



## Principal News – February 2023

### Welcome Back

(Welcome Picnic Friday 24 February 6 - 8 pm)

What a great start to the year we have had. The students always start the year with a few weeks of 'Setting the scene', getting to know their new classmates and teacher/s, developing the classroom norms and expectations and routines. To walk around the school over the past week, you could mistake it for mid-year, (partly because the weather felt like winter) but mostly because the students were settled and busily engaged in learning. The welcome picnic is a whole school event to celebrate the start of the new school year. This year it will be on Friday 24 February from 6 – 8pm on the front oval on Clarke St. BYO everything. More details will be shared on Compass closer to the date.

Last week we welcomed our 75 new prep students and their families, two returning from a year overseas and six new students and their families who have joined our school at different year levels. The new preps have a staggered start to the year, with half of each prep class attending for one day and the other half the following. We have found this to be a successful way to settle the prep students as it provides the opportunity for the teachers to meet the parents as well as spend quality time with half of their class. This is one of the positive outcomes coming out of our experiences over the past three years. We trust you will all have a great year and feel welcomed by our lovely Westgarth Primary Community.

I would also like to welcome our new and returning staff, who have joined our committed team to provide a quality education for your children. New this year are Jenny Li in year 3, Stephanie Herbert in year 5, Rhys Maxwell and Stephanie Ashman to Integration, Fiona Robinson new to Library Technician and Enise Eser in first aid from late February. Returning from leave this year are Brenda O'Leary (graduate teacher support), Yolanda Stephenson (STEAM specialist yr 3 - 6) and Esmi Marketou (Spanish Language P – 2). While most of our other staff have returned there have been a few changes to the year levels they are teaching.

### Parent Information sessions – NEXT WEEK

- **Years P – 2 Tuesday 14 February 6 – 6.45pm**
- **Years 3 – 6 Wednesday 15 February 6 – 6.45pm**

Each year we run an information session to inform parents about the classroom organisation for the year, some minor insights into the teaching and learning program and to answer general questions parents may have. This year the sessions will be run over two nights **via WebEx**, both starting at 6.00pm (until approx. 6.45pm). The Brooke St session for years P -2 will be on Tuesday 14 and the Clarke St session for years 3 – 6 will be on Wednesday the 15 February. Details about session login details will be sent out via Compass newsfeed on Monday 13 February.

### New Specialist classes

- **STEAM specialist classes – Year 3 - 6**

The acronym S.T.E.A.M stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Science.

This year students in years 3 – 6 will participate in hands on projects for one session per week, with Yolanda Stephenson, as part of our specialist program. It will include coding using Scratch, building structures and obstacle courses for robots to navigate over/through, building robots using Lego and editing clips using iMovie.

This program will give students the opportunity to design, build and code whilst also continuing to develop their critical thinking and teamwork skills.



Keep a look out for regular updates in this newsletter to see what is happening in the Westgarth world of S.T.E.A.M.

- **Spanish Language specialist classes – Year P – 2**

We are very happy to have been able to secure a part-time Spanish teacher to provide Spanish Language lessons for the students in Prep – 2. As you may recall we were unable to staff the second Spanish program in 2022 due to a lack of available teachers, so our students dropped to one lesson of Spanish per week, through our visual art program. For 2022 we offered Library as a specialist class. This year we are able to keep library and re-introduce Spanish to the P – 2 students. Esmi Marketou who was our founding Spanish teacher is welcomed back to run this program. Students will learn the Spanish language through stories, songs, performance, and a multitude of engaging activities.

### Meet our School Improvement Team (SIT)

Ben Jones is Mathematics Learning Specialist. Ben is responsible for the mathematics professional learning and support for teachers to ensure a consistent program is taught across the school. His professional learning for staff has helped new staff understand the Westgarth PS approach to teaching and learning in mathematics with a focus over the past three years around the planning and teaching of 'challenging mathematical tasks'. Ben also coordinates the use of mathematics assessment tools and learning resources. Ben regularly attends maths planning sessions to support teachers to administer mathematics assessments and analyse assessment results to inform lesson planning that is responsive to our students and their learning needs. He coordinates the student participating in the Australian Mathematics Competition. On top of this, Ben co-teaches a year 4 class and co-leads the Year 4 team, both with Megan Robertson.



