



Principal News – August 2026

Trivia – this Saturday

Huge thanks to the team of parents who have been organizing the Trivia Night happening at Welcome to Thornbury on Saturday 15th August (this Saturday). Thanks to all the parents, carers and their friends and families who are supporting this fun night. Word on the street is that there is a surprise judge for the best costume so make sure you dress up in your best Christmas gear and join in the fun!



Writer's Festival

We are excited to introduce a new celebration of learning to our calendar. Our inaugural Writer's Festival, which will form our three-year rotation with our art show and whole school performance, has been rolling out over terms two and three, and will come into focus in the week starting 24 August, which aligns with Book Week and concludes with a Writer's Showcase on Wednesday 2 September. We will have a Book Week costume parade in the gym on Monday morning starting at 9.10am as part of our Monday assembly. Then later that day the students will participate in some cross-aged activities. Students will complete their writing pieces for the showcase, and these will be displayed at the Showcase on afternoon of Wednesday 2 September from 3pm – 5.30pm. We hope you enjoy our celebration of the literary arts. Please see the Library News for more details.

Principal Internship - Joe Dykes

I would like to introduce and welcome Joe Dykes to the Westgarth PS community. Joe is currently completing a Department of Education Principal preparation program and will be shadowing me for four weeks. He has taught at Fitzroy North Primary School for many years and is currently the assistant principal there. Joe has a passion for student voice and empowering students to make a positive impact on their learning community. We hope that Joe enjoys his time with us and gains a great deal from the experience. If you see him around, please say 'hi'.



The Anxious Generation

I have just finished reading *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* by Jonathan Haidt. I don't normally share my professional reading with the community, but I found this book to be highly relevant to many of the concerns raised by the parents and teachers I work with.

Haidt explores how the rise of smartphones, social media, increased screen time, and more isolated lifestyles have contributed to a significant increase in mental health challenges among adolescents. He also examines how, in our efforts to keep children safe, we have increasingly structured and supervised their lives, limiting opportunities for independent, play-based experiences that are essential for healthy development.

Many of the concerns we hear from parents—including friendships and social challenges, resilience, adaptability, coping skills, happiness, problem-solving, connection, sleep, and separation—are presented as symptoms of this shift away from a play-based childhood. The book also explores how these changes are affecting boys and girls in different ways.

It is not too late to facilitate changes or alternatives in our homes, schools and communities, that will influence the way our children/students are impacted by societal changes to childhood and how that translates into their adolescence and adulthood. I highly recommend it to all parents and educators.

Student Cycling Safety Around Our School

I have been increasingly concerned about the safety of students travelling to and from school by bike.

Under Victorian road rules, children under the age of 12 are permitted to ride on footpaths, as is an adult supervising them. Cyclists on footpaths must give way to pedestrians and are required to dismount and wheel their bikes across pedestrian and children's crossings.

Road safety authorities recognise that children under the age of nine can ride on roads when supervised by an adult, depending on their cycling skills, confidence and experience.

However, it is important to remember that children's road awareness and ability to assess hazards are still developing. Children do not develop their full peripheral vision until around the age of 10, meaning they can find it more difficult to see hazards approaching from the side without turning their head. Their ability to judge speed, distance and potentially dangerous situations is also still developing. Their smaller height can make them less visible to drivers, particularly in busy areas around the school.

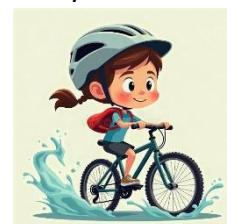
Unfortunately, we have already seen the consequences of these risks. In recent years, three students have been injured in dooring incidents — one on Newmarket Street and two on Brooke Street — and we have also experienced several near misses.

I encourage everyone travelling around the school, whether by car or bike, to take extra care and consider how we can all help minimise the risk of accidents. Parents and carers should consider whether their child currently has the cycling skills, road awareness and experience needed to safely ride on the road.

I also encourage parents to remind children who ride to school without supervision, to wear their helmet all the way to school, as some older students have been seen riding with their helmets on their handlebars instead of their head.

There are also some positive developments ahead. Darebin Council will be increasing bike parking at the front of the Brooke Street site sometime during this financial year. Council is also partnering with the school to participate in the **Octopus Schools Program in 2027**, which will provide further opportunities to support safe and sustainable travel to school.

The safety of our students is a shared responsibility, and I encourage everyone to slow down, stay alert and take extra care when travelling around the school.



H5 Bird Flu

Cases of H5 bird flu have been confirmed in birds across Australia, including in south-west Victoria.

