campus due to mandated changes to school operations. For a short period we were distanced from life inside the school walls as school gates became hard lines in the dirt. Again it was the teachers who reached out with daily updates and afternoon chats, phone calls, zoom sessions and carpark meetings to ensure parents could remain connected to the daily routines of their children. When lockdowns came into force, learning at home was made so much easier by the individualised learning offered by the teachers and the take-home packages of resources that made the children feel special receiving their very own 'present from school'. As I write now in mid 2022, we have reached the shore on a post-pandemic island after staying afloat during the storms and squalls of 2021. The journey has bought us all together in a new way, where we don't take physically gathering together for granted. The school grounds are once again open and full involvement with day-to-day school life continues to enrich our lives and our children's learning experiences. The best part is that ourcommunity is growing and so opportunities for connection are richer than ever.

Amie Green



Chairperson, School Board

A message from key school bodies continued

Message from the Principal

Despite its numerous challenges, 2021 was a year that saw growth in many areas for our school. We added Year 6, becoming a Kindy to Year 6 school and 11 new students. Covid restrictions, vaccine mandates and face masks were part of our daily lives. For some thesedemands were manageable while for others they were confounding and invasive. Unlike2020, the ongoing and expanding restrictions created tension in both our school andbroader community. It challenged our family inclusive philosophy enormously. Our staff were committed to providing a safe environment for students and staff alike and were extremely dedicated in following Covid hygiene practices. As I write this message in 2022, we are living with Covid in real terms, and it continues to cause disruption. In 2021, it was due to restrictions, in 2022 due to infection and isolation. We held our school community together with communication and understanding.

Council approved our development application to extend the school across Prince Lane, beginning our chapter on the Prince St site. We upgraded and expanded the existing gravel car park on Prince St and removed the car park on King St. This allowed us to create an additional 8 car parks and extend the playground on King St. We were also successful in our capital grant application to build a new classroom on the Prince St site. As I write in 2022, it is nearly complete.

We squeezed a lot in at school despite the lockdowns. My highlights for the year included the working bee with parents to finalise the installation of the new playground, TSS Quidditch with rules the children



devised themselves, our purchase of new kayaks and subsequent kayaking adventure on the Tweed River, driving to the kayaking adventure in our new bus (!) and winning the Tweed Shire Council Toad Busting Competition! We collected 388 toads, which Council tells us can lead to between 1.5 million and 13.5 million less cane toad tadpoles in our local environment!

The analogous nature of ridding ourselves of invasive toads and an invasive virus was not lost on me nor was the passion of the children to contribute to the protection of habitat for native frog species. Humans have a critical role as stewards of the environment if we are to avoid zootonic viruses and invasive species. We would like graduates of TSS to be passionate stewards in the future. We're very happy to be here, united and grateful for what we have at the end of 2021.

1 Nuba

Carla Wilson Principal





Contextual information about the school and characteristics of the student body

The Small School is a new, progressive independent school in the heart of Murwillumbah. Incredibly we are now in our fourth year of operation. In 2021, we had 33 students in K-6, two full-time teachers and one part-time learning support teacher.

We are committed to the

philosophy of democratic education, which prioritises children having a voice in their own school, and to providing an environment where children feel safe and empowered to speak about their feelings and thoughts and learn the skills and value of listening to others.

We have a focus on developing self-direction and self-ownership of learning, project-based learning, play-based and hands-on learning, self-reflection for both students and staff and the development of a community to support each other and our children to navigate our modern world.

We truly value and welcome parents and community mentors to participate in our school. We want children to experience being at school and learning at school in connection with their families and wider community as much as possible.

The Small School has a multi-age setting and in 2021 offered two classes for all students, K-2 and Years 3-6. Teachers modify or extend material commensurate to a child's capacity and readiness. Teachers' have a strong focus on individualising student's learning programs and are able to deliver the curriculum with flexibility, allowing for a wider spectrum of abilities not defined by age.

At the school's inception we chose to structure our philosophy based on guiding principles.

The guiding principles provide firm ground and clear direction for the school while still allowing for the philosophy to continue to develop along with the school community, while the school is so young.

> Community Day Gate Gallery.

