



**SOPHIA MUNDI STEINER SCHOOL**  
Steiner Education and IB World School

# **Chronicle & Annual Report 2017**

# Principal's Report



Welcome to the Annual Review for Sophia Mundi 2017. As a school we strive for continual growth, reflection and response of societal needs. 2017 proved to be a year of inspiration, challenge and renewal. As in nature, we respond to opportunities as they arise. The seasons of change brought new staff, families and students to Sophia Mundi and ultimately, this continually renews our community.

The Board of Directors and I were focussed on reviewing, developing and consolidating. Succession planning, risk assessments and mentoring systems provided an opening to strengthen and balance our school. We employed coordinators in the Arts, Music and IB departments and our experienced staff spent time mentoring and reviewing others.

Heads of Primary (Katina Kondos) and Middle School (Ben Darby) were supported in leadership training. Ben's focus provided a platform for our school values to be developed, based on the underlying principles of Steiner Education: Gratitude, Love and Duty. These can be interpreted across the school as Growth,

Courage and Ethics which lead to the development of Strength, Compassion and Integrity.

The National Steiner Teachers Conference in Sydney was a wonderful opportunity for staff. We continue to actively develop and support staff to explore new horizons. The goal is to consistently send at least two staff members to the conference. Their experiences provoke active dialogue within the School.

Special Needs awareness and training was a professional development priority for us in 2017. We invited Barbara Baldwin to work with all staff and facilitate state-wide professional development with our colleagues in Steiner Education. The focus on Inclusive Education and differentiated teaching strategies aligned with requirements of the Victorian Institute of Teachers as well as our School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals. In 2018 we continue this work as we ask the questions of ourselves and society – How inclusive are we?

Internationally renowned German Waldorf Teacher, Gerd Kellermann visited us and created an exciting opportunity to train and implement our 'seedpod' teacher performance system. The development programme included mentoring, cyclical reviews and annual performance against Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards. Sophia Mundi was host for this inspirational programme and invited colleagues from across Australia to attend.

Our challenges were our opportunities. Identification of increased mental health needs and student behaviour management incidents led to further support for students with disabilities being made available. Ben Darby worked with students in innovative strategies, such as boat building. We began to employ assistants in the Primary classes. We also partnered with the Victorian Government in the Respectful Relationships programme which enabled us to undertake gender audits and train staff in Respectful Relationships, Rights and Resilience. At all times we felt the freedom to work within our philosophical and pedagogical approaches. We continue into 2018 to deepen our commitment to these programmes through our life skills, work experience, camps and restorative work.

As we faced life lessons in living with disability and mental health, we became the listening community. These conversations were not easy but now we can look back and see that we have built a community of inclusion and trust. As a community we are creative, innovative and inclusive but we are also human. Our life lessons continue to be modelled with resilience and love.

We were challenged by inappropriate material occasionally entering our school through technology. The robust and healthy dialogue that followed reinforced the significant and ongoing changes in culture regarding mobile phone practice and online communication. Parent College discussions led to continued IT discussion with teachers and



parents. The subject brought into focus the need to be present and engaged in human to human relationships. In 2018, we once again ask the adult community at Sophia Mundi to be present in the playground and engage with each other – becoming role models for the community we wish to create.

Sophia Mundi Secondary students are fortunate in that they can access many and varied leadership opportunities. At our small niche school students have the opportunity to participate in local community and service pursuits. Although service activities are often not celebrated in the same manner as sporting achievements they are important community contributions. A few examples of service activities which our students were involved with were: hospice care, Interact Arts, Abbotsford Covent, Collingwood Children's

Farm, sports coaching, fundraising for causes, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and environmental issues. The students are inspiring, and I hold the vision that we are in good hands in the future. Congratulations to all!

We opened the year with the upgrade to the library and study space. We refurbished our textiles and music classrooms as part of the arts wing focus. This creative space continues to be an inspiration to students and the Convent community. This work was made possible by a capital grant from the Commonwealth Government and a bequest. In 2017 we began a significant overhaul of our IT infrastructure: servers were decommissioned, Office 365 was rolled out across the school and we invested in new IT equipment. This project was overseen by the IT Steering Committee.

On behalf of the College of Teachers, I want to express appreciation and gratitude for all the teachers' exceptional depth of understanding of Steiner Education; and to our students for their commitment to Steiner and IB Education. And finally, thanks to our School Community and Board, for who you are and for what you bring to Sophia Mundi.

*Fiona Cock*  
PRINCIPAL



# Sophia Mundi Board of Directors' Report



The year started with the completion of the Library Refurbishment and Mezzanine level – a strategically important construction project for the School. Eastwood Property builders worked tirelessly over the Christmas and New Year period to have the project delivered on schedule. We would like to thank the site manager, Don Ratcliffe, and the company owner, David Eastwood, for the successful delivery of their third project within our challenging heritage buildings at the Abbotsford Convent.

A number of role changes occurred at board level during the year.

Darren Scotti was appointed Chair of the Finance Committee, replacing Robin Power. The committee members are:

- Darren Scotti (Chair)
- John Bradshaw
- Carlo Lacotta

The Finance Committee members are also the trustees of the Sophia Mundi Building Fund. Due to legislative changes, the Constitution was updated to allow the School Building Fund to operate within Sophia Mundi

Limited. This means that our community can continue to make donations and contributions to the School and receive Tax Deductible Gift Recipient Receipts from the School.

The School delivers an education for our children and it is incumbent on families to deliver on their promise to pay fees. The School, and in rare cases, the Finance Committee, continues to work with our families to help meet their responsibilities of fee payment whilst being sensitive to families changing circumstances.

Kerry Laughton was appointed as Acting Director. Kerry has actively volunteered throughout most of her adult life, having a brief intermission while her children were young. Now that both her children are in school (attending Melbourne Rudolf Steiner School in Warranwood), she had been looking for the right opportunity to contribute to public life again. She is a student of anthroposophy and is drawn to contributing to Steiner communities.

Kerry has recent professional experience as a senior policy adviser within the Department of Education and Training. Professionally, she is an experienced generalist with over 15 years of experience in public policy roles. Kerry was President of a not-for-profit board between 2005 and 2008, and also chaired a large Federal department's women's network for several years.

During the year the terms of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee were refined. This committee is now responsible

for bringing new Directors on board and for the process that sits behind this – the review process for board, board committee and Principal performance, as well as staff remuneration advisement. The committee also updated the process for searching for, selecting and appointing Directors. A representative of the Members is now involved in that process as a way of ensuring the interests of the Members and Directors are aligned.

