

PAPATOETOE EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

ANNUAL LETTER

29 February 2020

To the community of Papatoetoe East Primary School,

I am delighted to report on a very successful year for our school.

Our closing roll for 2019 was 518 slightly lower than 2018, which was 530. In 2019 we had 140 enrolments compared with 138 in 2018. The Papatoetoe area continues to be a transient area. Excluding Year 6 students we have had 47 students leave the school during the year. We bid farewell to 75 Year 6s on 18th December 2019. 2020 enrolments have been coming in thick and fast over the first month of the year. At the time of writing we have already opened our sixth year 0/1 class, which was scheduled to start in April or May.

Curriculum and Student Achievement

Currently schools are expected to develop a local curriculum that reflects both the New Zealand Curriculum document and the local context in which the school delivers the curriculum. The past year has been a year of exploration into the ways we approach teaching and learning as we seek to establish a local curriculum that is broader, more culturally responsive, more engaging, with increased levels of inspiration for our learners here at PEP.

In the last year we have branched out into several new areas where we believe there is potential to bring greater significance to the learning experiences of our students. Most of these curriculum initiatives have taken the form of small pilot groups that we refer to as *project teams*.

Piloting new teaching and learning initiatives is a valuable and often overlooked strategy in schools. This is mainly because humans are impatient and want to move their ideas along as quickly as possible. Further frustrating matters, schools are encouraged to deliver new initiatives to their whole staff because of the way that funding for professional learning is allocated by the Ministry of Education. The MOE encourages whole school professional learning projects provided by external facilitators. However, launching a whole school initiative without first trialling it does not make sense and should be avoided for several reasons. First, when changing aspects of curriculum delivery there are a number of potential pitfalls that may beset this change. For example, sometimes there are aspects of the delivery process that are not entirely clear to those responsible for facilitating the plan within the school. This can lead to great frustration when problems are discovered mid-delivery.

Alternatively, when a pilot group trials an initiative before implementation across the whole school, school leaders are able to weed out some of the potential problems before the new approach is rolled out to everyone. Second, it is very helpful when the time comes to roll out a new teaching approach to a whole school, that there are a group of more capable teachers among the staff that can provide support and guidance. If there are some staff who have spent time working with the new approach, they can fill the role of ‘expert’ as teachers work together to implement the new initiative. The third reason pilot groups are important, is that from time to time there are ideas that are actually not suitable for the specific school. At times such as these school leaders need the intestinal fortitude to dispense with such ideas. Admitting that a new teaching and learning initiative is a waste of time, and there certainly are plenty of examples out there, is more difficult when a large number of teachers have been made to invest considerable time and energy in that initiative.

In the last year we had three project teams in operation. Each focused on a specific area that we believe we should be developing in order to ensure a stronger and more engaging curriculum. Each of these will now be discussed briefly.

Te Ao Maori

The Te Ao Maori Project Team was established to inquire into teaching practice that might better enhance the learning of Maori language (reo) and culture (tikanga). The intention was that over the course of the year this project group would provide clarity about what approaches our whole school might implement in order to be more culturally responsive. There were eight teachers who participated in this group. Each teacher enrolled and completed a paper through Te Wananga Te Aotearoa. The group also visited several culturally significant sights to gain greater understanding around how Maori culture links to *Our Place*. Teachers have trialled the use of a range of resources and have met together throughout the year to identify the extent to which their practice has been effective.

The overwhelming consensus from the group is that a key next step for us is to adopt a focus on Te Ao Maori (the world of Maori), how this relates to the Papatoetoe area, and each student’s own story.

A related area to keep an eye on in the educational policy space is that of Maori language learning. The revival of Te Reo is exciting for our country as there are many more people learning the language than in the past. However, I can say having taught in a dual language school that the acquisition of a new language is complex and requires quality teachers, something we currently do not have in the volume necessary to successfully deliver Te Reo to all New Zealand students, as the government has signalled it would like to. My personal opinion, although I’m not a language expert, is that the best hope for raising awareness and students’ capability in Te Reo, will be to develop a host of online resources that teachers can utilise to promote the learning of Te Reo.