We have 6 guiding principles in our educational philosophy:

 Relationships with each other and with the environment are of paramount importance.

2. Learning is theme-based (integrated and emergent curriculum) and real-world focused (experiential).

3. Children thrive when they have some say in how they spend their day and what they learn (Democratic Education).

4. Families are part of the school (family-centred education).

5. We learn cooperatively not competitively (non-competitive environment).

6. Playing is learning too (free play and playbased teaching and learning).



Contextual information about the school and characteristics of the student body continued

There are 3 learning frames in the TSS Educational Program. They are:

Frame 1:

Focused Key Learning Areas (KLAs).

Focused KLAs include English, Mathematics, and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE). Focused KLAs are taught in class groups by the classroom teacher with the exception of PDHPE which is taught on occasion by both teachers using ateam-teaching approach to the whole school. The English syllabus is also taught through our whole school meetings (The Nesting Ground). The students learn to develop and apply contextual knowledge as well as understand and apply knowledge of language forms and features as they discuss new ideas for the school and problem solve together.

Frame 2: Thematic Learning Units (Integrated KLAs)

One theme is selected for a school-wide approach to learning each term. Each thematic learning unit explores key concepts across multiple KLAs, including Science and Technology, History, Geography, Creative Arts and PDHPE. There is also a continuing focus for teachers to identify and use English and maths learning opportunities within thematic units. Themes are chosen for their richness and breadth in a collaborative process between students and teachers. Each theme is broad enough to accommodate each individual child's interests and passions. This ensures that teachers can focus on real student engagement, a key benefit of this approach.

The guiding principles provide firm ground and clear direction for the school while still allowing for the philosophy to continue to develop along with the school community, while the school is so young.

2021 Thematic Learning Integrated Units		
Term 1	Space (Science, History and Visual Arts focus)	
Term 2	Oceans (Science, Geography and Drama focus)	
Term 3	Clothes (History, PDPHPE and Dance focus)	
Term 4	Animals (Science, Geography and Music focus)	



Personal Interest Project - Mongolia



Contextual information about the school and characteristics of the student body continued

Frame 3:

Student-Owned Skills and Sustainability Program (Courses /Additional Activities)

The Student-Owned Skills and Sustainability Program (SOSS includes 4 courses – 1. Electives, 2. Personal Interest Projects, 3. Sustaining The Small School (STSS) and 4. Investigations.

The courses in the SOSS program are authentic, purposeful, skills-based and sustainabilityfocussed. The underlying pedagogical approach is aimed at promoting student choice and responsibility and engagement in school life.

2. Course Title: Personal Interest Projects

Students have the opportunity to delve further into areas of personal interest by completing an individual project. These projects can be technology based, research projects, create and build projects or performance based. Students plan and complete their project throughout the course of the term and present it with a method of their choice on the last day of each Term to parents and interested community members on 'Community Day'. The underlying pedagogical aim for the PIPs is to create awareness of the design and learning process through the development of planning and organisational skills and selfresponsibility in learning.



Electives are offered by staff, parents and/or community members in areas of interest and/or expertise and are optional activities that the children elect to participate in. The variety and focus of the elective choices are guided by teachers who explore and suggest areas of interest which are either art/craft, science or sports based. As with all elements ofthe SOSS Program, Electives are hands-on, authentic, purposeful and involve student choice. Examples include – circus skills, tie dying, archery and an enduringly popular elective, Dungeons and Dragons (storytelling game).



3. Course Title: Sustaining The Small School (STSS)

Sustaining The Small School (STSS) is a weekly wholeschool activity facilitated by teachers, as well as other staff members and occasionally parents. Activities are aimed at creating authentic, hands-on and purposeful experiences. These experiences often support children's learning of key concepts within Mathematics, English, PDHPE, Creative Arts and cross-curriculum themes, particularly Sustainability.







Contextual information about the school and characteristics of the student body continued

3. Course Title: Sustaining The Small School (STSS) - *Continued*

Additionally, the underlying pedagogy in STSS is aimed at promoting responsibility, feelings of belonging and engagement with school life. Students help to identify and create the STSS activities and choose which one to participate in. Examples of activities that may be offered within STSS include, but are not limited to, gardening and cooking projects, waste management projects, school beautification or improvement projects, fundraising projects, etc.



