



THE
NATURE
SCHOOL

2019 Annual Report

Table of Contents

- 1. A message from key school bodies**
 - a. Board Chair Report 2019**
 - b. Head of Primary Report 2019**
- 2. Contextual Information about the school**
- 3. Student outcomes in standardized national literacy and numeracy testing**
- 4. Professional learning and teacher standards**
- 5. Workforce composition**
- 6. Student attendance and management of non-attendance**
- 7. Enrolment policy**
- 8. Characteristics of the student body**
- 9. Policy summaries**
- 10. School determined improvement targets**
- 11. Initiatives promoting respect and responsibility**
- 12. Parent, student and teacher satisfaction**
- 13. Summary financial information**



Vision



A community in which children learn and shine through authentic experiences in nature, becoming active global citizens for a sustainable future.

Values

Connect: we value connected learning opportunities, connecting with our community, and connection with nature.

Protect: we value childhood, protect the rights of children, and advocate for protection of the environment.

Respect: we value self respect, respect for others, and respect for the natural world.



THE
NATURE
SCHOOL

1a. Chair Report

It is my privilege to provide the 2019 Presidents report for the Nature School Incorporated.

This year I and my fellow Directors sought to focus on the future of the organisation and growing all programs in a sustainable and efficient manner.

We leveraged off the simply gargantuan efforts made by our founders, former directors and current Board members alike. We used those efforts to inform our strategic direction, not only for this year, but for the future of the organisation.

At the core of every decision made this year and the sole reason any of us are involved in this wonderful community, was the children. In every question raised and decision made at board level was the underlying question, "How will this benefit the kids?" and with that mindset I believe our organisation has made some wonderful progress this year. Some key points include:

- 1) Our Board has grown both in number and in expertise. Additional Board members were selected based on both our current needs and our future goals.
- 2) With great delight we welcomed Karen Marlin into the organisation as part of the Executive Team. Karen's vast experience with Barker College in Sydney is already showing benefits to our community and I expect some very exciting developments in 2020.
- 3) In 'future proofing' the organisation the Board have elected to work towards registration of the Early Years program. 2020 will see a vast body of work by Program Manager, Jacqui Leach, and her team to achieve this goal.
- 4) The continued growth in our Primary School will see our 2020 student numbers increase to up to 60, spanning K- Year 4. We went through the NESA Registration process again this year, as we will continue to do each year until we reach Year 6. To the credit of Primary Head Teacher, Catherine Oehlman and her incredible staff we yet again obtained full 5 year registration for current years as well as approval to extend to Year 4 in 2020.



5) The Board is continuing to work on its Master Development Plans to ensure we have appropriate infrastructure and resources year on year.

6) 2019 was not without its challenges. As the whole community dealt with an unprecedented bushfire season. I was extremely impressed with the level-headed conduct of our Executive Team, their staff and the extraordinary community of ours, particularly in such trying times.

As we look to the future of The Nature School, I can say with confidence that we continue to strengthen the foundations of a truly resilient and sustainable organisation and I look forward to watching the growth of the community throughout the years.

Cameron Mynott

President and Chair,
The Nature School Incorporated





Primary School



1b. Head of Primary Report

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Birpai People, who are the Traditional Custodians of this land upon which we walk and we work, we learn and we play. I acknowledge their deep connection to Country and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

As I reflect on the second year of The Nature School, it is difficult to see past the bushfires which so impacted our region. Immediately a song that the students sang over and over floats back into my mind... *It's dry, so dry, smoke and fires are everywhere. We long with the Earth for the sweet touch of rain.* In years to come, students, staff and families will all look back on 2019 and remember the day the sky turned red. But we will also remember the way the fires brought our community together. The way students baked for volunteers at the Koala Hospital and sewed animal pouches for FAWNA. The way families cared for each other during unexpected closures and weeks of thick, choking smoke. The way a staff member stood beside me under falling ash and helped me hose down my home. These are the moments when we see our values lived out. **Connect. Protect. Respect.** While a crisis situation may bring these values to the forefront, they remain a constant foundation for all we do at TNS and are evidenced throughout this report.



2019 was a year rich in connection. Our Adventure Days took us to 17 different locations throughout the year connected to our learning, including Oxhill Organic Farm, Port Macquarie Observatory, Bago Maze, Sea Acres and a wide range of local bush and coastal habitats. We welcomed many visitors into our school as well, including Aunty Ang Marr-Grogan and Arly Mehan who helped us learn more about Birpai ways of knowing and shared the Gathang language with us. We enjoyed visits from authors including Jacqueline Harvey and author/illustrator Stephen Michael King who painted our stunning mural. Rose Wilson joined us weekly for NatureSong, teaching us songs about fire, rain and even mosquitoes.

We participated in citizen science projects including the Koala Smart program, the Aussie Backyard Birdcount, and some students even attended a threatened species identification workshop hosted by the Hastings Birdwatchers Club. Other attendees were amazed at the students' knowledge of critically endangered Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters. We were involved with organising and facilitating the educational aspects of the Hastings Sustainability Showcase, and our older students were able to spend time with Costa Georgiadis discussing ideas for a sustainable future. We hosted beeswax workshops in conjunction with the Food Smart Families program, participated in sustainability workshops by Impact Environmental Education and remained involved with The Lost Plot Community Gardens.

It was also a year of celebration and growth. We rejoiced in the opening of our new playground, danced up a storm at the annual Bushdance, shared soup and lanterns at our Winter Gathering and celebrated with the Innes Lake Community at Christmas time. National Tree Day, Harmony Day and Naidoc Week all provided opportunities for respectful celebration. Through it all, our focus remained on learning. We connected adventures and celebrations with curriculum areas to maximise learning outcomes. Teachers designed creative integrated units of learning, and continued to stretch themselves professionally.

Such a dynamic and unique school environment always sparks interest, and again in 2019 we received significant media attention. Our feature article in Australian Geographic Magazine showcased stunning images of our students in the bush and highlighted the significance of our impact on the educational sector. Throughout the year we were featured on television news, local radio, national radio, local newspaper and online articles. We were also delighted to be finalists at the Port Chamber of Commerce Awards in the Childcare, Education and Training category.

Of course, a wonderful year like this cannot happen without a wonderful team. This year Jessica Foulkes and Matt Dooley joined Roy Fleissgarten and myself in the teaching team. Ashlee Hill began the year with us as an additional Teacher Aide, and when family took her to Newcastle we welcomed Katwin Gibson. Louise Lord joined us to provide administrative support in the office. My heartfelt thanks to the team for their commitment and support, particularly through our second Registration and Inspection with NESA – which was again excellent. In the second half of the year Karen Marlin relocated from Sydney to join us as the inaugural Business Manager of The Nature School. Together with Jacqui Leach (Head of Early Learning and Play) the three of us form the operational Executive for TNS. I cannot thank Jacqui and Karen enough for the support they provide to me.

My thanks also to the Board of TNS who continue to govern with diligence, and in particular to our Chair Cameron Mynott. The contribution of each Board member behind the scenes is costly in terms of time, and significant in terms of impact. On behalf of TNS I extend my thanks to Pastor Mark VanDerVeer and the team at Honour Church who continue to graciously welcome us into the building at the Innes Lake Community Centre. And lastly, thank you to our families. Thank you for choosing us, trusting us, and partnering with us as your children grow.

In a year that ended with smoke and fires for our community, together we look forward to the flourish of new green growth that will emerge. Year on year we continue to grow as a school. Our enrolment numbers grow, our staff team grows, and our vision to create a community in which children learn and shine through authentic experiences in nature continues to blossom. Through the haze, the future of TNS shines bright and clear.

Catherine Oehlman
Head of Primary



2. Contextual information about the school

TNS Primary strives to be a leading progressive independent school with a focus on nature. Learners at TNS are scientific thinkers, curious questioners, and articulate communicators, capable of affecting change now and in the future.

