

Chair Report to AGM 2009

Vittorio Cintio

“Some of us here today had doubts, in the darkest hours, about whether we could pull off this move. We questioned whether we could keep the continuing promise of this school alive.

The fact we stand here today answers that question.

We are here because of the thousands of hours of parents, friends and teachers scraping, painting, digging, clearing, carrying and sweating their way through last summer and beyond.

We are here because tradespeople, politicians and city council bureaucrats connected with our dream and went that extra mile for us.

We are here because Annie Carment, my partner, and the love of my life, just did not know how to quit.

We are here because of the fierce commitment of Mark, Nancy and our leadership group to sustainable human centred education.

We are here because our parents believe that there is more to raising kids than giving them the tools to accumulate wealth and status- and that learning how to give as well as take is fundamental to the survival of our communities as well as our planet.

We are here because when we walk in to any classroom we are delighted by the engagement, the joy in the work and the mutual respect.

Since this is my last address to you as the Council Chair, I am going to share with you some of my part in the story of the government of this School.

My involvement began as a parent in 1987. I took little interest in the School beyond being grateful that it existed and provided the kind of education I wanted for my children.

I was drafted into standing for Council ten years ago. Ironically this was the only contested election in the history of the School. The losers of that election were not happy. They thought that it was not in keeping with the school ethos that I actively campaigned and canvassed for the votes of fellow parents. This was the symptom of a more fundamental schism.

I found a community deeply divided. The parent and teacher councils barely spoke to each other. Enrolments were declining. The foundation that supported our existence was increasingly sceptical of our educational direction. It would not give us security of tenure and we were therefore not eligible for government capital funding grants.

In the face of this I held firmly to the belief that there was more that united us than divided us. I thought it would take a year or two to achieve security of tenure- before I could slip away to a more idle use of my spare time.

I led a consultation process of all the parties. We forged a new constitution uniting the school under the government of a single democratically elected council, comprising equal numbers of teachers and parents.

Sadly in April of 2007 we were notified that our lease would definitely not be renewed beyond 2008.

You know the rest.

The road ahead is tough. We can expect our share of setbacks. There is still an educational culture in the broader world that worships measurement for its own sake, that values enormity of scale with the illusion of choice, and that is driven by the fear of failure.

In the face of this we must remain true to our principles of a human scaled education, that is both

socially and environmentally sustainable.

This means sustainable school government and administration, sustainable financing, sustainable use of energy, water, land and buildings. And all of this must support a sustainable teaching workforce.

To be sustainable our School Council must reflect diversity, embrace robust internal debate, but also speak with one voice.

Our administration must not be a captive of its own processes, but an efficient servant to the needs of staff, parents and students.

To be sustainable our fees have to be affordable but also be enough to salt some away for the lean years. To be sustainable we need our enrolments to match our business model.

To be sustainable we must be imaginative in recycling buildings, some of which are more than 100yrs old. We must capture the rainfall and use it well. We must strike a balance between frugal energy use and the comfort of our staff and students.

And of course buildings, land, governance, finance and administration are not ends in themselves.

They are the container for a sustainable teaching staff.

As the baby boomers retire we are heading into an era of teacher shortage. It is understandable that we would take particular care in nurturing and conserving a scarce resource. But truth be told, scarce or not, we must nurture our teachers, simply because it is right.

We ask of our teachers that they do and be their very best. This is only sustainable if we give them the very best. Whilst we can and must support their professional growth and development, it is up to our teachers to challenge themselves, to keep their knowledge and skills up to date and never stop honing their craft.

We must give them the necessary time and space to do this.

It has been a privilege to make a contribution to our school. I have made many friends amongst current and past councillors. They are now brothers and sisters in arms.

My tenure has been longer than George Bush but shorter than John Howard. I am like an old football coach, past his prime; the sound of my voice too familiar, my tactical insights, now worn and hackneyed.

It is time for a fresh voice."