

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School Donnybrook



## 2022 Principal's Report

Well, what a year 2022 has been. Leading up to the commencement of school, things were looking strong. To complement our existing staff, we had a number of new teachers commencing; some willing, able and ready to share their knowledge gained over many years in education and some just starting out, energetic and ready to tackle their new role. We also had a new leadership team who started the year learning about high performing teams and what it takes to become one. Things were looking positive.

However, COVID reared its head early and government restrictions dampened our start to the year. We had to cancel some events, modify others and again prepare for the possibility of online learning. From an administrative point of view, the year became burdened with changing directives, endless online briefings and updates, constant parent communication, vaccination spread sheets and online processes for the reporting of COVID-19. From there it became about contact tracing and the administering of official health department isolation directives, as well as dealing with large student and staff absences making continuity of learning and practice across the whole school very tricky. When I reflect on this time, I am filled with pride at how flexible and adaptable our staff were, and how they continued to provide for our students and each other despite the challenges and sometimes personal battles that they were facing. At some stage throughout the year, everyone had their turn at the bottom, but in true testament to the staff culture we have built at St Mary's, there was always someone there willing to say. "I've got you" or "I've got this." I would like to offer our staff my sincerest appreciation for their efforts throughout the year.

From a strategic point of view, the school has continued to improve in line with our strategic direction. The building and painting program was completed for the commencement of the year and will now be maintained over the next six years. We have two new playgrounds being developed over the December/January holidays which should be completed in time for the students return in 2023. I would like to extend my appreciation to the School Advisory Council who have been instrumental in getting these initiatives off the ground. I would also like to extend my appreciation to our P&F, Donnybrook Amcal Life Clinic, Donnybrook Chamber of Commerce, Donnybrook Community Bank and the number of anonymous donors whose financial support have contributed to the playground development which will benefit our students for many years to come.

At the beginning of Term 2, we completed a school climate survey. The climate survey sought feedback from parents, students and staff regarding school operations, teaching and learning, and culture and wellbeing. Overall, the results were very positive. Most notably for our parents was that we provide a welcoming school environment. For our students, it was their connectedness to school and low social harm. For our staff it was job satisfaction. Our biggest areas for improvement included parent engagement and feedback on academic performance. Both of these could be expected given the challenges we have faced this year, however, we will continue to build upon them in 2023.

This year we have focussed on developing our culture within the school and have tried to bring to life the eight Mercy values (forgiveness, courage, respect, compassion, service, justice, excellence, and

determination) in everything we do. We have implemented the Making Jesus Real framework and many great initiatives, including Random Acts of Kindness Week, student leadership development and many social justice opportunities. Our Mercy values have influenced everything we do at St Mary's from our Student Code of Conduct, to our behaviour management plan, to our MJR awards and rewards system. Our students understand what is expected of them and I am continually in awe of their willingness to accept and care for others in the school. We really do have some great students at St Mary's.

Early on this year, we were fortunate enough to secure a place in a cohort of 30 schools implementing the RULER approach to social and emotional learning. RULER is an acronym which stands for Recognise, Understand, Label, Express and Regulate our emotions. It is a framework with useful tools that will allow us to support our students in developing their emotions literacy and self-awareness. Emotions drive our learning, decision-making, creativity, relationships, and health so it is important that we support our students in developing the skills and strategies that are going to help them to become more emotionally aware and able to enact their best selves when dealing with challenging or problematic situations. Our staff have been developing their understanding of the RULER approach this year and are looking forward to implementing it with our students next year.

This year, our senior leadership team including Mr Luke Skehan, Mrs Jo Wright and myself have been working with a leadership consultant from Catholic Education hoping to position ourselves as a high performing team, who complement each other's strengths and areas for growth, who are wise in our decision making and available to support our staff and students, and who inspire hope and positivity around our school. Recently, we completed a feedback process where our staff were able to offer their thoughts on our leadership across a number of measures. We were the first senior leadership team in our system (Catholic Education) to embark on this journey, and the only ones in our system who have sought feedback as part of commitment to growth and development as a team. This process itself was very affirming and has provided us the opportunity to reset our goals and refocus on the future needs of our staff and school.

