

# Fitzroy Community School

I'm not known as a party animal, but surrounded by so many people I've known over the last 40 years, it's lovely to be here and see you all – past students, past and present parents, professionals and friends!

How many times have I said to myself *I wish I'd attended this school myself*. I do hope that many more children in the future will be able to attend a school like FCS.

Faye and I made this school in order to create a better quality of life for children and for the adults they become. We never intended to score consistently within the top 1% of NAPLAN, but these outcomes have aroused more public interest in our school.<sup>1</sup>

Our second generation principal, our son Tim, has kept the show on the road very effectively and also created a second campus (where we stand today), very ably run by Wayne and Joelle. We certainly hope more educators will in the future be able to open more small primary schools which cater for the whole child.

What do I believe are the key concepts for an independent primary community school to flourish?

- 1 a **small enrolment** (up to 65), creating the supportive environment of an extended family<sup>2</sup>
- 2 a greater **variety of adults** involved in the child's school week – not just one-teacher-one-class<sup>3</sup>
- 3 activity **outside the school walls**, developing physicality, enjoying the outdoors, going on outings, and learning how to behave in different social contexts
- 4 regular opportunities for **intelligent conversation** in group situations during the school week<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this is not a cram school. We spend less time in class than any other school we know.

<sup>2</sup> Schools with large populations have sometimes divided their primary population into more intimate “villages”.

<sup>3</sup> We use our best English teacher to take several different groups in English. Similarly for all subjects. We independent alternative primary schools also have the great advantage that the principal may approve participation in the classroom by volunteer parents and grandparents who have been nominated by the teacher. This enables sub-groups of children to be better serviced.

<sup>4</sup> We started out with a focus on interpersonal communication skills. But, to our happy surprise, the effects of cultivating intelligent conversation as a way of life for primary children have yielded great advantages for their secondary and later lives. They have advantages in public speaking, conflict resolution and personal problem-solving.

- 5 some regular **free time**, so the child can discover who they individually are – which can otherwise be obscured under a regime of 24/7 adult-supervised activity, and
- 6 because parents are properly the **ultimate authority** over their children’s education, and because we as whole-child educators insist on certain practices (like the above), it is essential that this type of school does not simply enrol all-comers, but first interviews prospective parents to ensure that they **approve** of its practices.<sup>5</sup>

As awareness grows of the merits of community schools, we trust that certain barriers will be lifted:

A we trust that parents will win the **right to choose** who shall educate their child

B we trust that school funding will be based on **family means** (and special needs) – not simply upon who runs the school

C we trust that independent educators who will take responsibility for the whole child will have the **right to open** their own schools and that parents may freely “vote with their feet”

Faye and I are grateful to all the parents who have chosen to trust our educational services for their children. We are grateful to all the beautiful children who have responded so well to what we have offered. And we are grateful to the several very devoted teachers who are willing to focus on **the hidden curriculum** (the long-term influence of the school way of life).

We must also thank people who are not directly involved in our school life, but have cleared the way for us. Some public officials make a sport of obstructing innovators whose work naturally does not neatly fit into the established system, based on practices of the past. But, thank God, there are also public officials who will stand up and be counted for letting new vision find its feet – and give society a chance to explore better ways. To those inspiring public officials, we raise our hats.

There are also odd individuals – I don't mean peculiar, I mean unexpected – who are inspired by the FCS dream and who have contributed substantially in time, talent, materiel and even cash. So the little community of FCS also draws on a wider, less visible, community of people with vision and values.

Faye and I have had to count our blessings many times over. And we dearly wish that you, to whom we pass on this work, will greatly enjoy the FCS part of your life. And bravely uphold the core impulse of the school dream – to **empower the mind** and **uplift the spirit** of the growing young human.

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<sup>5</sup> Schools which routinely take in all applicants inevitably come under pressure from a variety of adult anxieties, and end up with a school which imposes a stunted lifestyle upon all their children.