After opening initially for children across K-2 in 2018, the strategic plan is to continue adding grade levels and additional staff until we reach a full K-6 Primary School in 2022. TNS seeks to employ highly qualified, experienced teachers whose educational philosophy and life experiences align with the vision articulated by the Board. While it is not essential that teachers have had professional experience in a progressive environment, a willingness to learn and an understanding of the educational philosophies outlined below are essential.

At TNS Primary learning is regularly taken beyond the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to take students outside on a daily basis during all KLAs, as appropriate to the lesson. Adventure Days are fortnightly offsite excursions into local natural habitats or the local community. Adventure Days are planned in conjunction with Integrated units of work and require a high degree of teacher planning and understanding of curriculum.

The following educational philosophies underpin teaching and learning at TNS Primary:

Innovative education

TNS offers innovative education which uses an experiential, learner led approach with a 'green focus'. There is a de-emphasis on textbooks in favour of varied learning resources. Classes have a low student-teacher ratio that allows us to focus on the needs of the students as individuals. Teachers encourage students to take risks, make mistakes, persist, think outside the box, assess situations from different perspectives and work cooperatively. Creativity, problem solving, independent thinking, communication and collaboration are

encouraged and fostered. TNS has strong community involvement. We engage experts in various fields from our community by inviting them to our school, or taking our students to them through regular Adventure Days and other excursions.

Connection to the Natural Environment

The natural environment provides opportunities for challenge and experiential learning.

Nature based education supports a child's development in social and emotional intelligence, problem solving and environmental understanding. In a world overloaded with virtual distractions, TNS students are given time and space to come down to earth and engage with the natural world. Nature offers children the chance to learn about themselves and the world around them, and builds emotional resilience they can use throughout life.

Connection to nature and our environment allows us to teach the importance of our collective eco-footprint and the hope of creating respectful custodianship. Teachers incorporate learning from nature, about nature, or within nature when planning all units of work.

Inquiry based learning

Inquiry based learning is facilitated by teachers who pose questions, problems or scenarios, rather than simply presenting established facts or portraying a smooth path to knowledge.

As students develop skills and expertise through the primary years, they are increasingly capable of posing their own questions to investigate. At TNS, inquiry based learning:

- occurs both during planned units of teaching, and through multi-age interest groups
- focuses on scientific exploration through real world experiments
- emphasises learning by doing – often outside (hands on projects, expeditionary learning, experiential learning)
- may involve collaborative learning projects and the associated development of social skills
- may involve individual learning projects specific to the interests or learning needs of students

- should incorporate some form of presentation of findings at the conclusion of the investigation

Indigenous and cultural learning

TNS seeks to foster authentic relationships with Birpai Elders and focus on local Indigenous knowledge through story, song and Language (Gathang). Ongoing points of connection with our Birpai community include visits from Aunty Ang (Birpai artist) and Arly McNerny (Birpai consultant) as well as occasional visits from Uncle Bill (Birpai Land Council). When possible, Indigenous consultants will be invited to join our learning on Adventure Days at places of cultural significance. Teaching staff also incorporate Acknowledgement of Country into all Adventure Days.

Place-based education

At TNS we take advantage of our stunning location through immersive learning in the community and natural environment to create authentic, meaningful and engaging learning for students. Through place-based education we seek to engage students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and connect these with learning outcomes across the curriculum. Regular visits to our local bushland at Innes Lake Nature Reserve are facilitated through a partnership with our National Parks and Wildlife Ranger. This allows students to intimately know one natural environment, including its seasonal cycles, flora and fauna, and experience changes there over an extended period of time.



3. Student outcomes in standardised national literacy and numeracy testing

Extract from TNS Assessment and Reporting Statement:

The purpose of assessment is to gather valid, reliable and useful information about student learning. At TNS we adopt an integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment, and as such assessment is an ongoing and integral part of the teaching-learning cycle. Quality assessment tasks enable students to demonstrate what they know and can do while providing teachers with opportunities to gather evidence about student achievement in relation to syllabus outcomes.

At TNS we are committed to standards-referenced assessment that:

- *is based on syllabus outcomes*
- *enables students to demonstrate their learning in a range of task types*
- *is free from bias*
- *is inclusive of and accessible for all students, with appropriate differentiations or adjustments provided as necessary*
- *is part of an ongoing process where progress is monitored over time*
- *is respectful of each child and sensitive to their age and developmental stage*

A range of strategies may be used to assess student learning. The type of assessment activity and the means of gathering evidence will depend on outcomes, context, and students' learning needs. At TNS assessment strategies include:

- *teacher observations*
- *anecdotal records*
- *rubrics for rich assessment tasks*
- *checklists*
- *peer assessment*

- *self assessment*
- *learning portfolios (a growing collection of student work samples from throughout the semester)*
- *inquiry based research questions*
- *hands-on activities or practical demonstrations*
- *presentations*

A 'test' should only be used when evidence of student knowledge and understanding cannot be collected any other way. At TNS we prefer authentic assessment tasks and work samples collected in the context of the usual school day and not under 'test conditions'. As such, we do not teach children how to perform in standardised tests or expect them to complete assessment tasks within strictly enforced time limits. While we fully cooperate with all legislative requirements regarding standardised tests, we are philosophically opposed to standardised testing and do not sacrifice valuable teaching time for practising past papers or teaching performance techniques.

* * *

In 2019 we had a small number of students eligible to sit the NAPLAN tests, however parents of these students chose to withdraw them from testing on philosophical grounds. Each of these parents had a face-to-face meeting with the Head Teacher, without coercion, before making this decision.



4. Professional learning and teacher standards

4a. Primary teaching standards/ qualifications

| Category | Number of Teachers – as at end of 2019 |
|--|---|
| (i) Teachers having teacher education qualifications from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognized within the National office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AE-NOOSR) guidelines | 4 |
| (ii) Teachers having a Bachelor Degree from a higher institution within Australia or one recognized within the AE-NOOSR guidelines but lack formal teacher education qualifications | 0 |

4b. Professional learning

TNS Primary strives to have skilled, effective and professional teachers who are committed to improving the quality of their teaching in order to enhance student learning. There is a strong focus on the professional learning of all staff at TNS, and continuous engagement with informal and formal professional development opportunities is expected. In consultation with the Head Teacher, teaching staff are required to set professional learning goals that are connected to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) and aligned with the School's philosophy. Professional development days for staff are scheduled throughout the year. At the first Professional Development day in the academic year, new staff will participate in an induction program as part of their learning. Weekly meetings provide an ongoing opportunity for collegial conversations, and for the Head Teacher to meet with collaboratively or individually with staff members.