STEM Integrated Mathematics

Mathematics has for a long time suffered an image problem. This is mainly due to mathematics historically being taught in a pure form by way of sums and away from more relevant contexts that might interest students. When learning is placed in an applied context it has the potential to take on

more meaning for learners. The concept of *STEM integrated mathematics* is simple – teach mathematics within science and technology contexts and students will be more engaged in learning.

In 2019 we worked with a number of teachers to develop their ability to teach maths through computer coding and graphics and design. In total 6 teachers had 8 - 10 lessons modelled in their classes. The lessons utilised floor robots and/or a basic computer programming language called Scratch to teach maths through coding.

A few number of teachers (4) had graphics lessons modelled in their classroom. These lessons included the use of Sketchup a free design programme that is a web-based. Sketchup allows teachers to teach about 2D and 3D shapes in a way that kids enjoy because they get to design and create their own models.

In 2020 we intend to roll out a STEM approach to learning maths two days per week across years 3 to 6. Watch this space!

Play based learning

It is well established that play is linked to higher motivation, greater well-being, more effective executive function, and unlike many learning experiences in school it finds little resistance from children. Given that engagement in play enhances social and well-being dimensions, and is generally regarded as enjoyable, it goes to reason that for primary-school teachers and their students play-based learning has plenty to offer.

Building on the work started back in 2018, in 2019 our Year 1 team has developed the use of play based learning in their classrooms. Having worked closely with the team throughout the year, I can confidently say it has been an exciting journey. The progress made by these teachers in their classrooms has been remarkable and we now have a very well established model across the Year 0 & 1 classes.

During play based learning time students spend periods of the day engaged in their own self-directed learning, participating in everything from water play, to building with Lego, to dressing up and role playing. When the teacher is not playing with students she is engaged in running reading, writing and maths groups, introducing the students to early literacy and numeracy. Why this model is so useful is that it dispenses with the activities that keep kids busy (and bored) and focuses on two really important aspects of early learning:

1. Student directed exploration, and,
2. Direct teacher instruction.

Early indications are hugely exciting as we are seeing big leaps, particularly in oral language which is the basis for all language development.

Late in 2019 the Year 1s were joined by the Year 2s in starting to trial play in their classrooms. The Year 2s are looking at a more structured approach to play that links with the developmental progress of their students. Both teams will continue to build on this progress in 2020.

Reading, writing and maths

We continue to closely monitor the progress of our students in reading, writing and maths. In these academic areas we play the long game as we are focused on bringing up achievement levels over the course of a student's time at our school so that by the time they graduate in Year 6 they are achieving at their potential across all three areas. We continue to fight forces beyond our control when it comes to developing proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Our total number of funded English Language Learners (ELL) was 236 during 2019. This represents the number of students recognised by the MOE as needing additional support because they come from homes where English is not the first language. We also struggle with a huge variation in the early childhood experiences of our students. A quality early childhood experience can vary greatly in form. Some children have spent extensive time within learning centres, others have stayed at home with parents. However, it seems that the quality of those experiences, whether centre based or home based, can vastly differ and students arrive at school with varying levels of oral language capability. This is why we think about our numeracy and literacy goals in a long term way. We want as many of our students as possible to leave Year 6 at a proficient level. Sometimes it takes 6 years of learning in the PEP environment to get students where they need to be to take the next step to intermediate.