Megan Robertson is our Literacy Learning Specialist. Megan started in this role in 2020, she was our Professional Learning Communities (PLC) leader in 2021 and returned to the literacy leadership role in 2022. Megan's role is like Ben Jones' however within the English curriculum. She supports teachers with their English planning and implementation, and their administration and analysis of English assessments. She works with the English support (tutor) teaching team to identify and track students in these programs. She leads the professional development in all areas of English. In 2022, the focus was reading and its connection to spelling. In 2023 the focus for our teacher professional learning is reading, writing, and spelling. Both Megan and Chris Sarandis have recently completed a Masters in Learning Intervention through the Victorian Government's Inclusive Education initiative. This looked at whole school evidence based teaching practises, supporting students with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia), identifying and capitalising on student strengths – including extension opportunities for all students and supporting neurodiverse students within a school environment. As stated above, Megan co-teaches a year 4 class and co-leads the Year 4 team, both with Ben Jones.



Ben Cunningham is our Leading Teacher. Ben wears many hats however his main roles include student engagement and wellbeing years 3 - 6, staff professional learning, teacher induction and mentoring/coaching, digital technologies leader and the High-abilities practice leader.

Professional Learning Communities - Ben C, Megan and Ben J have led a team of curriculum leaders in establishing Professional Learning Communities to support teachers to undertake guided inquiries into their teaching practice in Literacy and Mathematics. This work commenced in 2020 as part of our Strategic Plan and has been implemented since then. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are an approach to school improvement where groups of teachers work collaboratively at the school level to improve student outcomes. Professional

learning community (PLC) schools start from a simple idea: students learn more when their teachers work together.

Building a PLC is a proven way for schools to increase student learning by creating a culture that is:

- focussed on continuous improvement by linking the learning needs of students with the professional learning and practice of teachers
- committed to professionalism
- fuelled by collaborative expertise.

Carolyn Shiels and Jo Wheeler also form part of the School Improvement team. Our role is understanding the data and developing the strategy to identify needs of the students and staff and provide the resources to ensure the students, staff and family's needs are being met. Carolyn's focus is on student wellbeing (P – 2 & Program for Students with Disabilities) and school organisation, while Jo's is about school development, educational, symbolic and cultural leadership.



### School improvements

You have no doubt been watching the works happening at the front of the Brooke St site. We are so happy with the outcome. This space is inviting and clean and has a brilliant water feature. We will have an official opening on Friday about midday with the Hon. Kat Theophanous, so if you are available, please pop in to see the cutting of the ribbon. The final works will include a new fence along the front of the school and along the car park, as well as some final planting along the car park border. This will happen at the end of February. In the meantime, the students will be allowed to play in all the areas that are not fenced off. Some students may enjoy the water a bit much, so we advise you to put a change of pants and socks in your child's school bag. We do ask that you help us by talking to your child about not walking on or picking the plants. Young children can be like locusts and wipe out a garden in no time. We will be educating the students about how to use the space but would appreciate you reminding them and when they are with you, please supervise them and remind them about keeping our plants safe. Getting the \$250,00 funds for this work started back in 2019 so we would like it to stay fantastic for as long as we can.



### Single use plastic ban

Single-use plastics make up a third of the litter in our environment and are difficult and costly to clean up. They pollute the environment, harming wildlife and contaminating our food and water. They are also a poor use of resources – they are often used for only a few minutes and generate significant waste that is not recyclable. They can often easily be replaced with reusable products.



Under new regulations, from 1 February 2023, Victorian businesses and organisations (including schools) will not be able to sell, supply or provide a number of single-use plastic items. The ban applies to the following single-use plastic items made from conventional, degradable or compostable plastics:

- Drinking straws
- Cutlery including knives, forks, spoons, chopsticks, sporks, splades, food picks and sporks
- Plates
- Drink stirrers and sticks
- Cotton bud sticks

The ban also applies to:

- Food service items and drink containers made from expanded polystyrene. This includes expanded polystyrene plates, cups, bowls, clam shells and any cover or lid that is also made from expanded polystyrene.

Westgarth PS will be implementing the Victorian government's single-use plastics ban in the items we use as a school community including the fiesta and other fundraising events, OSHC, classroom and staffroom activities and other school events. We will not be using any banned single-use plastic items. Our Golden Lunchbox award represents our school's long-term commitment of encouraging rubbish free lunches, and we would encourage all families to reduce our school waste by also considering not supplying single use plastics in lunchboxes as well, e.g. chip packets, muesli bar wrappers, yoghurt drink containers, juice boxes etc.

### **Exceptions to the ban**

People who need single-use plastic drinking straws due to a disability or for a medical need will still be able to purchase and use these items. If your child needs to continue using single-use plastic drinking straws because of a disability or medical need, please let their class teacher know and we will ensure that there is a supply available for your child's use at future school activities.

The Victorian government has produced a useful [Fact Sheet](#) explaining which items are banned and which are not, including information about exemptions.

