



Annual General Meeting

April 2008

Principal's Report

It is with pleasure that I present my first annual report as Principal of St. Mary's Primary School, Swan Hill. I have enjoyed immensely my first term at St. Mary's and look forward to my family and I having a long and rewarding association with the school. I wish to acknowledge the wonderful support and guidance that I have received from both Fr. Peter, Craig, Gabrielle, Ginny and Maree since my appointment. I wish to thank Craig for passing on to me a great school with wonderful foundations and I hope that I can carry on the fine work and traditions that he has started.

Our school is a large school that continues to offer challenge and excitement for our students. There is a confidence and vitality that is reflected in the many programs and new initiatives that operate in our school. Our staff is a strong team and we are all working to provide our students with the best education available to them.

At the beginning of this school year we welcomed six new teachers to St. Mary's, four of whom were graduate teachers. Mark Bonney, Rachel O'Sullivan, Xavier Kennedy, Lauren Geary, Teagan Bice and Emma Giddings have all impressed with their dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to their students.

In addition to our new teachers we have also employed several new staff in supporting roles. Melita Sartori is working in the middle school as a teacher's aide, Bobby Wise has been employed as a Koorie Liaison Officer to support our Koorie families across the school and Janelle Hogan is working as part of the School Administration Team to co-ordinate the School Uniform Shop. Janine Dow, Sonia Kelly and Leanne Ward continue work at school one day a week to release our class teacher's and co-ordinator's to enable them to plan and evaluate class programs. With Glenda Ritchie away on extended sick leave we are fortunate to have Trudy Travaglia step up into the Canteen co-ordinator's position, ably supported by Deanne Verbeek.

Administration

Recently we were audited and I have just signed off on the finished documentation. I continue to be impressed with not only Maree's professionalism but the cohesiveness of the office staff of whom she manages. We are currently finalising the work to be completed as part of our successful application for a 'Water Grant' and as part of a successful Capital Grant application we are near to completion of plans for the redevelopment of our school carpark.

We began the school year with 520 students enrolled. This number is 15 down on the 2007 enrolment and can be partly attributed to our low numbers in Year 5 where we have only two classes. We anticipate that when we graduate the current Year 5 cohort that school enrolment will again be up around the 540 number. Currently our enrolment is 521 students.

We continue to enrol good numbers of prep students and will soon embark on our Prep Enrolment Program for 2009. We continue to be a three form entry school except at Year 3 and 4 where we have 7 multi-age classes. At the end of the last academic year a decision was made to go with straight grade levels at Prep, Year 1, Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6 and to date the arrangement is working very well.

The Parents and Friends Committee continue to be a great support for the school and this was evident at the recent Grandparent's Evening, again extremely well supported. I extend many thanks to Lou Angus, Mark Dacey and their reliable group of workers for all of their efforts. It is with great pleasure that I can inform you that through the enormous work of the P & F committee over the past 12 months, that they have raised over \$26,500 for use towards improving the learning outcomes for our children. I would also like to acknowledge Ginny for all her behind the scenes work liaising with the P & F and for being the Principal's representative on the committee.

Curriculum

Continuous ongoing improvement in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy remain a focus for our school and our strategic plans. We are committed to attributing more funding to aid and support these programs in the school and hopefully our student results will reflect this. Mandy Hinton and Chris Mitchell continue in their respective roles as non-class based Literacy and Numeracy co-ordinators and both bring to the positions a wealth of experience and expertise. Currently Mandy is undertaking a course in SELL (Supporting Early Literacy Learning) and Chris is providing a series of workshops for staff on improving their mathematical understanding and working with VELs. We are fortunate to have Michael Ymer working with us this year and one of our closure days will be run by him and Chris. Michael worked closely with the education department when developing the progression points in Numeracy. Deanne Dacey and Wes Harrison are also training in EMU (Early Mathematics Understanding) at the Catholic Education Offices in Ballarat. Andrea Stutley also completed this training last year and it is our hope that these teachers will form the core of a Mathematics Team.

This year our reporting schedule requires us to comment on nearly all the VELs domains and thus the reports continue to evolve and become more extensive. Again the staff have put a great deal of effort into not only writing the academic reports but intimately knowing the capabilities and capacity of each of their students and they are to be commended for this.

This year we are fortunate to be led by Mark Gibson of the Catholic Education Office and Ginny in a series of staff professional development workshops on PoLT (Principles of Teaching and Learning). PoLT requires the teachers to evaluate and reflect on their teaching practice against a standard of teaching while also establishing clear whole school expectation of what we believe constitutes good learning and teaching practice. We are all looking forward to these workshops to learn from those around us.

Grounds and Maintenance

Towards the end of last year Doug Hazlett was recruited to take over the role of Groundsman and Maintenance from 'Darbs' who had served so well at St. Mary's for such a long period of time. Doug has taken over the role and flourished and has his hands full ensuring our lovely grass doesn't get too long – a nice position to be in! The aesthetics of our school grounds continue to be a showpiece and a great selling point for our school. We hope that we can continue to give the grounds sufficient water to keep them at this attractive level. Recently we replaced the seating area under the shade sails, removing the wooden sleepers and replacing them with coloured cement. The carpark and water tank projects are also currently in the forefront of our minds when considering future developments of our school grounds.

Several people commented that it was nice to start the school year this year without the inconvenience of major building projects being carried out.

Pastoral

We continue to receive great support from Fr. Peter and Sr. Kathleen both in their dealings with the children and the class masses and other liturgical events that they help celebrate. We hope to continue the development of St. Mary's along the path envisioned by the Sisters of St. Joseph when the school first began. We are committed to continuing the growth and development of our school, a school where the Catholic faith is nurtured and our students are guided by the teachings of Jesus through the gospels. We will continue to foster in the children, an appreciation that all life is precious, their unique place in the world and the unconditional love of God who makes all things possible.

I would like to thank Gabrielle, Geoff and Evan for their work on the School Board over the years and to the other Board for their excellent work during the year. I have appreciated their enthusiastic support and the sound guidance they have provided for our school.

St. Mary's Primary School is proceeding on sound foundations. We are achieving our goals and we are providing our students with a fine education. I look forward to future challenges and the further development of our excellent school.

Paul Bissinella