We continue to track our students against a set of benchmarks based on the National Standards. What you see in the table below is the real deal and an honest reflection of our students' achievement. Some schools have decided that they will remove certain groups from the data they report, such as those students receiving learning support or English Language Learners. We have opted here to provide to our community a real reflection of progress, as you are well entitled to have. The results are as follows:

	Reading	Writing	Maths
	<i>All percentages represent the number of students above our school benchmark</i>		
Year 2	64%	68%	71%
Year 3	78%	68%	73%
Year 4	74%	67%	63%
Year 5	70%	58%	62%
Year 6	72%	59%	58%
Overall	72%	64%	66%

Extra-curricular

Extra-curricular activities are a significant factor determining the experience of our students. Each year we attempt to add the greatest possible value to our students' experience of school through specialised activities. I am pleased to say that we have an ever increasingly vibrant extra-curricular life at PEP. In the last year our teachers have led cultural groups, sports teams, and trips over and above the normal classroom curriculum they deliver. I won't expound on these individually. However, I would like to acknowledge the work of Lynley McHugh, our Extra-curricular Coordinator. She has to be constantly on top of a number of events and the associated equipment necessary to provide a great experience for our students. She does this so well and our students get to enjoy the added value of many additional sporting and cultural opportunities.

OLA

Other Learning Areas (OLA) is the name we give to the integrated approach to teaching several areas in the curriculum at the same time. To achieve this we take a thematic approach to learning that brings together a few different curriculum areas (e.g. science, health, social sciences etc) under one topic.

Highlights from the 2019 school year were the passion projects that each student had the opportunity to develop in Term 2 and our Toy Expo in Term 3. Both these experiences gave students the opportunity to exercise autonomy in their learning. Engagement levels teachers reported were very high.

In 2019 we explored the following themes as part of our Other Learning Areas Curriculum:

Term 1: Survival - Extinction (Science - Planet Earth)

Term 2: Making a Difference - Bright Sparks (Social Studies)

Term 3: Change - Toys and Electricity (Social Studies / Science - Physical World)

Term 4: Diversity - Lights, Camera, Action (The Arts - Dance and Drama)

In 2020 we plan to explore four more exciting themes as follows:

Term 1: Creativity - Our Living Classroom (The Arts - Visual)

Term 2: Communities - Window to our World (Social Studies)

Term 3: Hauora - Safety (Health)

Term 4: Inquiry - Digital Buddies (Technology)

Kiwisport

Another year has passed and we have again, as a New Zealand state school, enjoyed the support of Kiwisport funding of \$7072.01. With our extensive programme of sport and PE in the school this

funding has been extremely helpful. At PEP we have invested our Kiwisport funding into several key areas. They are:

- Sport and PE equipment: \$ 2508.59
- Transport for sports teams and outdoor education activities: \$1691.65
- Membership in the Papatoetoe Sports Cluster: \$238.70

Field days that our students have participated in are: swimming, playball, cricket, rugby, soccer, netball, touch, rugby, gymnastics, cross country and athletics.

Staffing Matters

Teachers' pay

In 2019 primary teachers and principals finally reached agreements with the government in the long-running pay dispute. After almost a year of negotiation primary teachers were joined in the pay talks by the PPTA who, given they hold considerable political sway, were able to agree on a pay increase that a majority of teachers could agree on. Needless to say, teaching continues to be a profession in which people enter and remain for reasons that are largely non-financial.

Staff Development

The school has invested heavily in staff development in the past year. Research shows professional learning and development (PLD) is a key element in successful schools, as well as influential on teachers enjoying their work. Over the years I have noted that more than anything, including pay, teachers want to feel that they are growing as professionals. This means professional learning is an ongoing commitment at PEP. It would be impossible to cover every PLD experience of the past year. Instead I will focus on one important initiative.

We have had three project teams running this year focusing on upskilling teachers and creating deeper understanding in specific curriculum areas. The areas we have focused on are STEM integrated mathematics, Te Ao Maori, and Play-based learning (PBL). Each project team has had 6 or 7 teachers contributing and have met regularly throughout the year to inquire collaboratively into their specific area of inquiry. The groups have also taken part in external professional learning to contribute to the development of key ideas. There has also been modelling and trialing in classrooms. Among the successes there have been misfires and failures, but these are often then turned around as learning experiences and utilised to move teachers toward more effective and informed practice. I believe it is safe to say that all those who have participated in our project teams have gained something significant from the experience and we now have a number of experts in the school to develop these three areas in 2020. All three areas will be major foci for us as a school.

