

# Thorndon School Newsletter

18/2009

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25 June 2009  
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Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire  
W B Yeats

## Action List

- |  |                          |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Don't forget to vote for the Board by-election.        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Don't forget school banking tomorrow</b>    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you returned the 2 <sup>nd</sup> language survey? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you returned any curriculum feedback?     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are all payments up to date?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you registered for the holiday programme? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Dear Parents

Kia ora.

Some relief last weekend for the followers of rugby I mentioned last week and probably a reasonably relaxed weekend as we play Italy but we might have some longer term concerns as we look ahead to the Tri-Nations. Those of you who don't follow won't care and will probably be much more relaxed as a result.

This will be the last newsletter of the term from me as next week I am off to the New Zealand Principals Conference in Palmerston North and then immediately on to Sydney for my younger daughter's wedding, which will be much more exciting, much as I always enjoy the interchange of ideas at the conferences. I am also looking forward to some relief from the cooler temperatures we have been enduring. I am sure there will be a great deal of discussion in Palmerston North around the National Standards which are the cause of considerable concern in the primary sector at present. More on the standards later in the newsletter. If you would like to read more about them and perhaps to send in some response you can go to the following sites:

[http://www.graphicmail.co.nz/nz\\_members/39/ftp/NatStandards\\_Parents.pdf](http://www.graphicmail.co.nz/nz_members/39/ftp/NatStandards_Parents.pdf)

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/~media/MinEdu/Files/NationalStandards/NationalStandardsParentFamilyWhanauFeedback.pdf>

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/Consultation/NationalStandards/ConsultationPackParent.aspx>

We have almost reached the end of the second term and we are half way through another very busy year which shows no signs of being less busy in Terms 3 and 4. We have the new curriculum to think about, talk about and plan for, draft national standards to consider and respond to, swine flu to fret over, and a building project to manage. Three way conferences have started and will continue into the new term, there will be further consultation meetings to come, Maths Week, Art Week, Speech Competitions, Cultural Festivals, Athletics Competitions and before we know it we will be writing reports for the end of the year.

The Three Way conferences I have already mentioned have started and I urge all of you to get online and start booking your times. These conferences are such a valuable opportunity for you to hear your children talking about what they have been learning at school and to offer evidence of this and for you to work with the teacher and your child to establish some goals for the rest of the year. It is also a real opportunity for you to support and affirm your children in what they are doing, to acknowledge the work they have done and to show that you value it. We always aim for a 100% response to the invitation to come to these meetings but I don't think we have ever managed it. Perhaps 2009 will be the year. Please try to set aside some time to come along for a conference. If you find it impossible within the times available please contact your child's teacher to see if an alternative time can be arranged. Contact details are all on the school's website.

Enjoy the holidays.

Bill Sutton

**National Standards**

There is little intrinsically wrong with the notion of National Standards and we, like many schools, have developed our own sets of expectations for pupil performance which are likely to align reasonably well with these standards. We report on these to parents and written reports are accompanied by explanatory charts which are not dissimilar to the graphs demonstrated in the Reporting to Parents material that form part of the Ministry's discussion material. We are confident that the majority of children at Thorndon will meet the standards reasonably comfortably. You might ask then why we are uncomfortable with these standards.

It is not necessarily the standards themselves which cause concern. There are however questions about why the standards have been introduced and what might be done with them. When the Minister is on record as having said that they will "act as a disinfectant for poorly performing schools" there must be concern about the intentions and beliefs behind them. New Zealand has a high performing education system but the implication of the "Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy" is that this system is failing. These standards are supposed to address the problem of the long tail that New Zealand has in international assessment results and there is certainly a social imperative to do this. The method chosen however has, in the eyes of most educators, questionable value. It is a simplistic approach to what is a very complex problem which has much more to do with societal problems than with the education system. Lester Flockton, one of New Zealand's most respected education researchers and academics John Hattie in a recent article:

*Internationally credible studies (including Hattie's work) show that home background and the child's individual make-up typically account for 70 – 80 percent of achievement; that socio-economic factors have been shown time and time and time again to be the most powerful correlate of achievement (of standards).*

If this is so then schools should not be held solely responsible for addressing the problem of this long tail.

Standards based assessment has been tried and found wanting in other Western countries, notably the UK and the US. A recently released report, The Cambridge Primary Review, is damning in its assessment of what national testing has done to teaching and learning in Britain, and there is fairly universal agreement that the "No Child left Behind" initiative in the US has failed to bring about the desired improvements.

