Banksia Montessori School

Strategic Plan 2014 - 2019

Version 2.1
Revision Notice

This is a managed document. All copies of this document preceding this release are obsolete and shall be destroyed.

This Strategic Plan 2014 - 2019 document is:

- Version 2.1
- Dated 18 February, 2016

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<th>Date</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

1. **Objective** ............................................................................................................................. 1

2. **Background** .......................................................................................................................... 2

3. **Plan Development** ............................................................................................................... 3

4. **Strategic Objectives** ......................................................................................................... 4
   4.1 Introduction of New Parents ............................................................................................... 4
       4.1.1 2016 Objectives ......................................................................................................... 4
       4.1.2 2014 Objectives ....................................................................................................... 5
       4.1.3 Future Objectives ..................................................................................................... 6
   4.2 Leadership of the Governing Body ..................................................................................... 7
       4.2.1 2016 Objectives ......................................................................................................... 7
       4.2.2 2015 Objectives ....................................................................................................... 9
       4.2.3 2014 Objectives ....................................................................................................... 11
       4.2.4 Future Objectives ..................................................................................................... 12
   1.3 Attractive and Functional Environment .......................................................................... 13
       4.2.5 2016 Objectives ......................................................................................................... 13
       4.2.6 Future Objectives ..................................................................................................... 14
   4.3 Cultural Diversity ............................................................................................................... 15
       4.3.1 2015 Objectives ....................................................................................................... 15
   4.4 Open and Effective Parent/Teacher Communication ...................................................... 16
       4.4.1 2016 Objectives ......................................................................................................... 16

5. **2016 Objectives Summary** ............................................................................................. 17

6. **2015 Objectives Summary** ........................................................................................... 18

7. **2014 Objectives Summary** ........................................................................................... 19

8. **Acronyms & Abbreviations** .......................................................................................... 20
1 Objective

This paper aims to provide insight, justification and recommendations pertaining to the operation and governance of Banksia Montessori School (BMS) over the next 5 years. The strategies outlined in this paper support the ongoing requirements for growth, investigate new programs to meet increased demand and remediate existing concerns raised by parents and teachers.

The core strategies in this paper are underpinned by the Registration Standards and Requirements for Non-Government Schools. The five strategies identified by the school council are:

1. New Parent Introduction
2. Leadership of the Governing Body
3. Attractive and Functional Environment
4. Cultural Diversity
5. Open and Effective Parent/Teacher Communication

The strategies are captured in the school’s vision statement and challenge statements:

Banksia Montessori School will be a highly recognised and sought after school, who is instrumental in the holistic development of our children. Our highly informed parent governed council will be leaders in governing a sustainable and evolving school that embraces cultural diversity, fosters trusting and open relationships and provides an attractive and functional environment for work and play.

BMS Challenge

- to produce well rounded, happy and confident children who feel connected to the school
- to have an efficient and effective council that can look after the financial stability and long term success of the school
- to provide an attractive and functional environment for the children, teachers and employees
- to embrace and celebrate cultural diversity
- to welcome, involve and inform parents, and provide them with easy access to information
- to enable effective and timely parent/teacher communication where feedback is based on mutual trust and respect
2 Background

Banksia Montessori School was formed in 1982 and is a parent governed, not-for-profit, independent school. The school caters for up to 30 children from 3 to 6 years of age. It has been located at 17 Chatton St, Dianella since 1998 and currently holds a lease with the City of Stirling until 2017, with the option of extending it for another 5 at that time (5 + 5 year lease).

The Montessori philosophy to education is based on the enjoyment of learning and this underpins the core values of the school. The teaching staff manage the classroom and learning environment and determine the most effective ways to provide a positive educational experience to the children. Their method and manner focuses on developing qualities of independence, responsibility, self-motivation and adaptability in the children.

The governing body of the school consists of parents who volunteer their time and efforts to undertake all responsibilities relating to the effective governance of the school. They are elected from the parent body by the School Council. The governing body takes guidance from AISWA (Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia) who provide services for independent schools to assist them in providing a high quality education to the students.
3 Plan Development

The strategic planning process was initiated by a planning workshop in early 2014 that included the governing body, parents and teachers. The workshop focused on identifying and classifying critical issues, developing a strategic vision and developing objectives to achieve the vision.

