Westgarth
Primary School
Safe, Fair & Friendly

Principal News – October 2026

Spring Fair 18 October — WE NEED YOUR HELP

With only a few sleeps until the biggest event on the Westgarth calendar, we need all hands-on deck. Please keep abreast of the Compass call outs for donations and volunteering to help with preparations and on the day of the Spring Fair. If everyone donates a little bit of time and goods, then we have a wonderfully successful event. Donations of second-hand goods can be dropped off on Saturday 17 October, see Compass for details.



Child Safety and Wellbeing at Westgarth Primary School: Information for families and the school community

Westgarth PS is committed to providing an environment where students are safe and feel safe.
Our child safety framework Westgarth PS Child Safe Framework explains how we support and maintain child safety and wellbeing at Westgarth PS. It includes our:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child abuse (including grooming) – identification and response, and
- Child Safety Code of Conduct, which outlines acceptable and unacceptable behaviours for all staff and volunteers at our school.

Our students and families are important partners in providing a child safe environment. These regular newsletter reminders are one of the ways we ensure our school community is aware of:

- our commitment to child safety, and
- how to provide feedback or raise child safety concerns.

If you have any concerns about child safety at any time, please contact Jo Wheeler (Principal) on 94815577. Any child safety complaints or concerns are treated seriously. For more information about our school's complaints process, see our Complaints Policy.
We also welcome your ideas on ways we can improve our approach to child safety and wellbeing. If you have any suggestions or comments, please contact Jo Wheeler on 94815577 or at Westgarth.ps@education.vic.gov.au .

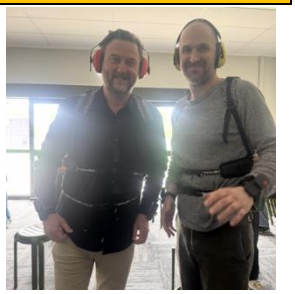
School start and finish times – yard supervision

The playground is supervised by a yard duty teacher from 8.45am each morning and until 3.45pm each afternoon. If students are onsite prior or after these times, they either need to be enrolled in Out-of-school-hours care, or supervised by an adult who is watching them, not just in the yard. The small amount out of pocket expense for OSHC is not worth a student being in danger. If money is preventing you from accessing OSHC please come and speak to Jo.

Pupil free Days — 2 & 3 November

While these dates have been circulated all year, we would like to remind you of two pupil free days this term. One is from the allocation by the department for professional development and the second is a public holiday. Please note that the professional practice day, the OSHC program, offers curriculum day care but not for public holidays. **Professional Practice Day 2nd November and 3rd November Cup Day Public Holiday.**

What's been happening in S.T.E.A.M.?



On Wednesday the 16th of September, the Year 5s had a visit from Guus Hoevenaars and Kylie Davies (Parents of Neve). Guus and Kylie bought in some amazing tech they have developed- Haptic Vests. These vests allow deaf and hard of hearing people in the community the opportunity to feel music. Different parts of the vest react to different instruments within the song. It was so engaging and amazing to see how tech can make a real-world difference in people's lives. Thank you very much for coming in to present Guus and Kylie.

Keeping Students Safe Online

With our children well connected online, we as adults can best support their safety by staying curious and connected with them, and initiating conversations as early as possible. We know we don't hand teens the keys when it's time to begin driving… the preparation for this begins way back when you stopped and looked both ways when you held their hand as they waddled across the road. The same goes for e-safety. To promote help-seeking if the need arises down the track, being proactive with these conversations can help ease our discomfort as adults and also reduce the shame children can feel when they encounter content or situations that require our support.

Despite age restrictions, exposure to content including pornographic and other sexual content can still occur, accidentally or otherwise. This may could occur when a child is using an adult's device and clicks a pop-up, when a character on a video platform (e.g. Youtube/Youtube Kids) has been altered to be sexual, or a child may search for content (maybe out of curiosity, a quick google of 'bum', or a, 'hey Siri, show me butts').

So, what can parents/carers proactively do?

- Start conversations about consent, body safety and respectful relationships from before school age, in age appropriate ways
- Ask children before taking their photo and sharing it - model to them that their body and their image belongs to them (we want them to be aware of their rights and know they can help see if an image of them or their peer is ever used to make a deep-fake)
- Discuss both their good and bad experiences online. Ask about games they're playing/interested in, and how it felt after they watched/played
- Better yet, join in with them! Find a common interest, or immerse yourself in their interest to promote connection and ease of conversations about their online world. Play a game together, watch a video and talk about their thoughts and feelings
- Start conversations early to promote critical thinking about content they see online e.g. questioning stereotypes, questioning if content is real/fake

It's never too late (or too early) to begin these conversations, so fear not if you haven't… **However, what should you do if you become aware your child has encountered explicit content online?**

- First, regulate yourself - it's important not to appear embarrassed, or horrified to avoid shutting down the conversation before it has even begun
- Reassure them they are not in trouble (this can be crucial in promoting children's safety and increasing the chance they come to you for support in future, whereas banning the device can be counter-productive)
- It's okay to admit your own feelings of discomfort (you may say that no one talked with you about this and you're glad to have the opportunity to problem solve together)
- Check in with them about their feelings if they feel like sharing.
- Ask whether they found it themselves or someone showed them, without getting angry or upset (if the content was shown to them, there are additional steps to take)
- Encourage them to question what they see. No need to go into detail about the content, but try to use the moment as a learning opportunity, to teach them that porn and other sexually explicit content

online is usually not realistic and highlight what is missing or wrong compared to real life e.g. lack of consent, violence, stereotyping (you may remind them how movies/tv shows we watch are often not real)

- Establish clear expectations going forward, thank them for problem solving together and keep the door open for future thoughts or questions

For further info (including in the case the content was shown to them):
https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents

For information on age-appropriateness of games, shows, books, movies, online platforms:
https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

Principal Network Conference – Cyber Safety presentation

Last week Ben Cunningham and I were fortunate to attend the Darebin/Yarra Principal Network Conference where we heard from former police officer Susan McLean from Cyber Safety Solutions. Her presentation focussed on children growing up in a world where their friendships, learning and identity are shaped online. She discussed the risks and threats that have emerged in this area including deep fakes, sextortion, blackmail, sexting and problematic screen use and addiction. I have purchased a copy of her book – *'Growing Up Digital'* which is a book for parents, heling to navigate their kids and teens navigate life online. This and other parenting books are available from our school library. You can learn more about Susan's work on her website https://www.cybersafetysolutions.com.au/.

Student Leadership – *'The Student Voice' newspaper*

If you haven't had a chance to read either of the 2 editions of the student newspaper, *The Student Voice*, which has been sent out via SeeSaw, I would highly commend them to you. The school captains have done a brilliant job in sharing school news and other stories important to them. The captains have had the opportunity to interview experts in their field, and I have witnessed personal growth from their first interview to their latest with WPS parent and ABC reporter Margaret Paul. We offer a variety of leadership opportunities for our students. The latest is the Junior Auctioneers for the fete. We endeavour to spread the opportunities so that as many students as possible have the chance to experience leadership.

Octopus Schools update

Thank you to everyone who completed the parents and students travel survey as a part of the Octopus Schools program.
The survey is now closed, and we had a great response with 114 parents and 239 students responding. The winner of the prize draw will be contacted by Darebin Council.
The information you have provided will go a long way in informing the council of our needs, wants and issues around travelling to school safely and building on active travel.
Now the council will work on creating the draft 'legs' map and assess potential infrastructure improvements, which we will discuss in our next catch up later in the year with the council.

Jo Wheeler
Principal