It is with great pleasure and pride that I write this annual report on behalf of the staff, parents and students of rooms 19 and 20. It has been a positive year for all involved and I am pleased to have the opportunity to share it with you and reflect on what a fantastic learning environment we share.

Jo Simpson, Coordinator

2014 – A Summary

Throughout 2014 rooms 19 and 20 were at full capacity with 16 students. We also accommodated an extra student who is enrolled in mainstream school but benefits greatly from attending many of our sessions. Staffing has remained consistent with 3 teaching staff and 2 permanent Student Support Officers being employed. We applied and received funding for extra support hours which resulted in 2 extra full-time and 1 part-time Student Support Officers. These positions were primarily to support students on a 1:1 basis but also provided more support generally in both classrooms.

Our main focus this year has been identifying our priorities and building our future in partnership with families and support agencies. Time was spent discussing students needs, seeking families opinions and working collaboratively to set goals for the future. This resulted in the formal writing of a strategic plan. This was presented to the Governing Council early in 2014.

We have introduced several new learning areas – Intensive Interaction for students who require support with connecting with the world and building relationships, multi-modal communication methods to support students are starting to communicate, sensory play with the development of the sensory rooms and outdoor equipment, the introduction of positive education principles and the introduction of a literacy block.

“There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child can do, instead of what he cannot do.”

Dr Temple Grandin

Highlights

The Fringe  The students were invited to Birdwood High School to see the Fringe performance of James and the Giant Peach.

Zoos SA  The mobile Zoo attended class giving students a chance to look at, touch and engage with several animals.

Grandfriends Day  A large turn out of Grandparents and friends attended to spend time with students in class

Ladies of Variety  The continuing support of LOV allowed our students to access many opportunities outside of our school community
We have also developed an open door policy, inviting parents, professionals and staff to feel welcome in our learning space at all times. We have accommodated several therapists on site and have benefited greatly from the expertise and knowledge they have been able to share with us. Several staff from the mainstream school setting have become frequent visitors to our learning space and the students have enjoyed the new interactions with staff and students. Our buddy system has continued throughout 2014 with students from the year 6/7 classes attending daily to support our students with social play, practical lessons and attending assemblies and whole school functions.

Positive psychology has also had an impact on our learning environment. In July 2014 three members of staff spent the July school holidays working with the team at Geelong Grammar School. On returning to school we began to focus on and celebrate achievements. The term ‘panning for gold’ was being used to identify good things that had happened for our students. We also began to spend more time reflecting on our own strengths and our students’ strengths which has allowed us to create a more positive learning environment for all.

Complex Communication Needs – Emerging Technologies

2014 saw the completion of the Complex Communication Needs Emerging Technologies Project. Involvement in this project has seen the increased use of technology to aid communication in our learning space. Several members of staff have received training.

A few words from our Governing Council Rep.

As a parent involved with the Mount Barker Primary Unit, I have found 2014 to be a very positive year. It has felt structured with a happy, fun, cooperative team at the helm.

Communication has been a highlight for me, both between the teaching body and parents, and also the improvements that have been made and are constantly evolving to enhance our children’s development in this area. A lot of appropriate and inspiring resources and equipment, inside and out, have been introduced for this and to assist in other areas of development such as gross and fine motor skills, life skills and sensory processing and development.

The Unit had many opportunities to participate in whole school activities throughout the year and with a positive presence were able to enjoy assemblies, discos, sports day, a movie excursion, science fair, Christmas concert and year 7 graduation, along with all the other wonderful excursions the Unit was lucky enough to be involved in. I find this inclusion very important and hope it continues to be an area of growth.
The student’s families being given the opportunity to choose the Units identity was an important part of the year when we were welcomed to share our opinions and personal views. I feel this was an important step in building a feeling of partnership with teachers in our children’s education.

Lastly, it has been impossible not to notice the dedication, commitment and time our teachers and SSO’s have put into networking, attending beneficial workshops, training and information sessions, to be able to provide the best education possible for our kids. I have found them approachable, open and positive in every meeting, formal and informal.

I’m looking forward to continued improvements throughout the Unit in 2015. I feel we have a good working team of teachers who can help bring the best out of our children.

Layla Norris
Governing Council Representative.

Our strategic plan — a pathway to flourishing

The strategic plan is split into three categories – communication and language, Australian Curriculum and community collaboration. In this section progress will be noted in relation to the goals identified in each area.

Communication and language

- Completion of the CCNET project has resulted in increased staff capability at using emerging technologies resulting in improved outcomes for students.
- Introduction of a multi-modal approach to communication using speech, signing, pictorial exchange communication, pragmatic organisational dynamic display books, and Proloquo2go on iPads allowing students to access and variety of methods suiting needs.
- Room 19 set up with a particular focus on developing communication.
- Several staff trained in Intensive interaction program to support students who find it a challenge to interact with the world and build relationships with others.
- A staff member attended Proloquo2go training and has upskilled several other staff members.

Australian Curriculum

- Implementation of a daily literacy block in line with the mainstream school.
- Creation of a developmental curriculum which will support students to access Australian Curriculum goals in the future.
- Staff attendance at regional support meetings focusing on Australian Curriculum in special options settings.
- A staff member attended a conference relating to structured teaching approaches for students with autism.
Peer observations have been completed and critical friends established to challenge thinking and extend learning as professionals. The focus of these observations and subsequent conversations has been curriculum and pedagogy.

Staff have visited Murray Bridge Special School to observe and discuss developmental approaches to curriculum.

A staff member has attended Adelaide West Special School to observe curriculum focusing on literacy.

Community Collaboration

Building relationships with Willow Close Kindergarten and Mount Barker High School to aid transition of students starting at and leaving Mount Barker Primary School.

All teaching staff attending regional networking meetings.

Increased involvement in attending whole school events.

Increased presence in newsletter, school parents handbook and Principal’s staff bulletins.

Attending several community events organised by the Ladies of the Variety.

The achievement of long term goals needs to be celebrated. The dedication of staff and families to support students in a consistent and unfaltering manner is to be commended. The students below have achieved a long term goal and deserve recognition:

Bronti – holding a spoon, raising her hand and feeding herself.

Jaylen – interacting with staff and students voluntarily.

Cisco – interacting with students and staff voluntarily.

Scott – using verbal communication to greet people.

Chloe – using verbal communication to express her needs.

We have made good progress towards goals identified in our strategic plan. 2015 will give us the opportunity to focus further on improving our learning space and the opportunities that we provide for our students and the support we offer to our families.

“If they can’t learn the way we teach, then we must teach the way they learn.”

Dr Ivar Lovaas