Since the initial development of the plan some of the objectives have changed to align with the changing needs of the school, but the overarching strategies have remained the same. This document shows the progress and evolution of those objectives. Those which have been completed or made obsolete have been updated and objectives which are still in progress have been moved forward to the relevant year.
4 Strategic Objectives

4.1 Introduction of New Parents

“to welcome, involve and inform parents and provide them with easy access to information”

Parents who feel welcomed, involved and informed will generally contribute more of their time and skills to the school and are more likely to refer friends and family members. The concerns raised during the initial planning workshop highlighted that new parents were unaware of the processes of the school and where to find information that currently does exist. Since then a number of changes have been implemented to remediate the issues and further actions have been identified to continually focus on this objective.

4.1.1 2016 Objectives

4.1.1.1 Incorporate Induction into Busy Bee

The first busy bee of the year is an opportune time to welcome new families and introduce them to existing families in the school. In the past, children were invited to the busy bee and a sausage sizzle would follow after tasks were completed. New parents were partnered with an existing parent on a specific task to provide an opportunity for them to get to know other people.

For the first busy bee of 2016 the council has decided to alter the structure of the busy bee and form teams led by a council member. Parents are given a choice as to which team they wish to join and team leaders are the point of contact for each parent. This should provide opportunities for new parents to meet other families in their team as well as getting to know the council members.

4.1.1.2 ‘Meet & Greet’ Sausage Sizzle

The council has decided not to invite children to the first busy bee or to follow the busy bee with a sausage sizzle. Instead a separate “Meet & Greet” sausage sizzle will be organised to allow families to focus solely on getting to know one another.
4.1.2 2014 Objectives

4.1.2.1 Buddy System

The Buddy System was an initiative to buddy up new families with existing families so that they would have a single point of contact to ask any questions. This was partially implemented in 2014 however a proper process was not developed. This led to inconsistent allocation of buddies and an inability to measure the effectiveness of the initiative.

In 2015 the School Administrators took over the enrolment function and process so they became the single point of contact for new families. This has replaced the need for the Buddy System.

4.1.2.2 Updated Induction Packs

In order to provide a central source of information for new parents a Parent Handbook has been produced. Each year the handbook should be revised according to the feedback given from new parents.

Additionally, a staff handbook has been produced for the teaching staff and must also be revised regularly based on feedback from the teachers.

School Administration is now responsible for the update of the induction packs for new parents and the initiative is considered completed.

4.1.2.3 Regular Parent Catch-ups

Parents who are able to see each other regularly in an informal situation generally have better working relationships, communicate more often and effectively and are better informed. These catch up’s will also provide a forum for new parents to ask questions of other parents with regards to the running of the school.

Team BBQ’s and other social events have been organised throughout the year.
4.1.3 Future Objectives

4.1.3.1 Investigate Cloud Based Document Storage Services

Currently all documentation, policies and other information are stored either in paper files located in the office at the school or on the office computer. However, there is no ability to have remote access to work collaboratively on documents.

In order to provide easy access to information a cloud-based document storage service was suggested. This would allow users (council members) to access the documents from anywhere they have an Internet connection. It is also cost efficient, as it does not require the school to purchase management software or licenses for each user. With generally high amounts of storage and backup and recovery managed by the provider, a lot of administrative overhead and infrastructure costs are removed from the school.

There are several providers of such a service, for example Google Drive. This provides user cloud storage, file sharing and collaborative editing. Others that have been suggested include Microsoft Office 365, Mega and Dropbox.

Microsoft Office 365 has been investigated and partially implemented so it can be tested. It is hoped to further the project in 2017.
4.2 Leadership of the Governing Body

“to have an efficient & effective council that can look after the financial stability and long term success of the school”

Prior to July 2015 all families were required to serve on the council for a period of 12 months during their child’s attendance at the school. As a parent governed school this ensured all parents would contribute to the governance of the school and ultimately led to the creation of more council positions to ensure there were enough for parents to fill. The Council used to consist of 11 positions: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Fundraising Officer, Marketing Officer, Enrolment Officer, Maintenance Officer, Employment Officer, Purchasing Officer, OHS Officer and IT Officer.

However, the large number of positions reduced the efficacy of the council and in 2015 a restructure of the council and office was implemented. (See 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.3.2 for further detail).

