

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School Donnybrook



## 2023 Principal's Report

*St Mary's Catholic Primary School Donnybrook is committed to empowering our school community to become compassionate, confident and capable individuals. Our inspiration and strength to achieve this, comes from our mutual support and the sharing of our faith in Jesus Christ.*

*"Let's bring the joy in 2023!"*

Catholic Identity	Education	Community	Stewardship
Inspiring Christ-centred Leaders	Catholic Schools of Excellence	Catholic Pastoral Communities	Accessible, Affordable and Sustainable System of Schools

At St Mary's, 2023 has been a productive year with all of the restrictions placed on schools over the last two years becoming non-existent. We still faced our challenges regarding students and staff illnesses, but it was great to be building back towards what could be phrased as the "new normal." Whilst the pandemic may have been considered over it became concerning talking to families and learning of their struggles as they worked towards recovering from the trauma of the previous two years, the rising costs of living (including interest rates and rental prices), and in many instances even the prospect of securing a home for their families. As a staff, we decided early on that we needed to be a place of hope for our students and to "bring the joy" each and every day.

### Catholic Identity

This year we have had 26 students move through our sacramental programs (Confirmation 10, First Holy Communion 8, 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, Mrs Eileen Thomson, Mrs Ellen Pettersen and Mrs Annie Hutton for their contributions in coordinating the sacramental programs this year.



We have continued to develop a culture that recognises the "Spirit of Jesus" alive in the world, and acknowledge the efforts of those who think, speak and act just like Jesus. The Making Jesus Real (MJR) program has continued to be the vehicle in which we support our students in understanding these concepts and way of being in the world. The eight Mercy values (forgiveness, courage, respect, compassion, service, justice, excellence, and determination) are alive in the school and complement the MJR program.

At the end of the year, and as we prepare for 2024, our staff will be working with Catholic Education's Faith Formation team to better understand Pope Francis' vision for accompaniment and how journeying alongside each other spiritually supports us in our own personal growth and the collective growth of the group, which ensures we are mentally and spiritually able to support the needs of our students and their families.

## Education



Mathematics has been an area of focus this year and as a staff we have worked closely with a number of numeracy consultants to better understand the mathematics needs of our students in today's world, and to enhance our ability to meet their needs. This year we have worked towards completing a Numeracy Position Statement which identifies the key features and expectations of programming for Mathematics at St Mary's. This document provides staff with guidance and identifies a range of teaching strategies that support students in the mathematics learning. The decision was also made to move away from Prime Mathematics and adopt

iMaths as an instructional program, as it gives students opportunity for both explicit learning as well as investigations and problem solving. Next year, there are a number of changes to the Australian Curriculum, and these will be reflected in the revised iMaths program known as "Maths Trek."

It has been great to see our staff continue to develop their skills in delivering comprehensive literacy programs using their knowledge of Talk for Writing, Letters and Sounds, and Soundwaves. It has also been pleasing to see how the study we completed in 2021 in evidence-based approaches to reading instructions have continued to influence our teaching, assessment practices and intervention programs.

This year, we commenced a new STEM program for our students in Years 1-6 led by Mr Skehan. STEM is an approach to learning 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. This program has been a favourite of many of our students and they have enjoyed the hands on and investigative approach to learning.

This year, we have also provided our academically high achieving students the opportunity to participate in an extension program known as the Bebras Challenge. The program promotes problem solving skills and computational thinking. Student participation in this program was based on student performance across a number of standardised assessments as well as class performance. The students engaged in small group preparation sessions and competed at the end of Term 3. Collectively we had many great results including two students who finished in the top 5% of the state.



Again, we have continued to provide our students with many opportunities to compete and develop their skills across many physical activities and sports. This year our students have participated in many sporting clinics, two sport periods per week and had the opportunity to compete in Cricket, Swimming, Basketball, Winter sports, Cross Country and Athletics.

This year we have also further developed our Arts program to include a re-envisioned music component which has included the teaching of guitar. I must say a huge thank you to the P&F who generously supported the program in purchasing 26 Loog guitars, and to Mr Skehan whose passion in this area has really inspired a love of music in the students. We are very excited to be developing this area further in 2024.

Also this year, we commenced instruction in the RULER approach to the teaching of 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. We held two parent workshops throughout the year, both of which were the most engaging parent workshops I have ever been involved in.

## Community

As a community, we had the opportunity to come together early on for the P&F Sundowner and official opening of our new playgrounds. During the January school holidays, two playground areas were completed in both our Early Years Centre and on the lower oval. This development has brought much joy to students and the school community, and I would again like to thank those that supported, including Amcal Life Clinic Donnybrook, Paradise Beef, Bendigo Community Bank Donnybrook, the Chamber of Commerce, and our School Advisory Council and Parents and Friends Committee.



At the beginning of Term Two, our staff came together to reconnect, reset and continue to build the relationships we have developed over many years together. This took the form of prayer, reflection, goal setting and a fun afternoon of lawn bowls dressed in our favourite Op Shop attire. A great day was had by all and this set the scene for a productive start to the term.

Supporting our staff to continue developing the skills, strategies and attitudes towards managing their mental health continued to be a focus throughout the year. At the beginning of Term Three, our staff (along with 120 other CEWA teachers and consultants across the Southwest) attended a workshop presented by Phil Britten. Phil is a Bali Bombing survivor who now uses his story to inspire people internationally to make positive changes in their lives. His engaging and moving presentation challenged us all to think differently about our lives and set the scene for a very positive term; a term which is usually very wet, cold, long and at times challenging.