Classroom Release Time (CRT)

In 2019 we implemented a more creative and slightly more time-generous approach to the provision of classroom release time (CRT) for staff. This means now all classroom teaching staff receive a full

morning (until after our second break which ends at 1.45pm) each fortnight for their CRT. This is different from the shorter more frequent time slots we previously provided. We have given teachers the option of working from home during this time. The move has been well received by staff who have noted the refreshing impact working away from school brings. This opportunity means they are able to get through a significant amount of extra work because they are largely uninterrupted by the constant distractions of a busy school when doing their administrative work.

Despite more flexible employment practice being the norm in most industries these days the above mentioned approach, or ones like it, are relatively novel ideas. The fact that teachers don't have more flexible working arrangements is a small indictment on employment practice in the teaching profession, which seems to lag behind the rest of the working world. Nevertheless, we will continue to strive to provide the best possible employment conditions for our staff that we can.

During teachers CRT time their classes attend one of two classes - makerspace or enviro. One of the great successes of 2019 was the introduction of a full-time enviro teacher - Brigid Mulrennan. She has established a fantastic experience for our students who have enviro class with her once a fortnight for two of the four terms. During enviro class students cook, bake, water plants, feed animals, plant seeds and weed gardens, with the ultimate goal of learning more about living for a sustainable future. As a result our school gardens are looking fantastic and our students are becoming increasingly environmentally aware.

The makerspace is an equally exciting experience, facilitated by Rachael Clark. Here students explore every corner of the technology curriculum from 3D printing to building structures with popsicle sticks and glue guns. When I met with four students from each class at the end of last year, they routinely acknowledged that the makerspace is one of their favourite places in the school.

Team leaders

Our team leaders play a vital role in the functioning of our school. Each team has between 4 and six teachers and they rely on their leader to support them in a variety of ways including the sharing of school wide communication, providing feedback on practice, leading conversations about supporting student learning, and being available to problem solve to support the students and other teachers in the team. I'd like to thank our committed team leaders Sue Prendergast, Reeta Achary, Philippa Cowper and Natalie Fowler for all their work. All have their own unique strengths, are respected by their peers and are an integral part of why *Our Place* is a great place.

Senior leaders

This letter would not be complete if I didn't stop and sing the praises of the school's other senior leaders - Deputy Principal - Nicola Eley and Associate Principal - Sarah Jones. Apart from the challenge of working with me and my sometimes idiosyncratic ways, they oversee the daily operations of the school with energy, patience and humour. Some principals mention that they sometimes face quality issues in their senior leadership teams, this is not true of my situation working with Nic and Sarah. Both are highly professional, exceedingly capable people who add volumes to the school.

Turnover

Staff turnover continues to be low at PEP. In 2019 we said a strange kind of goodbye to Brosnon Siluuga who left his position as a full-time teacher to pursue his own business interests. However, before he ‘departed’ we signed him up to a part-time position and he continued to support us with relieving throughout the second half of 2019.

In December 2019 we bid farewell to Kay Osbourne, a valued learning support assistant. Kay started working at PEP in 1992, a tenure of nearly 28 years. We had a lovely high tea to say goodbye.

Support Staff

We are lucky to have a number of learning support assistants supporting our students across the school. They are a very dedicated group that we appreciate immensely for the way they go about their work.

Our office team of Donna Bagley and Christine Beetham do an important job in ensuring that the administration of the school is ticking over nicely. I guess the best way of explaining what they do comes from Mrs Beetham herself, when asked to describe her job the reply was simply, “I work miracles!” I suppose that this isn’t that far from the truth. On a daily basis they are asked to do all number of miraculous things, from cleaning up grazes, to enrolling new students, to finding lost children, their work is never completely done, but always done well.

We have a group of about 10 teaching assistants who work hard to keep certain students in line, ensure resources are in tip top condition, and support classroom teachers in all number of different ways. Our appreciation for these ladies is huge.

