



**The Presbyterian &
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Dear School Community Members

I write to you on behalf of the ten men and women who currently serve as members of the PMSA Council in order to provide you with some clear information about the PMSA.

The PMSA Councillors are unpaid volunteers, all of whom are professionals in their field and the vast majority of whom have full-time occupations. All but two of our Councillors have served for less than 7 years and 5 have served for 3 years or less. This ensures we have a balance of Councillors with depth in our Association, but also new and fresh ideas and approaches.

Our role is defined under the PMSA Constitution and By-Laws that are published on the PMSA website. We work to ensure the welfare of the four PMSA schools and the thousand staff it employs.

We are supported by a small team of dedicated PMSA staff, which assists in formal liaison with our School Principals, Councils and the Presbyterian and Uniting Churches. Our intention is to operate within a lean environment to ensure PMSA resources are geared to its educational mission of the schools rather than sustaining an expensive bureaucracy.

In recent months, many of you will have viewed with concern a range of allegations raised against the PMSA in the social media and the press.

The scope and speed of these attacks exposed our lack of resources, expertise and experience to deal with them. We misjudged the depth of some critics' feelings and the lengths that some opponents of the PMSA would be prepared to go to act on them. Even in the minds of some fair-minded, traditional supporters, that may have led to a belief that the PMSA is unaccountable, arrogant and out of touch or irrelevant.

We take on the roles of Councillors for only one reason – a desire to serve the PMSA School Communities of which we are very proud.

As Christians, we face criticism accepting that, in most cases, it is well-intentioned and we try to treat our critics with courtesy and fairness. Knowing we are not perfect, we try to be respectful of, and open to, different ideas no matter how they are expressed.



What we have experienced in recent months is something quite different.

A nucleus of largely anonymous critics, stating that their aim is to improve our schools, has chosen a path that confounds us.

Their actions to date include:

- establishing teams of people to review PMSA actions - in some cases going back decades;
- using those resources to “investigate” a litany of perceived wrongs and then feeding them to the media without any attempt to fact check them much less to ensure any semblance of truth;
- organising public rallies, including at the gates of Somerville House while students were in some cases, preparing for end-of-year exams;
- creating distressing fictions about our schools that have, in many cases, tarnished the final year of school in the memories of young men and women who are completing Grade 12;
- creating angst and disillusionment for the thousand dedicated teachers and support staff who work in our schools;
- issuing an anonymous letter to a senior PMSA employee, threatening him if he took any action to support the PMSA;
- systematic and hurtful character assassination of the Councillors which have often been severely distressing for us and for our families;
- feeding and supporting the Courier Mail in publishing articles that consistently ignore the true facts the PMSA has tried to present.

In response to the unique and damaging actions directed towards Somerville House, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Queensland appointed an eminent and independent facilitator, retired Court of Appeal Judge, Hon Richard Chesterman AC RFD QC, to engage with the stakeholders of the Somerville House Community.

Even the Churches’ calls for moderation and reconciliation, to allow that process to take place in a spirit of calm, have been ignored by the key players in the group opposed to the PMSA.

This is a phenomenon we have been slow to recognise and even slower to address but, within days, we will begin a comprehensive range of actions to address the misinformation and, more importantly, the underlying concerns that have surfaced.

We will be publishing and speaking to the truth in a variety of school forums and we will be dealing, one by one, with each aspect of the misleading and damaging misinformation that has been published to date.



Our staff is not deserting our schools – the level of attrition is no greater than in any typical year and is almost entirely due to retirements and to career changes that all large employer organisations experience.

Our students are not deserting our schools – we are at 98% of target student numbers for 2018 and new entrant numbers remain strong.

All our schools are in robust financial health and performing to budgeted levels. In 2016, the PMSA oversaw the management of over \$386 million of net assets, returning an EBITDA for the group of 18% (improving from 17% in 2015).

Borrowings for the group were well contained at just 2.5 x the 2016 EBITDA level, despite new borrowings for Somerville House for the expansion of its capital works program.

The PMSA continues to provide a strong financial framework that supports current and future capital projects at each of our four schools. We expect to see nearly \$30 million invested in our schools over the coming months.

The PMSA has supported the establishment and development of a Quality Teacher Framework. This industry leading framework is applied across all four schools to the benefit of almost 4900 students. Our students receive the best possible teaching and consistently achieve high results compared to all other schools across the State.

In stating these facts, we acknowledge the support of our past and present School Principals. Their dedication has fostered, and will continue to foster, an environment where our children can be given the best opportunities to excel and to become our future leaders.

Speech Nights for each of Clayfield College, Brisbane Boys' College and Somerville House were magnificent, and we express our sincere gratitude that whatever differences those of us who love our schools may have, they were put aside in joyful celebration of our daughters' and sons' achievements and the contributions our staff have made to enable them. At the end of November, our Sunshine Coast Grammar Community will no doubt complete this year's celebrations with the same excitement and in the same spirit.

The true meaning and significance of these events should not be lost - they should remind us all why our schools exist, what they provide to our families and, in turn, our wider community, and of the responsibility we share to protect them, no matter what challenges we may face or what differences we may have.



In closing let me also give you the following assurances.

The PMSA is moving to a thorough review of governance across its schools – a process that we have worked on consistently over the years, and which we had been planning to open up to wider community discussion even before the current controversies arose.

It is in no way, shape or form a centralisation strategy – it is a process that respects the traditions and independence of each of our schools. It is intended to explore and decide on ways to improve the way we and the schools operate, and it will expressly include consultation with every stakeholder group and address the messages that have been sent by our critics.

We believe that the challenges we are facing today will be catalysts for an even stronger organisation and it is our sincere and determined wish to ensure that we achieve that outcome, with the support of the majority of caring and dedicated families who make up our community.

Yours sincerely,
Presbyterian & Methodist Schools Association

Greg Adsett
PMSA Chairman