Since the restructure the council has been able to operate more effectively and is able to concentrate on the following objectives.

4.2.1 2016 Objectives

4.2.1.1 Implement Staff Retention Plan

The teaching staff are considered to be one of the most important factors for the success of the children individually and the school as a whole. They are guides and facilitators for each individual’s learning and must remain constantly alert to the direction the child is heading to help them succeed. It is for this reason that retaining the staff is imperative.

As each teacher’s goals and career path is different, a staff retention plan needs to be implemented to help the teachers achieve their personal goals in alignment with that of the school’s.

The council is continually working with the staff to develop this plan, to plan for future staffing requirements and changes.

4.2.1.2 Create Handover Packs for New Council Members

Initially this action required each council member to produce a pack to pass on any information they had learnt to new council members taking up the position. However, most packs were never produced as it typically took quite a lot of time to learn the role and be confident enough to document the information.

With the reduction in council positions and the collaborative nature of the council this activity is still relevant, however instead of ten packs being produced (one for each position) there should be only one. This information should cover the responsibilities of the council as a whole and the strategies determined by the council.
4.2.1.3 Alignment with another Montessori School

One possibility that has been discussed to provide parents with a succession program for their children is to align with an existing Montessori school that provides education from the age of 6. It is envisioned that a relationship is set up with other schools to take Banksia children by confirming their enrolment. This would increase the predictability and stability of confirmed enrolments for children aged 3 to 6 and beyond.

Potentially it should also be explored to align financially and share budgets. Synergies can be achieved by consolidating processes and procedures, curriculum and even council roles, which would overall provide a more stable operating environment for the school.

4.2.1.4 Provide Primary School Education

The next logical step for the expansion of Banksia is to investigate providing primary school education and becoming a school that caters for children up until high school. This would allow Banksia to be competitive with other schools that also offer education from ages 3 to 12. A larger school would also be more financially sustainable with more funding provided by parents and government.
4.2.2 2015 Objectives

4.2.2.1 Transfer Council Responsibilities to School Administration

The following two initiatives have replaced 4.2.4.2 Permanent Council Members. Please see that section for the reasons for why they were created.

The school council is required to govern the school, formulate strategies and set the direction for the school. They should not be involved in the day-to-day affairs of running and managing the school.

The following responsibilities should be transferred to the School Administrators as they are not considered to be governance functions.

- **Enrolments**
  Respond to all enrolment enquiries, process all applications and enrolments and conduct interviews with principal for prospective families

- **Marketing**
  Administer any marketing requirements as directed by the council

- **Finance**
  Maintain budgets for principal to oversee, facilitate financial year audit

- **Employment**
  Maintain staff/contractor contracts, ensure salaries comply with relevant awards, arrange relief staff when required

- **Purchasing**
  Manage class room and office consumables and purchase accordingly

- **IT**
  Maintain IT passwords, liaise with IT support services and maintain up to date, functional and working operations of the school’s IT equipment (including security & backup) and maintain content of the school’s social networking (parent portal, website, Facebook etc.).

- **Secretary**
  Attend council meetings to take minutes, collate and distribute, organise agendas, compile and distribute monthly school newsletter
4.2.2.2 Reduce the Size of the Council and Streamline Responsibilities

With the transfer of management activities to the School Administrators, the council responsibilities need to be streamlined and the number of positions reduced to be more manageable. The following council positions will be modified. (See Rules of Association document for further detail).

- **Chairperson**
  No change to responsibilities

- **Treasurer**
  Will now provide oversight to budgets and not creation of individual budgets

- **Secretary**
  Taking minutes at council meeting will now be done by Business Manager

- **Business Manager**
  Take minutes at council meetings, financial and physical management of the school, update register of Members of Association

- **Principal**

- **Up to 5 other persons from the parent body**

Additionally, it is expected that the council will meet fortnightly without the rest of the parent body and meet monthly with the parent body to report on the council’s progress. The council is expected to make decisions collaboratively and have a shared knowledge of the council’s goals and responsibilities.
4.2.3 2014 Objectives

4.2.3.1 Playgroup Visits

In order to attract parents to enrol their 3 year olds and build a waiting list it is proposed that parents visit some existing playgroups in the area to speak to the parents about their Montessori experience.