The Nominations and Remuneration Committee members are:

- Robin Power (Chair)
- Nicholas Conigrave
- Jennifer West

During 2017, the Board also reviewed and updated policies for which it has responsibility. These policies are:

- Child Protection
- Disputes and Complaints
- Duty of Care
- Emergency and Critical Incident Management Policy
- Fee Policy
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Safe Schools

With much of the governance work strengthened over the last two years, the board will be more focused to strategic matters. A couple of topics in the strategic spotlight are teachers' pay and school fees affordability.

I would like to thank all our wonderful teachers for the hard work they do every day to bring to our children the wonders of the world and the soul, and our Principal and Management

team for managing the School. I would like to thank the Teachers' Assistants, our Administrative team, all other staff members, volunteers and all those within the community who have contributed in some way to making our School what is it.

I would also like to thank my Board colleagues and those who assist on our committees for their most generous contribution. Without this collective community effort, our School would not be able to do the work we do.

*Robin Power*

CHAIR – SOPHIA MUNDI BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS

## New Director Profiles

### PATRICK JOST

Patrick joined the Board in 2018, after moving from Luxembourg to Melbourne in 2017. He has two children at Sophia Mundi, Lea (Class 4) and Matthias (Class 1).

Patrick is an accomplished entrepreneur and has a passion for new technologies. He loves to be involved, always aiming at bringing positive and significant change to the table. He is also a former board member of the Waldorf School in Luxembourg.

### KERRY LAUGHTON

Kerry joined the Sophia Mundi Steiner School Board in 2017. Kerry has two children, Rhone (Class 4) and Finn (Class 1), who attend Melbourne Rudolf Steiner School.

She works as a strategic advisor to the public sector, currently employed at Ambulance Victoria. She was formerly the principal integrity advisor at the Department of Education and Training. Kerry has been an inner work path student since 2014.

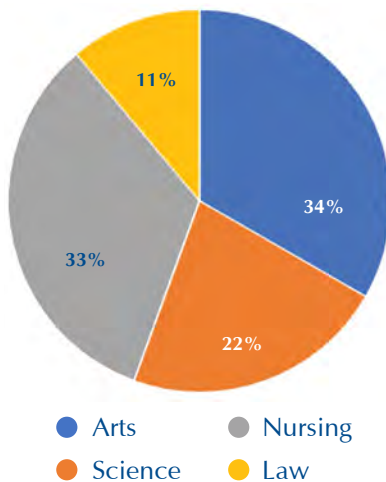
In 2016 she attended the Steiner Teacher Training curriculum studies course at the Michael Centre – Melbourne Rudolf Steiner Seminar.



# Graduating Class of 2017



**2017 IB GRADUATE:  
TERTIARY COURSE DISCIPLINE**



A School can have no higher aspiration than to provide an environment in which young men and women, the people of the future, can experience the deepest values of the human tradition as a foundation on which to forge, in freedom, the shape of the future.

Imbued with the wisdom of Rudolf Steiner and his knowledge of the evolving human being, Sophia Mundi is an educational organisation for children of all ages, fostering self-reflection, community wellbeing and healing in the world. I believe in each student and their individualism and trust that they will take the



courageous steps to honour their education and hold the truth that our future needs.

I was thrilled to stand with the Class of 2017 at their Valedictory dinner. The journey of each young adult and their parents was a privilege to share. The themes were of inner truth, courage, gratitude and insights into their education. The students are to be congratulated on their outstanding success in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. The Class of 2017 is the fifth cohort to graduate from Sophia Mundi under the Diploma Programme pathway.

The Class of 2017 consisted of nine students. Of their Year 9 Class of 2014, 40% continued into Class 12.

The two-year IB Diploma Programme curriculum encompasses the study of six

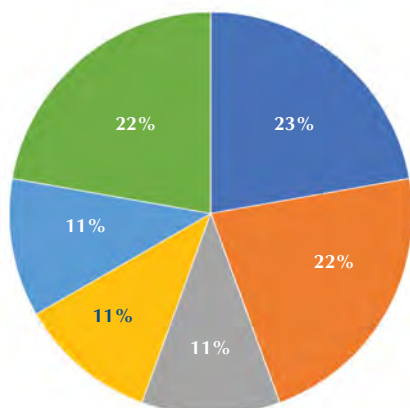
subjects together with the core components of Creativity, Action and Service (CAS), Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and Extended Essay (EE): a 4000 word academic research based essay. The aim of the challenging and rigorous Diploma Programme is to develop internationally minded people who strive to display the IB Learner Profile outcomes of being inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced and reflective individuals.

Of the Class of 2017, five students completed the Diploma, with the average score of 27 (out of 45). One of the five students earning Diplomas received an ATAR over 90. In addition, the Class of 2017 bested the world average in two subjects: Environmental Systems and Society and Mathematics Standard Level.

The cohort all received their first University and TAFE offers after results were issued. 10% of members took a gap year to travel and work, while 90% went on immediately into further study, working towards degrees. We are always excited to see how each student decides to use their unique talents.

*Fiona Cock*  
PRINCIPAL

**2017 IB GRADUATE:  
TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**



- Victoria University
- Australian Catholic University
- RMIT
- La Trobe University
- Stella Adler Academy of Acting - Los Angeles (USA)
- Melbourne University



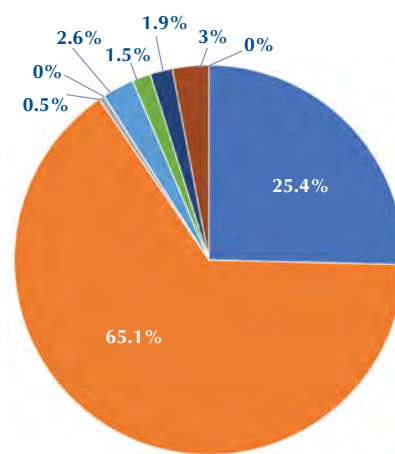
# Financial Report 2017

During the 4th Term of 2016 the Board of Directors increased fees for 2017, continuing to use the simplified fee system (introduced in 2014), which includes most school fees within the annual composite school fee. Although Sophia Mundi maintains good control over its expenses each year, the increase in fees was necessary to fund increases in operational expenses.

