

Halton prepares to tackle new smoking bylaw

See page 2



STEP helps young people finish school

See page 8



Milton hosts national BMX event

See page 13

HHS pleased with health care funding

See page 16

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A Metroland Community Newspaper

Vol. 142 No. 31

Tuesday, July 3, 2001

32 Pages

\$1.00 (GST included)

Public school board to undergo audit for alleged wrongdoing

Vice-chair says board has nothing to hide

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

School is out and the auditors are in.

An external audit expected to cost up to \$50,000 will be held this summer at the Halton District School Board.

The investigation is in response to irregularities alleged by Burlington Trustee Michael Ellis.

Mr. Ellis shocked his colleagues last month when he called for an independent investigation and ministry takeover of the board. He also asked for the resignations of the chair and vice-chair.

Ellis' charges included misrepresentation of financial matters pertaining to school closures, last-minute information before votes, plus violations and abuses of board bylaws and policy.

At Wednesday's board meeting, trustees fired back.

"The allegations are groundless and it's a real shame it will cost us badly-needed dollars to clear our name," said Vice-Chair Mary Chapin.

"The independent audit is a way to prove we don't have anything to hide."

Both she and Chair Ethel Gardiner said they will not resign over Mr. Ellis' accusations.

"They are not specific and they are very difficult to deal with," said the chair. "But the allegations plant questions in the mind of the public. They put the board and staff at risk in terms of public trust."

The board must decide between letting the accusations fester or using badly-needed resources for an investigation, said Ms

Gardiner. "I came today determined that we needed an investigation."

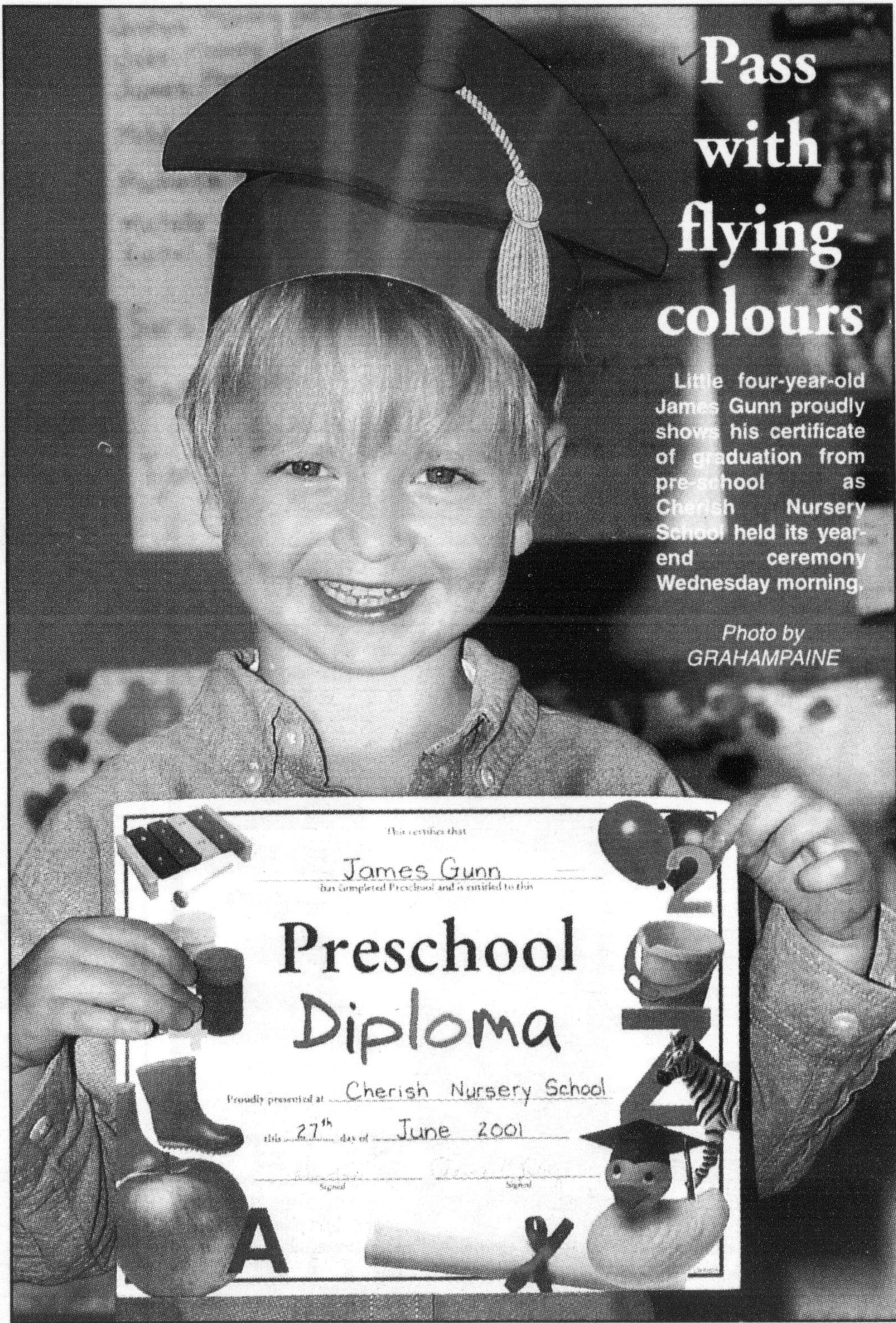
She said cheerleading is the most important job of board members. "Being a trustee is not about colleague-bashing and staff-bashing or petty politics. It's about recognizing, valuing and respecting an education system."

