Westland School: Proudly Progressive!

Description

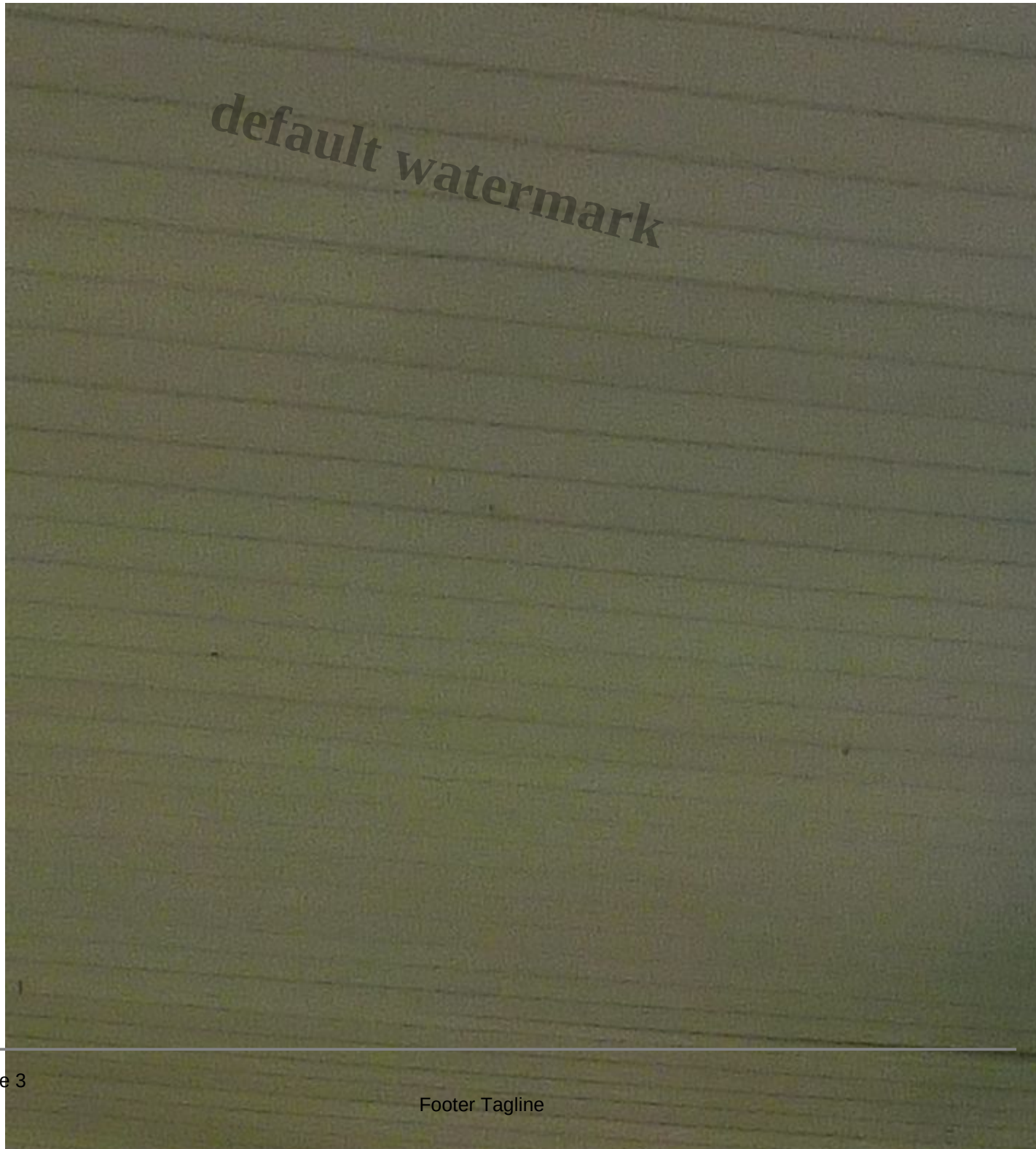
Welcome to Westland!

When I asked Scott Moran, Westlandâ€™s head of school, if he would describe Westland as a progressive school, he told me emphatically, â€œYes!â€• Marcia Capparela, Westlandâ€™s assistant head of school, echoed his sentiment, adding, â€œProudly.â€•

Proudly Progressive. Thatâ€™s exactly what Westland School is. An excellent progressive K-6th grade located on a scenic, two acre campus along Mulholland in the Santa Monica Mountains. It is an exquisite gem of a school, idyllic and inspiring, with one story buildings which center around a courtyard, omitting the need for indoor hallways. The indoor-outdoor quality gives a spacious, open feeling to the small school.