As indicated, Building Fund Donations are 2.6% of income (2016: 2.8%) and we appreciate and thank those parents who continued to contribute towards the Building Fund. These donations became Sophia Mundi's co-contribution of 40% of cost, which helped secure the government capital grant in September 2016. The government capital grant (equivalent to 60% of cost) made it possible for Sophia Mundi to complete building alterations, refurbishment of the library, mezzanine floor, administration offices and music/craft room.

## INCOME SOURCES EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES

INCOME SOURCES	2017	2016
Government Grants	25.4%	22.7%
Student Fees	65.1%	68.8%
Fundraising	0.5%	0.6%
Donations	0%	0.6%
Building Fund Donations	2.6%	2.6%
Other Income	1.5%	1.5%
Income -Trading Activities	1.9%	1.6%
Government Capital Grant - Library	3.0%	0.7%
Deficit	0%	0.7%



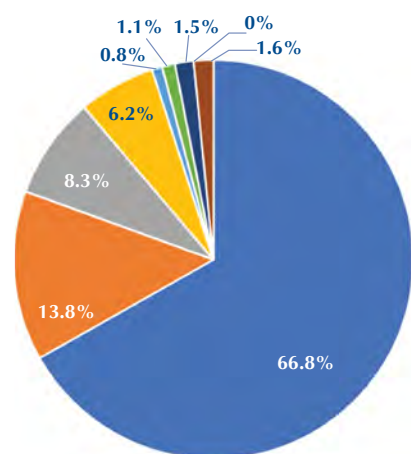
From the beginning of 2016 our accounting Chart of Accounts have been fully aligned with the Department of Education and Training (DET)'s recommended Chart of Accounts for Non-Government Independent Schools.

This resulted in a new reporting category, namely: Trading Activities. This category includes everything that is not related to the actual education teaching process, such as Aftercare, Playgroup, Canteen and Student Payables. Although we do not make a surplus on trading activities, they are a part of the very necessary fabric that constitutes Sophia Mundi.

Finally, the Audited Financial Statements (available on our website) indicates a Surplus of \$69,653 or 1.6% of total income for 2017 compared to deficits of \$28,165 or 0.7% shortfall in actual income for 2016.

*John Bradshaw*  
BUSINESS MANAGER

## EXPENSE CATEGORIES EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES



EXPENSE CATEGORIES	2017	2016
Employment	66.8%	69.9%
Occupancy (incl Depreciation)	13.8%	12.9%
Educational Expenditures	8.3%	7.9%
Discounts/Bursaries	6.2%	4.9%
Bad & Doubtful Debts	0.8%	0.3%
Financial & Interest Expenses	1.1%	1.2%
Expenses of Trading Activities	1.5%	2.0%
Capital Expenditure Library	0%	0.9%
Surplus	1.6%	

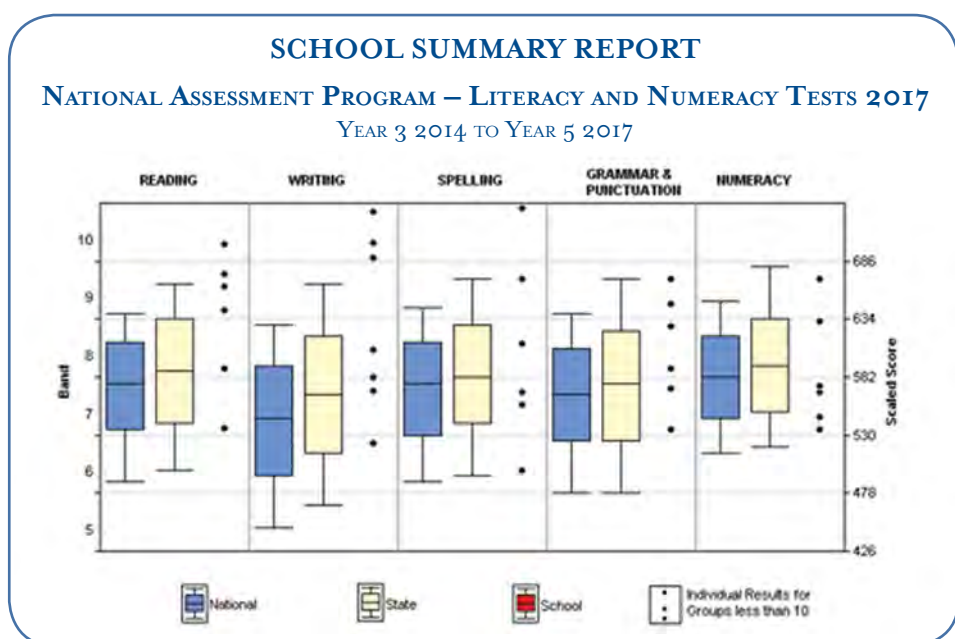
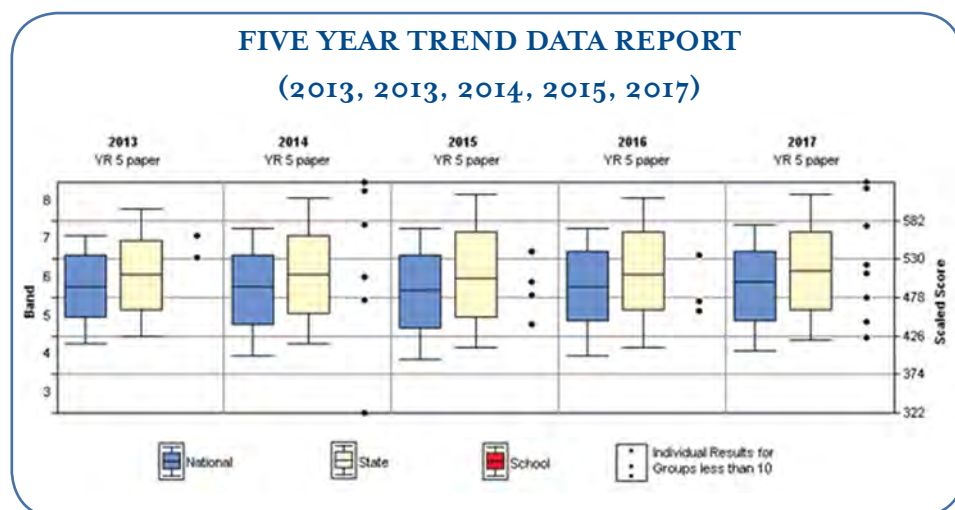
# NAPLAN – Student Learning Outcomes 2017

The Sophia Mundi assessment process determines student performance and learning outcomes in a rich and broad curriculum designed to address the social, emotional, academic and artistic development of each individual student.