Finding out what our clothes are made of and where they come from

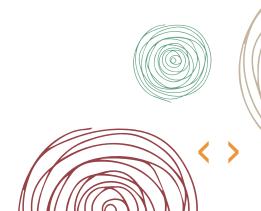
4. Course Title: Investigations (Walker Learning Approach)

The Walker Learning Approach is an Australian

holistic pedagogical approach. The aim of the Walker Learning Approach is to promote a sense of investigation, wonder, exploration, curiosity and interest with a rich range of materials, resources and opportunities in which students can engage. The Walker Learning pedagogical approach positions the child at the centre of their learning, considering their individual development and personal interests. During Investigations, children have the opportunity to investigate and engage with learning areas of their choosing within the classroom. The classroom teacher plans, designs and creates a number of learning areas (Literacy, Numeracy, Collage, Construction, DramaticPlay, Tinkering, Sensory etc) to support the current learning intentions of the class.



Box Wars



Student outcomes in standardised national literacy and numeracy testing

A small number of our students were eligible to sit Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN but the parents of eligible children withdrew their children after due consideration.



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Teacher professional learning, accreditation and qualifications

Teacher Professional Learning in 2021

Professional learning activity	Number of staff participating
Adjusting Teaching During COVID-19	1
NCCD Term 1 Network Meeting (Implementation and support): Teachers completed this PD to support our understanding of the way our students with disabilities learn, how to create adjustments for the different students, timetabling and planning to meet NCCD evidence requirements and planning meetings with families.	3
Road Safety Education (Partnering with Families): Support training for schools to partner with parents and carers in support of Road Safety Education (RSE).	1

Teacher professional learning, accreditation and qualifications *Continued*

Teacher Professional Learning in 2021

Professional learning activity	Number of staff participating
Identifying and Responding to Children and Young People At Risk: Training covered the legislative responsibilities for reporting, types of abuse and neglect that children and young people are most commonly exposed to and possible indicators and the reporting process for child protection in independent schools.	4
Learning Difficulties Essentials Online: Understanding specific learning difficulties Including dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia.	1
The Role of Decodables In Explicit Evidence- Based Literacy Instruction (Webinar): SPELD NSW session on how decodables texts are designed to support evidence-based literacy instruction.	1
The Science of Reading - Essential Knowledge for Teachers Seminar: Introductory session to the evidence base supporting effective reading instruction methods, including the multidisciplinary basis of Science of Reading and the latest research on synthetic phonics instruction.	1
Challenge accepted - Practical Actions for Reading Success: Evidence informed literacy practices in the early primary years.	1
NCCD Term 4 Network Meeting (Review and Reflection): Review of 2021 NCCD and planning for 2022.	



Teacher professional learning, accreditation and qualifications *Continued*

Teacher Accreditation

Level of Accreditation	Number of Teachers
Provisional	1
Proficient Teacher	2

Teacher Qualifications

Level of Accreditation	Number of Teachers
Teachers having teacher education qualifications from a higher education institution within Australiaor as recognised within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) guidelines.	3
Teachers having a bachelor's degree from a higher education institution within Australia or one recognised within the AEI-NOOSR guidelines but lack formal teacher education qualifications.	0



Workforce composition

The workforce composition of The Small School can be viewed here:

https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/52680

Student Attendance

Grade	Whole year attendance rates for 2021 by year level
Kindy	73.1%
Year 1	87.39%
Year 2	77.3%
Year 3	90.23%
Year 4	84.65%
Year 5	90.79%
Year 6	86.4%
Whole year attendance rate for the whole school (K-6):	84.27%

The following excerpt from our Enrolment and Attendance Policy outlines our approach to non-attendance:

Strategies for improving regular attendance

Resolution of attendance difficulties will be carried out in accordance with the school's commitment to early intervention and support for families and the school's Wellbeing and Safety Policy.

Early intervention is the most effective way to resolve irregular attendance. Mostly irregular attendance will be resolved through prompt follow-up with parents. Early intervention strategies are informal and carried out by the classroom Teacher. Firstly, teachers will check for any readily resolved barriers to attendance such as transport or other family arrangements. Where there has been a discussion with parents about improving attendance, this is reported to the Principal and other staff at the Staff Meeting.

