TAMINMIN COLLEGE COUNCIL AGM 25 FEBRUARY 2014

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

The College Council is responsible for good governance, which involves determining the broad direction of the school by advising the Principal about:

. educational needs of the community
. needs of students and staff
. building links between parents, community groups and the school grounds
. community use of facilities
. how the school’s money will be spent;
. employing relief teachers and some non-teaching staff
. and participating in the selection process for the Principal/senior staff.

Council does not have a role in day to day management issues, such as staffing and class structures, which are the responsibility of the Principal. The Chairman represents Council at a wide range of meetings and functions throughout the year.

2013 was a difficult year for public education, and a year of frustration and significant workload for Council. I must admit that whilst I have compiled this report, I have found it difficult to believe that all of what I am about to report actually occurred within the space of 9 months, and probably explains why some Council members may have been a little worse for wear by the end of the school year.

Council’s efforts in 2013 were primarily focused on continuing to pursue adequate funding and staffing.

The year began lobbying for additional essential services funding for the increases in power and water charges. Discussions with the Minister and Department of Education culminated in Taminmin College receiving a disconnection notice with
the Department instructing the Principal to pay the account in full, whilst Council reiterated its decision not to pay the unfunded portion. The issue was resolved at the eleventh hour, with the Department paying the unfunded portion of the account. The Minister for Education subsequently announced that Cabinet had approved additional funding for schools for essential services tariff increases.

Shortly after this issue appeared to be resolved, Government announced a revised teacher staffing allocation formula which increased student-teacher ratios in Middle and Senior Schools, with a proviso that no school would lose more than 5 teachers in 2014. However, Taminmin College was originally notified that it would lose not only 5 classroom teachers, but also an Assistant Principal, Counsellor and Careers Counsellor. Council strongly advocated for equity with other schools and ensure the loss of staff would be limited to 5 classroom teachers, despite media allegations that we were receiving preferential treatment. After a significant amount of effort, Council received written confirmation that the additional positions would remain at the College. However, staffing issues continued to dominate the remainder of the year, specifically in regard to contract teachers. Council considered it completely unacceptable that contract teachers were unaware at the beginning of the last week of the 2013 school year whether they had a contract for 2014. Following weekend discussions, Departmental staff confirmed contracts, including that all contracts which had been issued across the NT for one term would be reissued for two terms.

It was pleasing that there were also several infrastructure projects finalised as a result of negotiations commenced in preceding years. A summary of achievements and activity is as follows.

. PAWA funding – gained Government commitment to assist schools with the full impact of the power and water tariff increases;

. negotiated in regard to the decreased teacher staffing allocation which resulted in retaining the Assistant Principal, Counsellor and Careers Counsellor;

. Grant received to enable the purchase of a new bus, fitted with seatbelts;
. completion of the new Canteen, and approval of 3 year lease for canteen operators (who are also introducing online ordering);

. upgrade to gym acoustics and stage doors, which will allow Awards nights and presentations to be held in the Taminmin College gym;

. installation of additional water bubblers at Block 15 and the farm;

. commencement of oval upgrade;

. fitting out of several classrooms with new furniture;

. completion of Special Education Centre courtyard;

. allocation of additional farm funding of $37 000 per year, in line with commitment negotiated in the previous year, which was attempted to not be delivered on;

. continued to pursue and eventually received (in August 2013) the 2012 Essential Services exceptional circumstances reimbursement claim ($78 537) and also the Semester 1 2013 Relief Teacher reimbursement claim ($26 738);

. finished the year with a budget surplus;

. continued to pursue realistic allocation/methodology for administrative and specialist staff, which are currently taken from teacher allocation, and received a commitment to permanently fill some of the administrative officer positions;

. organised for the Minister, CE and Dep CE to attend a Council meeting on 13 August to discuss a wide variety of issues of concern in education. At that well-attended public meeting, the Minister for Education stated that notified absences will be included as attendance for the purpose of calculating the staffing allocation. However, the amended effective enrolment policy for 2014 appears to have reneged on this commitment, and ‘bums on seats’ on the day the statistics are taken will be the sole measure, meaning short term sickness or family emergency may see teaching resources reduced, even though these students may be back at school the following week;
. introduction of the new school uniform, which had been approved by Council in 2012;

. reviewed canteen and caretaker contracts;

. negotiated with Inpex to sponsor a piece of equipment (radial drill) in the VET workshop, in the amount of $10 000;

. requested Principal to implement education campaign, involving parents, in regard to the increased incidence of bullying/cyber-bullying;

. approved the funding of diaries for each student;

. approved the purchase of an outdoor noticeboard to notify school community of events, as requested by SRC.

In addition, I represented Council at the following:

. regular meetings/discussions with the Minister for Education, Department Chief Executive and senior executives regarding infrastructure, funding and staffing inequities;

. History Day;

. Meeting with Senator Fiona Nash, the then Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education. She now serves as the Assistant Minister for Health in the Abbott Coalition Government, and is the Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate;

. meeting with consultant undertaking education planning in the Greater Darwin Area;

. participated in our Principal’s Review and Australian Professional Standard for Principals Reflection Tool;

. Taminmin 30th Birthday celebrations;

. visit of delegation of Chinese Principals;
selection panels for the Business Manager and two Administrative Officer positions;

World Teachers’ Day function;

Middle and Senior School Award evenings;

Year 12 Graduation Ceremony;

Year 12 Art Exhibition.

Council continues to ensure our school community is invited to participate and be involved in the College and regular reporting of activity is provided in the e-news. Council also extended an invitation for a member of the Australian Education Union to join Council in one of the three invited positions to ensure Council has an awareness of issues of concern to teachers.

None of the above achievements would be possible without our school community demonstrating a unified position, and I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance given to Council and the College from the Member for Goyder, the Hon Kezia Purick MLA; Member for Nelson, Mr Gerry Wood MLA; and the Member for Daly, Mr Gary Higgins MLA and their electorate staff. I thank them for highlighting not only our challenges, but also our significant achievements, particularly in the Legislative Assembly.

I would also like to thank my fellow Councillors for the significant contribution they have made to improving educational outcomes over the past 12 months and the support they provide me, which enables me to convey that I speak with the authority and full confidence of Council.

Lastly, I would like to thank Principal Miriam McDonald for her educational leadership and integrity. Her determination to pursue the best outcomes for our students and staff, rather than the easiest outcomes for herself, is inspiring. I am in awe at her ability to remain positive when she is regularly placed in a difficult balancing act between the wishes of the Department and those of Council. It was therefore pleasing for Council to see her considerable contribution acknowledged in 2013 at the NT Teaching in the Territory Excellence Awards by receiving the
‘Regional Award for Secondary Principal of the Year’. She received further recognition from the Australian Professional Teachers’ Association, being one of eight recipients nationally of an ‘Award for Meritorious Contribution to the Profession’.

Whilst recognising there is still much to be done, the role of each School Council is to leave the school in a better position than it was at the start of the school year. In my view, the 2013 Council has achieved this. However, the past year has again highlighted the crucial role parents can play in improving student outcomes and I encourage all parents to consider assisting Council. Whilst my report has focused primarily on resourcing and infrastructure, I also acknowledge the significant and continued improvement in educational outcomes, which the Principal will talk further about.

Beverley Ratahi

Chairman

Taminmin College Council