

A collaborative approach

TRUDY MOALA, PRINCIPAL AT GRACE LUTHERAN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE MORETON BAY REGION OF QUEENSLAND, SPEAKS TO *EDUCATION MATTERS* ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPOWERING STAFF AND STUDENTS.

WHAT IS GRACE LUTHERAN PRIMARY SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHY AND HOW DOES IT GUIDE YOU AND YOUR STAFF?

As a Lutheran school, we have a Christian ethos, but we are also very future-oriented. This view to the future can be seen in the flexible, agile learning that takes place in our classrooms, and in the design of our facilities including our buildings and the design of our furniture.

Our staff are collaborative and involved in regular professional dialogue with each other and outside specialists. I am always impressed with how well the teaching staff involve themselves with any professional development on offer and the change they are willing to embrace.

HOW DOES GRACE LUTHERAN PRIMARY SCHOOL DIFFER FROM OTHER SCHOOLS?

Most primary schools in the independent sector are connected to a secondary school but we are a standalone primary school, with an enrolment of about 400. There are not that many independent primary schools around, so we are very focused on young children – transitioning them into school, and then getting them ready for secondary school.

Apart from our academic work, we also have a strategic intent with our extra-curricular offering. There is a strong focus on areas such as Performing Arts and STEM. We also have a compelling Japanese language program, and our sporting program is developing too. It's about



Ms Moala visits classrooms on a daily basis to get to know each of the school's students.



Ms Moola with the school's captains.

allowing the children to experience fun and joy with these sorts of activities, not just giving them more academic work. As we have a robust community involvement at our school, this year we are taking parents and students on a 10 day trip to Japan. This optional tour involves over 30 participants and our Japanese teaching staff are looking forward to showing our families Japan and how important our language program is at our school.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL?

Grace Lutheran Primary School will celebrate its 50th birthday in 2021. Our history is that the school came out of the congregation, which is located just across the road from us. It was originally a one-stream school, but has now moved up to a three-stream school.

There is a history of connection to the congregation but also to the wider community. The school now has students of many different religions and is very multi-cultural.

There are strong connections to Moreton Bay in the Redcliffe area and to the marine environment because the beach is just two blocks away. Many of the children take part in EcoMarines activities, where they are encouraged to look after the marine environment. The group also studies how the marine environment is being impacted by litter or waste.

IN WHAT WAYS HAS THE SCHOOL EVOLVED SINCE IT WAS ESTABLISHED ALMOST 50 YEARS AGO?

When we look back nearly 50 years ago, Grace Lutheran Primary School was situated in an outlying area. It was a small school on the Redcliffe Peninsula with only one class at every year level. The school is growing all the time and we try to constantly improve our practice. Staff have a real commitment to the children and to providing the best they can for them.

It has continued to be a very professional and well run school, with a strong curriculum focus. We started providing a community for the congregation and are now really reaching out into the wider community.

HOW DO YOU PROVIDE SUPPORT AND LEADERSHIP TO YOUR STAFF?

I try very hard to empower our staff. I try not to lead with a top down approach. It is very much about forming teams – seeking out their opinions on things, looking at what they want, what themes they want to see, what facilities they think we need – and then determining what we need to do to put plans into action.

I am very strategic in my leadership. I ensure there is lots of consultation and then start making decisions that may impact staff now or in the next three years or so.

HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE WELLBEING AMONG YOUR STAFF AND STUDENTS?

Being a Christian School, we have input from the local congregation to support our staff. The school also pays for a support group that allows any of our teachers to attend some sessions if they would like to. We try to have a good staff social culture, hold regular morning teas and have places that teachers can go that are comfortable.

I also meet with staff to determine any pressures, to see where I can help.

We have two deputy principals who are very focused on ensuring all teaching staff are supported in the classroom, and in their lives in general too.

WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY IN THE DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES OF THE STUDENTS?

I go out around the school every day, visit classrooms and make sure I speak to children individually throughout the year so that I can get to know them better and find out more about them. There are a few roles I need to play as a Principal – there is a social and emotional role, as well as an academic role.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN THE PRIMARY SECTOR?