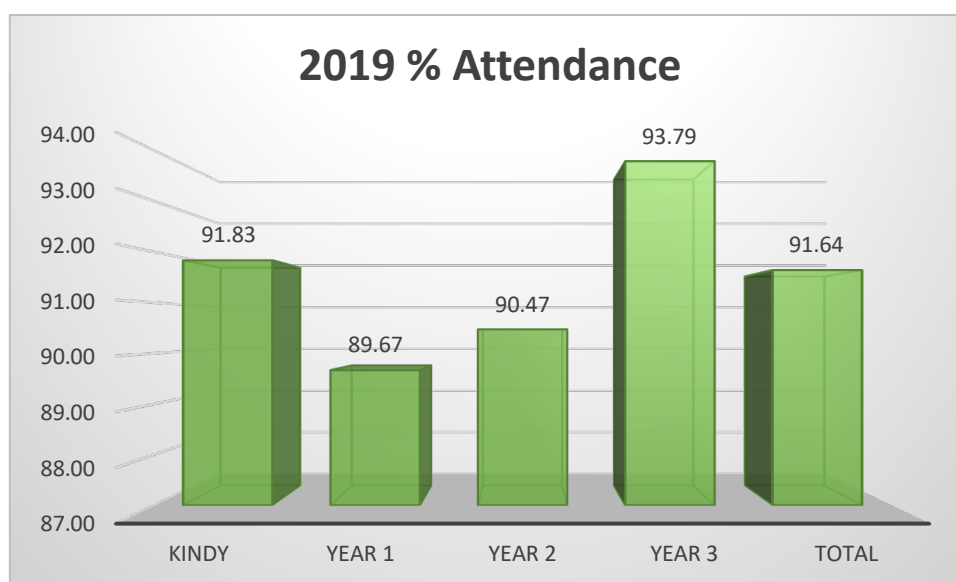
| Description of the Professional Learning Activity | Staff participating |
|--|---------------------|
| Mandatory Child Protection Training | 5 |
| First Aid Training | 5 |
| CPR and Water Safety Training | 4 |
| Anaphylaxis Training | 4 |
| Asthma Training | 4 |
| Professional goal setting and reflection | 4 |
| Learning with STEM workshop | 4 |
| Host: Mid North Coast Sustainability Educators Network meetings | 4 |
| Host: Programming session for local area (cross sectoral) | 4 |
| Caring for Koalas Symposium | 1 |
| Mid North Coast Sustainability Educators Network meetings | 4 |
| Head: AIS Principal Induction Program – 10 days | 1 |
| Head: AIS Annual Principals' Briefing | 1 |
| Head: filmed interview – “Authentic programming in Primary contexts” (University of Newcastle Education Faculty) | 1 |
| Head: Principal presentation for graduating teacher education students (University of Newcastle Education Faculty) | 1 |
| Head: Professional supervision of training Teacher Aide | 1 |
| Head: Professional mentoring | 1 |



5. Workforce composition

| Primary School Staff – as at end of year 2019 | |
|---|-----|
| Teaching Staff | 4 |
| Full time equivalent teaching staff | 3.0 |
| Non-teaching staff | 2 |
| Full time equivalent non-teaching staff | 1.0 |

6. Student attendance and management of non-attendance



The school implements policies and procedures for the management of student non-attendance. A daily record of school attendance of each student is maintained throughout the term. Parents/guardians are asked to communicate directly with the class teacher/administration office if their child is not attending school for any reason. This is preferably done through email but can also be done either in person or by phone. Any unexplained absence is followed up with the parents/guardians, firstly, to ascertain the safety and wellbeing of the child and, secondly, to remind them of the necessity to communicate with the school.

Initially if there are concerns with poor attendance the Head Teacher will meet with the parents/guardians to identify and discuss strategies and possible support to address the attendance issue. If the problem continues, the Head Teacher may develop a School Attendance Improvement Plan for the student and their family or may need to work collaboratively with other government or non-government agencies including the AIS NSW to escalate or arrange for a Compulsory Attendance Conference. The parents/guardians will be informed that continued days of absence could result in a mandatory report being lodged. All meetings with the parents/guardians and student will be documented and kept in the student's file.



7. Enrolment Policy

This Version: 2.3

| | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Policy Reference | TNS-022 |
| Prepared by | Head Teacher |
| Approved by | TNS Board of Directors |
| Approval date | 29 March 2019 |
| Page numbers | 8 |
| Next review | March 2022 |

Version history:

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1.0 | October 2017 | Final |
| 2.0 | 29 January 2018 | Draft |
| 2.1 | 26 September 2018 | Final (with mark-ups) |
| 2.2 | 26 September 2018 | Final |
| 2.3 | 29 March 2019 | Reviewed |

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the enrolment criteria and procedures adopted by The Nature School Inc (TNS) for students at The Nature School Primary.

2. Context

The Nature School Primary opened in 2018 for students in Kindergarten to Year 2 and continues to grow each year. Through our enrolment process we seek to partner with like-minded families to create a community in which children learn and shine through authentic experiences from and within nature, becoming active global citizens for a sustainable future.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Relevant legislation | Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Disability Standards for Education 2005 |
| Related TNS policies | TNS Disability Inclusion Policy TNS Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy |

3. Policy

It is the policy of TNS that

- enrolment processes will be transparent, fair and equitable; and
- the School will fulfil all obligations under the law regarding anti-discrimination.

4. Definitions

disability – includes:

- total or partial loss of a person's bodily or mental functions; or
- total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought process, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour.

reasonable adjustment – a measure or action taken to assist a student with a disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students, while balancing the interests of all parties affected.

on the same basis – an education provider treats a prospective student with a disability *on the same basis* as a prospective student without a disability if the provider makes any decisions about admission or enrolment on the basis that reasonable adjustments will be provided in accordance with the Standards (Disability Standards for Education).

unjustifiable hardship – an exception to providing adjustments when complying with the Disability Standards for Education would pose an excessive burden on the education

provider, staff or other students, in line with Section 11 of the Act (Disability Discrimination Act).

5. Procedures

5.1 Enrolment flow chart

See Appendix A

5.2 Enrolment process

Kindergarten will provide the usual entry point into the School, however enrolment at other grade levels will be considered provided places are available. Children who are five years old, or who turn five on or before 31 July in that year are eligible to start Kindergarten.

1. Enquiries are welcome at any time. The School administration officer will respond to all enquiries by providing:
 - TNS Primary Prospectus
 - TNS Fee Schedule
 - TNS Enrolment Policy
 - TNS Enrolment Terms and Conditions
 - TNS Register of Interest form
2. The School administration officer will enter information from the Register of Interest form into the register of interest list on the School's online student management software. The Register of Interest will remain open until the end of Semester 1 for the following School year.
3. Parents/carers of children on the register of interest list will be contacted for an enrolment interview in Semester 2 for the following School year. As only limited places are available each year, when interviewing priority for acceptance will be given to:
 - a. siblings of existing students

- b. children currently enrolled in The Nature School Early Years program, with a record of regular attendance and up to date payment of fees
- c. children of parents who are currently actively involved in The Nature School community in a paid or unpaid capacity
- d. children of parents who align with the attitudes, values and priorities of TNS

TNS has absolute discretion in determining the weight of each of the factors it takes into account in determining whether to offer both an enrolment interview and a subsequent place for the child.

4. Prior to the enrolment interview parents must submit to the School administration officer:
 - a. completed Enrolment Form
 - b. a copy of the child's birth certificate
 - c. all medical, psychological, or other reports about the child
 - d. a copy of the child's last report, for children entering grades other than Kindergarten
 - e. any other relevant information or documentation considered necessary, either by the parents/carers or the School, including evidence of Citizenship or resident status if a child was born overseas

Important note: Providing false or misleading information or failing to provide important information may impact on an offer of enrolment or lead to an offer being withdrawn.

5. At the enrolment interview the Head Teacher, or a school representative appointed by the Head Teacher, will:
 - a. establish that the expectations and commitments of the parents/carers are consistent with the vision and mission, resources, and policies of TNS; and inform parents/carers of their responsibilities regarding fees
 - b. for Kindergarten students, assess the child's readiness for formal schooling

- c. for students with identified additional needs, consider alternative or additional assessment processes that may be required. (See **5.3 Disability**)
Any external assessments or reports required will be at the parents/carers expense
 - d. if necessary, seek permission to contact the child's preschool, previous school, medical or other personnel considered significant for providing information pertaining to the needs of the child. Where information suggests a profile of willful misconduct, bullying, strong anti-social behaviours, poor school attendance or any other behaviours that may be detrimental to the other students, staff, or the School, the Head Teacher may at their discretion decline to proceed further with the enrolment application.
6. Following enrolment interviews, formal offers will be made to successful applicants at the discretion of the Head Teacher, with priority given as outlined above (point 3 of the enrolment process).

The School administration officer will provide successful applicants with a letter of offer to be signed and Acceptance Fee invoice to be paid by the due date, usually within 14 days. Failure to reply within the required time may result in the placement being offered to another child. The School administration officer will also inform unsuccessful applicants regarding the outcome of their interview.

7. When the signed acceptance offer and Acceptance Fee have been received, the child's details are placed into the School's online student management software and the student is considered to be enrolled.

Continued enrolment at TNS Primary is dependent upon meeting a number of factors outlined below (See **5.4 Withdrawal and Termination**).