Indoor/outdoor quality defines the campus

Scott relocated from NYC to become head of Westland last July. He is the dad of a Westland daughter and a two-year old. Heâ€™s super-smart, very nice, high energy and down-to-earth. His energy and enthusiasm for the job make you want to join in whatever heâ€™s doing. Marcia is an incredibly friendly and soft-spoken educator whose friendship with my step-mom and co-author, Anne Simon, dates back to their days at Wildwood School. Scott and Marciaâ€™s combined experience brings with it a discerning eye for both the big picture and minute detail. A dynanic duo, these two top administrators share a love of progressive education, years of combined experience and a strong commitment to the schoolâ€™s 1949 founding principles.



Outside a classroom building

Together with the Westland faculty and staff, Scott and Marcia have set their collective minds on answering the question, *What does progressive education look like in the 21st century?* Scott articulates some of the central ideas, including collaboration, risk taking and how to pick the best educational concepts and tools that are available nowâ€“ and in the future. For example, he says, teaching sharing through the use of wooden blocks rather than putting two students on an Ipad and telling them to â€œshareâ€• is just one way to balance progressive concepts with the newest tools. Of course, Westland believes there is a time and place for technology, but it isnâ€™t the best way to teach a 5 year-old the concept of collaboration, Scott points out.

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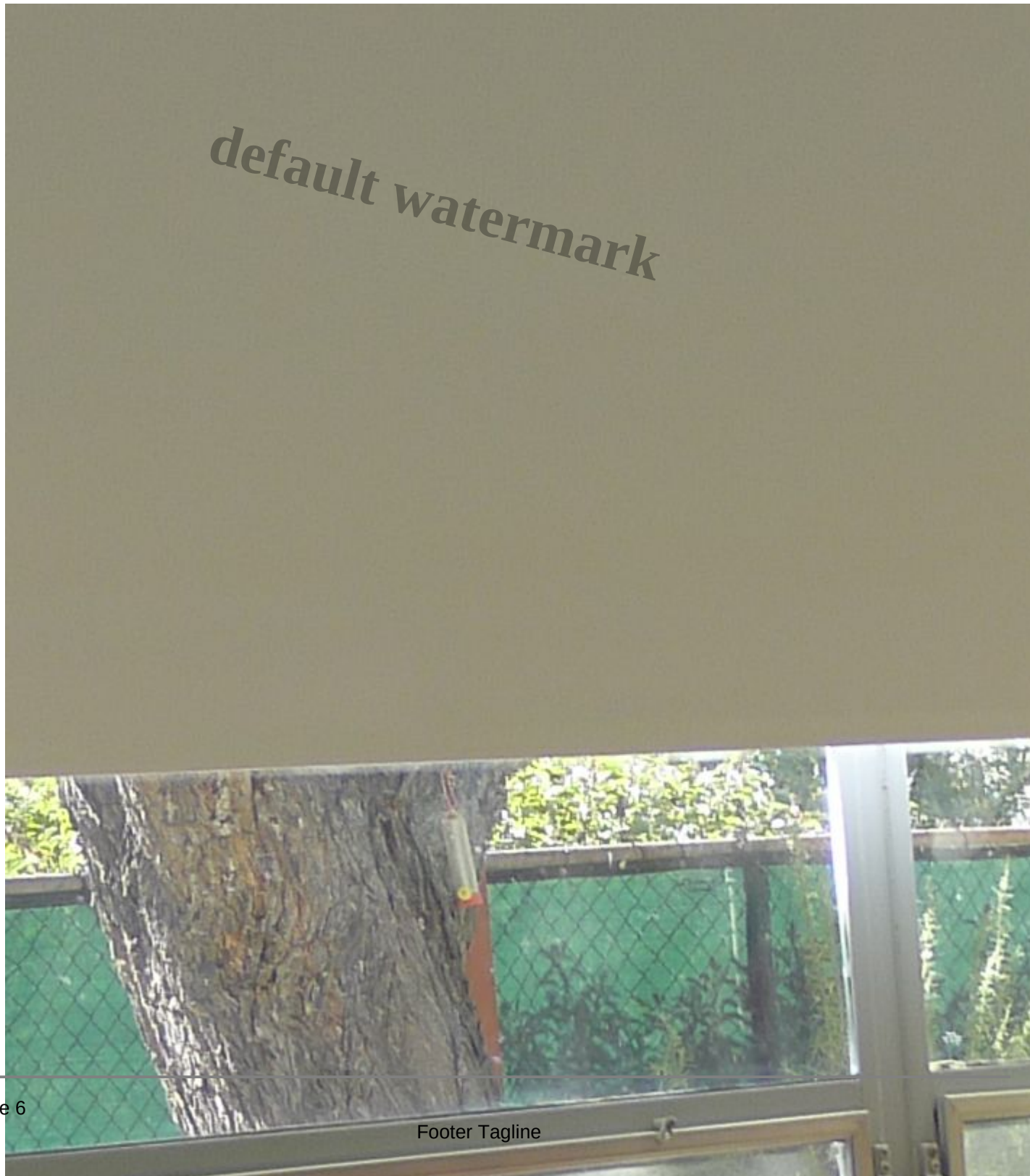
A view of the outdoor play area