Student progress in specific areas of numeracy, spelling and reading comprehension is assessed using information compiled from results of standardised tests which students complete each year level from Class 3 to Class 10.

Relevant information from these tests and ongoing assessment of main lesson material, oral presentations, performances, class and individual projects, is regularly shared with our Education Engagement and Enrichment teachers and parents to maximise student learning outcomes in all domains. This ongoing assessment by Class and Specialist Teachers using a variety of modes takes into account disabilities and multiple intelligences with which different students are endowed.

In 2017 a small cohort of students in Classes 3, 5, 7 and 9 participated in the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. Student results were distributed to their parents at the end of Term 3. Class teachers, guardians and Engagement and Enrichment staff noted their students' results as part of the ongoing assessment process in place at Sophia Mundi. Since many parents at Sophia Mundi



choose to withdraw their children from NAPLAN tests, insufficient data is produced from which to draw conclusive comparative results within the School, from class to class and from year to year.

However, for those students who do participate, we provide the above reports: *(Please note that unlike many schools countrywide, Sophia Mundi provides an inclusive education and does not focus on teaching to NAPLAN.)*

For those who participated in NAPLAN tests, the outstanding academic results were:

- 100% of Class 3 were above the minimum standard across all age ranges in writing.
- Across Classes 3, 5, 7 and 9 grammar and punctuation were particularly strong.
- Class 7 reading, writing, grammar and punctuation were significantly above State and National bench marks.
- It was pleasing to note that students were strong in Statistics and Probability.



## Staff Retention

All Teachers	80%
Primary	88%
Secondary	82%

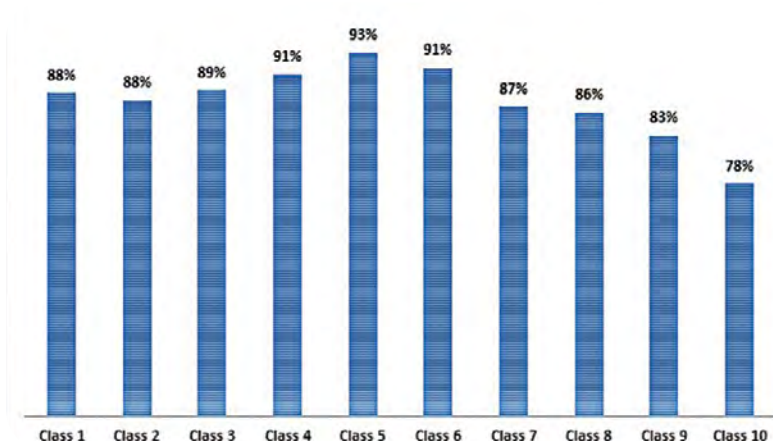
## Staff Attendance

In 2017 we had a general Staff attendance rate of 97.1% and Teaching Staff attendance rate of 96.3%.

## Teaching Staff Qualifications

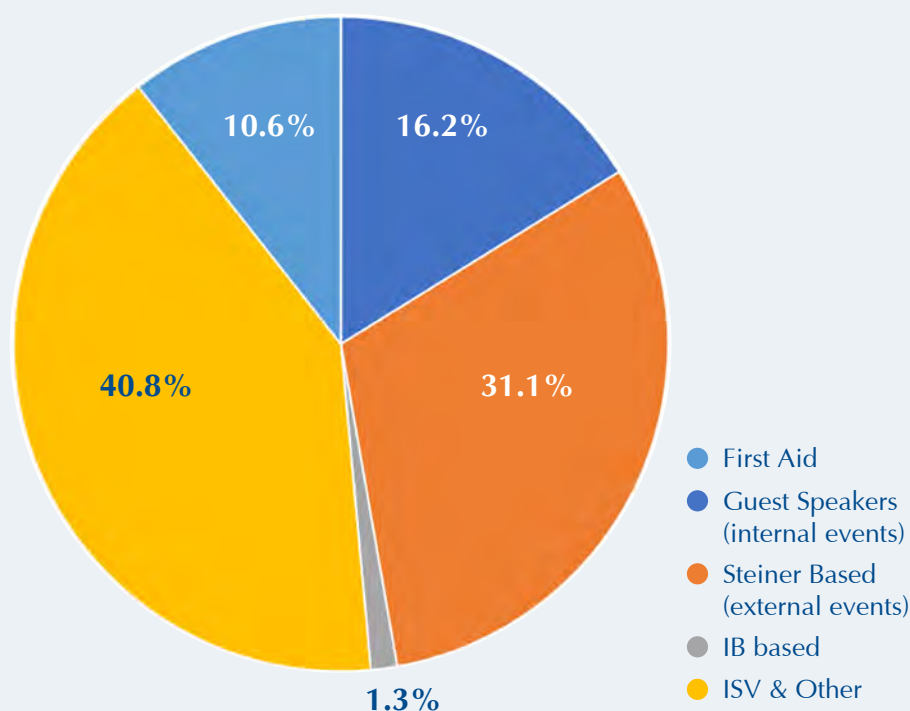
Qualification	Total
Doctor of Philosophy	1
Masters Qualifications	7
Master of Education	1
Steiner Education Qualifications	13
Eurythmy Qualifications	1
Bothmer Gymnastics	2
IB Certificates	16
Post Graduate Diploma	1
Graduate Diploma of Education	12
Graduate Diploma Outdoor/ Environmental Studies	1
Diploma of Education	9
Bachelor of Letters	1
Bachelor of Science	3
Bachelor of Applied Science	1
Bachelor of Arts	16
Bachelor of Education	6
Bachelor of Teaching	3
Bachelor of History	1
Bachelor of Law	1
Bachelor of Music	2
Bachelor of Visual Art / Fine Arts	4
Advanced Diplomas	5
Certificates	2

### 2017 STUDENT ATTENDANCE



## Professional Development Distribution

2017 STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPENSES AMOUNTED TO \$22,050 AND HAD THE FOLLOWING PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION:



# Digital Footprints

## Implications of a 'digital footprint' on your child's career prospects

The following is a summary of research done by Dr Rachel Buchanan from the University of Newcastle on the Implications of digital footprint career prospects:

*There have been massive changes in employment over the past two generations. A single-track career is no longer the norm and new career patterns have emerged: serial careers, lifestyle careers, portfolio careers as well as more haphazard career paths due to the increase in part-time work, and unemployment.*

*Along with these changing patterns, the internet has changed the way people seek and find jobs and the way companies recruit and select employees. More than half of all organisations have a policy of profiling potential employees and a quarter of workers have witnessed their employers using the internet to profile candidates.*

*In this context it is very important that students are taught to present themselves well online. Responsible online engagement can create a positive public persona which acts as ongoing resume of achievement and identity.*

Dr Buchanan's research suggests that the end of primary school is a good time to start educating students towards build a positive online presence. This would build upon their cyber safety awareness and help them transition to high school where their internet usage increases.