5.3 Disability

Where parents/carers have indicated that their child has additional needs, or information has come to light indicating the possible need for learning support or other measures to assist the child to participate at the School, or to use the School's facilities or services, the Head Teacher will make an additional assessment of the child's needs. Where information obtained by the School indicates that the child has a disability, the Head Teacher will seek to identify the exact nature of the child's needs and the

strategies required to address them. The Head Teacher will determine whether reasonable adjustments can be made, taking into consideration:

- the child's disability
- the views of the child and/or the child's parents/carers
- the extent to which the adjustment would allow the child to participate on the same basis as a child without the disability
- the effect of the adjustment on the child
- the effect of the adjustment on other students and staff
- the costs and benefits of the adjustment

TNS is committed to providing reasonable adjustments required by children, provided such measures or actions do not create unjustifiable hardship to the School. The Head Teacher will consider the School's financial circumstances, the estimated expenditure required for the adjustment, and the availability of financial assistance to the School before declining to offer an enrolment place due to unjustifiable hardship.

5.4 Withdrawal and Termination

- If an offer of enrolment is made and accepted, and the parents/carers subsequently decide not to proceed with enrolment, no less than a full term's notice must be given or one term's fees will be charged. An exemption may only be granted in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Head Teacher.
- If parents/carers choose to withdraw their child from the School for any reason, one full term's notice must be given. Fees in lieu of notice will be charged if insufficient notice is received.
- A child's enrolment may be terminated at any time at the discretion of the Head Teacher, due to (but not limited to) the student not making satisfactory progress, students or the parents/carers not observing all behavioral codes of conduct, violent and aggressive behavior, bullying, causing considerable disruption to other students, consistent non-attendance, or failure on the part of the parents/carers to pay fees. If a student's enrolment is terminated, one full term's fees will be retained before any refund is given.

Appendix A - Enrolment flow chart



Families enquire about TNS Primary

School administration officer provides prospectus, Register of Interest form, Fee Schedule, Enrolment policy, Enrolment terms and conditions

Parents complete Register of Interest form and submit to the School

School admin officer collects Register of Interest forms. Head Teacher selects families for interview. Admin officer requests completed enrolment application and other required paperwork prior to interview

Parents and child attend an enrolment interview

No offer made

Offer of placement

Parents sign offer and pay acceptance fee

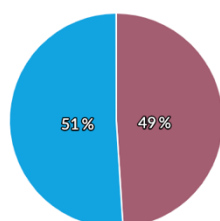
Student enrolled at TNS Primary

8. Characteristics of the student body

Students

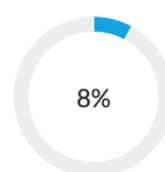
Total enrolments: 39

Boys 20
Girls 19

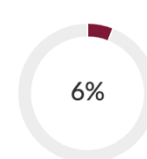


Full-time equivalent enrolments: 39.0

Indigenous students



Language background other than English



9. Policy summaries

| Policy | Summary | Changes | Availability |
|--|--|--|--|
| TNS-003 Child Protection Policy | The safety, protection and wellbeing of all students is of fundamental importance to TNS. The Child Protection Policy is an important document, as child protection is everyone's responsibility. In addition to the full policy being available on our website, we have also included extracts to ensure that all members of our community know what to do if they need to report misconduct. Policies TNS-004 and TNS-015 provide further procedures and guidelines to ensure the wellbeing of our students. | V3.0 Reviewed March 2019 – minor edits as recommended at Inspection | Publicly disclosed on School website, and available from the school office |
| TNS-004 Safe and Supportive Environment Policy | | V2.3 Reviewed March 2019 – minor edits | Available from the school office |
| TNS-015 Pastoral Care Policy | | V2.3 Reviewed March 2019 – minor edits | Available from the school office |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| TNS-035 Bullying Prevention Policy (Students) | TNS is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, productive and harmonious educational environment for students, free from bullying. | V1.2 Reviewed March 2019 – minor edits | Publicly disclosed on School website, and available from the school office |
| TNS-012 Behaviour Management and Discipline Policy | TNS will deal with student disciplinary matters quickly and effectively, while ensuring procedural fairness and the right to an unbiased decision, in order that a positive and productive learning environment is maintained for all students. | V3.0 Reviewed March 2019 – minor edits | Publicly disclosed on School website, and available from the school office |
| TNS-014 Grievance Resolution Policy | TNS is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, productive and harmonious working and educational environment for students and employees. It is acknowledged that grievances may arise from time to time. Where grievances do occur, TNS is committed to prompt, impartial, fair and confidential resolution. | V2.2 Reviewed March 2019 – minor edits | Publicly disclosed on School website, and available from the school office |

As the School is only in its second year of operation, all policies have been annually reviewed in line with our Registration timeline and requirements.



10. School determined improvement targets

| Target | Comments | Achieved? |
|--|---|---------------|
| Secure permanent home site for TNS Primary | This goal was set in 2018. While we are grateful for our beautiful leased premises we continue the search for a permanent location as TNS grows | Ongoing |
| Employ further staff | Additional classroom teacher employed and TA hours increased | ✓ |
| Registration of Year 3 | Five year registration granted Year 3 | ✓ |
| Initial Registration of Year 4 | Initial Registration granted for 2020 | ✓ |
| Increase enrolments | The school increased enrolments from 22 students to 39 (close to capacity of 40) | ✓ |
| Lodge DA with local council and gain approval for increase to student numbers for 2020 | Approval granted for student enrolment numbers to increase to 60 in 2020 at current location | ✓ |
| Improve social media presence (quality and quantity) | We implemented social media guidelines and a schedule to ensure consistency. Significant growth across Facebook and Instagram. | ✓ |
| Focus on behaviour management and discipline | Consistent dialogue around and implementation of school rules. Parents report increased satisfaction. | ✓ and ongoing |
| Secure additional classroom for 2020 | Agreement in place for additional room use on leased premises | ✓ |
| Upgrade all classroom furniture | We were able to purchase furniture late in 2019 ready for the start of the 2020 school year | ✓ |
| Purchase minibus for fortnightly Adventure Day excursions offsite | We were able to achieve this late in 2019 | ✓ |

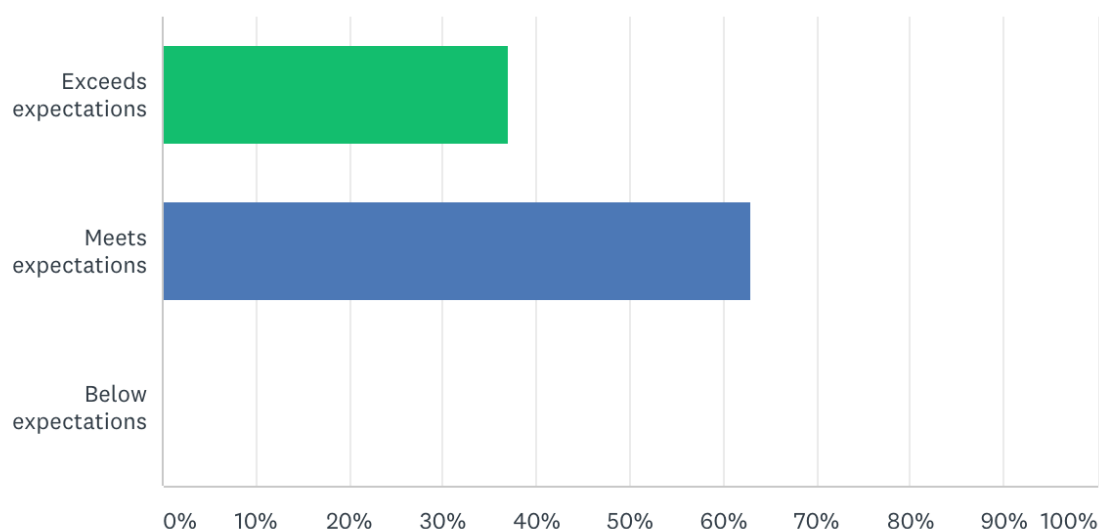
11. Initiatives promoting respect and responsibility

