

Matthew Gibney Catholic Primary School

Annual Community Meeting 2017 Principal's Report

I would like to thank you all for being here this evening. It is my task to present to you the annual school report for 2017.

In a speech to Principals in 2016, the Archbishop of Perth described Catholic Education as the jewel in the crown of the Catholic Church in Australia. He was, in effect, explaining to us how it is the schools that, in this day and age, are the ones that are the most active in spreading the message of Jesus to their community.

It is an interesting time for the Catholic Church and a challenging time to work in Catholic Education. The Royal Commission into clergy abuse of children highlighted a shocking disease that had pervaded our Church. The findings that will be released early next year will bring the actions of our Church hierarchy into even greater focus and, in turn, highlight the weaknesses that the Church failed to act upon. The implementation of child protection programmes and Codes of Conduct, although a positive inclusion, will be seen by many as being too little, too late in the wider community.

The census results that were released this year made clear that formalised religion is on the decline in this country. The number of people identifying themselves as Catholic dropped to its lowest level since the census has been taken. 30% of the population now identify themselves as no religion, posing the question of how does the Catholic Church and, by extension, the Catholic school remain relevant in these changing times. Once upon a time, the wisdom of Church leaders was taken into account when decisions were being made. Now, those in authority actively discourage using our leaders as a source of wisdom and information.

When Gonski 2 was announced by the Federal Government this year, we received the first indication that Catholic Education across the country was not going to be given the fair treatment that it had in the past. All Catholic schools collectively have taken a hit in their funding and the future of this is still unknown. Catholic schools will now, more than ever, have to live by its motto of doing more with less.

In September of this year I was privileged to be chosen to attend the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium and be involved in an intensive study course that explored Catholic Identity. Part of the course was the opportunity to participate in field visits that took us to primary and secondary schools. It was a stark and confronting indication of what may happen if we don't value what we have. These schools were Catholic in name only. There was no visible sign that the schools were Catholic in any way or form except they taught Religion as a subject for 2 hours per week. There were no crucifixes, no prayer focuses, no prayer reflections, no class liturgies, no school Masses, no social outreach. It reminded me of how much you don't appreciate something until it is gone. We all have, for many years, taken for granted that the Catholic school as we have known it will always be there moving into the future. I believe that, after my experiences in Belgium and talking to those who have been involved in Catholic Education in that country, unless we do really value what we have, that our Catholic schools as we know them today will be gone inside two generations.

Catholic schools are a special place. It is a community of believers who are joined together to learn and grow in the love of God. We teach our students that our Catholic faith is not just a

subject to learn in the classroom but an action that needs to be lived out. Our faith is love in action. Our Minnie Vinnies programmes, opened up to our Year 5 and 6 children, lead our school community in reaching out to those in need. The students throughout the whole school and their families have been involved in food drives and blanket drives to assist those who are far less fortunate than many of us are. I would like to thank the Minnie Vinnies for their work and to our school community for their generosity. Through this generosity, many will be a little better off than otherwise they would be.

Our school continues to work hard to maintain a positive relationship with our Parish. Our Sacramental programmes continue to be shared between the school and the Parish. This year the Parent/Child workshops were held here at our school. Students were prepared for Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation. They also attended a retreat where they had the opportunity to reflect on the difference receiving these Sacraments could make in their lives. I would like to acknowledge the work of each of the teachers who have prepared the students to receive these Sacraments.

The school has a very well developed liturgical life. Upon entering our school's administration building brings the Church's Liturgical season into focus. Thank you to Mrs Keddie for ensuring that we are always reminded of which season we are in during the year. Each class celebrates Liturgies of the Word and class Masses. The whole school gathers to celebrate at various times during the year. Sometimes these celebrations take place at the school and sometimes the students travel to the Church to celebrate. I would like to acknowledge the work of Mrs Keddie, our Religious Education Coordinator. I would also like to thank Fr Francis and Deacon Trevor for their spiritual guidance throughout the year and for leading us in our Liturgies. We look forward to this positive relationship continuing in 2018.