Steiner schools value and foster a strong sense of community to provide students with a balanced,

well- rounded education. And we hope the child will bring these values to their wider society when they graduate. The personal experience of meeting a Steiner educated adult and the quality of their personal relationships are frequently the real test of a successful graduate – this is often commented on by employers. The online digital world of social media however is a different matter and can sometimes misrepresent their true qualities. Digital data remains fixed and usually cannot be changed even when the child has developed and matured.

In Sophia Mundi, internet cyber safety will be taught in Class 7 Digital Technologies lesson and is reinforced throughout their studies

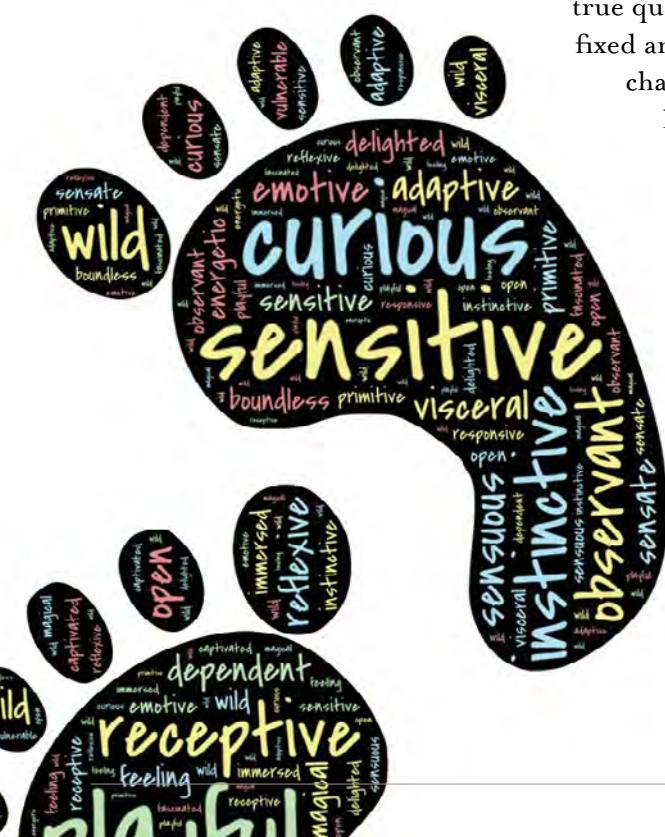
as well as being addressed in the Life Skills lesson. It builds on the respect and trust that has built up in their school experience, yet emphasises that the media is not so forgiving and that teenage experiments, risk-taking and exploration of their burgeoning identities can often be taken out of context by a future employer.

Kindness and respect as well as personal appearance and interpersonal skills must also include a positive online identity. This may seem daunting, but the challenge is unavoidable; it is better to have a positive digital presence than none at all. A thoughtful and carefully curated digital footprint that highlights your child's skills and interests could help them stand out in a good way.

Phil Jopson  
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TEACHER

Digital footprint of children: latest research on the issues and implications: <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=1938>

What parents can do: <http://parentinfo.org/article/having-a-positive-digital-footprint>



# Respectful Relationships

## Lead School

In 2017, Sophia Mundi took on a new initiative called Respectful Relationships, a Victorian Government program being incrementally rolled out across all schools in Victoria. The program came out of research done by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which found that the key driver of male violence against women is gender inequality. One of the recommendations was a targeted K-12 education program to teach respect and equality, and to break down the stereotypes and expectations that hold us back and propagate discrimination and violence in all its forms.

The initiative forms part of a larger curriculum, Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships. This curriculum delves into a range of topics in an age-appropriate way, including character strengths, problem solving, stress, conflict, relationships and gender identity.

The lesson content is designed to improve student wellbeing, and the pedagogy is collaborative, activity and narrative based. This curriculum sits alongside our Steiner curriculum so that, where needed, we can make explicit the implicit values we already teach through our rich storytelling and deep spiritual work.



As a Lead School, we are able to access \$10 000 of funding each year, over two years, to invest in resources, training and projects that will transform the culture of our school community and promote equality and respect. Last year, we invested the money into:

- Library books promoting diversity, from picture books to information resources
- Staff curriculum training
- Professional Development by Lisa Romero, looking at Gender and Sexuality from an anthroposophical perspective

This year, we are investing into:

- Further training into Responding to Family Violence Disclosures
- Student Action Group focusing on social justice issues, with a student publication
- A whole school humanitarian initiative

One of the great successes has been the 'Justice Collective' – the Middle School student action group which has been meeting weekly to discuss issues around the environment and waste, gender equality, refugees and the school community. We are using the funding to publish a student publication that will explore and raise awareness about these issues. This has been an empowering project for the students and connected them with the local and global community which they are a part of.

*Tanya Rao*  
CLASS 8 TEACHER AND  
SECONDARY ENGLISH



# Sporting, Artistic Excellence And Community Service

Artistic, academic excellence, sporting prowess and service continues to flourish in a 'Community of Inclusiveness'. This is the Sophia Mundi difference; our students are free to explore their interests from School and take them out into the world.

In 2017 we had students participate in the local, national and international arena in their chosen field. Pursuits including debating, kayaking, beach volleyball, canoeing, canoe polo, judo, dance, acting, bush walking and State Music Camps have been explored with passion and enthusiasm. To reach these representational levels requires commitment from families and teachers alike and we congratulate all those involved.

Physical Education (PE) at Sophia Mundi is a non-competitive environment. In 2017, PE Coordinator Katherine Ellis initiated a partnership with 'Sporting Schools' (an Australian Government initiative) which provided students with opportunities to explore a variety of sports including; Soccer, Volleyball, Netball, AFL, Acrobatics, Gymnastics and Yoga.

The 'Sporting Schools' programme is continuing in 2018. Katherine has also introduced Bothmer Gymnastics and Circus skills across the School to the delight of the students.



