Small school called Largs has historic role

By WENDY ROBINSON
Largs Public School, near Maitland, is the oldest continuously operating school in Australia with many of its original students having descendants still attending.

Largs principal Sharon Palmer said the school had been in operation since 1838, but officially became a public school in January 1849.

"I think it started as a church school and then became a public school after the Board of National Education was established in 1848," Ms Palmer said.

"It's a fabulous school and we have a great sense of community. There are many tales of the past to be told - mostly about the cane and being crammed into one classroom."

The small school has 105 students - many of whom had their grandparents, and great grandparents attend the school.

Ms Palmer said it was originally called Dunmore, but changed its name in 1892.

"However over the years visitors from Largs in Scotland have visited, bringing gifts from the much bigger school," Ms Palmer said.

On the school site there is an Old Bush Hut which has an area set up like an old classroom with ink wells and a cane. The other half of the hut is a mini-museum with a lot of memorabilia.

Ms Palmer said the school was proud of its history, but there was "sometimes a bit of a blur between fact and fiction".

"Some people swear the Old Bush Hut used to be a classroom, which is why we have set it up as such, but I somehow doubt it. What I do know is the school has a very bright future ahead.

"As we say at Largs, small schools are great schools."

Proud of their history...Kaylah Simmons, Abby Schafferius, Nick Lightfoot and Tyler Skinner.

FACTS

- In 1849 there were 15 government schools.
- In 2007 there were 2,200 government schools.
- In 1851, an average 100 students was considered the maximum for a one-teacher school.
- In 2006, the average size of primary classes was 24.6 students.
- In 1848, the Board of National Education recommended school fees should range from one penny to one shilling per week; with the local school board to set the rate.
- In 1906 primary school fees were abolished.
- In 1925 high school fees were abolished.
- In 1995 voluntary contributions were introduced to enable parents and guardians to enhance educational and sporting school programs.
- In 1880, school attendance was compulsory for children between six and 14 for a period of not less than 70 days each half year.
- In 2010 the school leaving age was raised to 17 unless the student had already completed the School Certificate or was in paid employment, or a combination of training and paid work.