The parents should be equipped with overall information about Montessori principles and be prepared to share their own experiences with Montessori education and Banksia specifically.

This initiative was completed in 2014 by a couple of parent volunteers. However, it proved difficult not only to find volunteers but to find playgroups or day care centres who would allow a representative to visit.

4.2.3.2 Permanent Council Members

A survey of council members in September 2013 highlighted that “70% found that being on the council was a rewarding experience, although less than half wished to take up their own position or continue in their own role in 2014”. The workload of some of the positions was quite extensive and there is a steep learning curve for anyone taking on a position.

This was one of the reasons for suggesting that council members should be permanent and paid for their efforts on the council.

In mid-2014 some members of the council started looking into this more thoroughly. It was clear that financially the school would never be able to afford employing council members as staff, although there was still a need to reduce the learning curve for council members and provide incentives to join.

This initiative transformed into transferring the council functions to the School Administrators and streamlining the council by reducing the number of positions. Transferring some responsibilities to the School Administrators would reduce the day to day activities and allow the council to focus on governance. Reducing the size of the council would allow council members to meet more frequently and work more closely together as a team.

In 2015 during the process to change the “Rules of Association” it was discovered that council members cannot be paid or reimbursed in any way financially. Therefore this action has been made obsolete.
4.2.4 Future Objectives

4.2.4.1 Provide an On-site Playgroup

Montessori education begins at age 3 yet many parents will only be thinking about kindergarten at this age for their child. In order to expose more parents to Montessori principles and to build more predictable enrolment numbers for 3 year olds it is proposed to investigate producing an onsite playgroup.

Parents who attend a Montessori playgroup with their child will have a better understanding of Montessori principles are more likely to enrol their child for further education.

This initiative was raised in the initial 2014 workshop with plans to investigate the feasibility of where and how to provide a playgroup. The council has decided to add it to the objectives for 2017 after the completion of the new building for the staffroom. An additional room in the new building is being costed which could be used for this purpose.

4.2.4.2 Succession Plan for Children

As Banksia only caters for children aged 3 to 6 this poses a number of challenges for parents as they try to determine where to send their child for their kindergarten and primary school years. The high demand for quality education is putting increasing pressure on parents to determine which school they want their child to attend and to enrol them as soon as possible. Parents with more than one child prefer to have all of their children attending the same school and as many primary schools also cater for kindergarten and pre-primary children they will often enrol all of their children at the same school.

Currently there is no process in place to assist parents with a choice of primary school once their child finishes at Banksia and this is reducing the number of confirmed enrolments and increasing the number of children leaving the school early. In order to retain existing parents and encourage new parents to send their children to Banksia it is imperative to develop a succession plan for children.

A number of alternatives were raised in the initial 2014 workshop which are described below. However, the council is unable to commit to the workload of investigating these options in more detail at this time and will reevaluate in 2017.
1.3. **Attractive and Functional Environment**

Montessori education requires a prepared environment; one that is designed to provide the maximum ability for learning and exploration. The harmony and beauty of the environment should invite the learner to come in and work as well as being ordered, uncluttered and well maintained.

Since the signing of the lease at 17 Chatton St, Dianella in 1998, the school has invested in and maintained the buildings and the grounds through State and Federal government funding. A number of initiatives have been identified to progress further towards the vision of having an attractive and functional Environment.

**4.2.5 2016 Objectives**

**4.2.5.1 Redesign and Upgrade the Existing Playground**

While the current playground adheres to current fall zone regulations and is regularly audited for safety, the teachers have expressed a desire to reduce the size of the playground to be able to monitor the children more closely. This will also alleviate the pressure on teachers as currently all 3 staff members are required to supervise outdoor play. With a smaller playground only 2 staff would be required to supervise.

It is proposed to completely redesign and upgrade the playground to provide a more vibrant, fun, safe and sensorial experience for the children in alignment with our strategic vision. Requirements have already been sought for the playground from parents and teachers and the project is ready to enter the design phase, which will be completed this year.

This project also incorporates the Musical/Sensorial Cubby House and the Mural. Budget has been allocated for these activities and will be completed this year.

**4.2.5.2 Provide a Separate Office/Staffroom**

The current office is located directly off the main classroom, is quite small and not very private. In addition to this the teachers currently have no place they can go to be away from the children to have their own space during the day. Since the hours of the school administrators have been increased the teachers are increasingly competing for time and space in the office for classroom needs.

