

## SUMMARY:

# Plenty Valley International Montessori School October 2017 School Community Forums

Dear all,

We recently held three independently-facilitated community forums to hear from members of our school community and reach a better understanding of your views.

It is clear our community cares passionately about our school and the value of Montessori education to children and to society – as do we and the Board. We'd like to thank the families who attended.

We welcome a diversity of opinions as a natural consequence of that passion, while urging that communication be voiced with mutual respect based on an understanding that everyone wants the best for our school.

The forums provided much food for thought, including aspects of the school performing well and areas of legitimate concern. As a next step, the facilitator has developed a potential model for community consideration to guide a cycle of improvement (see below).

In this document, we aim to summarise the feedback. We will communicate further in future re any more concrete changes we plan based on this feedback. However, we have already taken the following actions:

- Called a **General Meeting** where parents who are Association Members have the opportunity to vote and **stand for office**, helping shape the future of our school (all families are entitled to have one parent as an **Association Member** – and we encourage you to join, if you haven't already)
- Created a **Community Engagement Committee** to review and help revise the Code of Conduct – let us know if you're interested in joining
- Committed to an **independently-facilitated appeals process** that will be made available to two families whose Enrolment Contracts were recently terminated

Parents reported satisfaction with many aspects of the school including:

- **Enthusiastic, committed, dedicated teachers**
- An **alternative model of education**, working with the evidence and research-based Montessori philosophy that caters to the universal child and to individual needs, and promotes curiosity and confidence through consistency, role-modelling and self-directed learning
- An **appropriate ratio of staff to students**
- The **music program**
- **Physical location and set-up**
- Sense of **diversity** within community and **feeling at home**
- Use of **peace tables** to realise principles of grace and a sense of love

While the forums were prompted by concerns about the termination of Enrolment Contracts for two families, more general suggestions and views were also aired in the following areas:

- Communications
  - **Reflect on the nature of interactions** between school management, teaching staff, and parents

- Find a way to identify, agree on, and articulate **principles of communication** amongst the school community (Commit to **mutually respectful and transparent** communications)
- Form a **dedicated communication team** or mechanism to review/ improve official communications
- Provide **adequate, accurate information** across all levels – and be **responsive** to correspondence and concerns
- Decision-making
  - **Clarify mutual expectations** of the school community and Board
  - Encourage more members to join the Board &/or create **Board sub-committees** to improve engagement, participation, and communication
  - Find ways to increase the general understanding of the **constraints on transparency** that apply to the Board, school administration and teachers
  - Review the school's **constitution** to reflect the complexity of the contemporary environment
  - Adjust the **format of the AGM** to allow for greater focus on issues
  - Review other school **policies and procedures**, including the **Code of Conduct**
  - Review / improve mechanisms for staff to identify and resolve **issues of concern** – as part of a process of “continuous improvement”
  - **Review current mechanisms** for students to report and resolve issues
  - **Ensure clear and fair rules** and notifications
  - **Ensure effective decision-making processes**, with an appeals process
  - Include **parent teacher co-design/consultation** in any major policy reforms
- Culture
  - Practice the philosophy of quality **Montessori**
  - Make decisions in the **interests of the child**
  - Create an atmosphere **free of fear, with trust and respect**
  - Commit to greater **community involvement**
  - Continue to work towards a **growing school community** with a waiting list and good student retention

Naturally, there was also substantial discussion around the two families whose Enrolment Contracts were terminated.

The Board noted that a timely, independent and robust independently-facilitated appeals process is being made available to the families.

