

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Donnybrook



Principal's Address 2021

Wow, what a year it has been at St Mary's. I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year getting to know the staff, the students, and our families. My wife and I have felt very welcomed, and our children have had the opportunity to make many great friends, both in the school and the wider Donnybrook community.

I quickly learned how passionate our staff are about our school and in making sure that our students' schooling experience is both valuable and enjoyable. I'd like to thank them for the support that they have shown me throughout the year, and for their willingness to take on challenges for the betterment of our school and our students. Thank you, all!

Whilst Covid loomed early and nearly delayed our start, we have been able to operate and maintain a degree of normalcy throughout the year. Regardless, this year we have created an online learning portal for students in Years 1-6 and are able to move to home learning quickly should it be required in the future. Catholic Education is currently reviewing system and school plans for the handling a Covid breakout in 2022 in line with the State Government's Vaccine Mandate.

This year we have had 25 students move through our sacramental programs (Confirmation 10, First Holy Communion 10, Reconciliation 5). The school continues to be a beacon of hope for our parish, and I would like to extend my appreciation to Fr Joseph for his support and guidance throughout the year. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Mrs Liz Lomax, Mr Luke Skehan, Mrs Nicola Cross and Mrs Eileen Thompson for their contributions in coordinating the sacramental programs.

This year we have increased the amount of physical activity our students have been involved in, including a second sports lesson per week, involvement in community sporting clinics, student teacher grudge matches and involvement in carnivals such as the SW Cross Country Championships and the Basketball WA Carnival. We even won the 2021 Interschool Athletics Carnival. Thank you to Mrs Pettersen for her efforts in coordinating the carnivals and clinics this year. We look forward to providing our students with more sporting opportunities in the future.

This year we have seen many new initiatives. At the beginning of the year, we introduced a growth coaching program with staff that allowed them to reflect on their practice and set goals for improvement in line with their roles and responsibilities. Throughout the program, our teachers have received two coaching sessions per term including growth coaching with myself, and instructional coaching with Mrs Liz Lomax. Our EA's have also been included in the program, exploring how they can better support the educational needs of our students. The program has been very insightful and provided me with a great opportunity to build relationships and learn how to better support our staff and school. Again, I thank the staff for their willingness to participate, to continue working towards their goals and for the honesty in which they have shared with me this year.

In Term Two, we introduced literacy intervention programs to aid those students who required additional support when reading. Ms Tara Vanderwielen and Mrs Louise Long were both trained in evidence-based reading approaches through the Macquarie University before setting to work with our students. The

programs have proven very valuable this year and will support us in the future to identify students at risk early and intervene at the best possible time. I would like to thank them both for the energy and enthusiasm that they have shown towards the programs and our students.

As a staff we explored the science behind learning and evidence-based approaches to teaching. This has led to many changes in the way we teach reading across the school and the resources we use to both support reading development and measure student growth. We have revised our assessment schedule for 2022 and we will be better placed to identify students at risk and intervene using evidence-based approaches early. Next year, we have also recommitted to the Lexile reading program which monitors students reading progression and sets them challenges to achieve each term. Further to this, and complementing the science of learning, we will be focusing on instruction in 2022, ensuring that the teaching we offer results in the best academic outcomes possible for our students.

We have worked closely with Dyslexia SPELD Foundation (DSF) this year in implementing the Talk for Writing program. The program use spoken activities to develop students writing skills. Thank you to Mr Skehan who has been instrumental its implementation and thank you to our teachers who have gone about adopting the program with a keenness to learn and support each other along the way.

This year we have also had staff trained in Making Jesus Real. The framework is grounded in positive psychology and draws students' attention to the Spirit of Jesus in action in their lives and helps them to think, speak and act more like Jesus each day. Next year we are hoping to draw greater attention to this program in the school and link it with best practice approaches to students social and emotional development.

At the beginning of Term 3 will also introduced the Mini Marvel's program which is a Pre-kindy, parent involved program aimed at supporting our parents to build positive relationships, and to support our 2022 Kindy students in their transition to school. Thank you to Mrs Donna Verhaaf who has done an amazing job in coordinating the program this year.

This year we signed a painting and maintenance contract which has begun and will see the school painted and maintained over the next 7 years. The painting will be completed in preparation for the 2022 school year.

This year we have completed two climate surveys, which have given us information on how our school is performing from the perspective of staff, parents, and students. Most notably, staff are motivated and understand our vision and direction. For students, they have positive relationships at school, and they value their schooling experience. For parents, they feel welcomed and trust their children are safe at school. Moving forward, there is a greater need to support our students in developing their social and emotional awareness and capabilities, to give our students a greater voice in their school, and to reward and develop potential leaders within the school.

Next year, to give our students greater voice in the school and further develop our students as leaders, we are changing our student leadership structure and creating a student council. The council will consist of two heads, two deputy heads, four faction captains all from Year 6 with two class representatives (which will change each semester) from Years 3, 4 and 5. The winners of these positions will be announced at the Graduation Night. Mrs Annie Hutton will be working with them as they look towards driving social justice initiatives and student lead improvements across our school. Thank you, Annie!

As part of Catholic Education's strategic direction to make Catholic Education more accessible and affordable to families, St Mary's has been included in a new low fees initiative for 2022 and beyond. This initiative will see St Mary's receive additional financial support to ensure that our programs are not compromised and

that we are better able to support our current families and future potential families. For a copy of our updated fee schedule, please visit the school's website... which might I add has also been updated this year.

This year we have said goodbye to a number of staff. I'd like to thank Ms Emily Botteon, Mrs Jodi Sheehan and Mr Kim Walsh for their respective contributions to our school and students over a number of years. I also extend my appreciation to Mrs Melissa Eastcott who has supported us over the last part of the year in Year 6. This year we also say goodbye to Mrs Liana Clynick who has worked with us over a number of years in different capacities, most notably the fantastic job she has done with our current PP students. Thank you, Liana!

Mrs Cross has taken maternity leave for baby number two. We wish her all the best for the year ahead and the safe arrival of her little girl. Nicola is a much-loved member of staff, and we look forward to having her back on the team in the future.

I would also like to extend my greatest appreciation to Mrs Dale Green who has served our school and community for over 25 years. During that time Dale has served as Teacher, Assistant Principal, Acting Principal and most recently as ICT Coordinator. Her positive attitude and willingness to listen and share her wisdom will be very much missed in our school. Thank you, Dale!

This year, we welcomed Miss Kate Jendrzszak to the team and look forward to working with her again next year in her first official fulltime role as classroom teacher. Congratulations, Kate. Also in 2022, we welcome Miss Chelsea Moore to our staff. Chelsea is the current Pre-Primary teacher at Queen of Apostles Riverton and comes to us with 17 years' experience as an early years educator. Welcome, Chelsea!

Before finishing, I would like to offer my appreciation to St Mary's School Advisory Council and the Parents and Friends Committee. I thank them for the support they have shown both myself and the school over the year, and for the experiences they have shared with me along the way. Thank you!

Lastly, I'd like to offer my greatest appreciation to both Mrs Elizabeth Lomax and Mrs Katja Humphries. Schools are very complex places to manage, and the support they have both shown me throughout the year has been very much appreciated. Thank you!

Thank you all for a great year of fun and learning at St Mary's. I wish you all the best for Christmas and the New Year. Stay safe and enjoy the time with your families and friends and we will see you all again next year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AG', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Gammon