A look inside the history of Brisbane Grammar School

Board of Trustees

Brisbane Grammar School is governed by a Board of Trustees – the School’s supreme administering body with wide ranging responsibilities governing its management and growth.

The role of the Trustees was defined in the Grammar Schools Act 1860. The Act stated that learning was to be encouraged by establishing public grammar schools to provide ‘all classes and denominations’ of residents in the Colony of Queensland with ‘the advantages of a regular and liberal course of education’.

This Queensland legislation was unique in Australia at that time and theoretically provided a mechanism for developing a framework for an education system from primary to secondary school to university.

Any municipality in Queensland in which £1,000 had been privately subscribed for establishing a grammar school became entitled to claim from the Government a grant of £2,000 and an annual endowment of £500 per annum. By an amendment of the Act in 1864 the annual endowment was increased to £1,000 on certain conditions.

The Brisbane Grammar School Board of Trustees was to comprise four members appointed by the Government in Council and three elected by subscribers or donors to the School. The Queensland Government representatives on the first Brisbane Grammar Board of Trustees, elected on 18 October 1867, included the Hon T.B. Stephens (Chairman), Hon Charles Lilley, Dr K. I. O’Doherty and A.B. Pritchard. The subscribers, elected on 20 September 1868, included L.A. Bernays, W. Brookes (Treasurer) and R. Macdonnell.

The Corporation of the Trustees of Brisbane Grammar School was thus constituted and the election and appointment of the trustees was originally on a triennial basis. Now the trustees hold office for four years and at the end of that time are eligible for re-election or re-appointment.

Brisbane Grammar School was one of eight Queensland grammar schools established under the 1860 Act during the 1860s. In 2000 these schools established the Queensland Grammar Schools Association.

The School opened on 1 February 1869 and was Brisbane’s first boys’ secondary school and second in Queensland after Ipswich Grammar School.

The role of the Trustees, who work on a voluntary basis, includes determining the strategic direction of the School; appointing the Headmaster; ensuring that students, their welfare and development remain the central focus of the School in all its activities; working with the Headmaster, staff and school community to promote and implement the School’s mission and values; approving and monitoring policies and practices relating to optimal human resource management within the School; ensuring appropriate review processes are in place to monitor and enhancing the quality of all school activities; assuming financial responsibility and accountability; and reviewing governance policies and performance of the Board of Trustees.

Expenditure is recouped by income from government endowments and by fees paid for the pupils. On occasions revenue is obtained by appeals to Old Boys, parents and friends, and public-spirited community members. Donors to the School appeals are still the only people who are eligible to vote for Trustees.

The Board of Trustees has been represented by many fields of community endeavour over the years, including Rhodes scholars, from the legislature, judiciary and the law, to medicine, science, the services and business.

Inaugural Trustees included Chairman, Sir Charles Lilley, Chief Justice of Queensland. He was an advocate for higher education and initiated the gold and silver Lilley Medals. Other Trustees at that time included Dr Kevin O’Doherty, responsible for Queensland’s first health act and Lewis Adolphus Bernays, the first Clerk of the Queensland Legislative Assembly and founder of the Queensland Acclimatization Society.

One of the most illustrious Chairman of Trustees was Sir Samuel Griffith, Chief Justice and Premier. He was a principal author of the Constitution of Australia and became the first Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia.

From the laying of the foundation stone of the original Brisbane Grammar School on 29 February 1868 to the present day, the Board of Trustees has steered the School through changing economic and political times to ensure the values enshrined in the Grammar Schools Act 1860 are maintained.

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