A Progressive State Of Mind

Westland defines its educational philosophy as one where teachers are involved in developing and implementing an integrated, hands on social-studies based curriculum. It is a child-centered, non-competitive learning environment that uses experiential learning to develop problem solving and critical thinking skills (Source: Westland literature). One of my favorite aspects of this philosophy is the integrated curriculum, where what is being taught in one class relates to the subject being taught in another class. The non-competitive aspect of the school is perhaps most noticeable in the lack of school sports teams. However, students play sports in local recreation leagues and club teams.

Room to move!

Scott is refreshingly candid, opening up about many aspects of Westland School. A thought leader who understands the why and how of progressive education, we spent time in his office talking about how Westland strives to stay true to its roots while incorporating 21st century ideas. The small size of the school (about 131 students total) offers a place where parents are very involved in virtually every part of the school (volunteering is required!) and kids help make things happen too.



Group One Classroom

Westland uses a unique system to place students in classes. There are six class groups for the seven grade levels K-6. This gives flexibility and a multi-age environment. At one point during their elementary years, students are re-grouped which means that they spend a second year in one group that has been carefully re-configured based on eachâ€™s childâ€™s academics, skills, friendships, and other factors. Rather than remain with one group from K-6, re-grouping offers new opportunities for a childâ€™s social and educational growth.

The Westland Studio

Woodworking is a signature program at Westland. Learning by doing is a central theme that flows throughout the school and woodworking is a hands-on activity where all students create projects linked to their social studies themes. A full-time teacher/woodworker oversees the projects and through building, designing, sawing, sanding and seeing the final projects come to life, students develop a wide range of skills including math, measuring and design. The finished projects are visible around the school and a lot of them are used for student activities. Kids build houses, neighborhoods, cities and more!

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Made by students!

Woodshop for the 21st Century!

A melding of progressive ideas, interpreted for the modern classroom is what sets Westland apart. There is nothing outdated about this school. It is present, ready to leap and bound into the future. A spirited, expansive view of education by its administrators and faculty make the notion of sitting in a classroom exciting by knowing how to tap into the joys of being a kid.

Community Sings

Music is an important program at Westland, where the program includes an array of instruments and voice. Community Sings is a tradition where the entire school comes together for schoolwide sings that showcase school projects and experiences. A Civil Rights sing coincides with the MLK Jr. Holiday. Parents, siblings and friends are welcome to attend these popular gatherings.

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Westlandâ€™s Garden

Lauri Kranz, a Westland mom of two and my lovely friend, is the designer/manager of Westlandâ€™s gorgeous garden. Lauri is a landscape gardener extraordinaire and one of the coolest people I know. Loyal devotees in the form of parents help Lauri work with students to create â€œharvest and cook days,â€• including, Potato Pancake Day, Radish Day and Stir Fry Day. Getting kids to eat vegetables isnâ€™t difficult when theyâ€™ve planted, grown and harvested these delightful goodies! She often posts recipes for parents to make at home with their kids.

Urban beauty!

