

School Education Board Report 2014

Welcome to the 2014 Annual General Meeting of St. Mary's Parish Primary School Williamstown Advisory Board. Our Board is an Advisory body which exists to provide a conduit between parents and the school and to assist the Parish Priest and School Principal in an advisory capacity in all matters pertaining to the efficient management and development of Catholic education at the school. Although our board is not a decision making body, it does have capacity to influence outcomes as it provides for consideration being given to popular opinion or concerns based on parent viewpoints. Matters relating to staff employment and curriculum remain the responsibilities of the Parish Priest and Principal.

I would like to thank the members of this year's board and their commitment in working through this year's objectives and leading our working parties. Ms Leanne Dillon, Ms Christine Muecke, Ms Jackie Marcina, Ms Rose McVicar, Mr Joe Covelli, Mr Steven Sagona, Mr Ray Clarke (Retired) (Parent Representatives). The support and advice provided to Father Greg Trythall (Parish Priest) and Mr Jim Sheedy (School Principal) is truly appreciated and has made a positive impact on what has been achieved this year.

This year the Board embraced the working party committee structure to ensure with added resources we could achieve our targeted goals. It meant that the Board worked more closely with teachers, parents and the wider community to focus on achieving our desired outcomes more effectively. Achievements this year included, creating the plan and commenced strategy to ensure we can optimise our tax deductible Voluntary Building Fund in 2015, wrote and/or reformatted 12 school policies with most ratified using a standardised template approach (new policies will continue to be added to the school portal), success with Hobsons Bay Council with stages 1 and 2 of McLean reserve rectification works now complete, worked with Mr Sheedy to appoint the architects to commence the 1st stages of our master plan, made progress in making our school more sustainable, and improved the way we communicate through the SkoolBag App.

Outcomes from our Committees:

1. Voluntary Building Fund Committee

The "St Mary's Williamstown Parish School Building Fund" is endorsed by the Australian Tax Office as a registered deductible gift fund and donations from the school community, general public and local businesses are most welcome. All contributions made are fully tax deductible. The generous and widespread support of the fund will protect the integrity of our buildings and provide for a greater learning environment for current and future students.

The School Advisory Board established the Voluntary School Building Fund to raise additional capital for major building works. As the oldest, continuously operating Catholic school in Victoria, St Mary's has a rich and proud history of education on a site with buildings of heritage significance. Like many buildings and homes in Williamstown, our 1925 structure requires some major foundation works and refurbishment of the last 8 classrooms will ensure optimal learning environments for our children.

Going forward the Voluntary Building Fund Committee will concentrate on marketing the fund. All the Capital Works projects identified as being in need will now be managed by the Capital Works Committee.

The Voluntary Building Fund Committee is currently conducting a feasibility study and working on the Strategic Plan for determining the future funding needs for Capital projects which are in need.

As a result of this plan we will be launching a Capital Appeal program similar to that undertaken by the Parish prior to June 2015. The program will be voluntary but we are keen to ensure we can get a good participation rate. A committed pledge over a specified period of time will ensure we can maintain our school for our children and for future generations. Father Greg has committed to pledge \$100k in total to the school over the next 3 years from the parish. The generosity of many in the past and present has ensured we have the school we are so proud of today. All pledges will be tax deductible.

Many other schools do not offer such a program and impose a Capital Maintenance Levy which is not tax deductible to support the up-keep of their schools. The Advisory Board will work closely with the Parents and Friends Committee next year to support each other in developing fundraising activities which may be deductible. Thank you to the P&F Committee for their ongoing support.

2. Sustainability Working Group Committee

St Mary's has a commitment to introducing and developing sustainability into its core activities of teaching and operations. The Sustainability Committee, promotes and co-ordinate the development and implementation of sustainability initiatives across all areas of the school.

Jackie Marcina and Rose McVicar, along with other members of the Parent Sustainability Team continued to work towards the main objective of obtaining a 5 star rating for the ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic Sustainability Certification and to promote environmentally sustainable practices at the school.

Achievements this year include:

- The Parent Sustainability Team consists of 9 parents and Dominique Dybala as the teacher representative. The team meets every fortnight.
- Grade 6 students this year have also participated in the committees initiatives.
- Students Green Team remained active. They designed a survey to collect data around travel habits, which was feed into the review of the Travel Smart Policy. They also ran a 'slogan' competition within the school, to encourage/challenge the school community to change its behaviour in relation to sustainability.
- Developed new Travel Smart Policy – encouraging more children to walk, ride to school. A Travel Smart survey was undertaken to compare results from 4 years ago. Even though the government no longer supports the Travel Smart Program, St Mary's has elected to continue this important initiative.
- Obtained a \$10k grant for the school to be used in the area of sustainability. The grant was used to insulate and draught proof the Prep classrooms. Other options considered for the grant included investigating the idea of getting blinds in classrooms with north facing windows and replacing light globes to more energy efficient lighting. Solar panels to school building were also a consideration.
- Obtained the AussiVic 3 star status. This has accredited us from the "Transforming" to "Sustaining" level.
- The Committee had a stand at this year's fair and many families and visitors to our fair had fun mixing their own smoothies with the blend and mixer bicycles.