New Zealand has a new broad based curriculum which is admired and envied around the world and aims at developing students who are creative, flexible and adaptable, able to meet the challenges of a new and rapidly changing world. The approach taken by introducing these national standards looks backwards rather than forwards and there is a real danger that this will lead to a narrowing of the curriculum rather than the broad approach envisioned in the new curriculum.

The standards have been introduced with almost indecent haste. Legislation was introduced under urgency before Christmas meaning that the select committee process was by-passed and a period of barely 2 months has been allowed for public and sector consultation. This is in stark contrast to the lengthy and comprehensive consultation process which resulted in the new curriculum and the almost universal buy in from the school sector. At the moment the Ministry is unable to answer many of the questions schools and principals have because the standards and processes that surround them are still in development.

There is a real danger that "league tables" will result from the collection of data on national standards and this achieves little that is positive. Publication of league tables could result in a huge drop in confidence and morale across the sector and falling rolls in schools where the standards have not been met by most children. The vast majority of schools work hard with diverse communities to engage learners and parents in the education process. The money being spent on something that is not broken might be better directed to meeting the needs of those children in the long tail and this expenditure need not necessarily be in the school system.

Until we get more reassurance and evidence that our fears are unwarranted and that the standards will benefit New Zealand children I and most other principals will remain cautious and sceptical.

**Board Elections**

Nominations for the board have now closed and I am delighted that four parents have been nominated for the two vacant positions.

Voting papers have been mailed out to everyone on the school electoral roll – which is available for inspection in the office – and you should all have these by now.

Completed papers are due back to school **12:00noon on Friday 3 July**. These voting forms may be posted – in time to arrive by noon on the last day of term – or brought in to the office and put into the red ballot box attached to the counter.

There is a personal statement by each of the candidates towards the end of the newsletter which will help you make your choices.

The triennial elections for the whole board are due to be held next year.

**Car Parking**

The car park outside the school which services the pool gets very busy and crowded in the mornings and in the afternoons when parents are dropping off and collecting their children. It is even more congested at the moment with swimmers using the pool while the Aquatic Centre is closed for maintenance.

Parents have noticed that some cars are driven into the car park very fast. The potential for an accident is high because of the number of pedestrians in this area, many of them children who can be unpredictable.

The congestion has also led to one or two minor examples of “car-park rage”. Can we plead with everyone to slow down and be patient!

We don't want any children knocked down and nor are we particularly keen on seeing any of our parents raging at each other in the car-park.

**After School Care**

At the end of this term Jude Hancock, the senior supervisor at our after school care programme, will be finishing up and moving away from Wellington. Jude started as a junior member of the after school care team some years ago taking over as a senior supervisor when Moses Ariama left last year. Jude has made a significant contribution to the successful operation of the ASC programme and we wish her all the best for the future. There will be the opportunity for parents and children to farewell Jude next Friday, the last day of term.

**Term 2 Calendar**

There is not much of this term left now but there is a surprising amount in the calendar for Term 3 already.

Jun 29	Dental Caravan on site.
Jun 29	Y 4-8 to performance at Capital E.
Jul 1	Wellington High School Open Evening.
Jul 3	Term Ends.

**Term 3 Calendar**

Jul 20	Term 3 starts.
Jul 23	Central Zone Chess Tournament.
Jul 28	Gardasil vaccinations – Y8
Jul 29	Drawing Workshops – Whole school
Jul 30	Maori/Pasifika Curriculum Consultation Evening.
Jul 31	Sausage Sizzle – New rooms and Play area.
Aug 6	Curriculum Consultation – Y7/8 parents.
Aug 10	Maths Week begins
Aug 12	Maths World
Aug 13	Maths World
Aug 18	BoT Meeting
Sep 2	Central Zone Speech Competition
Sep 8	Winter Sports Festival – Y5/6
Sep 10	Maori Pasifika Parent evening
Sep 15	Winter Sports Festival – Y7/8
Sep 22	Jump Rope
Sep 23	Science Roadshow – Y7/8
Sep 24	Science Roadshow – Y5/6
Sep 25	Term ends

**Consultation Meetings.**

We were to have a meeting about the curriculum for parents of Year 7/8 children this afternoon but have postponed it because there were only 2 people able to make it.

We will try this again early next term and you can see the date in the calendar above. While we have made these meetings for the parents of specific year groups anyone who is interested is more than welcome to come along.

These meetings have been held to give parents a very quick over view of the curriculum and the reasons for its development and once the last of them has been done we will organise further meetings to discuss the development of a local curriculum.

If you have already been to one of these meetings you will have been asked to send in your responses to some specific questions. Please don't feel it is too late.