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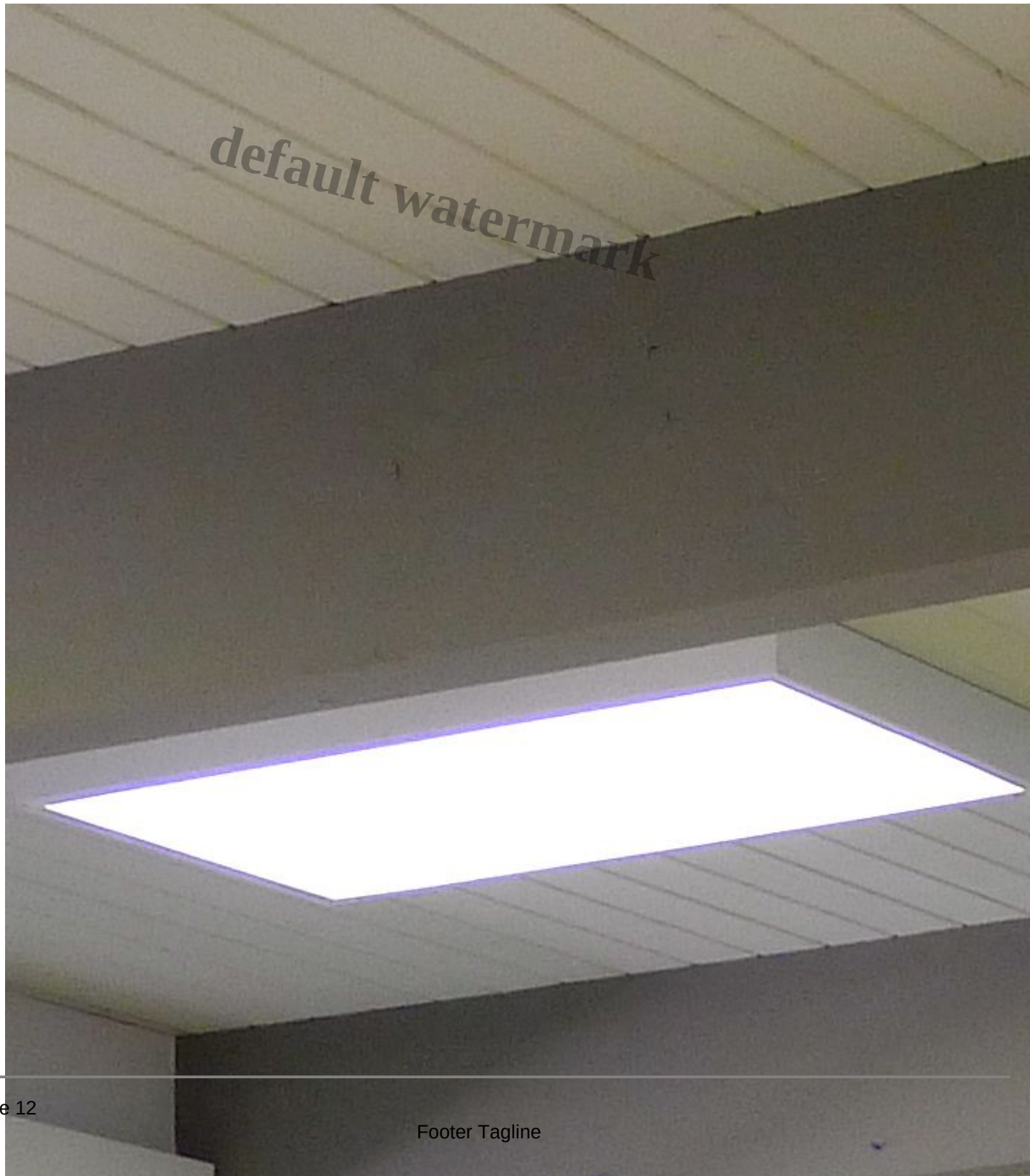
Eco-friendly

Westland uses technology not for the â€˜bells and whistlesâ€™ effect, but rather as one tool among numerous tools that is introduced gradually into the curriculum. In the early grades, technology is not present in the classroom. However, by ages 8-9, the school uses technology to help kids learn. The school believes kids should be â€œsavvy users of technology not just consumers.â€• (Source: Westland School).

