

# Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School

# Principal's Annual Report 2006

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The landscape for Lutheran education in the northern suburbs has changed quite a bit over the years – the Lutheran churches at Salisbury, Blair Athol, Para Vista, and more recently here at Wynn Vale saw a need to provide an educational service that sat specifically within a Christian framework. One by one they built a Christian community dedicated to the education of young people. However, since Endeavour College first opened its doors nearly nine years ago, a vision developed that would bring the fledgling secondary school into partnership with three Lutheran primary schools and a kindergarten.

A decade ago there were many tracks out of Golden Grove Lutheran for our graduating Year Seven students to take. Today the landscape is markedly different. The tracks have largely given over to a sealed highway linking our school to Endeavour College, and up to 70% of our students and their families now choose to take that path each year. It is an exciting landscape for LENS – Lutheran Education in the Northern Suburbs. Three, once loosely connected Lutheran primary schools now work very closely together, spiritually, corporately, and professionally. Two years of effort has resulted in the development of what we called Integrated Studies. Rather than teaching much to a shallow level, Integrated Studies focuses on big concepts, and encourages students to engage in their learning to a much deeper and more meaningful level. The staff from our LENS primary schools continues to work together, and there is considerable pride in this curriculum development that has already attracted attention from other schools who want to learn more about Integrated Studies.

That's one example of why the landscape has changed so much. Another area in which we continue to work together is the area of middle schooling. A philosophy rather than a place, middle schooling in LENS is spread across four schools – Years six and seven in the three primary schools and years eight and nine at Endeavour. We continue to work, locally and collectively, to acknowledge the needs of this unique group of students, and to put into place strategies that best meet their needs. It is our desire and vision that students graduating from our school will be ready for the next step in their education.

Where once there were a few schools dotted here and there with no real connectedness, the landscape now resembles a valley dotted with interconnecting villages, independent yet interdependent, seeking their strength from what they share together. We like the concept of villages. Together, our schools will have over 1,500 students, but big is not necessarily better. Three smaller primary schools, each with around twelve classes, working with a secondary school aiming for around 500 students, give us the opportunity to operate in a more personal and relational way. We deal with individual students and their families. We have a unique, caring community here at Golden Grove Lutheran, a community that is based on the Christian faith and how that can be exercised in everyday life. The journey for each child, here at Golden Grove Lutheran, and within the wider context of LENS, is a unique and special journey. The experience of the 'village' is a valuable and important one for every student here. For those students whose journey with Golden Grove Lutheran concludes this year, I thank you for your contribution, and wish God's blessings upon you as you prepare for the next phase of your journey.

As I reflect over the year that was, I keep coming back to the fact that there has been a significant effort over the years to develop our School as a caring community. I hope that this is picked up, by those within our community, and also those on the 'outside' looking in. This is not an accidental outcome, but arises from a desire to 'walk the talk.' How can we, as a Christian school, best serve the local community? What can we do that sets us apart?

### ***A Sustainable Student Population***

The School's governing body has identified five areas that are critical in order the School may achieve its objectives. While they are all interconnected, they can also be dissected and studied, one at a time. In order to be a healthy school at a time when there is high competition for limited student enrolments, we need to have a sustainable student population. Inherent in that simple statement is the recognition that there needs to be a master plan, there needs to be a direction that is understood – there need to be compelling reasons for parents to choose this school for their children. Our new master plan, developed in 2006, sets the direction for the physical development of the school for the next ten years. Stage 1 in 2007 will see a second computer suite built, while Stage 2 in 2008 will see the addition of two more permanent classrooms and a substantial adventure playground. A pleasing work environment for staff and students is just a starting point, but it's a good one.

### ***Quality Christian Education***

Most parents see the safety and happiness of their children as a hallmark of a good school. I would agree to a point, adding that the quality of the education offered is integral in identifying a good school. The secret in offering and delivering a quality Christian education lies squarely with the calibre of our staff, from the support officers to the classroom teachers, from the office secretary to the principal.

I am constantly impressed by the passion of our staff. They understand that they, along with their students are life-long learners. The journey is unique for everyone; we hope an education at Golden Grove Lutheran will support and add to a spiritual dimension of growth and education. I am indebted to the staff who, through their teaching, their Bible study, their sharing, their prayer, their modelling, by their 'being' have contributed to providing a quality Christian education. After two years of vacancy our church has a new Pastor, and we welcome Leon Rosenberg to Golden Grove. Leon has been quick to seize upon the links between our church and school, and his presence and guidance will add further depth.

If ever there was a place to catch a 'bug' and get sick, it would have to be a primary school! At our school, in 2006 the average staff attendance rate was an impressive 96.4%. When you consider that 12% or one eighth was for carer's leave, it makes the statistic even more impressive.

