

St Mary's Primary School – Chairman's Report  
Annual General Meeting  
8 April 2008

It is with pleasure that I present the 2007-2008 Annual General Meeting Chairman's Report for St Mary's School Board.

Once again we have had busy and successful year at St Mary's. The Board has discussed and considered many things and, as usual, have worked successfully as a team to support the staff at St Mary's to deliver a high standard of education in a caring, community setting.

After the excitement and disruption of the building projects of the previous year, it was hoped that this year would be a more settled consolidating year. Of course, as always, just when you think things are going to slow down, they speed up.

Our canteen received a much-needed refurbishment. We now have an excellent facility, which is far more suited to a school of our size. The canteen staff are to be commended for managing as well as they did for so long, and also handling the challenges of working out of the Multipurpose Room for a slightly longer time than was previously expected.

The school continues to apply for grants to assist us to maintain and upgrade all aspects of the school environment. We hope to see the installation of rainwater tanks in the near future and are planning the upgrade of the side car park and drive way.

While on the subject of both water and dust, I acknowledge the challenges facing our school as a result of the ongoing dry conditions in our region. Both emotional and financial burdens are beginning to show themselves in our school community. This will continue to be an issue for our school in the future and I would like to acknowledge the excellent work done by Maree McLean who continues to successfully manage the challenges of such a large and diverse school in an increasingly difficult economic environment. Maree's commitment to ensuring that our school is in the best financial position possible cannot be underestimated when celebrating the high education standards for which St Mary's is known.

The school Fair returned to its previous identity as the St Mary's MacKillop School Fair. Once again this day was both a social and fundraising highlight. It is amazing to look around at all the various stalls and activities at the Fair and consider the amount of hours put into making it a success. Both of our school communities deserve to be congratulated.

In this, and in many other ways, the St Mary's Parents & Friends continue to support the school financially and practically. A major focus of the P&F this year was the Uniform Shop. The P&F are to be congratulated firstly on their vision in setting up this venture, and also on the hard work and commitment in the establishment and running of the shop. Their continued support will allow the shop to grow and develop further.

With the establishment of Catholic Education Swan Hill (CESH), St Mary's and MacKillop continue to forge stronger links. The two schools have discussed over a long period of time how best to structure fees and transition programs. CESH will look to develop a P- 12 model of cooperation in areas such as curriculum, staff professional development and uniforms for families. The St Mary's Board has always been open to discussion in this area and will continue to support this concept.

Of course the major challenge last year for the school, the Board and myself personally, was the resignation of Craig and the subsequent appointment of Paul Bissinella as Principal. While change is always difficult and the responsibility of finding a new leader for our school was almost overwhelming, I feel that it is essential to recognise the support given to myself, the other members of the selection panel and the school in general by the Catholic Education Office through Chris Robarts. His knowledge, experience and support assisted and empowered us in making the decision to appoint Paul Bissinella. We are very pleased to have Paul as our Principal and while he is still settling in after a very short first term, he has taken to the role extremely well and has already shown himself to be a most capable leader.

Over the year I have been fortunate to be present at many of the liturgies and masses led by Fr Peter and I believe that we are fortunate to have his presence in the life of the school. His support and leadership provides a focal point for the school's commitment to providing a meaningful Catholic education to our students.

Mention must also be made of the strong commitment to providing pastoral care to all staff, students and families of St Mary's. This was most evident in the school's handling of Vicky Merritt's sudden illness late last year. This incident was managed with grace and compassion by the staff, who were themselves shocked and upset. All care was taken to ensure that communications channels were open and support networks were in place.

So although the challenges have been many, I would like to acknowledge the leadership of Craig, Ginny and Paul over the preceding year. Not only have we had a change in principals but we also bade farewell to some long standing staff members, either on a permanent or temporary basis, including Kate Quin, Vicky Merritt and Jo Balsarini. It is a credit to all three that the transition from Craig to Paul has been so smooth.

I would also like to thank all members of the Board for their enthusiasm, commitment and support and congratulate them on their team work and forward thinking.

Thank you

Gabrielle Schammer  
Chair

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