If attendance does not improve following an initial discussion, the Teacher in consultation with the Principal will communicate further with the family. Steps will include:

- Arranging to meet with parents and if appropriate the child, to discuss any concerns or barriers that may exist.
- Asking the child or parent if they know what might help them feel more comfortableat school.



- Providing one-on-one time with the child and a trusted staff member at school.
- Reminding a parent they are welcome to stay with their child at school whiletheir child settles in.
- Investigating a different teaching approach for the child.

• Addressing concerns about a relationship with another child (if relevant) and facilitating the development of their relationship or if not possible, providing them with strategies to be separate at the school.

• Recording information about barriers to attendance and strategies to address them in a Student File Note or where appropriate, a Learning Support Plan.

If a child is considered to have an unsatisfactory school attendance and early intervention strategies have failed to improve attendance, the Principal and Teacher will arrange to meet with the family in an Attendance Improvement Meeting.

A child is considered to have an unsatisfactory school attendance when they have:

• Regular absences without explanation/satisfactory explanation (despite followup from the school) for more than 15-20 days in a term.

- Regular absences and explanations provided by parents which are not accepted by the Principal.
- An extended period of absence without an explanation or the explanation is not accepted by the Principal. An extended period of absence may be consecutive or irregular patterns of non-attendance.

At Attendance Improvement Meetings:

• Any matter discussed at an informal early intervention meeting will be reviewed.

- A documented school-based Attendance Improvement Plan is developed.
- Parents will be reminded of their legal obligation under the Act and the Principal's obligations under the Act to keep accurate records of attendance, decide whether reasons given for absences are justified and to address issues of non-attendance, which could include the involvement of outside agencies.

• Referral to outside support agencies is arranged where necessary.

Where Attendance Improvement Meeting strategies do not work to improve school attendance, the Principal will work collaboratively with other government or non-government agencies including the NSW Association of Independent Schools to arrange for a Compulsory Attendance Conference if this is recommended.

The Compulsory Schooling Conference is the final school-based intervention that can be taken to address matters of unsatisfactory school attendance. The Principal must explain to parents that the school may refer the case to the Department of Education Legal Services to take further action where children of compulsory school age continue to have unacceptable unexplained or unjustified absences from school, despite attempted interventions at the school level.



If a child's attendance at school remains unsatisfactory the Department may apply to the Children's Court for a Compulsory Schooling Order. The Children's Court magistrate may order a Compulsory Schooling Conference to be convened.

The School and the Department legal staff will remain committed to working in partnership with parents to address the issues which are preventing a child's full participation at school. In circumstances where a breach of compulsory schooling orders occurs further action may be taken against a parent in the Local Court. The result of court action can be the imposition of a community service order or a fine.

Extended unexplained absences where it is believed that the child has left the school will be followed up in accordance with the requirements outlined in this policy, namely evidence that a Department of Education Officer with home liaison responsibilities has been notified of the child's full name, date of birth, last known address, last date of attendance, parents' names and contact details, an indication of possible destination, other information that may assist officers to locate the child, and any known work health and safety risks associated with contacting the parents or child.



Morning Circle









Enrolment policies

The Enrolment Policies for Families is available on our website at: https://www.thesmallschool.org.au/policies-procedures

This provides families with a full description of the enrolment process.

The Enrolment and Attendance Policy is a policy which is for internal use, it is consistent with the Enrolment Policies for Families and describes in detail the school's procedures for enrolment and attendance. This policy is attached with this Annual Report to the NESA submission through RANGS Online.

Student - Led Electives







TSS has policies concerning student welfare. They include:

- Behaviour Management Policy;
- Anti-Bullying Policy;
- Raising a Concern or Complaint Policy;
- Well-Being and Safety Policy.

As a democratic school we are committed to procedural fairness for children, parents and staff alike in all our day-to-day activities. We do not allow corporal punishment of any kind in our school and have policies to guide our actions to ensure that we uphold procedural fairness when disciplining children. This remains the case in the event of suspension or expulsion, where adherence to policies is critical.