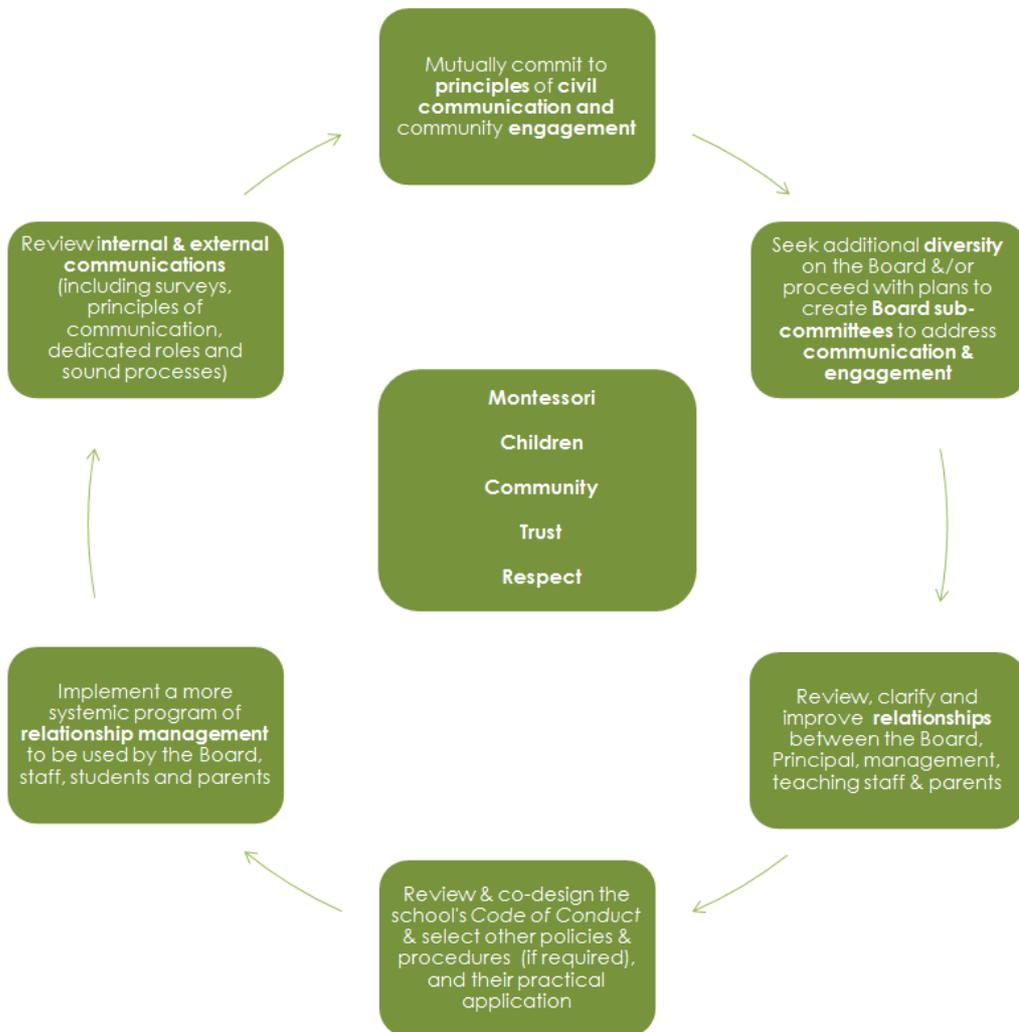
They also explained that legal, administrative and ethical confidentiality constraints meant they could not go into detail on the cases – in accordance with legal advice and advice from regulatory and professional bodies.

Members of the community noted the resulting informational vacuum had been filled with partial accounts and speculation, fuelling suspicion, distress, anxiety and anger.

In response, Board members described deliberating over this case at length, and taking what they unanimously agreed to be the least bad option in the interests of the school community.

We agreed it would be valuable to review the lessons to be learned from the experience, and noted that schools faced an increasing burden of regulation and a changing environment – which could lead to disharmony if expectations were unclear.

A positive outcome of the forums was the development of a model by the independent facilitator, Dr David B Moore PhD. This model sets out a possible future cycle of improvement for us and the community to consider.



If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us directly.

Yours sincerely,

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