Respect is a key value in our organisation and one of the three foundations underpinning everything we do at TNS Primary (Respect – Safety – Learning). From Kindergarten our students are taught to respect themselves, others and the environment as outlined in the school rules. All members of our school community are expected to do the same. Staff and students at TNS Primary participated in a broad range of community initiatives in 2019 promoting respect and responsibility, including:

- Adventure days – to our local bushland and into the wider community
- Hastings Sustainability Showcase (including planning and involvement with the Schools Program Art Competition, Primary Schools Workshop session with Costa Georgiadis, and facilitating nature play sessions for all ages)
- Koala Smart program
- Midwaste Food Smart Families program
- Community beeswax workshop (Hosted by TNS in conjunction with Midwaste)
- National Schools Tree Day
- Cleanup Australia Day
- Plastic-Free July
- Hastings Birdwatchers / Birdlife Australia – Critically Endangered species identification workshop
- Aussie Backyard Bird Count during National Bird week
- TNS Bushdance
- Active and ongoing involvement with The Lost Plot Community Gardens
- Involvement with the Men's Shed group at a local retirement village
- Tree planting ceremony to celebrate students who exemplify safety, learning and respect
- Participation in community Christmas Carols at the Innes Lake Community Centre

12. Parent, student and teacher satisfaction

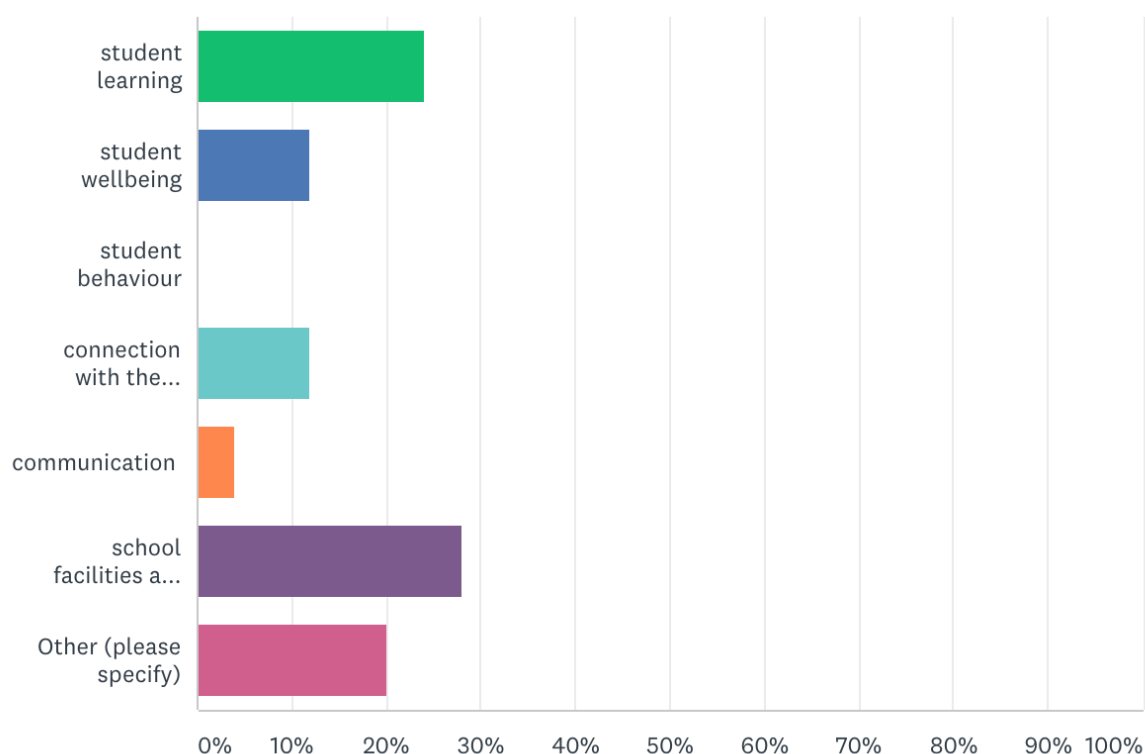
The annual survey provides an important avenue for families to give feedback on the school. Survey results highlight areas of strength, and opportunities for further growth. Our current parents are very happy with their choice of school, with all respondents indicating that The Nature School meets or exceeds their expectations.



How happy are you with TNSP for your child/ren?

Parents were asked to evaluate how well the School supports their children's learning, wellbeing, and connection with nature. Unsurprisingly, 96% of parents feel that TNSP supports connection with the natural environment extremely well or very well. 89% of parents feel that the school supports student wellbeing extremely well or very well. In considering student learning, 81% of parents feel that the school supports their children's learning needs extremely well or very well.

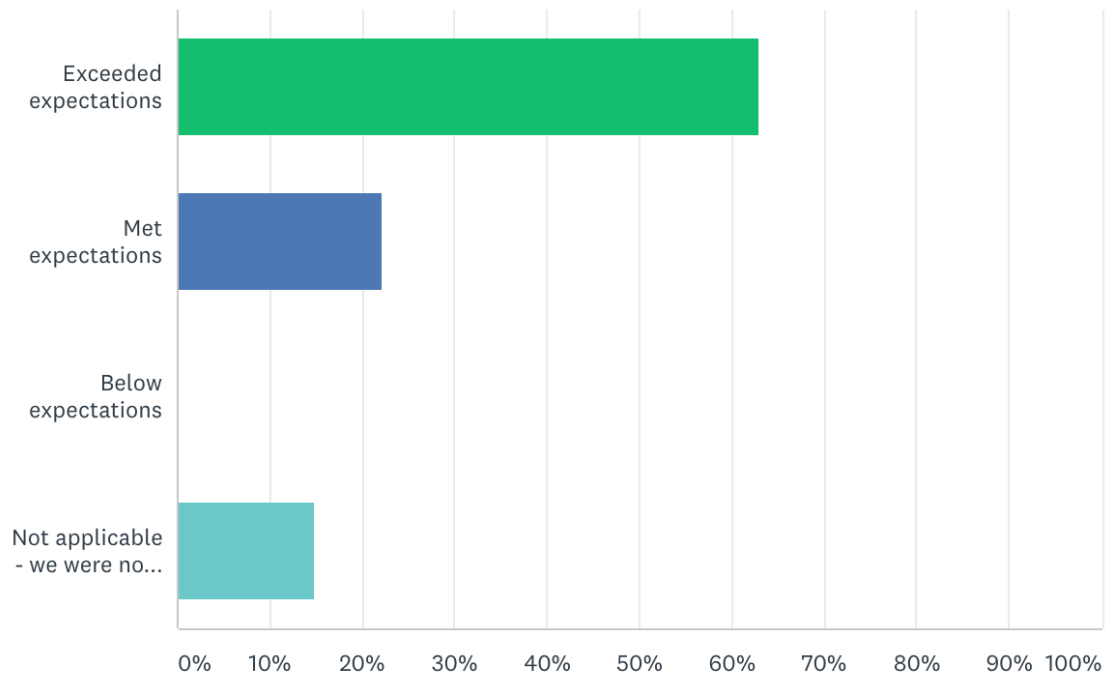
Parents highlighted student learning (24%) as one of the top two continued focus areas as the School grows, but the greatest improvement area as rated by parents was facilities and resources (28%). Respondents in the 'other' category (20%) almost exclusively outlined further requests for facilities and extra curricula activities, effectively bringing this area to 48%. This is also consistent with teachers' views, who agree that facilities and resources should be the key growth focus (50%) followed by student learning.



In which area do you think TNSP most needs to continue improving?

In the previous year's annual survey, parents highlighted fundraising, social media, communication and discipline as areas for growth. It is pleasing to note the significant improvement in the areas of student behaviour (0%) and communication (4%), with very few respondents now indicating the need for focused growth.