In the initial 2014 workshop it was proposed to investigate how to provide a separate office that may also include a staff room section for the teachers. The Startup phase of the process was initiated in 2015 where capital grant funding was investigated and consultation with the City of Stirling took place.

The project is ready to enter into the Design and Application phase this year where detailed designs and drawings will be produced, costs sought for the building itself and permits and licences sought. Sufficient budget has been set aside for this phase of the project.
4.2.6 Future Objectives

4.2.6.1 Repaint the Classroom and Grounds

Along with the redesign of the playground it is proposed to repaint the classroom and the grounds. The choice of colour should align with the overall playground design theme. The inside of the classroom has already been painted white last year.

This initiative will be explored in conjunction with the playground redesign, however there is no budget set aside for it this year.
4.3 Cultural Diversity

Maria Montessori identified several human tendencies that throughout history have been common to all humans. It is important to study these in order to understand the similarities and differences of human beings around the world to cultivate a deeper connection to all humans.

4.3.1 2015 Objectives

4.3.1.1 Parent Run Cultural Activities

During Harmony week in 2014, a parent organised for the children to watch a demonstration of how to make pasta. This was such an engaging activity for the children that it is proposed to investigate what other skills exist among the parent body specific to a race or culture which could be demonstrated to the children throughout the year.

In 2015 the parents organised additional cooking sessions where 3 parents volunteered to cook dishes from their country of origin. Once again this was a huge success and should be a continued initiative among the parents.

Also in 2015 another parent organised African drumming as an incursion.

Other cultural activities could include songs, dress, costumes, language, traditions or customs.

4.3.1.2 Engage Local Aboriginal People

Currently there are no aboriginal children attending Banksia, however the parents feel it important as Australians for the children to be exposed to the customs and traditions of aboriginal Australians. In the past local aboriginal elders have come to speak to the children about their culture and it is proposed to organise this again, perhaps on a more regular basis.

For Harmony Week 2015 a parent organised for an aboriginal to come and play the didgeridoo for the children.

In 2015 the council applied for a PALS grant from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to incorporate an aspect of aboriginal culture into the playground project. The principal and council decided to put a mural on the wall by the sandpit with an aboriginal design. The parents voted on the ‘Rainbow Snake’ theme with the six aboriginal seasons. The local artist will also be invited to speak to the children when the mural is finished to explain her work.
4.4 Open and Effective Parent/Teacher Communication

Parents are often keen to understand how their child is progressing. New parents especially want to understand how their child is fitting in with the class. Currently two parent/teacher interviews are held per year, in Terms 2 and 4, however parents are free to organise a time with the teachers outside of these interviews if they have any concerns.

4.4.1 2016 Objectives

4.4.1.1 Written Reports for Children

Parents have expressed a desire to be given a written report for their child that would serve as a base for their discussions with the teachers. It is proposed to investigate whether the teachers are in a position to do this for each child on a regular basis. The existing process may need to be reviewed in order to ensure parents understand when they will be receiving feedback about their child’s progress and what the minimum expectations are.

This initiative was initially raised in 2014 and will be looked into in 2016.
5 2016 Objectives Summary

The following table summarises the actions for 2016.

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<th>Action</th>
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<td>Meet &amp; Greet Sausage Sizzle</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cloud Based Document Storage</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Staff Retention Plan</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handover packs for new council members</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Redesign and Upgrade existing playground</td>
<td>2016 - 2017</td>
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<td>Alignment with another Montessori School</td>
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<td>On Site Playgroup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Repaint the classroom and building</td>
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<td>Separate office</td>
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6 2015 Objectives Summary

The following table summarises the actions for 2015 and their status at the end of the year.

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<th>Action</th>
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<td>Cloud Based Document Storage</td>
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<td>Parent run Cultural Activities</td>
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<td>Transfer Council Responsibilities to Admin</td>
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<td>Reduce council size and streamline responsibilities</td>
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<td>Separate office</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
<td>Not Started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written performance reports for children</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
<td>Not Started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer council responsibilities to office</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>In Progress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8 **Acronyms & Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMS</td>
<td>Banksia Montessori School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIWA</td>
<td>Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia</td>
</tr>
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