**Cricket Holiday Programme**

Hey kids the Wellington School of Cricket is running their mid winter School Holiday programme and they want you to be involved.

For more information or to register for this fantastic programme please visit:

[www.cricketwellington.co.nz/content/school-of-cricket/holiday-programmes.aspx](http://www.cricketwellington.co.nz/content/school-of-cricket/holiday-programmes.aspx)

or contact either:

Ivan Tissera  
021 894-338

[i.tissera@firebirds.co.nz](mailto:i.tissera@firebirds.co.nz)

or

Glenn Pocknall  
021 409-864

[g.pocknall@firebirds.co.nz](mailto:g.pocknall@firebirds.co.nz)

**Second Language Learning**

The few returns we have had from parents about second language learning are telling us that the most popular so far are:

French	7	Chinese	7
Spanish	6	Japanese	3
German	3	Samoan	1
Italian	1	Tagalog	1
Portugese	1		

Maori was left out of the question because we intend to keep that going and offer one or more of these as an extra depending on demand and resources.

We have also surveyed secondary schools and 8 local secondary schools offer the following languages and this information too is useful for us.

French	7	Maori	6
Japanese	6	Chinese	3
German	3	Samoan	3
Spanish	2		

**Second Language Learning**

If the school is offering a second language I would prefer it to be one the following (in order of preference)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Child's name and Room \_\_\_\_\_

**Swine Flu**

This is the time of the year when seasonal illnesses often take a toll on children and in recent days we have had as many as 29 children away, about 12% of the school. We seem to be a little better off than some other local schools which have had as many as 60 children away.

It is impossible to know how many of these absences are attributable to swine flu, if any, especially when we hear that up to 1/3 of people who have it might not even notice because the symptoms may be so mild that they don't realise they are sick! It does seem to make a bit of a mockery of the containment efforts that have been made. What is clear is that parents are taking note of our requests to keep children home if they are unwell. Thank you for this.

We are aware of the difficulties working parents face when children are ill and some of our staff face the same problems. As with any large organisation though, where people work in close proximity over extended periods of time there is a real risk of illness and infection spreading very rapidly. It is really important that sick, and even off-colour children do not come to school. We continue to promote hygienic practices but children are not always entirely reliable and we cannot guarantee that they are doing as we and you ask.

And lastly, the importance of making sure that the school has up to date contact information has not diminished.

**To the Parents of Pre-Schoolers.**

The much-loved NZ author/illustrator Lynley Dodd will be at the Children's Bookshop in Kilbirnie Plaza on Monday July 20th at 10.30 am, (the first day of the new term) to read her new book "Hairy Maclary Shoo" at a special story time.

All are welcome, there is no charge and no need to book, (but please, no groups), and you are invited to bring several of Lynley's other books for signing.

Remember to bring your camera.

***Candidates Statements.***

**JO CRIBB**

"I have a background in government policy and management, having had analyst and management positions in a number of government departments including the Education Review Office. Currently I am the Group Manager Policy and Research at the Families Commission.

I have a doctorate in Public Administration specialising in non-profit organizations and have enjoyed a number of volunteer roles in social service organizations. I am currently studying Te Ara Reo Maori at Te Wananga o Aotearoa.

I would welcome the opportunity to bring my skills in policy development, knowledge of the government and experience in developing strategy to the board and make whatever contribution I can to our special school.

With a son in the new entrant class and a daughter starting in a couple of years, we are looking forward to a long involvement with Thorndon School."

**DAVID WARE**

"David is the father of Milly (6) and Maddie (4) and he is the Managing Director of a Wellington-based telecommunications company that he started 15 years ago.

'I think we've got the best little school in Wellington and I want to make the future even brighter. For example, I'd like to see more technology in our classrooms, better equipment and facilities, and the development of a sustainable funding path for the school going forwards'.

His job has given him expertise in strategic planning which he feels could be used to help build a strong future for Thorndon School.

'We live in very challenging times and Thorndon School needs a board with a range of skills we can use to plan a clear path ahead', he said. The Ministry of Education's budget is under even more pressure than in previous years, and David believes the school will need to work really hard if it wants to secure access to some of the land from Kimi Ora school.

'If you decide to vote for me I'll do everything I can to ensure we maintain a strong focus on the fundamental skills our kids need to succeed in the world, particularly numeracy and reading'."

**JAMES TURNER**

"I have two daughters at Thorndon School (Amy and Emily) and would love to have the opportunity to further support the school by being formally involved with the Board of Trustees. I was born in Australia, brought up in South London, attended university in Sheffield, and have lived happily in Wellington since 2004, the best move I have ever made.