The chair said when she became a trustee in 1995, board meetings centred around "accusation innuendo and ugliness." This did nothing to improve the education of children, said Ms Gardiner.

The board approved the audit by an 8-2 margin, with Debbie Downs and Lynne Blanchard against the motion and Drew Currah absent.

Ms Downs said she'll ask for Mr. Ellis' resignation when the investigation is completed.

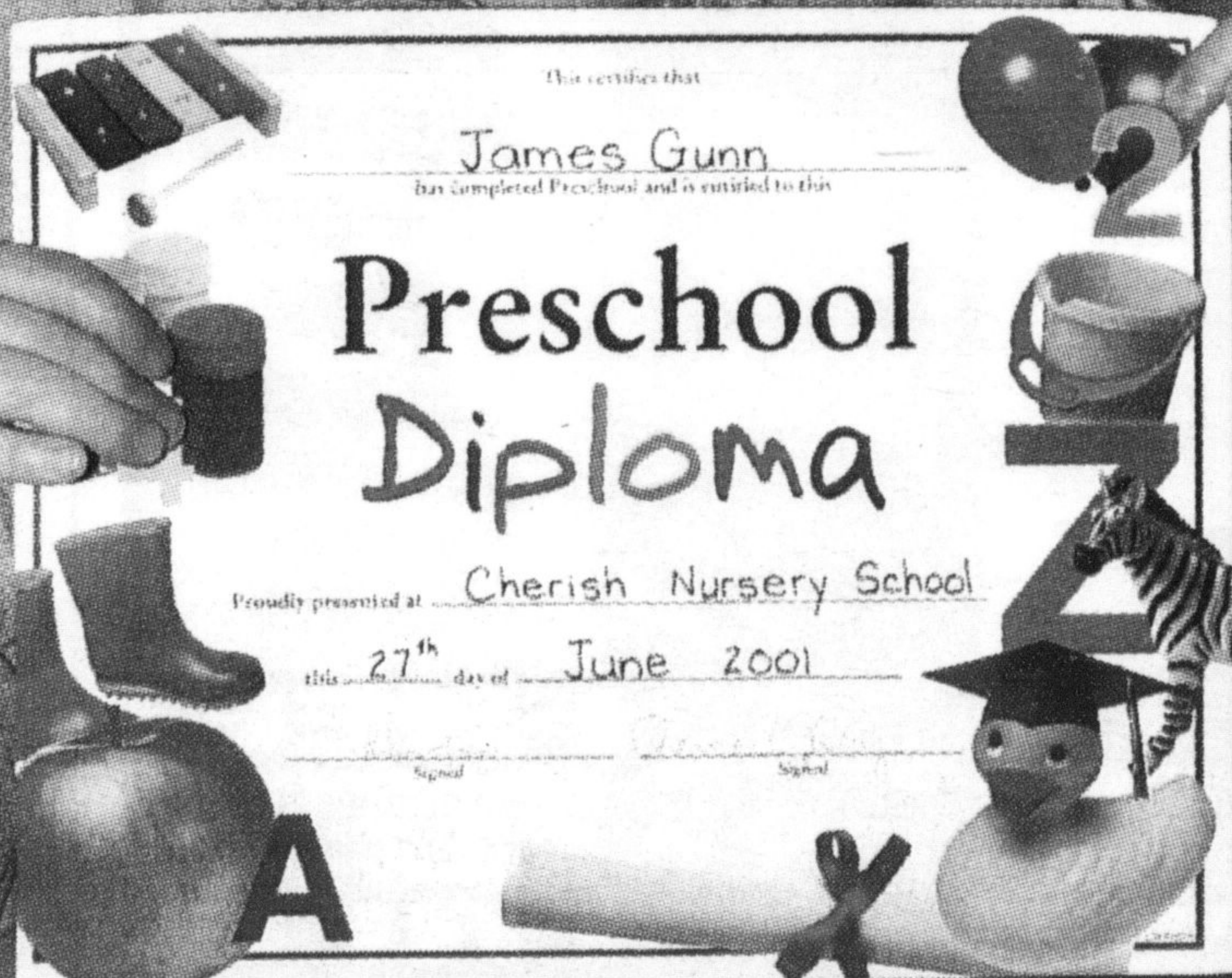
"Trustee Ellis last week made a decision • see ELLIS on page 9



Pass with flying colours

Little four-year-old James Gunn proudly shows his certificate of graduation from pre-school as Cherish Nursery School held its year-end ceremony Wednesday morning.

Photo by GRAHAMPAINE



INSIDE

Comment 6
 Dateline 20
 Sports 13-15
 Classified 16-18

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