## Royal Melbourne Show Art, Craft & Cookery Competition

Four Sophia Mundi students received awards for their craft contributions at the 2017 Royal Melbourne Show Art, Craft & Cookery Competition:

- **Olrla Farrington, Class 4:** First place for her craft bag in the Junior category of *Fibre, Yarn and Fabric - Primary*
- **Fancy Fei, Inika Senanayake and Ella Nekvapil, Class 5:** Third place for their joint entry "Group of Elephants", in the Junior category of *Fibre, Yarn and Fabric - Toy Making*

The competition encourages creativity and passion at all skill levels and showcases the best home-grown talent from around Australia. It is part of the Royal Melbourne Show, Victoria's largest and most iconic annual community event.



## Annual Music Concert 2017

On Wednesday 13 September 2017 we held our Annual Music Concert in the iconic Bakehouse Studios in Richmond. The evening comprised of two back-to-back concerts 1 hour and 1.5 hours. Each concert featured our Class 6–10 music ensembles: Guitar Ensemble, Cello Choir, Sophia Strings, Middle School Choir, Contemporary Band, Percussion Ensemble, and Accelerando Strings.

Ensemble performances were interspersed with solo and duos performances by students from Class 6 to Class 11. The evening also featured performances by our students who toured Japan and South Korea in July–August 2017 with Judy Clingan and The Wayfarers.

The music presented ranged from classical Western music to jazz,

contemporary, musical theatre, and string quartets. Class 7 student Jasper Bennett-Conigrave debuted his composition 'Journey to a Mythic Land' written for string orchestra.

Over 80 students took part in the concerts with 10 music staff and over 15 classroom staff in attendance. Each concert was sold out prior to the night.

The event was a huge success. Audience members, students, staff and parents were flowing with praise for the quality of the music performed and the professional composure of the students both on and off stage.

Performing at Bakehouse Studios gave Sophia Mundi students the opportunity to experience a professional stage setting within a gorgeous atmosphere at the heart of

Melbourne's thriving music scene. Much gratitude to Sophia Mundi parents and owners of Bakehouse, Quincy MacLean and Helen Marcou, for hosting us in 2017.

*Myfanwy Hunter*  
MUSIC CO-ORDINATOR

# Gender, the body, the Spirit

Sophia Mundi has adopted a new framework, the Victorian State Government's 'Respectful Relationships', an initiative aspiring to build gender equality in our communities through preventative education and transformative practice. This is a ground-breaking program, informed by research into family violence, and its root causes in gender inequality, fed by stereotyped constructions of what it is to be male and female in our society. As a lead school, Sophia Mundi teachers have been exploring these ideas to build a nuanced and deep understanding, that we carry as we teach the next generation. Below is a perspective on gender that blends the theoretical with the spiritual.

*"Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum."*

Harper Lee, 'To Kill a Mockingbird', 1960

An opening description in a classic text, of a typical small town in the Deep South of America in the 1930s. It gives us a window into the traditions and roles performed in that place and time, but also a picture of gender that seems to span time and place. Of men, stiff, unfeeling, strong, industrious. Of women, nurturing, homely, preening, soft and sweet. And it begins innocently enough. But it leads us to ask questions.

What does gender mean to us?

Does it mean something to be a man, or a woman, something more than your body, more than your social inscription? Are there shared conceptions, patterns? Are there grey areas oscillating between the binary? If we name those things we share, when do they turn into cliché? Repeated, repeated, repeated, so they become meaningless, homogenous, irrelevant, limiting.

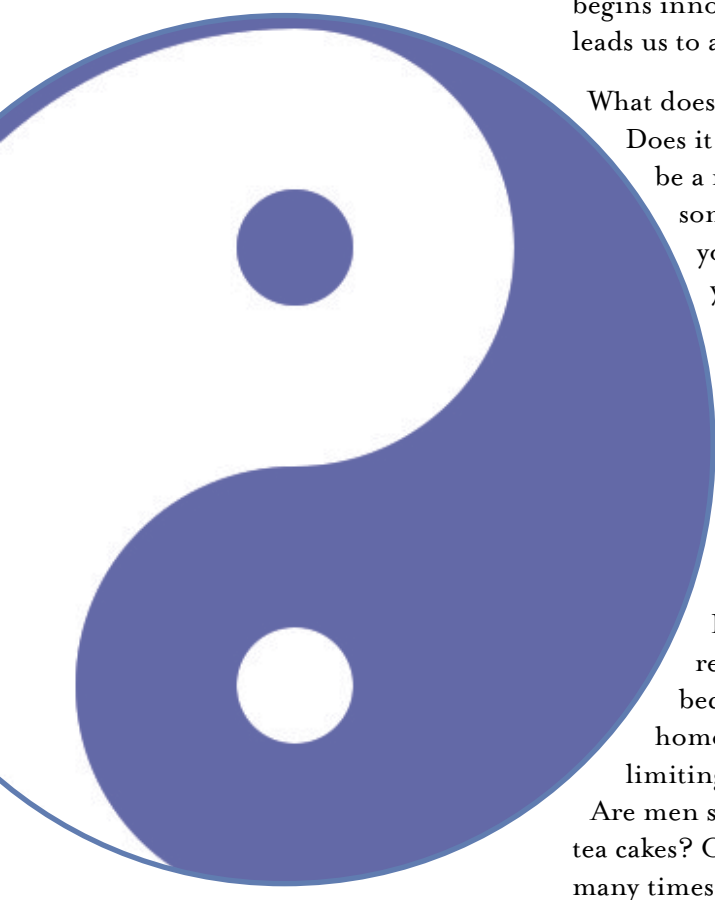
Are men stiff? Are women soft tea cakes? Or are we just told so many times that we absorb it?

These questions divide people. They polarise. We are angry at those who feel differently. And understandably so. For the

way we answer these questions powerfully shapes our social roles – in work, in economics, in the home, in relationships. Sexism upsets people, it implies violence, oppression, untruth. But just as much, feminism upsets people, it makes people uncomfortable, dislodged, threatened. It is impossible to have a conversation without arguing, getting defensive, clinging to our fixed views. And so, the dialectical landscape is left a desert of frustrated silence, dotted with bursts of ineffective ranting.

In academic discourse, there are two ideological camps. The social constructionists argue that ideas of gender are purely constructed by society, fabricated by culture, the media, passed on through generations, infiltrating into our psyche until they become inscribed into who we are. The way out is to name it, see how gendered constructions play into our forming of identity, work to undo those unconscious biases we carry. We can play with gender, see it for what it is, a performance. We can then be free to experiment and develop a more authentic and nuanced picture of our individuality.