Additional to this, we have had many other occasions throughout the year where our staff, families and community have come together to celebrate our school, including Mother's Day and Father's Day, the school Disco, Book reading night and of course the Pingo night which our P&F hosted at the football clubrooms. A massive thank you must go to Alison Dowey for her efforts in organising the night.



## Stewardship

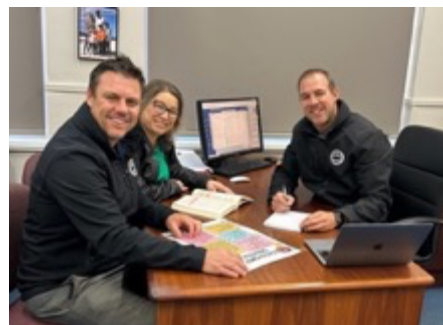
At the end of Term One our school participated in a Quality Catholic Education School Review and Principal Review with external CEWA auditors. This process was extremely positive and affirming of the changes and efforts we have made over the last three years. Most notably, our school has been identified as a child-focused community which considers the needs of our students as a priority, and that our behaviour



management processes are reflective of Catholic understandings, student wellbeing and restorative practices. This process also revealed to us that our staff believe in our vision for the school and are hopeful for the future. The process also highlighted areas of growth and opportunity both for me as an individual and for us a school.

At the beginning of Term Two our school participated in our annual Climate Survey. I am again pleased with the results of this survey which reflected the beliefs of parents, staff and students. For our parents, they acknowledged that we are a welcoming school with supportive staff. Our greatest area for growth was assessment and feedback. For our students, they acknowledged that teacher support, expectations, rule clarity and moral identity were highest, with our greatest opportunity for growth being resilience and wellbeing. For our staff, they acknowledged job satisfaction and school mission as being highest with our greatest opportunity for growth being participating in decision making, parent/caregiver involvement and encouraging improvement of practice.

This year, our senior leadership team including Mr Luke Skehan, Mrs Jo Wright and I culminated two years working with leadership consultants from Catholic Education in an effort to continually grow as a high performing team. In October, we again completed a feedback process with our staff which has supported us in better understanding our individual and collective leadership styles, as well as areas of strength and opportunities for growth. This process was extremely affirming of the efforts we have gone to and the work we have completed as a team this year. I offer my sincere appreciation to both Mrs Wright and Mr Skehan for the way they go about their roles, and the effort they go to in driving positive change for our school. In 2024, we will look towards a different model for leadership development which will include both individual coaching and team collaboration. Next year, we welcome Miss Chelsea Moore into our leadership team. Chelsea has been appointed as a leader of Health and Wellbeing and will be working alongside us to drive strategic direction and wellbeing initiatives in the school. Congratulations Chelsea!



This year, we also surveyed staff, students and parents in an effort to better understand the needs and expectations of our community in regard to Information and Communication Technology within our school. The results of these surveys have supported the school in writing an ICT User Agreement which will be released to students and parents next year, in time for the arrival of our new devices. These new devices are being purchased through a leasing program to ensure our staff and students are able to keep up with advancements in both technology and education.



This year we have also engaged with Catholic education in creating a marketing plan for the school. This plan has supported us in improving our social media presence across differing platforms as well as working with external agencies in the publishing of different media including photos and videos.

Strategically, next year we will continue our focus on Mathematics and the implementation of RULER. Our staff will complete training in Berry Street which is a practical, trauma aware and positive approach to teaching, that enables teachers to increase engagement with students with complex, unmet learning needs and successfully improve all students' self-regulation, growth and academic achievement. Berry Street will complement what we are doing in the RULER space whilst supporting our teachers in developing the skills and strategies to support all our students with their different learning needs.

This year, we say goodbye to Mrs Eileen Thomson, Mrs Annie Hutton and Mrs Ellen Pettersen (who may return in 2025).

Eileen commenced at St Mary's in 2011. In that time, she has taught students from Years 3-5. She has many fond memories including supporting students in their reading, passion projects and the school's 100 year celebrations. But her most notable memory was when we had a skateboard group visit the school and the students encouraged her to have a go. She did manage to stay on the skateboard, with the help of two very brave Year 5 students.

Ellen commenced at St Mary's in 2013. She has worked with students from Years 5-7 and held specialist roles in Science, Technologies and Physical Education. Her fondest memory of St Mary's has been the sport carnivals. She has loved watching the students cheer on their friends and surprise themselves with their performances. She has taken joy from watching them grow in confidence and ability, and relished in their smiles as they have received their ribbons and looked for their parents in celebration.

Annie commenced at St Mary's in 2014 and since then has worked across all year levels from Kindy to Year 5. Her fondest memories have been watching the students go from being the cutest in the school to being the coolest (or so they think). For Annie it has been an absolute privilege to teach at St Mary's for so long and to be part of such a beautiful community.

I thank Eileen, Annie, and Ellen for their contributions to our school over the years and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Whilst we say goodbye to some, we also welcome others. Next year, Mrs Lizzy Grubisa, Mrs Shondelle Watts and Mr Mark Busher will join our team in a fulltime capacity. I am confident that with their work ethic, attitude towards learning, willingness to care for our students and communicate with parents, and their new energy and ideas, that we will have another productive year at St Mary's in 2024.

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. Thank you to our staff for continually showing up each and every day, putting our students first and working hard to create Christ centred and child focussed learning environments. 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.

Lastly, 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 world 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.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Gammon  
Principal