This year we have had 20 students move through our sacramental programs (Confirmation 7, First Holy Communion 5, Reconciliation 8). The school continues to be a beacon of hope for our parish, and I would like to offer my gratitude to Fr Joseph for his support and guidance throughout the year. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Mrs Jo Wright, Mr Luke Skehan and Mrs Eileen Thomson for their contributions in coordinating the sacramental programs this year.

Throughout the year, we have continued to provide our students with many opportunities to compete and develop their skills across many physical activities and sports, including involvement in community sporting clinics and carnivals such as the SW Cross Country Championships and the Slam Basketball Carnival. We also hosted our first ever Swimming Carnival and won the 2022 Interschool Athletics Carnival. Thank you to Mrs Pettersen for her efforts in coordinating the carnivals and clinics this year.

In Term 3, our Year 3 and 5 students sat NAPLAN. NAPLAN is a measure of students reading, writing and mathematics ability. Whilst we did see some improvements in our class averages across most assessments, we agree there is still much work to be done. Our school data including DIBELS, PAT testing, Easy Mark and various screening tools suggests that our students are growing and learning, and that our alignment to the Science of Reading approach (which includes evidence-based approaches to teaching, resourcing, assessment and intervention) are making a difference.

Our staff have continued in their knowledge and understanding of Talk for Writing. This year we have worked with Dyslexia Speld Foundation (DSF) to create both unified whole school planning documents and whole school unit planners. Writing club and class walk through's have allowed for the sharing of practice and the development of common approaches. This will be an area of continued development in 2023.

We have also looked closely at our pedagogical approach to the teaching of Mathematics and are revising our practice for 2023, which will include transitioning from Prime Maths to iMaths. Prime Maths is an explicit program that has served a purpose at St Mary's for many years now, however, we believe it has become too rigid for continued student improvement. The iMaths program will still allow for the explicit teaching of new concepts, but also has an online component that students can access, is better aligned to the Western Australian Curriculum, has greater opportunities for extension and support, and has inquiry style activities that allow students to be creative, to problem solve and to use their skills being developed in differing scenarios. The teaching and learning team at Catholic Education is going to support us in this transition, as well as the writing of a Mathematics position statement.

Next year, we will also be offering a new STEM program for our students in Years 1-6. STEM is an approach to learning and development that integrates the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Through STEM, students develop key skills including problem solving, creativity, critical analysis, teamwork, independent thinking, initiative, communication and digital literacy. More information will come of this new initiative in 2023.

Unfortunately, this year, we say goodbye to Mrs Emma Reynolds who is leaving her HASS position to spend greater time with her family, and in their family business. We also say goodbye to Mrs Nicola Cross who has been on maternity leave this year and fulfilling a contract at a school closer to her home next year. I thank both Emma and Nicola for their contributions to our school over a number of years.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to our School Advisory Council for their advice and support this year, and to the Parents and Friends committee for their efforts in friend and fund raising. A special mention must also be given to Tara Nierzaba for her efforts with Meal Deals and to Brenda Aisbett for organising Book Club for our students.

Also, last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank our staff. Thank you for continually showing up each and every day, putting our students first and working hard to create a Christ centred and child focussed learning environment. Thank you to my leadership and administration team including Mr Luke Skehan, Mrs Jo Wright and Mrs Katja Humphries who have worked tirelessly throughout the year to ensure school operations are in order and that we are continually striving to make St Mary's the best it can be for our students.

Next year we have increased enrolment numbers which is exciting. This may be partly due to our involvement in Catholic Education's Low Fees Initiative, but also because our staff have a shared vision and understanding for our students which has been widely accepted and appreciated by our community.

At St Mary's we aim to graduate confident, compassionate and capable members of society. There will be ups and downs along the journey, but we believe we have the people and processes in place to support our students in becoming the next leaders of society who are prepared to go out into the work and lead with their head, their heart and their hands.

Thank you all for your support this year, and I wish you all a safe and enjoyable Christmas break with your family and friends.

Thank you

Andrew Gammon