Reflecting on 2019, we also asked parents to particularly evaluate our handling of the bushfire crisis. This situation challenged our systems and processes, demanded quick decision making, and required a high level of communication with the school community. All families who were part of the school community at that time reported that TNSP exceeded or met their expectations during the crisis. (Note: 15% of respondents were not yet part of the School community and this question was therefore Not Applicable to them.)



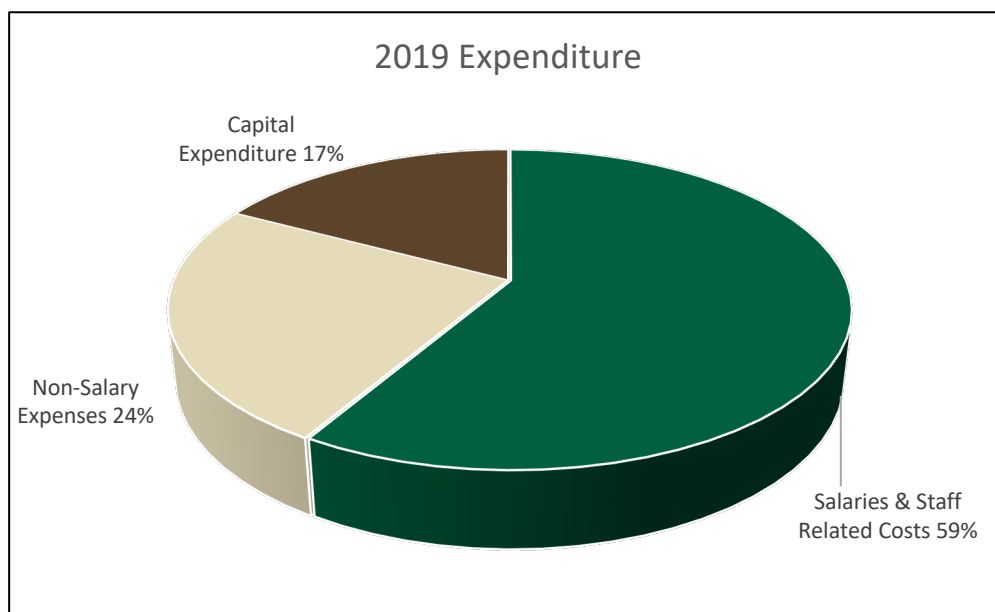
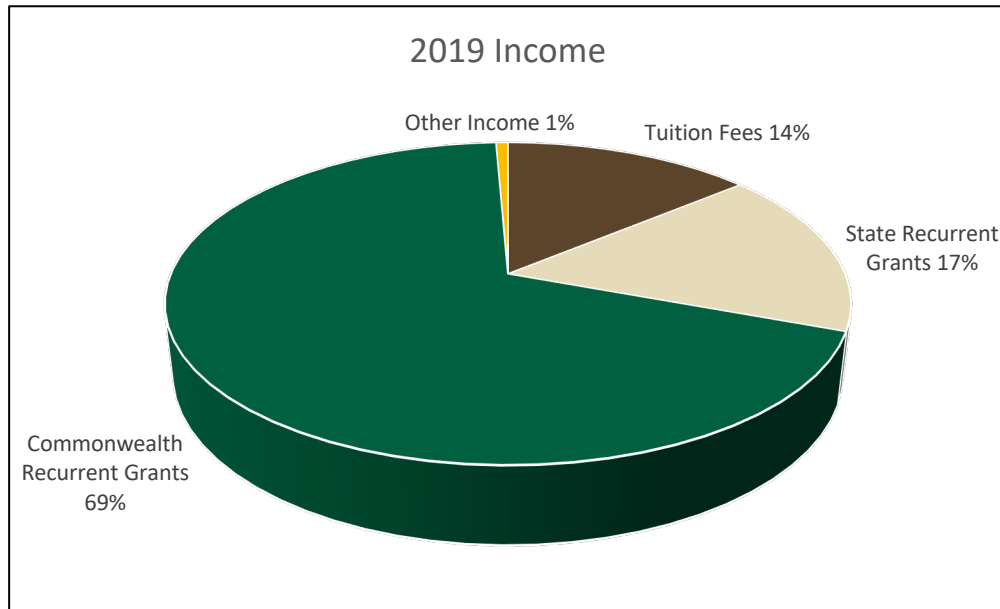
How well do you think TNSP handled the 2019 bushfires?

Overall, the results of the parent survey indicate that families are very happy with their choice of school. They would like to see a continued focus on student learning, and in the resources and facilities provided to students as the school grows over the coming years. This is consistent with the opinion of staff. For a school in only its second year of operation, this is encouraging feedback indeed.

When asked how they feel about their own school, students at TNS are overwhelmingly positive. 79% of students love their school, 9% like it, 11% think school is ok, and only one child reported not liking school.



13. Summary financial information





*Early Learning
& Play*



Head of Early Learning and Play Report

I would like to acknowledge the Birpai people, who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, live, explore and learn. I recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community, and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

What a year 2019 has been! I reflect back to a year ago, writing a report for a role that was so new, wondering what it had in store for me and if I was up for that task. As I sit here now, a year on, I feel like I have never been anywhere else. Thank you to the entire TNS community for welcoming me and helping to create that for me.

Though there are many organisations basing themselves in nature, no one does it quite like TNS. The heart of what we do is organic and authentic, and this is only possible through a community who really lives a philosophy of learning from and within nature. Thank you to *The Nature School Inc* Board of Directors, who keep this alive in the organisation. It is the magic that sets us apart.

Thank you to both Matthew Whatman and Cameron Mynott for their guidance and support in their role as Board Chair, and for their eagerness to see our Early Learning and Play programs grow. I'm also very grateful to Eirwyn Davidson for her hard work and diligence in her role as Board Secretary and welcome her as our new Board Chair in 2020.

As educators in the early years space, our job is extremely important. The Early Learning and Play programs would not be what they are without the amazing staff that make them. Thank you to Sybil and Yvonne for the trust they gave me in placing me in such an important role.

The administration of the 3 ELP programs is no small feat, so I thank Laura and Louise for their hard work in keeping the programs organised and running. Laura was an amazing support for me when taking on the role at the beginning of 2019. Later in the year, Louise took over the role of ELP administration, along with that of the Primary School. I can't thank them enough for their invaluable work.



The staff who are 'on the ground' with our children are the most passionate and dedicated educators that I have ever worked with. I'm grateful for their welcoming nature, and how they truly love their role, learning with our children in nature. Nature is our classroom, but our educators are the programs.

To the families who believe so strongly in what we do, thank you. We would not have a be here without your support.

Working closely with the Primary School has been instrumental to the growing success of ELP. I'll never forget the first cup of coffee shared at TNS where Catherine welcomed me and introduced me to the term 'One Tree'. As time went on, I fully understood it. Catherine is a wonderful colleague to work with and learn from.

The end of 2019 saw Karen Marlin join the Executive team as the Business Manager. Karen has already had an enormous impact in her short time here, and continues to strengthen our collaborative, 'One Tree' approach.

Throughout 2019 we worked closely with Council to assess our current sites and management of them. In Term 2 we said goodbye to Mahogany Hill reserve, which had been one of our original sites. Before leaving, we took part in 2 regeneration planting days with Hastings Council, Landcare and TAFE NSW. These were such special days of learning, with children taking part in morning briefings and being involved in the risk assessment processes for the day.

From Term 3 we were lucky to be able to continue using our site at Cassegrain Winery for our Early Years program and were introduced to a new council site at Thrumster, which we named 'The Grange'. This was a wonderful, open site, however, not long after beginning operation here, the nearby Lindfield Park Road fire began. This was to have an enormous impact on our programs and their operations.