PACT

We continued our relationship with PACT (Papatoetoe Adolescent Christian Trust) in 2019. We have community worker Sean Redfearn who runs several key programmes that are very well received by our students and their parents. Glen Tabor who has had a long history working with PEP, and who left his position as our community youth worker last year, continues to take our chess group that is very much enjoyed by those students who attend.

Board of Trustees

School boards play a vital part in the functioning of New Zealand schools. For this reason I’d like to thank our current board members for all their work. The role of a school board member can involve making complex decisions. This is made more difficult by the fact that most of our parent representatives have had very little experience with the day to day running of schools. Despite this

challenge PEP has a very engaged and supportive BOT. This was very evident as we spent time discussing strategic priorities for 2020. The board's focus was on supporting students, their learning and the teachers who facilitate this learning.

If you are a member of our community, consider taking the time to reach out to a board member and thanking them for their service. Current school trustees are:

Gina Bedwell (Chairperson)

Michael Kwan-Him (Deputy Chairperson)

Tanya Kumar

Gurgot Dhiman

Alexandra Tohovaka

Nimo Screen (Staff Representative)

Paul Crowhurst (Principal)

Finance and Property

I am delighted to report that the school is in a strong financial position leading into the 2020 school year. As at 31 December 2019 we had a healthy amount of working capital available to deploy when needed. Total working capital at the end of the 2019 school year was \$438671, compared with \$379544 at the end of 2018. The 2019 amount includes some payments already made for the upcoming covered outdoor learning area (aka The Dome). The Dome will cover a 14m x 31m area over the court between the field and the hall. Given the payments already made toward The Dome we have done well to improve our financial position over the last year.

5YA Progress

Every five years New Zealand schools enter into an agreement with the Ministry of Education known appropriately as a Five Year Agreement (5YA). The ministry agrees to provide a certain amount of money to the school and the school develops an approved plan to improve the property of the school (not including new building). I am delighted that in 2019 we were able to deliver the final projects on our \$600,000 5YA with the installation of heat pumps across around 20 different rooms in the school and the creation of a large cesspit outside the caretakers shed. There remains a few dollars available in the fund that we plan to use to add some water fountains around the school (installation in early 2020). For now, it is exciting to have delivered all projects in the property agreement for this five year cycle.

Board Capital Spending

Board funds have been utilised to make a number of capital investments in 2019. These include:

- Powder coating the senior playground

- Purchasing of new Chromebooks - to reach our goal of one to one devices in Years 4 – 6. Something we achieved in February 2020.
- Covered outdoor learning area – We have made payments to cover the initial construction costs of building The Dome. We expect construction to be completed during Term One 2020.

We are able to boast of a very tidy and well maintained school site. A big thank you goes to Graeme Brown (Financial Officer) and Antony Eley (Property Officer) for their ongoing work. I know very few schools as well served as ours in the property department. Together with me the three of us make up the property team, it is their hard work and industriousness that provides the impetus for such a good looking school.

Future Direction of the School

This year is shaping up to be another good one. We have several very exciting initiatives coming down the proverbial pipe, some old, others new. It will be great to see play-based learning expand into Year 2 and STEM integrated maths extend across years 3 to 6 classrooms. We look forward to a deeper exploration into Te Ao Maori (the Maori World) and how this relates to Our Place. One new initiative that really excites me is a focus on a daily fitness time for each class. Some of our students are desperately unfit and could do with some more regular vigorous activity. Then of course there is all the business as usual stuff that make our school the place it is, such as our sports teams, cultural groups, choir, kapa haka, orchestra, field trips, visits to the swimming pool, parent evenings, learning in the Makerspace, learning in the outdoor classroom, planting during enviro class, and of course the daily programmes run by our teachers.

Whatever your interest in ‘Our Place’ I encourage you to join in our learning journey, and enjoy what will be a fun learning journey in 2020!

Paul Crowhurst

For the Papatoetoe East Primary Board of Trustees

February 2020