Our Behaviour Management Policy is concerned with supporting a culture of relationship building and connection, with a view to always wanting to create a feeling of belonging in school life. Misbehaviour in most cases is seen as developmentally normal and usually responds to consistent, gentle and supportive redirection.

Participation of children in the development of the school's behavioural expectations (rules) is critical. Agreements are reached through discussion of the what, why and how and of dissenting views.

Bullying occurs when we feel frightened, unsafe, embarrassed, angry or unfairly treated as a result of someone's behaviour towards us. It can be confusing and isolating. At TSS we talk openly about bullying – what it is, how it affects people and what we can do about it.

Staff understand that bullying can have complex dynamics and that children who display bullying behaviour may be experiencing difficulties in their lives outside of school or may be responding or retaliating to another undetected or unreported incident.

Special Circles provide a forum to address concerns about bullying. However, this is not a carte blanche approach. Each incident of concerning behaviour is different as are the feelings of the child affected. Some children may want to address issues in a Special Circle. For others this is too confronting, and teachers must support children to have their voice in a different way, usually by speaking on their behalf until they have the confidence to speak for themselves.

Our close relationships to children and consequent close observation of their relationships with each other, provides very strong protection against any systemic behaviour going unnoticed or unaddressed.





The following table provides further summaries of our policies relating to student welfare.

TSS Policies	Changes made in 2021	Access to policy
 Well-Being and Safety Policy * Describes the culture and overarching principles TSS ascribes to for the wellbeing and safety of both children and staff. * It references other TSS policies related to physical health and health plans, codes of conduct for children, parents, staff and child protection. * It outlines the framework which supports the physical, emotional, intellectual and social safety of children. Similarly, for staff, it outlines the foundation of the rights of staff to work in a professional and safe environment and references the Work, Health and Safety Policy. 	No changes were made during 2021.	On the school website, link below*.
Anti-Bullying Policy * Provides clarification of what a safe environment is for children, what the effects of bullying can be, the responsibilities of staff, children and parents in relation to the prevention of bullying, how we monitor the nature of relationships at the school and how we address problems using principles of restorative justice as far as possible. * Restorative justice principles include guided discussion and negotiations. This process is described more below in Behaviour Management Policy.	No changes were made during 2021.	On the school website, link below*
Raising a Concern or Complaint Policy * Sets out the process for raising concerns or complaints about any aspect of the school's operations. * States the goal of creating a culture of openness in receiving constructive complaints with a view to strengthening the school through their effective resolution. * Provides the steps for making a complaint.	No changes were made during 2021.	On the school website, link below*

* https://www.thesmallschool.org.au/policies-procedures

TSS Policies	Changes made in 2021	Access to policy
Behaviour Management Policy * First and foremost, the Behavior Management Policy outlines the duty of care and kindness adults have to children, the responsibility of adults to model respectful behaviour and relationships in the school and it expressly prohibits the use of corporal punishment of any kind. * It outlines the school's commitment to conflict resolution, procedural fairness and restorative justice as the basis for behavioural management. * It references the codes of conduct and describes our priorities: modelling by adults; teaching methods which are responsive to individual needs, rule development as a collaborative and relationship-building exercise and an understanding that most misbehaviour is developmentally normal and responds to clear and calm redirection. * It outlines the principles for responding to breaches in the codes of conduct: procedural fairness, record management, restorative justice and prohibition of corporal punishment. * Restorative justice allows all affected parties of a social/behavioural problem, to have their experiences heard in a mediated process, to assist children to take meaningful responsibility for their actions. Restorative justice principles are used informally in Special Circles where nonserious breaches of the Code of Conduct are addressed. They are also used more formally in meetings between staff, parents and children to address serious or repeated non-serious breaches.	No changes were made during 2021.	On the school website, link below*.



School determined priority areas for improvement

Areas identified for improvement in 2021 and outcomes:

The regular production of school newsletter and provide a Family Handbook.	 The school newsletter was produced each term from Term 2 – Term 4. A comprehensive draft of the Family Handbook has been completed by a consultant in a special project's role.
Parent survey for broad feedback about the school.	• A parent survey was distributed at the end of 2021. It provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the school. The main area identified for improvement was music classes.
Physical challenges inside and outside of school (more adventurous camps/excursions).	 Each class introduced more movement breaks. These were optional for younger children and for older children they became part of mandatory daily challenges. School camps and excursions were limited due to Covid restrictions, however, the Year 5-7 had an active Winter camp.
Our understanding and implementation of ATSI crosscurricula priorities.	• This was not achieved due to time spent in online learning development and dealing with Covid restrictions at school, which occupied the focus for much of the year. An excursion to a local Aboriginal museum was not possible due to Covid restrictions.

