

PRESTON PARK

Manager's Newsletter | Winter 2026



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CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION
TRUST



The Season

Cold evenings and frosty mornings of late remind us that winter is indeed here. But spring is on its way — daffodils are here and being enjoyed. I love the fact that we have four distinct seasons in this part of the world: summer and winter, autumn and spring! Each one has its own impact, and each brings its own stimulation as well as its own challenges.

Winter chill slows growth, and the frosts do a great job of killing bugs — though they can knock plants around quite badly too. This winter has been no different; the frosts have done their job. But surprisingly, many plants have prospered, and I've been pleasantly surprised at the winter growth we've seen this year. Winter is also the time we prune and shape the trees, preparing them for spring growth — for the fruit trees especially, it's critical that the fruit-bearing branches are correctly trimmed. Pruning takes a fair bit of skill and a lot of time! Alongside overseeing the park as a whole, it remains my main hands-on task.

Team & Budget

This year's budget has focused on manpower, and I've been thrilled to have Toby back on board again. Sadly, though, due to some over-expenditure, we've had to curtail Toby's hours from August until January 2027. Being without him for that stretch will mean more work for me personally, but I'm hoping that between myself and the CET property team, we'll get through until the new budget kicks in.

I still love my daily wander around the park (mostly by Rova these days!) — it remains a great joy. The park is well through its developmental stages now; we designed it for sustainability and minimal ongoing care, and it's fulfilling that expectation beautifully. Our main tasks today are keeping the weeds from dominating and making sure every plant gets what it needs — sprays, shelter, sunlight, water, and fertiliser — to reach its full potential.

As always, I'm indebted to Caleb and Bay Trees for their pruning of the bigger trees and their care whenever storm damage occurs. I'm also very grateful for the work of Rob V, with his bobcat and various bulldozers — most recently recalibrating and re-metalling the tracks through the park and the forest. Importantly, he made sure the water flow minimises track damage and maximises drainage away from the paths and into the lake. It was a masterful job.

Trees for Survival

Mr Steve Te Whiti has led our excellent 'Trees for Survival' programme, involving Bethlehem College's Environmental Service Club students. His resignation after 21 years at BC has left a gap



in many areas of the school, Preston Park included — but people step up. The school will continue its involvement in T4S, and only this week I met with a Rotarian who will be their newly appointed T4S liaison: a personal friend and fellow educationist, George Bryant, who served as a principal himself for over 30 years (my age bracket, and then some!).

We took a slow walk around the park together as I outlined the liaison role — making sure seedlings arrive at the right time, with some Rotary club members hopefully assisting students to transplant seedlings into



their pottles and care for them over the following six months in the T4S nursery. Once the plants are ready, we'll all work together to transplant them into the wetland and along the banks near the Rugby Club rooms.

We spent most of the morning together, reminiscing. George was thoroughly taken aback by the size and quality of the campus. As he left, he simply said, "Graham, the campus is amazing."

Yes — the campus is a picture, and it provides just the right setting to fulfil our mission: growing Christ-centred students who understand the heart of God the Father, the love of God the Son, and experience the power of the Holy Spirit within them. The ambience, atmosphere and environment all provide the setting for the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every person who spends time here.

Honouring Those Who Serve

Can I take a moment to honour those who've served the park over the past twelve months. Obviously, the CET and their financial support; the Campus property team who mow the lawns, spray as required, and assist whenever I need them; Toby, our part-time 'jack of all things gardening'; and James of the CET team, who takes a special interest and volunteers on weekends wherever help is needed — pushing a little harder with the mower into the undergrowth, and picking up the prunings I leave behind for him! And the many volunteers, including students, who simply spend time cleaning up, weeding, and tidying. Thank you!

A Place to Explore and Learn

The park is designed for you, the BC community, and it's open to the public — 24/7 during daylight hours, for anyone to come, to linger, and to enjoy the beauty, peace and solitude it was designed for. It's there for all to see and enjoy. Just as importantly, it's a place to educate — for our students to learn.



It's lovely to see classes of students out in full learning mode, exploring the park to see nature as God created it. I get a real buzz, almost daily, hearing the laughter of children rising up from the park. Sometimes there are as many as five classes using the park at once, involved in five different activities — studies, fitness, art and composition. My particular favourite is seeing students out with clipboards and activity sheets, hopefully accessing the online studies that Vicky and I developed. QR codes on the black information bollards let any student with a smartphone access material suitable for ages 5 to 18 — with at least 144 living species to be found within ten metres of each bollard, and plenty of great information to explore.

Food for Thought

The biblical teaching on creation is that God alone made the universe out of nothing, bringing order, life and humanity into existence through His spoken word. The key foundational principles are divine origin, the image of God in humanity, and God's ongoing sustenance of the world.

THE CORE TEACHINGS IN SCRIPTURE

- **Creation ex nihilo** (out of nothing): God did not use pre-existing matter; He spoke everything into being. *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1).
- **The Creator-Creature distinction:** God is separate from and superior to His creation, remaining the ultimate sustainer of all life. *"You have made heaven... and you preserve all of them"* (Nehemiah 9:6).
- **The Image of God** (Imago Dei): humans are uniquely made in God's image, given value, dignity, and stewardship over the earth.
- **The Goodness of Creation:** every part of the physical world was declared "good" by God upon its making — and humanity, "very good."
- **Jesus Christ in Creation:** the New Testament identifies Jesus, the Word, as an active participant in creation. *"All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:1–3).

INTERPRETIVE VIEWS ON THE GENESIS DAYS

- **Literal 24-hour days:** the traditional view that God created the cosmos over six consecutive normal-length days.
- **Day-age or figurative view:** creation days understood as long, unspecified epochs, or as a literary framework for order rather than strict 24-hour periods.

Shalom, friends,

Graham C. Preston
Preston Park Manager

'The Park exists to glorify God, by providing a place of natural beauty and meaningful education for everyone'.