For teachers of today, there is a huge range of administrative tasks that weren't there 20 or 30 years ago. Today's world is very data-driven, which adds to the stresses of being a teacher. It does bale up a lot of their time and impacts hugely on a teacher's world. I try very hard to make that as seamless as possible by using technology so that it is quick and easy, but still manageable and worthwhile.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT EITHER AS A TEACHER OR SPECIFICALLY IN THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL?

Something memorable happens every week that either makes me laugh or blesses me. Children continue to amaze me. We have a philosophy here at Grace Lutheran Primary School of 'don't dumb it down, but push it up and see where the children will go'. We ask children to be independent, to have choices and to be empowered. Teachers regularly come to me saying I didn't think the children could do



this, but look at what they are doing.

Children constantly dazzle me with what they can do and what they can achieve. When we think back to around 10 years ago, children were supported in absolutely everything they did, now it has turned to us standing back and seeing what they can do, with scaffolded support of course. It is amazing what children can achieve when we take a step back.

WHAT TRAITS MAKE FOR AN EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL LEADER IN EDUCATION TODAY?

I think you need to be a learner and you need to hear what people are saying. You can listen, but sit there and think of what people are really saying and then try to get to the bottom of whatever the issue is.

If I don't continue to learn and grow each day in this profession, then I shouldn't be here. There is always a lot to learn about people, about children and about their families; and that's something I really enjoy.

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT NAPLAN AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS?

I don't have a big problem with NAPLAN but I do have a problem with it for students at Grade 3. I believe it is wrong to place eight-year-olds into such a stressful environment.

I think that some sort of benchmarking is not a bad thing, but obviously there is a huge statistical issue with NAPLAN in terms of the kind of information

it provides. I know that if I speak with any one of my teachers, they can give me a better understanding of where any particular child is at.

I do however have a massive problem with the My School website. I don't think that NAPLAN results should be publicly advertised so that parents can go in and compare schools, as some of the parents using

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the website don't have the statistical background to properly read the figures and end up making assumptions that aren't based on facts.

I think that rather than having the government saying that this is how you do it, perhaps we should have more input from teachers.

The billions of dollars that is spent on NAPLAN is a waste of money for the sort of data we get out of it. It would be more cost effective to select perhaps 50 schools at random across the country in order to collate the data.



Ms Moala taking parents on one of the school's Principal Tours.



Looking for a solution to your OOSH/OSHC challenges?

Australian families are desperate for good quality, affordable day care or outside school hours care



These days both parents are likely to be employed and working longer hours than ever. This, combined with transport issues, can make the issue of after school clubs or after school care a stressful one for parents and children alike.

AND IT'S BECOMING A MAJOR ISSUE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

Volunteer-managed OOSH or OSHC committees are struggling with the issue of out of school care in the face of new regulatory reforms that increase quality expectations but also increase administrative burdens. Senior educators like you are looking for a better way and OOSH service providers are frequently an attractive option.

You'll be well aware of the difference it makes to you and your school community when you have high quality, well managed outside school hours care on your site. At Sherpa Kids we deliver exactly that - but with a difference that other after school care and OOSH service providers cannot match. Because our business is built on the local franchise model you get the best of both worlds; the care and concern of a local decision maker based in your community, combined with the confidence and authority of stable, professional central management.

Firstly, your service is owned and managed by a carefully selected local community member; usually a mum or dad and, in some cases, an education professional.

They understand families, they understand schools, and they want to mirror your school's values in their before and after school care services and vacation care.

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And we'll buy all food and resources locally from retailers in your area.

Secondly, the franchisees are all part of a highly professional group with centralised resources geared to ensuring State and Federal regulatory compliance and enabling development of engaging programs for the children we care for. We've developed a fun and flexible, engaging programme of before and after school activities that is syllabus-led and can be tailored to fit the individual requirements of schools and their curriculums.

Fun, flexible and engaging OOSH/OSHC programmes that are syllabus-led.

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