

Principal's report for 2019.

I would like to start my report by passing on my sincere thanks to the wonderful people who make up our GST board. Your support and guidance is a constant comfort to me as I manage the daily world of our busy little school. I know that whenever we hit a roadblock or a problem, I have 10 people out there willing to lend a hand or offer a useful opinion. Decisions and solutions are found quickly and through robust and thoughtful discussion I know that we are steering this excellent school in a positive direction. Thank you to all of you. It is no small thing to give so much of your time to an organisation such as ours. It is truly appreciated.

In 2019 the board and the leadership of GST worked hard on updating our strategic plan, we looked to the future with this plan, how we can get there and what we will need to meet our needs. Space was identified as a big issue. We have a long history of re-purposing and finding ingenious ways to utilise the limited space we already have. Our buildings are not all purpose built and that can make it difficult. Constantly growing numbers and the thought of a possible 5<sup>th</sup> class group in the future has led to the commissioning of an architect to help work on an exciting building plan. We took a long look at fundraising and how we might improve our efforts in this area. Our Constitution is being re-written and modernised and we are certainly not sitting still.

2019 was a great year for enrolments in that we were able to build on the strong but steady growth of enrolments to the point where we had a very healthy census number of 33.3 full time equivalent enrolment. This was made up of 41 different children. It is wonderful to have new families join our school and we had a pleasing number of families join us after moving to Tasmania and the Meander Valley. It has been nice to have so many parents in the Meander Valley region and we are starting to see the growth of a strong parent culture and hopefully the re-emergence of a strong parent and friends' group. Not so many years ago we had only a handful of families who lived locally but our morning drop off is now a hive of activity. We thank all our families for their support and cooperation.

In 2019 our staff had a strong focus on communication and emotional regulation. We want all of our students to have the means and ability to communicate and this was led by our awesome Speech Pathology team in conjunction with our Occupational Therapist.

Through the use of **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)** high and low technology options were (and still are) used to give even our non-verbal students a voice. The use of picture boards, iPads, signing, and schedules are just some of the ways this can occur. Teachers worked hard to incorporate these methods into their lessons, allowing all students an opportunity to participate. AAC presents some great opportunities for mentoring and student partnerships as many students enjoy assisting their friends to communicate.

Unfortunately both of our Speech Pathologists have moved on to different stages of their career journey and we are still on the hunt for a new Speech professional, This highlights the difficulty many organisation have in not only attracting professional

staff to regional Tasmania but the very competitive nature of the NDIS world and the pressure that puts on organisations to retain and attract staff from an already small group of Allied Health Professionals.

Our Occupational Therapist is leading the charge on emotional regulation working on identifying and coping with a variety of emotions, helping students to develop tools to cope with uncomfortable feelings and regulate their behaviour. In one of our classrooms this has really taken off with the students working hard to compliment and help each other on a daily basis. Making your friends feel great has become a part of their routine. It is lovely to see.

At the end of 2018 we said goodbye to our Education Administrator, Chris Jacobsen. Chris was a wonderful asset to our school and was instrumental in helping us develop and implement new and exciting methods, policies and procedures. Her shoes proved difficult to fill and we were lucky enough to be able to use Chris' expertise remotely for sections of 2019. However at the end of 2019 we were very fortunate to secure Heidi Bush as our new Education Administrator. Heidi comes to us with a wealth of teaching and curriculum experience. Heidi is helping our staff to become excellent educators and guiding our curriculum to provide the best for our students. We are very much of the mindset that we are a school first and foremost and the educational progress of our students is of paramount importance. We want to provide our students with opportunities to be themselves and use their talents to flourish and grow. We are most fortunate to have Heidi on board to help us with this.

In 2018 Giant Steps Tasmania (GST) began the process of delivering Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) courses to our year 11 and 12 students. It is a bit of a learning curve and we have been working hard to learn new procedures and methods for delivering these courses. In 2019 we stepped up our delivery of these courses and offered a wide range of courses to our students. These courses are mainly at the lower entry level and are focused on life skills and practical numeracy and literacy. However we had some students doing quite sophisticated courses and one student has now gone on to full time at his local college. The students have amazed us with their ability to get through the course work and it is pleasing to have some of their efforts recognised with certificates. Our Blue Room teacher Danielle Whatley should be commended for taking on the challenge of our first attempts at formal senior education. She has been supported by our extended learning teacher and education administrators, but Danielle has driven the ideas and planning required to present varied and interesting courses for quite a broad range of students. It is testament to the dedication and tenacity of our teaching staff (and staff in general) they are adaptable and resilient and have such a desire to do the best for our students.

My personal highlight for the year (possibly even for my entire time at GST) was the formation of the first Giant Steps Tasmania Student Representative Council (SRC). This awesome bunch of students featured two members of each class group. This group met fortnightly and discussed various school issues and came up with some fantastic ideas. From the SRC conversations we developed 3 House Groups named after influential people in GST history. Triffitt, honouring our founding family, Clark,

honouring the great work of the Clark family and Christie, honouring the extremely important role of John Christie as a Principal and Board member. The SRC also decided on having a School Captain. Senior and Junior elections were held and there was a quite torrid political campaign leading up to voting day. The SRC presented us with challenges and rewards we had never envisioned. The SRC looked to supporting the community and did such beautiful things as raising money for Deloraine House and laying a wreath on the cenotaph on Remembrance Day. The fortnightly meetings were spectacularly entertaining and seeing the confidence of many of the members grow during the year was such a proud moment.

In 2019 we received many wonderful donations and gifts. I am constantly amazed by the enthusiastic nature in which the community supports Giant Steps Tasmania. Our Trivia night received excellent community support and the organisers did a marvellous job of planning a fun and entertaining night to raise money for our school and a local man fighting Motor Neurone Disease. Other notable supporters for 2019 were such great organisations as the Golden Opportunity Shop in Deloraine. They make a huge difference to the lives of three families by supporting them with school fees. Cityview Christian Church once again donated over 20 Christmas Food hampers to our families along with some craft items for our Trivia Night. We were pleased to receive continued support from many Rotary, Lions and other service clubs with even a generous donation for a visiting Taiwanese Rotary delegation. Aurora donated a significant sum for iPads and AAC applications. Woolworths Earn and Learn scheme resulted in the school receiving a great deal of new movie making equipment. There are many more and it is a pleasure to be considered a worthy recipient by such a broad section of the community. These donations help us to continue our good work and help our students get the best opportunities.

Thank you all for your continued interest in Giant Steps Tasmania.