Our school has steps to follow if sick or dead birds are found at or near our school.

If you see a sick or dead bird at or near the school, please let us know. If you find a sick or dead bird in the community, the advice from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is to:

1. avoid contact and keep your distance
2. record date, time, location and take photos
3. report it to using an [online form](#) or through the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline: 1800 675 888.

For current information about reporting, refer to DEECA's [H5 bird flu page](#).

For more information, you can check out these [bird flu resources from the Australian Government](#).

Hire of the gym

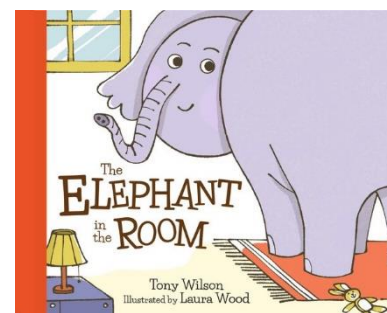
You may have seen the Compass message regarding the hiring of the gym. If not, we have opened an expression of interest opportunity for community groups interested in hiring the facility. Details can be found on the school website, [Hire of School Gymnasium](#). The closing date for EOI is Wednesday 19 August.

Updated Policies

We have been reviewing and updating our policies in line with the regular review cycle and regulations change. Please see the Policies section of our website for many of our policies. [School Council Policies](#)
The latest to be updated are Bullying Prevention, Volunteers and Complaints.

The Elephant in the Room – Tony Wilson

Idol MC, author and longtime Westgarth parent Tony Wilson is releasing a picture book called *The Elephant in the Room*. It's illustrated by Laura Wood, who he paired successfully with for *The Cow Tripped Over the Moon* (CBCA Honour Book 2016) and *Hickory Dickory Dash* (National Simultaneous Storytime 2017). This one's a glorious room by room romp about the world's biggest idiom, who is ignored by the family, until she isn't! It's a good one for teaching about idioms too, because there is a saying drawn into each illustration which kids and parents have to hunt down! Tony is sending the book to print on 20th August. It'll be dedicated to Alice Wilson (grade 6) but every little elephant who pre commits to buying a copy can have his or her name in the back of the book. The blurb here says to commit to two copies, but for Westgarth parents it's okay to order one. Great for ages 2-8. No payment until the books arrives in November or December. Approximate \$30 and no postage because we're local! Register your names at <https://www.tonywilsonauthor.com/the-elephant-in-the-room>



School Council Report

– Jason van Grieken (School Council President)

The last School Council meeting was held onsite at 7pm on Wednesday 29 July.

Principal's Report – Topics discussed: Child Safe training for school councillors; updated policies – Bullying, Complaints, Volunteers; grant successes – music room ramp and new solar for the Brooke St site, school review date (term 2, 2027), works completed in the holidays; industrial action; and general school council training/child safe training.

Finance – The Finance Committee meet monthly to discuss the previous month's financials. Detailed financial reports are provided to committee members for review and discussion. The committee discussed spending of the 2025 fundraising money on playgrounds improvements on both sites.

Environment – The environment committee met on Wednesday 22 July. We discussed the works completed over the holidays and mentioned how wonderful the school is looking. Further works to happen in the next holidays is the installation of two sheds, one replacing the current garden shed on the east boundary of the Clarke St site. Potential future works being considered include upgrading playground equipment at the rear of Brooke St; nature play area near the OSHC entry including a new sand pit or a stage area outside the music room. Other discussions was the new solar on the WEB installed over the holidays, funded by the Education Department, new solar for Brooke St to be paid back over 5 years, and the installation of a new ramp to the music room. If you would like to join the Environment committee, please email the school Westgarth.ps@education.vic.gov.au so we can add you to the distribution list.

OSHC – the OSHC program was reviewed and rated as part of the regular quality assurance process by VECRA. The rating was meeting national quality standards.

Fun & Fundraising – while there was no meeting as such, the FaF reported that they had successful kids' discos on Friday 24 July and planning is going well for the Trivia Night coming up on Saturday 15 August at Welcome to Thornbury.

Next meeting dates:

OSHC	Thursday 13 August @ 10am WebEx
Finance	Friday 21 August @ 10am WebEx
Environment	Wednesday 19 August 8am Jo's Office
Fun & Fundraising	TBC online
Hire of Facilities working party	25 August 8am Jo's office
School Council	Wednesday 2 September @ 7pm staffroom

If you would like to join a sub-committee, please contact the office so we can pass on your details to the convenors of the sub-committees so you can receive the correspondence and meeting invites.

Jo Wheeler
Principal