### **Student lunches and snacks from home**

Offences relating to the ban do not apply to private or domestic activities at home, e.g. individual families' decisions about lunch packaging. The intention of the government's new regulations is to remove these items from the supply chain prior to reaching the customer. **It is essential that you provide your children with a reusable spoon and/or fork if they need it for their lunch as we will no longer have a supply at the office. Students with pasta or yoghurt in lunches often come to the office seeking cutlery.**

If you have any questions, please contact Jo Wheeler or the School's Environment Captains teacher leaders, Habiba Nasser or Glenn Richards.

### **Yard Supervision Before and After School**

The school provides staff supervision for students from 8.45am each morning and until 3.45pm each afternoon. Students who arrive at school prior to 8.45am are required to be in Before School Care (OSHC) or supervised by a parent. Students who require supervision after 3.45pm must be booked into After School Care (OSHC). Please help us to keep your child safe by adhering to this. If there are issues specific to your family that you need school support with, please contact assistant principal, Carolyn Shiels.

### **School Council Elections 2023**

School Council assists with the governance of the school. The Westgarth School Council has 15 members including eight parents, four staff, the principal as executive officer and two co-opted members, traditionally from our community and a Parents and Friends representative. Each year half of the council complete their 2-year term and vacancies arise. We have four parents retiring from council this year (plus a further 2 co-opted positions) so if you would like to be involved please collect a nomination form from the office or request a copy of the form to be emailed to you by contacting the office 9481 5577. The schedule for the process is below. We will host a Q&A/information session for those wanting more information via WebEx on Tuesday 21 Feb at 7.30pm or alternatively you can call the school and talk to Jo.

Please complete this expression of interest survey if you wish to attend either of the Q&A sessions or would like us to contact you [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/School\\_Council\\_2023](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/School_Council_2023)  
Information about school council can also be found via this link <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-elections/policy?Redirect=1>

School Council Election Process and Timetable 2023		
	EVENT	DATE
a)	Notice of election and call for nominations	Monday 20 February 2023
b)	Closing date for nominations	Monday 27 February 2023
c)	Date by which the list of candidates and nominators will be posted	Tuesday 28 February 2023
d)	Date by which ballot papers will be prepared and distributed if election is required	Monday 6 March 2023
e)	Close of ballot	4.00pm Monday 20 March 2023
f)	Vote count	Monday 20 March 2023
g)	Declaration of poll	Tuesday 21 March 2023
h)	Special council meeting to co-opt Community members (the principal will preside)	Wednesday 29 March 2023
i)	First council meeting to elect office bearers (the principal will preside)	Wednesday 29 March 2023

### Dogs at school

We support the idea of your four-legged family member having their walk to and from school with your family, however School Council made the decision that dogs should not enter the school grounds. We have many people who have a fear of dogs and as the school and surrounding area is busy at the start and end of school, it can be stressful for the dog. Tethering a dog means it is not under the control of its handler and is also open to be approached by a child. If scared, it can bite. This has happened in the past. Boisterous dogs can also cause distress and fear in children. If you need/want to walk your dog to and from school, please say goodbye to your child/ren at the school gate. If you need to come onsite, please leave your dog at home. We also ask for your help to minimise the risk by:

- always having an adult in charge of any dog
- do not bring dogs on the school grounds
- do not tether dogs on the school side of the footpath
- if you need to come onsite, please leave your dog at home on that occasion.



### Asthma policy/practices

Parents of students who have asthma are reminded that they need to provide medication and an asthma management plan for their child. Each classroom has a first aid kit housed near the external door, which has a school supplied inhaler and spacer and used in emergency situations. While children will use their own medication when having an asthma attack, an emergency supply will be at close hand so no time is wasted locating medication in an emergency. Teachers will notify parents via Compass if their child has required medication during the day. While many students, particularly the older ones, manage their own medication, please encourage your child to let their teacher know when they need their medication and/or if they had some during a break time, so that it can be monitored, and they can be assisted by an adult. Our Asthma Policy is on our school website at [https://www.wgps.vic.edu.au/uploaded\\_files/media/1668736974asthma.pdf](https://www.wgps.vic.edu.au/uploaded_files/media/1668736974asthma.pdf). If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to speak to your child's teacher, Nella or Marg at the office, Enise in the first aid room or a member of the school's leadership team.

## Anaphylaxis Management

### Potential allergic reactions to nuts, nut products, seeds & other food products

As you may be aware for some children, even a minor exposure to nuts or foods containing nut products or seeds can set off a severe allergy, which may cause loss of breathing.