Our academic focus for 2017 has been focused on the teaching of literacy, particularly reading and spelling. A whole school approach has now been fully implemented in the teaching of reading and spelling and we are beginning to see consistent improvement across all grades. When we have analysed the data that we collect, we know that many of our students are achieving positive growth, many beyond what we would expect. Our NAPLAN results across all of the assessed learning areas show that our students are achieving mostly above benchmark. When we are compared regionally to other schools in the area, we are achieving above all of them. The number of at risk students are decreasing and those students that require assistance are being targeted earlier. Students who are higher achievers are being challenged to develop their potential. We give students the opportunity to succeed with our Music and Drama programme and our Physical Education programme. Students are being exposed to the Italian language. The Western Australian Curriculum has mandated that students from Years 3-6 are to learn a language other than English and we are well ahead of this benchmark. We are assisting students develop their skills in the ever changing world of digital technologies. All these point to the very successful teaching and learning programme that we have implemented and the high professionalism and dedication of all our staff. We know that what we are doing works. However, this doesn't mean that we can't assist our students from doing even better. Next year our focus will be on improving the standards of grammar and punctuation and of writing. I would like to thank all of our staff for doing what they do and for doing it so well. We are extremely lucky to have people work with our children who only want the best for them. I thank them sincerely for their hard work and wish them well when the holidays finally arrive.

Next year will see the completion of our strategic plan. The plan was launched at the beginning of the 2016 school year. Many of the items that are on the plan have been achieved. Some will be ongoing and will continue into our next strategic plan. Next year we will invite Jeff Thorne to

consult with us, as he did in 2015, and we will draw on all aspects of our community to produce our new plan which we will launch at this meeting in 2018.

I would like to thank our School Board for the great work they do in assisting with the Financial and Capital management of our school. Their generosity is appreciated and their hard work and diligence ensure that our school is well resourced and well maintained. Our treasurer has already outlined the capital expenditure that has taken place this year. All of this helps to have a school that is attractive for the students, well-resourced for the staff and a good place to be.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members of the board who will be finishing their service at the end of the year. Thank you to Angelina Hales, Michelle O'Boyle and Paul Adams. Each have left their own mark on the school and we thank them for their service. As directed by the School Board Constitution, our current board meets the requirements for membership so there is no need for elections this year.

I would like to thank the P&F for their support of our school. Under the presidency of Mike Feltham, they have continued to meet their benchmarks of building community and raising money for resources in our school. Each term they have organised a community and a fund raising event and all have been successful in achieving its aims. Thank you to all who so willingly give up their time to serve on the P&F, either as executive members or class representatives, and help to make our school a better place. I would like to thank Mike Feltham and Mike Belletty who will be leaving the P&F Executive at the end of this year. Each has made a fantastic contribution to our school. Thank you to Michelle Steward in her role as secretary and Natasha Alleway as treasurer.

I would like to acknowledge the many volunteers who help out in so many ways throughout the year. This school is very much a community school and all who volunteer help to build this community. Thank you to all who assist in the canteen, change reading books, go on excursions, assist in classrooms and just put your hand up to help out wherever you can. Your assistance has not gone unnoticed nor is it not appreciated.

Thank you to Diane Scriven and Karen Keddie for their support, advice and expertise as part of the school's leadership team. Both ladies are extremely experienced educators who are invaluable to me and to this community. We are very lucky that you have chosen to work with us. I would also like to thank Sue St Jorre and Tania Kays for the work they do in the administrative area. Federal and state governments are making schools extremely complex places with an increasing amount of compliance being added to already complicated roles. I thank both of them for managing these complex times and making our jobs easier.

As a school, we will continue to strive for excellence, keeping firmly in mind that we are a Catholic school. As a staff, we are committed to doing everything we can to ensure that the students who have been entrusted to us achieve their potential and are also part of the wider Catholic community. We know that we don't always get it right, but we are committed to continue to do better. We will continue to work hard so that our school reflects the example of Jesus in everything we do and, at the same time, offer a high standard of education for every student who has been entrusted to us.

We look forward to a successful 2018

Mark Powell
Principal