The essentialists, on the other camp, argue that there are essential characteristics of women, and essential characteristics of men. These traits are born out of our body, out of our being, they are fixed and timeless. Gender is not socially acquired, but an essence we are born with. The woman's experience is intimately linked with the womb, the nurturing, life-giving principle. The man's experience is bound up in the active, protective, strength-giving principle. To deny that is to deny a part of who we are. It is healthy to





engage and commune and live into these truths.

From the trenches of these two camps, grenades are thrown. The social constructionists condemn essentialism, for it is simplistic, it mutes diversity, it boils down our complex identities and choices in life to our genitalia. To frame the woman as passive, soft, submissive, and the man as active, hard, dominant, is to feed and encourage the power imbalance, female oppression and male violence. It leaves those who do not connect with these binary constructions, including transgender, intersex, queer, gender-neutral and other LGBTQIA communities, dangerously excluded. Essentialism sets up fixed stereotypes that are limiting and damaging to the free development of the human being in this modern world.

The essentialists vilify social constructionism, for it denies the experiences, traditions and deeply held beliefs of many communities. Not everything is a construction, a meaningless farce, an oppressive tactic. Our bodies are real, they are important, they are foundational to our existence on earth. Social constructionism minimises the importance of our bodies and the ideological and spiritual realities that come with it. Our sense of self is entangled with gender. A man can be strong without being tyrannical. A woman can be soft and emotional without being weak. We can work with these essential truths and not let them become oppressive or definitive.

The dichotomy between constructionism and essentialism is a dogged debate, and one that is littered with pitfalls. And it leaves us disempowered as to where to progress from here, without any shared foundation from which to build. To find that shared foundation, we need to first appreciate paradox. This is where something, and its opposite, are true at the same time. Paradox is contrary to a confined logic, but fundamental to wisdom. It is in paradox that we find the truth of any controversial world matter of gender, race, sexuality, global security, the environment, technology. And it is the inability to absorb a multi-faceted, paradoxical reality that holds us back in limited, incomplete perspectives.

*“Adam means ‘red earth’. God made Adam out of red earth. Adam is the principle of dust unto dust. The man is the outer principle, the principle of extroversion: the man is the physical body, and God created Eve out of man’s physical body. Eve was something higher. First the man had to be created, then the woman. The feminine was more subtle, more refined – a greater synthesis. Eve was created out of a rib because she could not be created directly from the earth.”*

*Osho, ‘Tao’*

If we can look at this story, beyond its religious and historical context, at the symbols at play here. The male principle is the outer, extroverted, active, earthy, sun principle. The female principle is the inner psyche, hidden, soul,

creative, moon principle. These ideas emerge in cultures around the world. But the way that these forces play out is not one-dimensional.

Each human soul, or individuality, is timeless, spaceless, genderless. But in the intermingling with a body, a vessel on this earth, it comes into relationship with gendered principles. A man may tend towards the masculine principle, a woman towards the feminine. But the truth is that both principles are active within every human being. Each individual has a different relationship to masculine and feminine, which is not limited to the body they were born into. Some may feel an essence of womanhood, or an essence of manhood, but the opposite is always existent within us. This can be understood through the yin-yang symbol. The light, sun raying, masculine side is infused with the feminine, just as the dark, moon-like feminine is infused with the masculine.

Further, it is the purpose of life on earth to transcend polarity, transcend your earthly vessel, and be in your true nature beyond all limitations. To absorb the sun and moon, the active and passive, fire and water, and become the whole.

It does not mean we must renounce our gender and the identities we have shaped, but to realise that within that form, there is also formlessness, room to grow and branch out, balance our temperaments, recognise what is holding us back.

Social constructionism holds some truth – gender is partly a social performance, and yet within it there are parts that are deeply authentic. Essentialism is true, but



also untrue, because it does not give the full picture of our nature as humans. If women are soft and nurturing, hidden beneath is a fire and strength. If men are strong and hardy, it encases a beautiful vulnerability. The difference is energetic, subtle, unspeakable. We must also recognise that not everyone fits into this dynamic. Gender is a layer of us, but is not determinate.

Essentialist principles become damaging when soft, mysterious patterns harden into rigid, overbearing rules. We tell girls and women to value themselves by their appearance and the male gaze, to be submissive and obliging, to doubt themselves. We teach boys and men to feel entitled to take control, to numb or bury their emotional sensitivity, to use violence and aggression to assert dominance. Society carries these invisible structures, biases and expectations that limit the free shaping of our individuality. We become caricatures of ourselves, the masculine and feminine untruthfully exaggerated to grotesque effect.

We need to move to a point where we can absorb diverse approaches to gender, allow them to exist together, without letting any narrative become stale or

limiting. Social constructionism was useful in waking people up out of the delusion of static, traditional, nuclear family roles as the waves of feminism washed over the twentieth century. Essentialism gave a bodily and spiritual foundation for people to unite through common gendered experiences.

All these impulses have their place in time. But the new impulse needs to be more encompassing. Labels matter, they are part of our biography and hold something, but in our time these forms are becoming less and less definitive. It is our task to recognise the individual beyond race, beyond class, beyond gender

*“The harmony above the sexes can only be found in so far as the two sexes raise themselves to that level. If, therefore, by making use of the knowledge to be gained from spiritual science we could enable the reality beyond the sexes to take effect in practical life, then the problem of the sexes would be solved.”*

*Rudolf Steiner, ‘Man and Woman in the Light of Spiritual Science’*

As teachers and parents, the personal becomes political. The ideas that we hold impress themselves upon the growing child, and so are inscribed into the future generation. Therefore, it is vital that we look at ourselves, look at how our conceptions of gender have been formed, and remain open, allowing these questions to enter. What does gender mean to us? Is there an essence? Is there a social construction? How does the yin and yang swirl through our inner lives? How can we dissolve the binary and move towards awakening? If we live with these questions, live in a fascinated contemplation of the mystery, rather than with fixed, closed answers, we allow the children to form in freedom.

Gender is skin deep, superficial, and yet runs to the core of who we are. It is bodily and yet spiritual. It is woven in with the rhythms of reincarnation, of our evolution as human beings. The picture in its totality is so rich, so paradoxical, so veiled in esotericism, that we can never fully comprehend it. It is not black and white, it is not singular, it is a beautiful, kaleidoscopic, light-dappled grey, filled with multiplicity.

