

CLEMTON PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL:

A "true blue" multicultural Aussie primary school with...a strong Hellenic flavour!!

"Aussie, aussie, aussie - Opa, opa, opa!"

Last Thursday 27 May 2009, Clemton Park Primary School in the south western suburbs of Sydney, tucked between Earlwood and Kingsgrove, blew out the candles of its 80th birthday cake with a great party befitting the excitement that was being built up by staff and students this year. Alongside with the 8 decades of existence of this NSW Department of Education's popular primary school, staff, students, family and friends also celebrated "Harmony Day", "Reconciliation Week" & "Environmental Education" in all one day during the "Public Education Week" that NSW celebrates annually in May.

The special guests started to arrive mid morning, including the Education Consul of the General Consulate of Greece in Sydney Mr Ioannis Pitsas, the NSW Department of Education K-12 Greek Language Advisor at the Curriculum Directorate at Ryde Mr Alexandros Geladaris, Greek language teacher seconded to Sydney by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs of Greece Ms Angeliki Athanasopoulou and the undersigned representing the Australian Hellenic Educators' Association of NSW as Vice-President, Marrickville Intensive English Centre as its Head Teacher and Saturday School of Community Languages-Liverpool Boys High School Centre as its Assistant Supervisor. The party started from 10.30 in the morning under partly cloudy skies and mild weather in the presence of hundreds of parents, grandparents ("yiayides & papoudes") and other relatives and family friends.

Clemton Park Primary School Deputy Principal Mr Christos Kououris, as Master of Ceremonies welcomed everyone at the beginning of proceedings and called upon the Prin-



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icipal Ms Angela Lapi to address the crowd. Ms Lapi could not contain her own excitement about the multiple celebrations occurring in her school, the pinnacle being its 80th year existence and its wonderful multicultural nature. She emphasised that the teachers and the students with their families are the "building blocks" of the school community and not the physical nature of the school. The school relies on its students, the children and their parents and grandparents as she said.

After the Welcome to our Country, the paying of respects to the indigenous peoples and the Australian National Anthem, a team of school boys from another school performed a traditional Aboriginal welcoming dance. This was followed by a moving speech by a student on the history of Australia as far as its traditional owners are concerned and the "Sorry" declared by the Australian Federal Prime Minister Kevin Rudd towards the Indigenous peoples.

A distinctive speech with some pungent message about the value of being bilingual or even trilingual was given by student Ross Kovanis. He spoke from the point of view that he is of Greek background and his "yiayia" is the key for him in maintaining his first language. Despite the humorous incidents he made reference to in his life as a young boy, Ross, in a smart manner, was able to highlight to all the significance of learning and maintaining Greek or Italian or Arabic or whatever language the children's family speaks. His speech was applauded for a length of time.

During the course of the morning, students performed a variety of items, including an Italian song, the well known Australian songs on television of the yesteryear "I love aeroplane jelly" and "I am a Vegemite kid" wearing characteristic student-made overalls with aeroplane jelly boxes and vegemite jars drawn on them, Abba songs and others. The school choir performed renditions of classical music such as "Ode to Joy" and tunes from recorders.

The songs that attracted prolonged applause were undoubtedly the two Greek students' dancing performances. The first part were 3 traditional Hellenic songs, the first one being a characteristic Macedonian song "Po, po, po, Maria", then a Thracian song "Kato sta Hortaroudia" and finishing up with a traditional Aegean island song from the Greek islands "I Thalassa". In all, Macedonian, Thracian and Aegean sounds filled Clemton Park from one side of the school to the other with the performing students wearing blue and white, representing the flag of Greece. The second part was performed by another cohort of students, wearing this time black and a

red sash, which presented the Taverna style music "Zembekiko" and in particular the "O horos tis Evdokias" melody, choreographed by Ms Anna Skribias. The students' precision and "levendia" (pride) in their presentation was noteworthy by all people present, as it made a lasting impression.

The official end of the celebrations concluded with an SRC (Student Representative Council) speech by students on the history of Clemton Park PS and a Costume Parade. The 80th birthday cake was cut which made everyone, young and old, fill the air with tunes of "Happy Birthday".

A multicultural party without good "tucker, could not be as a multicultural celebration. The school continued the party with the offerings of glorious food! Multicultural stands representing the various cultural and ethnic groups of the students adorned part of the school quadrangle outside. The flags of tens of countries were strewn across the buildings providing another colourful aspect to the school.

One could see the flags of Indonesia, The Philippines, China and Vietnam and others of North and South-East Asia region to the flags of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the FYROM (Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia) of the Balkans Region and flags of other regions around the world reflecting the diversity in the student and staff population. The flags of Cyprus and Greece decorated the Greek food stall which was the largest of all. Foods like dolmades, tiropites, keftedes, spanakopites, gemista, feta cheese, Greek village salad and other delicacies whetted the appetite of teachers students, families and guests.

A big congratulation must be given to the Principal Ms Angela Lapi and the staff for a memorable day. As Greeks say, "Ke tou hronou" ('And here's to next year' meaning that it is hoped that the same celebrations are done the following year). It should be noted that Clemton Park Primary School has approximately 545 students; 84% are of (NESB) Non-English Speaking Background of which 57% are of Greek speaking background!! The school has 3 NSW Department of Education appointed Greek community language teachers. They are Ms Anna Skribias, Ms Rena Strouboukis and Ms Stamatia Spanos. The school grounds and classrooms are also used for afternoon Greek classes by outside organisations.

Clemton Park Primary School is a "true blue" multicultural school with a...strong Hellenic flavour for sure. This is well and truly an example of how public education cares for its students and respects their language and cultural backgrounds and this particular day certainly did this.

Dimitrios Kametopoulos



Greek Dancers and Mrs Stamatia Spanos