In 2022, we intend to improve:

• Our whole school approach to literacy through a Science of Reading professional development project.

• Our classroom space through the addition of a new classroom for older students.





This year saw a focus on online safety during online learning and kindness initiatives both within classrooms and across the school. Online safety required upskilling for our teachers. Kindness initiatives were discussed with children in class and whole school circles, with explicit actions that would create a culture of kindness being explored.

A number of parent forums were held during the year with staff and parents to discuss Covid restrictions. These meetings had an explicit focus on respectful communication and were held to address the range of views present in our school community about Covid mandates.

In general, healthy conflict resolution is a large part of our culture at TSS. Staff regularly use restorative justice principles in Special Circles to guide children towards a better understanding of their own and others' behaviours. Rights are balanced with responsibilities at TSS and there is an expectation that children will contribute to a tidy and well-functioning learning environment.







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A parent survey was distributed at the end of 2021. It provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the school. The main area identified for improvement was music classes. There were a number of minor issues raised about menu planning for the school lunch program which can be readily resolved. The main areas of positive feedback concerned the overall educational philosophy and culture at the school.

Explicit feedback is sought from students by the teachers in an age-appropriate way across the school. This is done through discussions in classrooms and through a fortnightly whole school meeting.

Parent feedback was sought throughout the year through parent forums, in person where possible and via zoom during lock downs.

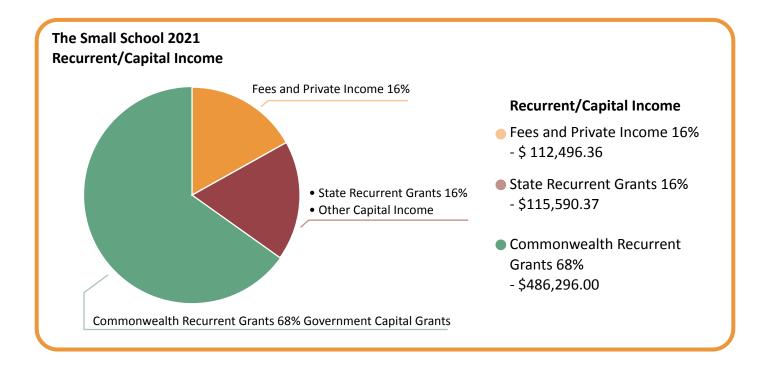
Staff at TSS operate in a collaborative, professional environment with many decisions being made together in staff and planning meetings. A culture of openness and mutual respect is very important at TSS. Teachers are seen as expert professionals who carry out a complex, vital and demanding job. The respect and autonomy afforded to teachers contributes greatly to their satisfaction and consequently the satisfaction of the children in their care. Specifically, feedback from staff is sought by the Principal in annual staff reviews.

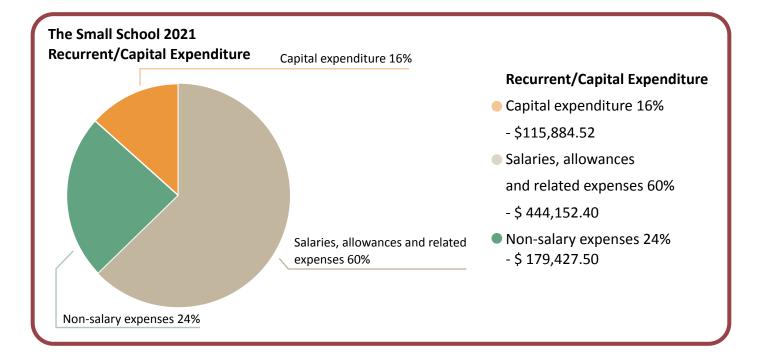


Zoom classes during COVID -19 lockdown











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