*Tanya Rao*  
CLASS 8 TEACHER AND  
SECONDARY ENGLISH

# Outdoor Education

## Murry River Canoe Trip

*Give me, amongst the confusion of my day*

*The calmness of the everlasting hills.*

*Break the tension of my nerves and muscles*

*With the soothing music of the singing streams that linger in my memory*

*Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep.*

*Teach me the art of taking one minute vacations...*

*Slowing down to look at a flower,*

*To pat a dog, to read a few lines from a good book.*

*Remind me each day of the hare and the tortoise*

*That I may know that though the hare is swift,*

*There is more to life than increasing its speed.*

*Let me look upwards towards the branches of the towering oak and know  
that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well.*

*Slow me down and send my roots into the soil of life's enduring values*

*That I may grow toward the stars of my greater destiny.*

*Inspired by a poem from Wilferd Arlan Peterson, 'Slow Me Down, Lord'*



On a sandy bank of the Murray River, 15 sleepy students awaken. It is still dark and they quietly pack up their campsite by torchlight. There is a thick mist layering the river's surface. They pack their canoes at the water's edge and at first light the group sets off.

They float silently, paddle and listen as the river wakes up around them. Kookaburras begin to laugh in the distance, fish are jumping, koalas sleep in the trees, flocks of cockatoos fly ahead greeting the day while whistling kites soar high above. After almost an hour of paddling in the dark, the group line up their canoes to make a raft as the sun rises over the banks and glistens in the river.

The students begin to talk and share their experiences of the morning as the mist on the river starts to disappear. Breakfast is eaten as they float in their canoes. The day has begun.

This captures a moment from one of our Class 10 camps in 2017. Outdoor Education is full of magical moments like these. On trips we encourage our students to slow down, take each day as it comes and be open to experiences such as a dawn paddle on the Murray River, taking the time to watch the sun set, eating and sharing food, or participating in good conversation around a campfire. In the constantly busy worlds that we live in it is important to slow down and discover our own magical moments.

Anneke Top  
OUTDOOR EDUCATION TEACHER





# Waldorf 100 - Weleda Bee Hotel

The first Waldorf/ Steiner school was founded in Stuttgart in 1919. Today there are over 1,100 Waldorf schools and almost 2,000 Waldorf kindergartens in approximately 80 countries around the globe – and the movement continues to grow!

The Waldorf100 initiative arose in the Autumn of 2014 and since then many associated and partner institutions have endorsed the idea. The intention is to make the 2019 Centennial an occasion to further develop Waldorf education for contemporary times, and focus more consciously on its global dimensions.

During the first Term of 2018 children at Sophia Mundi's Aftercare made and installed temporary Bee Hotels with Aftercare Co-ordinator Jude Walker. The project was inspired by a children's activity at the Melbourne Museum.

Coincidentally 'Bees & Trees' are a core theme of the celebration of 100 years of Waldorf/ Steiner Education – the Waldorf 100 anniversary. An international goal has been set to make all Waldorf/ Steiner facilities into 'bee oases' by 2019, places where bees can live and recover their health and swarm out again. [www.waldorf-100.org/en/project/bees-trees/](http://www.waldorf-100.org/en/project/bees-trees/)

In addition, Weleda (natural and organic skin care and biodynamic medicine manufacturer) has introduced the 'Weleda Bee B&B Hotel' project to school communities around Australia. The project aims to teach primary school children about biodiversity and the importance of pollinators, especially native solitary bees, by building their very own Bee B&B Hotel. The easy to build Bee B&B Hotel kits are designed for school vegetable patches and create a place for native solitary bees to live and build their families, while they go about their important job of pollinating vegetables, fruits and flowers. <http://beehotel.weleda.com.au/about/#beebnbhotel>

## Aftercare's Bee Hotel Project

Aftercare Co-ordinator Jude Walker takes us through the process of making and installing a Bee Hotel.

Before we started, we talked a lot about bee types and environmental issues relating to bees. A bee swarm coincidentally had to be moved from the playground, which created even more interest and discussion.

1. We began with paper versions of a Bee Hotel. These were fun to make and install but didn't last more than a week or two in stormy weather.

2. Bees like front and back door access, so the house needed to be open and the bamboo hollow all the way through.
3. We achieved this by designing a more permanent Bee Hotel with rulers and setsquares. IB and Middle School teacher Ben Darby cut up our timber for two Bee Hotels to the design specifications created by Louis (Class Two).





# Waldorf 100 - Postcard Exchange

Another exciting project for the Waldorf100 initiative is the "Postcard Exchange". Every Waldorf/ Steiner school in the world sends a postcard to every other Waldorf/ Steiner school in the world, receiving in return almost 1,200 postcards individually designed by a young person, showcasing something of his or her country, school, or self.



Japan



Brazil



Czech Republic



Austria

4. Construction involved cooperation and new skills. We learnt how to make two surfaces stick together with glue and how to hold a hammer correctly.
5. I brought in my little Bosch hand drill, which led to some Christmas wishes from the children.
6. Further construction consisted of gluing and nailing.
7. To fit out the Bee Hotel, I sourced some bamboo from a friend in Sydney and we collected bark and sticks and drilled through blocks of wood.
8. Our hotel was nearly ready to install...wire mesh stapled over the front and back helped to hold in the bamboo pieces in place.
9. The Bee Hotel was installed in a tree in the Prep play area within view of the Aftercare room windows.
10. A bee drinking bowl was assembled by Ewan (Prep).



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Our vision is to educate individuals who can meet the future out of a sense of inner freedom and purpose.

“What should be taught and cultivated...must be drawn solely from a knowledge of the growing human being and of individual capacities...The question should not be: What does a human being need to know and be able to do for the society that now exists? But rather: What capacities are latent in this human being, and what lies within, that can be developed? Then it will be possible to bring ever new forces into the society from the rising generations. The life of the social order will be what is made of it by a succession of fully developed human beings who take their place in the society. The rising generation should not be moulded into what the existing social order chooses to make of it.”

*Inspired by Rudolf Steiner's lecture  
“The Threefold Social Order and Educational Freedom”*



**SOPHIA MUNDI Limited**

A.B.N. 44 006 411 016

St Marys, Abbotsford Convent

1 St Heliers Street, Abbotsford Victoria 3067 Australia

T 03 9419 9229 E [reception@sophiamundi.vic.edu.au](mailto:reception@sophiamundi.vic.edu.au)

**[www.sophiamundi.vic.edu.au](http://www.sophiamundi.vic.edu.au)**



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