2017 - what a wonderful year! Let's have a quick think about what has happened...

We have grown - we moved classrooms into the car park and topped 800 students.

We started the plans for the building program - you will hear and see much more about that next year.

We connected with parents in new ways - Facebook, especially the closed groups, flourished. We had open classrooms, community news in Farsi, Arabic and Chinese languages, Q and As, Parrachatter, more Hang Outs, Family Circles, and the Community Action Team, CAT, produced the most marvelous Festival of Cultures just over a week ago. Words cannot describe the warmth and community feeling of that occasion.

Students were involved in an increasing number of extra curricula activities - choirs, dance groups, (including Indian, Persian, Chinese and American hip hop), dance sport, violin, recorder, guitar, music, art, chess, drama, public speaking, debating, ATSI, veggie patch and cooking, science, Tournament of Minds... and I believe that there will be even more next year! We had great success with TOM and with dance sport, and we had a NSW winner of the crystal growing competition.

Our school leaders excelled and set new plans in place, becoming true role models for the rest of the school, and proving themselves to be quality products of Parramatta West!

The school underwent external validation - a process that involved collecting evidence about all areas of school life and assessing it against the excellence framework. We produced 200 pages of annotated evidence which we presented to the panel. This process was exhaustive, and exhausting, but the result was extremely positive feedback and acknowledgement of the wonderful things that our school does and the success that we have achieved. It also has provided the basis for the next three year plan.

None of this happens by accident, or without enormous commitment from a large number of people. The teachers at Parramatta West are a select group of wonderful educators, supported by an equally wonderful team of school learning support officers and administration staff. They go above and beyond expectations every day because they want to make a difference and improve the educational and life experiences of the children and their families. They are led by teachers who support and encourage, problem solve, evaluate, research and share knowledge to ensure that the school is continually developing and preparing the children for the future. I have great faith in the school leaders who will take this school forward.

At this time I would like to acknowledge two people in particular who are leaving us this year after many years of service. Mrs Cotter has taught thousands of children (including some of their parents) at Parramatta West over 41 years! She has also shared her expertise with countless teachers, ensuring that young teachers learn from her wisdom. We hope that she will enjoy her retirement, and take with her many happy memories.

Mrs Allen is not retiring, but after 20 years at Parramatta West is moving to a school closer to home. We thank her for the years of support that she has given our students with additional learning needs, and wish her all the very best for her future. The children in her new school will benefit from her expertise.

Parents are part of our team too. Without your commitment to Parramatta West we would not be as successful with your children. We have worked hard over the years to connect with you, and this was brought home to me last week when I had the opportunity to hear from you at my retirement celebration day. You have listened to our requests to be involved, you have heard our messages, and that was the most powerful indication to me that my time spent with you, and writing my newsletters, has not been in vain. THANK YOU! Please spread the word, your involvement in your children's education is invaluable. Your encouragement, belief in them, the power of listening to them, supporting their interests, allowing them to find their own way in this life, with your support, will lead to success.

Thank you to the P and C, who work tirelessly to organise the home readers, in increasing numbers, the uniform shop, mothers and father’s day stalls and other special events. I know they have plans for being more involved in the school directions next year, so keep watching the P and C Facebook page and stay connected. Thank you to all the other parent helpers, the reading mums, the classroom helpers and those who step in when the call goes out.

Finally, the children - without whom none of us would have reason to be here.

When I talk to you at assembly each week, I have tried to pass on messages that I believe are important for you in order for you to become successful learners and valuable citizens of this wonderful country that we live in.

My messages have been about how you learn, how to grow your brain, what it means to have a growth mindset, the importance of putting rubbish in the bin and not allowing it to end up in the oceans, using less plastic, healthy eating, looking after your own property, not being a bystander or a bully, the importance of effort, 10,000 hours, goal setting, how to be responsible, safe and respectful to all.... and so it goes on. Often the year six students who are leading the assembly ask me what I’m going to talk about, so they can prepare what they are going to say in response - but I never tell them, I say something like, you'll have to listen, or wait and see. This is all part of my advice to them and to you - there are no shortcuts, you have to listen, to pay attention, in order to learn.

I encourage every single one of you to get involved in at least one of the extra curricular activities next year - and if there isn’t anything that interests you, think of something that does and ask a teacher to start a new club!

Some of you may remember my messages, others probably never even heard them. But these are the things that I want you to remember when you say at some time in the future, Mrs Donaldson was my primary school principal, and she used to talk to us in assembly. She wanted us to be the best people we could be. She believed that we could all learn, and become better learners. She wanted us to grow our brains, to dream BIG dreams, and work towards achieving them. She told us mistakes are OK, as long as you find out why you made the mistake, and learn how to fix it. And that practice can help you learn, as long as it is deliberate practice, not just doing the easy bits over and over again.

The world you are growing up is exciting; the future is yours to create. You have the benefit of going to school with children and teachers from all over the world. This can help make you global citizens, and you can make the world a better place. I believe in the future, and I believe in your capacity to make a difference. It is going to take hard work and commitment - so make those dreams big.

I will leave Parramatta West with many, many happy memories and great friends who I hope will stay in touch. I will be back to see the opening of the new buildings, hopefully before, and I will be interested to hear of the wonderful things that you are all doing.