While Golden Grove Lutheran looks toward retaining a stable staffing base and having continuity with staff who stay at the school for considerable periods, there is also a benefit in some staff turnover. In 2006 we were privileged to have two staff

on contract – Jodie Kriewaldt and Shane Heatlie – who did not continue into 2007. Shane undertook some excellent work with Boys in Education', and Jodie had charge of a senior primary class. With a 92.13% staff retention rate in 2006, staff turnover was quite modest.

All of our teachers at Golden Grove Lutheran are registered to teach, and have undertaken, among a range of professional learning activities, mandatory reporting and first aid training. Each year all staff undertake additional learning, in both formal and informal contexts. Three teachers have the equivalent of a three year qualification, while over half (55%) hold qualifications equating to a four year degree. Three staff have five years of professional training, while three have the equivalent of masters qualifications with six years of study.

In 2006, staff at Golden Grove Lutheran were offered a significant range of professional learning opportunities. This included undertaking research and learning in regards to 'Boys in Education', OHSW training, first aid, Reading Recovery (a specific program to assist reluctant junior primary readers), and students with disabilities. Literacy and numeracy learning was offered on a number of fronts – Early Years Writing, Fractions and Decimals, First Steps Maths, and teaching narrative writing. In addition to a literacy and numeracy focus in IT, staff were given training with emerging technologies like interactive whiteboards and nanotechnology, and several assisted in an ongoing project concerned with a system wide approach to storing and sharing large amounts of data between Lutheran schools. Almost 3% (2.76%) of the School's staffing costs were deployed in 2006 to fund professional learning opportunities. This amount translates to around \$1,770 per staff member, and a little higher at \$1990 for each full time teacher.

### ***A Growing 'Grace' Place***

The School Council also believes strongly that there must be evidence that the school demonstrates and exercises the grace that it teaches about. In 2006 we were fortunate in having at various times during the year the services of two fine young people who undertook the role of youth worker. Brett and Luke with additional duties in the church made themselves available to the older students in our school. They went on camp or helped supervise at lunchtimes. Brett spent time with a couple of individuals who really needed some appropriate role models.

In 2006 we were able to increase the role of counsellor from three days a week to four. Anna was able to conduct training for volunteers in the school. She undertook grief counselling courses with children, was there for parents at weekly coffee club, and was an ear for students and parents alike.

This is 'value-adding' in corporate speak, but for us, it means walking with the students, listening to them, and guiding them. It's assisting students in their walk, helping them to understand that they need not walk alone.

A long time in the planning and dreaming stage, a prayer area is to be developed in 2007. Students identified the most appropriate place to have a quieter area in the school that was still safe and could be easily supervised by staff on duty. Now all we have to do is build it!

### ***A Sound Reputation***

Golden Grove Lutheran enjoyed its highest enrolments in 2006 with 317 enrolments in twelve classes. Average attendance across all classes last year was 95.1%. Attendance in Years Reception through to Year 5 was 95.4%, and for senior classes (Years 6 and 7), attendance averaged 94.4%.

The school aims for as many children as possible to meet or achieve above the national benchmarks. We use the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) with Year 3, 5 and 7 students in order to determine national benchmark results in reading, writing and numeracy. In 2006 100% of the cohort of Year 3 students met the WALNA benchmark for reading, up 2% from the previous year. 96% of the Year 3 cohort met the WALNA writing benchmark, up 4% from 2005. 93% of the Year 3 cohort met the numeracy benchmark, but this was down 5% on the previous year.

In 2006 100% of the cohort of year 5 students met the WALNA benchmark for reading, which was the same result for the previous year. 94% of the Year 5 students met the writing benchmark, and this was up 5% from 2005. 96% of them made the numeracy benchmark in 2006, up 7% from the previous year.

91% of the Year 7 students in 2006 managed to reach the reading benchmark, down by 5% on the 2005 result for year 7. 95% of the Year 7 cohort met or achieved higher than the WALNA benchmark, down 1% on the previous year. In 2005 88% of the Year 7 students met the numeracy benchmark, and this went up by 3% to 91% in 2006.

Golden Grove Lutheran is committed to an academic programme that places literacy and numeracy as priorities. There are however, many other aspects to the School that differentiate it from other providers. The intentional Christian focus adds significant value to the School's program, and is supported by the contributions made by the local pastor, and the School's counsellor, employed for four days each week. In close dialogue with two other Lutheran primary schools our School has developed an Integrated Studies component, which we believe supports staff in their delivery of the curriculum. Working collectively on the curriculum has empowered staff in terms of 'ownership' and encourages them to work collaboratively and more effectively.

Additionally, the School has set a clear pathway for students by putting into place music, art and physical education specialist staff. Staff also make themselves available after hours, to facilitate student participation in competition chess, debating and public speaking. The physical education specialist teacher has put into place a fitness and well-being program known as 'Blue Earth', and has developed strategies to allow a number of basketball and softball teams to play after school. Students may also get the opportunity to participate in SAPSASA events and the local Lutheran primary schools Athletics Carnival.