As the risk of the bushfire and smoke increased, it was time to move on from Thrumster. The remainder of Term 3, and Term 4, was spent at Cassegrain Winery, moving around the property to create different spaces and manage environmental impact. To further minimise the impact, we also explored our community through excursions to The Lost Plot community garden, TNS Primary, Yarrinwood Park and The Koala Hospital.

In Term 4 we were grateful to welcome Arly Mehan into Primary and EY, as a Gathang language consultant. Arly gave us an authentic introduction into the Birpai culture, through language, dance and creative arts.

The profile of TNS grew in the community, first from the success of our presence at the Hastings Sustainability showcase, and then at a promotional day in Port Central. TNS also featured as finalists in the Port Macquarie Chamber of Commerce Business Awards in the Childcare, Education and Training category. Our ELP programs also began to gain media interest with stories of 'Plastic free' lunchboxes, our Winter school holiday programs, and Mindfulness programs.

Despite the challenges that bushfires brought, 2019 has seen an extremely successful year for Early Learning and Play. The collaborative 'One Tree' approach has meant that while Primary has grown so has ELP. Numbers in each of our 3 programs have grown so much that we have had to add days for Early Years and Holiday Programs, and cap numbers for Playgroup.

As we move toward registration of our Early Years program, I'm humbled to reflect on how far we have come in such a short time. 2020 has already brought with it some unique challenges but, as we teach resilience when in the bush, so we will be. I look forward to where we are headed from here and am so excited to be on the journey.

Jacqui Leach

Head of Early Learning and Play



Little Explorers Playgroup

Prepared by Belinda Castle (Playgroup Facilitator)

Highlights

Term 1 and 2 saw the end of facilitation at Mahogany Hill Reserve. After so many years of enthusiastic exploration it was time to move on, along with the Early Years Program in the hopes our founding bush site would begin to regenerate.

Term 3 and 4 saw the Little Explorers move to Blair Reserve. Belinda received great enthusiasm for this new site from parents and carers which was reflected in the growth of attending families.

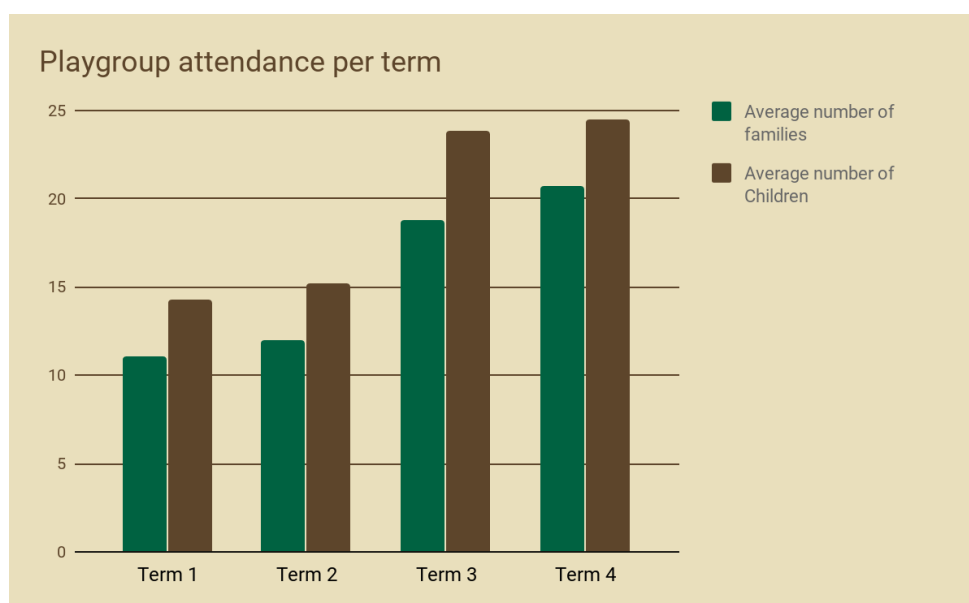
Playgroup was also facilitated twice at TNS Primary - the final Monday of Terms 2 and 4 in collaboration with Jacqui and Catherine onsite. These sessions were superbly received by the attending families.



Just one Playgroup session was forced to cancel in November due to the heavy smoke across the area from the Crestwood Bushfire. Another session saw the Little Explorers 'on excursion' at Macquarie Nature Reserve and the grounds of Roto House, where families were encouraged to visit Port Macquarie Koala Hospital. Playgroup e-adopted the first two injured koalas rescued from the fire grounds around Lake Innes Nature Reserve: Peter and Paul.

The 5 and 10 session pass options have worked well for the majority of families. For the purpose of streamlining and reducing administration time for Belinda, these will be phased out over a trial period of the first term of 2020 and cash payments onsite will no longer be an option.

Attendance



Attendance comment

2019 began with similar group numbers as 2018 ended. However, with the change of site, and positive word of mouth recommendations from attending families, the group grew spontaneously through term 3 and remained mostly at consistent high numbers through term 4 regardless of environmental factors.

Staff

Little Explorers Playgroup is run by our fantastic Playgroup Facilitator, Belinda Castle. Belinda continues to use her wealth of early childhood experience and passion for creative arts to run exemplary programs for children and their families. She is an educator for each of our 3 Early Learning and Play programs and is an absolute asset to the organisation.

Moving forward

Registration and sign-in will be moved fully from paper to online in 2020. Session payments will move to direct deposit only and will trial a similar invoicing system to Early Years Program.

Early Years

Highlights

2019 saw a move towards beginning to formalise more of the Early Years procedures and policies. Early Years, which is encompassed under what is now known as *Early Learning and Play*, made a shift from having flexible attendance numbers to maintaining a strict 1:5 adult to child ratio, with a group maximum of 15 children.

Staff of all ELP programs were given new staff uniforms, matching those of the Primary school staff and students. This was a well-received morale boost to the staff.

In Term 2, Early Years introduced fortnightly payment plans in addition to termly payments. These were extremely successful, making attendance much more realistic and affordable, and resulted in families enrolling their children in extra days.

This year also saw some experimentation with session hours. Our Friday session was changed from 3 to 4 hours for Terms 2, 3 & 4. This was fairly successful for some families, however at the close of 2019 it has been decided to go back to 3-hour programs as this caters better for our younger children. A survey was put out to families to gauge interest for opening of a Monday program, as well as an extended (7.5 hr) program. Families produced enough interest in the survey to deem the program required, however a lack of eventual enrolments made both the programs unviable.

During April, it was approved for Jacqui to begin the process of inquiry into EY registration, and Centre based care vs Mobile Preschool. After research, this information and the relevant comparisons were presented at the Strategic Planning day in September. It was here that the board voted to move toward applying for registration of a Mobile Preschool for EY.

Local visibility for all our ELP programs was increased by attendance at the Hastings Sustainability showcase, a promotional day at Port Central, various media coverage, as well as being nominated as finalists in the Childcare, Education and Training category at the Port Macquarie Chamber of Commerce Business Awards.

Term 3 2019 was a great success and was the first term the program had ever been completely full on 4 days. Term 4 followed suit, filling all enrolments and creating waitlists for each day.