The parents of children who may have a severe reaction would like you to help us make the school environment as safe as possible by exercising caution when packing school snacks and lunches. Whilst students with severe allergies can learn to manage and control what they eat there is no real way of protecting themselves from nut traces that may be present in the environment such as on clothing, furniture, drink taps and of course on other people's hands.

- Please avoid preparing school lunches with products that contain nuts, nut spreads, sesame products or chocolate that may contain nuts (e.g. Peanut Butter, Nutella and Tahini)
- Please do not send food to school for birthday celebrations. This stance is not due to allergies, but it does help us to manage possible exposure.
- As part of our policy, we do not encourage students to share food. All students will be encouraged to wash hands before and after eating.
- Please avoid packing any whole nuts as part of lunches for children under eight as they may get caught in small children's airways presenting as a choking hazard.

This year we have students who have anaphylaxis in Prep Kenji, Prep Ellie/Terri-Anne, 1 Estelle, 1 Isabella, 2 Madeline, 2 Rachel, 3 Liv, 3 Habiba, 3 Mairead, 4 Glenn, 4 Tess, 4 Ben/Megan, 5 Lara and 5 Bel.

## No food sharing

There are many reasons why we do not allow food sharing at school. Dietary needs, religion, allergies, Covid-19 and parent choice are some. Some parents like to celebrate their child's birthday by sending treats to school to share with classmates, but we ask that you **do not send any food birthday treats** either homemade or packaged. It is difficult for your child to understand why the teacher must send them home at the end of the day.

## Ambulance Cover

We strongly recommend that all families take out ambulance cover. Though serious injuries are rare, we have a policy of calling for an ambulance when in doubt about a student's health. We will usually ring an ambulance first and then contact a family member, and we have found that in many cases it is safer for both the parent and the child to be transported in an ambulance. It can be a distressing time for parents when their child is injured and is often not the best time to be worrying about how to get to the hospital or doctor. Families are liable for any ambulance costs. There is now a call out fee even if they are not transported to a hospital.



## Mobile device use at school

Our policy on the use of mobile phones and other devices with cellular capacity (such as an Apple watch) must not be used during school hours including recess and lunchtime and at OSHC, unless an exemption has been granted. Please refer to our Mobile Phone Student Use policy and our Acceptable Use of Technology Agreement.

[https://www.wgps.vic.edu.au/uploaded\\_files/media/1621915263mobile\\_phones\\_student\\_use.pdf](https://www.wgps.vic.edu.au/uploaded_files/media/1621915263mobile_phones_student_use.pdf)

## Sun smart

We would like to remind all students that they are required to wear a sun smart hat and clothing until the end of April. Caps do not provide adequate sun protection so please make sure your child wears a broad-brimmed or legionnaire style hat. It is also recommended that students apply sunscreen to protect their skin. Singlet and tops with narrow straps are not suitable to wear at school. Hats are available for purchase at the office. The school does supply sunscreen but students are welcome and encouraged to bring their own.

### **Working with Children Check & Child Safe training**

Parents/carers who wish to volunteer at Westgarth Primary School are required to have a current WWCC. Volunteering with reading in class, going on an excursion or helping out with sporting events or kitchen/garden will require a current WWCC. Once you have applied for your new card at [www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) you will need to bring your receipt to the school office to register. We are also providing a short training module on Child Safe practices, that all volunteers working with children need to watch. We will send details via Compass once it is ready.

### **School Payments**

You will have received a Compass notification titled '2023 Voluntary Parent Financial Contribution Schedule' at the end of January, which outlines the payments for 2023. Details about how to make the payment are included in the attachment. School's preferred method of payment is via the Compass parent portal.

Families can opt to access the half yearly payment plan via their Compass portal or can contact the school to set up a more individualised payment plan within Compass.

All excursions/in-house activities/wellbeing & swimming payments, are charged as the activity occurs throughout the year rather than a lump payment at the beginning of the year.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty, please call to speak with Carolyn Shiels (Assistant Principal) or Javier Arroyo (Business Manager) on 9481 5577 or email [westgarth.ps@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:westgarth.ps@education.vic.gov.au) (reference Parent Payments) to discuss possible support options or arrangements.

### **Lost property**

Apart from the enormous amount of waste created by unclaimed lost property, it takes precious time for staff to be managing lost items of clothing, toys and lunchboxes that could be otherwise used for educational purposes. Please help us by clearly writing your child's name on all removable clothing items, lunchboxes and drink bottles and toys. When collecting your children at the end of the day, please check with them to ensure they have all clothing, lunch and other items such as toys that they brought to school in the morning. You may even consider a reward system, so they take responsibility for their property. It is a great life lesson and will also reduce the waste of time and rubbish created by.

Jo Wheeler  
Principal