I have worked in the public service since leaving University in 1984. For the last 14 years I have been involved with education policy, and since moving to New Zealand I have worked for the Tertiary Education Commission as a policy manager and more recently managing the funding of private training establishments and the adult and community education sector. I have an MBA from Cranfield University School of Management.

I have a passion for everything I do. Outside of work I am a keen triathlete (I represented New Zealand at the World Triathlon Championships in 2008 in Vancouver and have been selected for the team again for this year's World Championships on the Gold Coast), and I am on the Committee of the Wellington Triathlon and Multisports Club.

I like the ethos and culture of the school, and hope to help the school build on this over the forthcoming months and years. The development of the new curriculum is an important opportunity for the school, and creative engagement by parents, including through the Board of Trustees, will be an important element of its success.

Thank you for the opportunity."

**ELLEN CHUAN YANG**

"I have two children studying at Thorndon School. My children, Daniel Year 8 and Emma Year 3, enjoy Thorndon School very much. Both of them were born in Wellington with Chinese and German family background.

Originally from China 16 years ago, I am active in the community. I have done some work for Thorndon School such as parent help and I used to run an after school Chinese class. I am a committee member of NZ China Friendship Society (Wellington Branch) in charge of the Mandarin Corner.

With quite a large number of Asian students, a parent like me can make valuable contributions to Thorndon School."

***Holiday Programme***

Newtown Movie School is a holiday programme for children aged 9 to 14 years. Our next programme runs in the first week of the upcoming holidays (Monday 6 to Friday 10 July - 9am to 5pm). Children take part in a fully acted short feature and make their own stop motion movies.

**We only have a few places left.**

You can get copies of the registration form, and see movies from previous programmes on our website

[www.acumen.net.nz/pages/MovieSchool.html](http://www.acumen.net.nz/pages/MovieSchool.html)

***The Fair***

December is still a little way off but the fair committee has already started work. Registration forms have been sent out and there have been enough returns in three days to fill 1/3 of the available stall space.

This is an early reminder that we will be asking for books and other donations as well as your time. Now would be a good time to note in your diary the date of the fair and make sure that you are available to help.

Sunday December 6 is the day and we would like to be able to call on every parent for assistance in the days leading up to the fair as well as on the day.

***T Shirts***

We have a set of Thorndon School T Shirts which we issue to children when they represent the school in some activity.

The understanding is that children will take them home after the event, wash them and return them to school.

There are a large number of these T Shirts out there somewhere and we would very much like them back by the end of the term.

Can everyone please check to see if their child has one of these?

***Chess***

Yesterday we hosted our own small chess tournament, playing against teams from Kelburn Normal School and South Wellington Intermediate. A fourth school was supposed to take part but pulled out.

Our team came second to Kelburn and this will be a good warm up for two further tournaments next term, The Central Zone tournament in July and the preliminaries for the Wellington Chess championships in August.

***Fund Raiser***

A group of girls from Wellington Girls College has organised a fund raiser for Women's Refuge tomorrow and a Mr Whippy van will be there tomorrow at lunchtime.

Any children wanting to buy a Mr Whippy can meet girls from the college at the gate on our court and they will be taken down to the WGC courts to buy their ice creams.

***Easyswim Swim School Khandallah***

Easyswim operates out of Khandallah Primary School's Indoor pool. We are now taking school age and pre school bookings for term three and our holiday week long intensive courses running July 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> and 13h – 17<sup>th</sup>.

If you are new to Easyswim, assessments are required. Please call to arrange this. To book or for information phone 2347946, email us at [easyswim@xtra.co.nz](mailto:easyswim@xtra.co.nz) or visit our website at [www.easyswim.co.nz](http://www.easyswim.co.nz)

***Board News***

The Board of Trustees met on 23 June, where the main topics for discussion were the Kimi Ora site options, the National Standards and the Board by-election. After a presentation of the Kimi Ora options (ranging from repair what is there, to completely demolish and rebuild to suit Thorndon's needs) the Board agreed next steps of getting more student input, and then recruiting a team to write a compelling proposal to take to the Ministry. Bill brought us up to date with the planned introduction in 2010 of National Standards for reading, writing and mathematics, and we explored some of the implications for Thorndon children. Bill reported that there were four nominations for the two vacancies on the Board, and that voting papers had been posted.

Other matters discussed were the new classrooms, the successes of the numeracy evening and the Maori/Pacifica meeting, the benefits of having such a good group of teacher aides, and the school's readiness for any swine flu disruption. Finally we also agreed a response to the (unqualified) audit report on last year's financials, and discussed how best to introduce more Toshiba tablets and netbooks into classrooms.