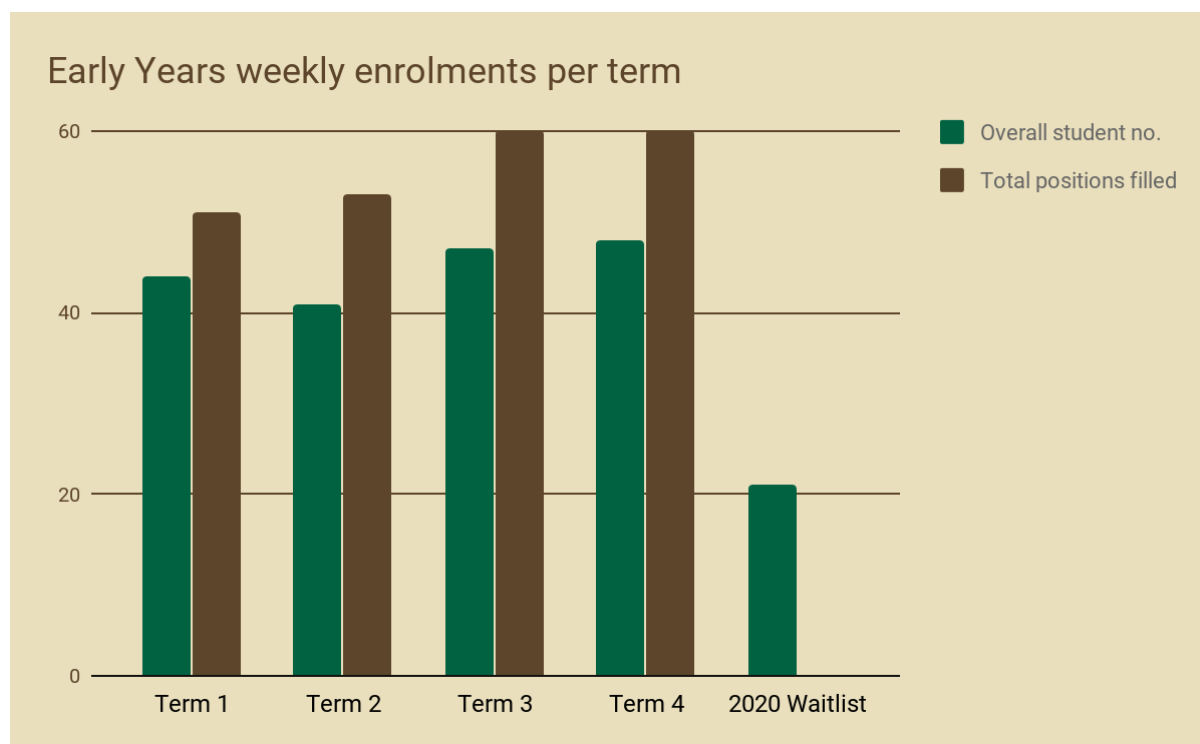
In Term 4, there was considerable interest from potential 2020 families. To best suit the needs of the program and potential families, we hosted an Open Day. Groups of families came to visit the program throughout the day during set tour periods.

The Early Years program went off site on excursions to TNS Primary, Yarrinwood Park, The Koala Hospital and The Lost Plot Community Garden.

Bushfires had a massive impact on EY during Terms 3 and 4. For a period of 2 weeks, EY was unable to operate, however for the months following this many of the programs had to be evaluated day by day to assess the safety of the program and where to run it. ELP consulted regularly with TNS Primary, NSW Health, the Rural Fire Service, as well as keeping track of the Air Quality Index regularly throughout the day.

There was much movement with sites in 2019. In Term 3, TNS was required to move on from Mahogany Hill reserve, to a new site in Thrumster. While this site was fantastic, it was a high risk once bush fires began so was only able to be used for half of Term 3. The end of 2019 saw us at Cassegrain as our main site as we also had to rest Blair Reserve. Council have worked closely with ELP to assess and secure new sites for 2020.

Enrolments



Enrolment Comment

Enrolments increased significantly during the year. This was due introducing payment plans for families making fees more affordable. As in past years, we also saw an increase in numbers in Term 3 and 4.

Staff

Overall, staff turnover in 2019 has been low. The beginning of the year saw some changes of staff, with Jimmy Collins moving overseas at the end of Term 1, and Yvonne Brown returning to the program after some time off. Yvonne stepped back into the role of Educator, after having been the Program Manager for most of 2018 and was instrumental in the continued success of the program.

Belinda Castle continued to work as our amazing 'Jack of all trades', working across all programs as an educator, and the Playgroup Facilitator. We were lucky to have Julie-Anne Thompson, Chay Khamson and Bernard Smith continue with us for another year and bring with them the experience of the years they have been with TNS.

Later in the year we welcomed casual worker, Emma Frost, who brought with her a wealth of bush regeneration knowledge and has been a wonderful asset to the team. Emily Schofield came to us from Forest Schools in the UK and began volunteering her time with us for the final 2 terms of 2019.

Partnerships with Community

During Naidoc week we welcomed Arlene Mehan to our Early Years program for the morning. Arly taught us about the local Birpai totems and helped us create with ocre and reed brushes. After the success of this session, Arly returned in Term 4. She visited Primary and EY fortnightly teaching staff and children about the Birpai culture and Gathang language.

We worked with Hastings Council, Landcare and TAFE NSW to do regeneration planting at Mahogany Hill at the end of Term 2.

Moving Forward

In 2020, Early Years will be opening 5 days a week for the first time. TNS will also be moving towards registration of the EY program, having begun the Provider Approval process.

School Holiday Program

Highlights

In 2019 we introduced themes to our Holiday Programs, including fires and cooking, natural dyes, 'Birds and Bugs', orienteering and more. Having these focused days had a positive effect on enrolments, increasing numbers gradually throughout the year.

Normally we would see a decrease in numbers in the colder months, however our fire themes seemed to keep interest and maintain enrolments during this period of the April and July holidays.

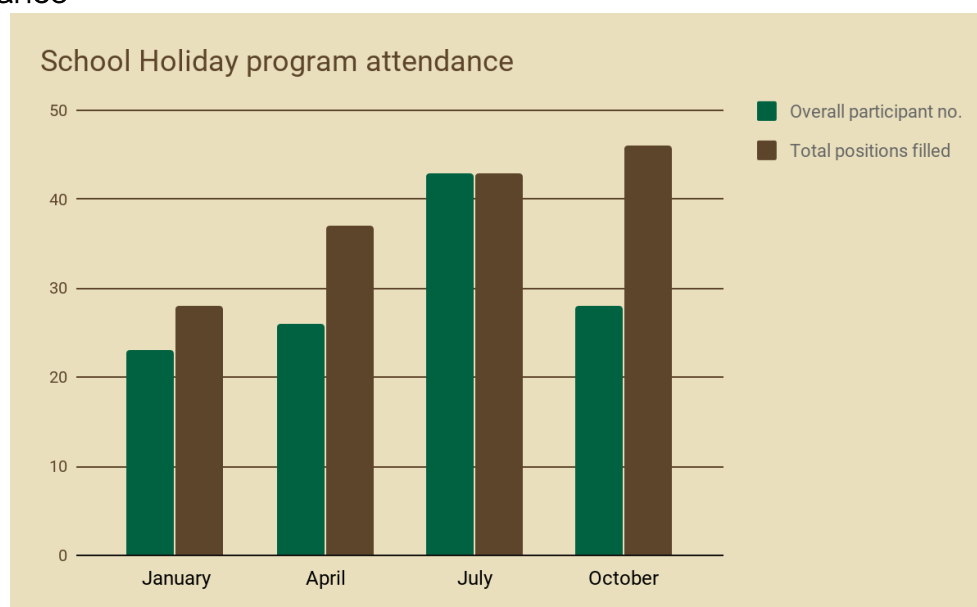
Our holiday programs gained media coverage during our 'Campfires and Cooking' day, as well as our 'Music and Mindfulness' day.

ELP collaborated with WELL, to run mindfulness and wellness sessions within our Holiday Program days.

On our unique 'Scats and Tracks' day we had Ryan Tate from Tate Animal Training Enterprises bring his dog Taylor out. Ryan spent time showing us how Taylor is able to trace and find Koalas in the bush and told us about the important work they did rescuing Koalas during and following the 2019 bushfires.

Holiday Programs were run at Cassegrain Winery for the first time, with much success. It was the operation at this site that allowed us to begin fire themed programs.

Attendance



Attendance Comment

The introduction of themed programs saw an increase in enrolments throughout the year. As the program had more success, extra days were added in, which reflects the increase in enrolment numbers.

Staff

All ELP staff continue to work between both EY and Holiday Programs.

Moving Forward

In 2020 we hope to move toward an online booking system to minimise administration time but also make it easier for families to book multiple days. We aim to continue to provide exciting and engaging programs and build our profile in the Holiday Program space.