Post School Destinations – in its early years Golden Grove Lutheran had smaller numbers in its Year 7 class, and these students would graduate and go onto to as many as a dozen different schools. This has changed significantly, and the trend

is worth reporting on. Two very significant developments in the last decade have been the establishment of Endeavour College, a secondary school in Mawson Lakes, and the establishment of LENS – Lutheran Education in the Northern Suburbs. LENS includes, in addition to Golden Grove Lutheran, two other Lutheran primary schools, a Lutheran Kindergarten at Salisbury and Endeavour College.

There has been a close working relationship between these schools, the result of which is essentially a Reception to Year 12 pathway; although for a very small number it may mean Kindergarten to Year 12. The relationship has developed to a point where enrolment at Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School will ordinarily mean a reserved placing at Endeavour College, unless mitigating circumstances prevent this, or if parents opt out of this pathway and choose another school for their child's secondary education.

The relationship between these schools has also fostered closer ties between staff, offered additional professional learning development, and facilitated the development of an Integrated Curriculum, used in all three of the primary schools. This starting point has continued to evolve to the point where the scope and sequence of curriculum and content is being set out in a Reception to year 12 context, as it applies to this group of schools. The potential in terms of outcomes for students is enormous, and may explain why the percentage of students going from Golden Grove Lutheran to Endeavour College has risen to the point where almost 70% of graduating students in 2005 and 2006 went on to Endeavour. We expect this trend to continue.

### ***Satisfaction – Proof in the Pudding***

Golden Grove Lutheran began collecting data from exiting students and their families in 2005 as a means of analysis and constant improvement. The majority of survey responses were from Year 7 students and families, but people leaving at other times were also asked to fill in a survey. This survey was developed as an on-line instrument to inform the leadership at both governance and management levels. The data collected assists in measuring how well the School is achieving its desired and stated outcomes. These include a sustainable student population, quality Christian education, a growing 'grace' place, a sound reputation and financial stability.

Overall, the students and their families have rated their time at Golden Grove Lutheran as 8 out of 10, and both students and parents responded overwhelmingly that the school is doing extremely well in most areas. The student ranking of 8 out of 10 and the parent ranking of 9 out of 10 suggest a consistency between students and their parents and how they viewed their school. Even better, they gave a grade that would equate to an 'A'.

In 2007 it is planned to expand the number of surveys to three – one at the end of a student's or parent's first year at the School, generally after Reception; a second survey halfway through primary schools, such as Year 4, and then to continue with the Exit Survey, generally aimed at Year 7 students and their families. The data from this broader spread of stakeholders will provide the school with clearer feedback.

In 2006 both students and parents who responded to the Exit Survey believed the School performed very well in its delivery of Christian teaching, the level of discipline and providing a safe and caring environment for students. The School also rated well with regard to the social development of the children, academic achievement, facilities, meeting the requirements of individuals, art, music, sport and other recreational activities. With respect to school improvement, some students believed access to computers was inadequate, and there were mixed feelings from students and parents in regard to feedback from teachers about progress being made in all subject areas. In 2007 a computer suite is being built, effectively doubling the access to computers.

Teacher satisfaction has also been measured through a survey instrument that asked for a score out of 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being outstanding. 86% of staff indicated their level of enjoyment as they lived their vocation at Golden Grove Lutheran at 3 or better, with 57% rating their experience at 4 or 5. All responding staff gave a 3 or better for the quality of the curriculum. 71% of staff believed their opportunities for professional learning and development rated a 4 or better. While there is always room to improve, almost half of the staff believed the emphasis placed on behaviour and student wellbeing rated a 4.

86% of responding staff believed the Christian ethos and program of Christian Studies was upheld within the school community at a rating of 4 or better, consistent with the view of students and parents. Some responses from staff indicated a desire to improve communication within the school structures.

### **Conclusion**

The data collected and presented here allows one to draw some conclusions. In time, collection of staff attendance and retention statistics may offer some insights for how the school may better conduct its business, but at this point, the data may be somewhat inconclusive. Similarly, an expectation that sick leave may increasingly be used as carer's leave by staff will only become evident as the data is collected and analysed on a regular basis. It may also be useful when analysing student attendance, to consider the breakdown between illness and parents taking children on holidays during term time, which seems to be an issue for some families here.

It would be fair to conclude that staff generally are happy in most areas of the school, but improvements in communication and the level of support for student behaviour and welfare are areas for growth. Communication between parents and staff was also mentioned by parents as an area for improvement, but overwhelmingly, both students and parents rate their time at Golden Grove Lutheran as a positive one. Benchmark data generally shows literacy and numeracy success for students at over 90%, which while pleasing, still leaves room for ongoing improvement. The School offers significant additional value to both students and staff. The commitment to staff professional learning, backed by significant financial support, appears justified.

Sincerely

Rainer Mayer, Principal, Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School