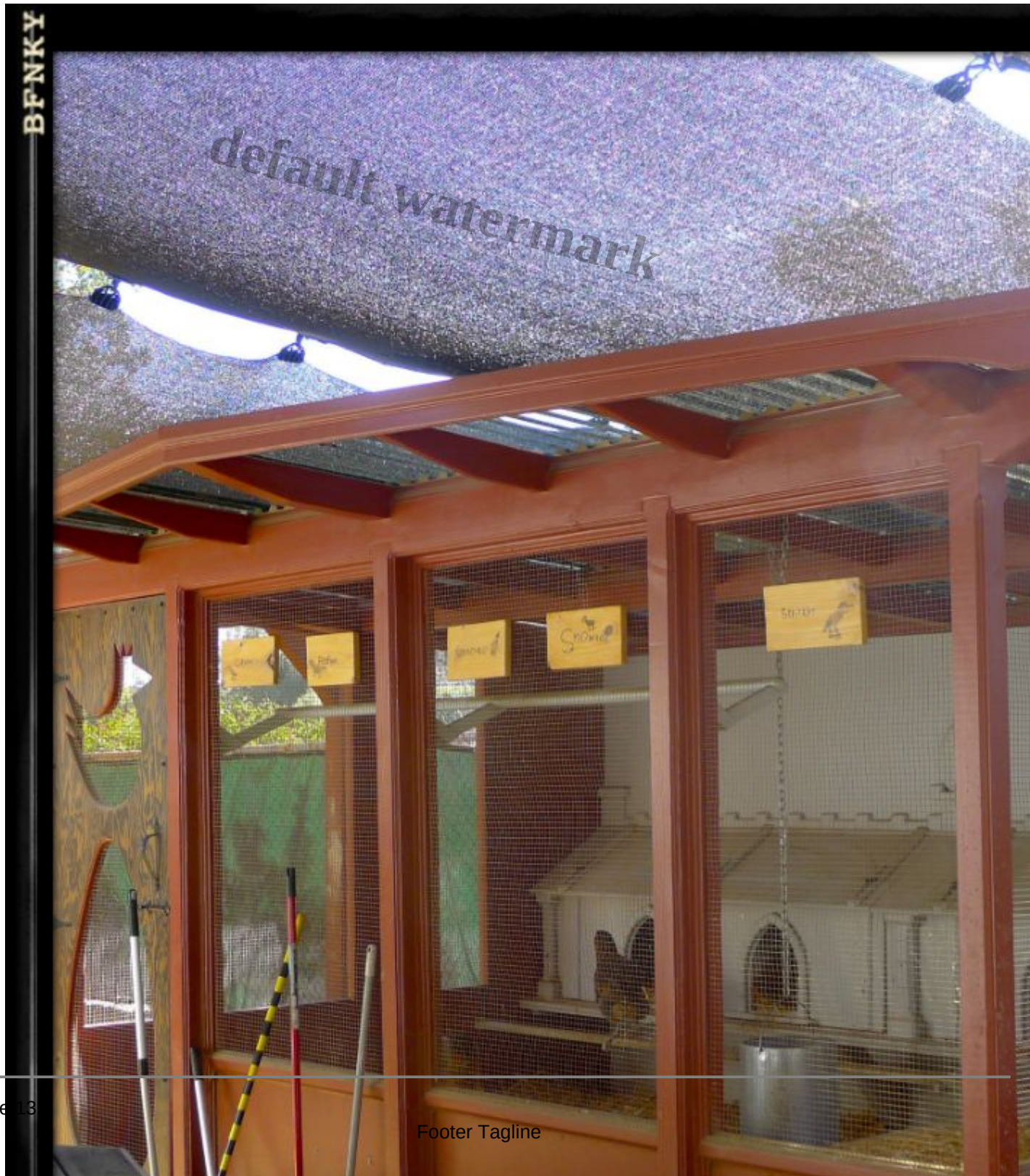
Library

Scott pointed out that because Westlandâ€™s tuition is in the lowest quarter for L.A. private elementary schools (about $19K per year), it attracts middle-income families. *For 2013-14, the amount of financial aid will double.* Parents should note that Westland admissions are competitive. The school receives far more applicants than available spaces. This is partly due to the small size of the school and partly due to its enormous popularity.



Group 3 classroom

Westland is a school where a kid centered sensibility defines its core. Westland is both offbeat and charming. Splashes of green, one-story buildings and a collection of wooden blocks reveal function and fun. Westland sparkles with imagination. Versatility and confidence, experimentation and creativity are hallmarks of this stellar school. It takes parents and kids on a journey that is a composite of ideas, old and new, bold and understated. It is the ultimate progressive school.



Students help care for chickens

For more information, visit, www.westlandschool.org

You can visit Lauriâ€™s website at www.ediblegardensla.com

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2. Progressive School
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