The main aim for 2015 will be to continue working on ResourceSmart AussiVic Sustainability Certification. With the base star rating soon to be established, next year St Mary's will look at new projects to be initiated, with the ultimate aim for St Mary's to achieve a 5 star rating.

3. Building & Maintenance Committee (McLean Reserve Refurbishment)

The Advisory Boards continued discussions with the Hobson's Bay Council has resulted in MacLean reserve having further funds allocated to its redevelopment in the Hobson's Bay Council budget.

Stage 2 of improving the reserve has now been completed. This stage saw the pathway along the school fence line from Parker to Cole St re-instated and the development of a nature play area between the school fence and pathway. The nature play area includes a sand play area, stepping and fallen logs, extra seating, hopscotch and planting.

The outcomes achieved in McLean Reserve must be attributed to past board members who have worked closely with council to achieve this favourable outcome which will benefit our school and the wider community. Thank you for your persistence which has seen a considerable improvement in the reserve for current and future students.

4. Capital Works Committee

The Capital Works committee was re-established this year to work closely with our engaged architects to implement the School Master Plan.

The scope of works which will be undertaken is dependent on how much we can raise. Father Greg has accepted the Board's recommendation for works totalling \$1.5 million to be planned on the contingent that funding is available.

The first stage to be undertaken is for a root barrier and associated works to be installed along the Cecil Street side of the school buildings. The estimated cost to complete these works is \$140,000.

Assuming funds are available other works which will be undertaken and overseen by the Committee include the:

- Underpinning of the 1925 school building.
- Refurbishment of 8 classrooms.

Works will commence in 2015 with the aim of all works to be completed prior to our 175th Anniversary celebrations in 2017.

A full project briefing to the school and wider parish community will be provided in May of next year.

5. IT/Communications Committee

St Mary's continued its commitment to move forward in this technologically changing world of ours.

Many families have embraced our new initiatives by reading the abridged newsletter online and downloading the Skoolbag App. Usage of the parent portal initially increased once some families overcame their logon issues. It has been noted though that most parents now only use the portal to view reports with a small number accessing the full version newsletter. As more parents upgrade to Smartphone's the Skoolbag App has become the most highly used tool to source school information.

A Communications Survey was also conducted and the results indicated:

- The Skoolbag App was very popular and by far the most commonly used tool by parents to receive information from the school.
- Parents were commonly unhappy about the difficulty in accessing the Parent Portal especially because it cannot be accessed from tablets or smart phones.
- Parents were generally confused and unhappy about why only the abridged newsletter was available on the Skoolbag App and website.
- Very few parents are accessing the Parent Portal on a regular basis. It is mostly being used to access reports.

Consideration was given to providing school reports via the portal only, and not providing a paper copy in the future. The school has determined that reports will continue to be printed. This is what parents want and the Catholic Education Office is developing a web based program that will encompass online reporting for all Catholic Primary Schools. This will render the parent portal programme obsolete in the future. The portal will be replaced with the parent communication and information centre which is ready to go live. This is a web based programme that is accessible from tablets and smart phones. It will be launched at the start of next year and offers enough security for parents to be able to access the full newsletter. Skoolbag App will also be supported and remain active.

Privacy and copyright implications are now covered off in our Privacy Policy which is in line with the new legislation.

An "Acceptable Use Policy for Parent Portal" has been written and ratified. It can be found on the school website and all users will be bound by this policy.

6. Policy Framework Committee

Our school reviews its policies in a cyclical process, and relies on Board input and discussion for this to occur. Board members Christine Muecke and Leanne Dillon have spent many hours prioritising the review of all our policies. The format of all our policies has been standardised. During 2014, twelve policies were either written or re-formatted. All have been reviewed and most ratified. Any new policies which are being written that are relevant to parents/carers are now available to be viewed on our school website.

Next year we aim to review and ratify another ten policies.

Other Issues addressed by the Advisory Board this year included:

School Uniform Review

The current school uniform was reviewed this year. The Advisory Board and parents in our school believed our uniform had too many options and that over the years new items continued to be added to the uniform but none removed. This created a blurred vision of what constituted the compulsory uniform.

A school survey was conducted to understand what our school community thought of our current uniform. The results indicated the uniform had too many choices and as a result our uniform did not present well.

Survey results indicated a consolidation of uniform was required. A phase in period would be required but the end result would be our school children will look smarter when wearing their uniform with pride. (Phase in period will not apply to preps of 2015. They will lead the school by wearing the consolidated uniform).

A consolidated uniform will ensure children abide to wear the correct uniform and have an appropriate uniform for each season. The consolidation in uniform will also ensure our supplier can commit to ensuring the quality of the uniform will improve.

A school uniform policy is being finalised and will be on the school website early in the New Year.

Committee Profiles

In 2015, we will continue to encourage the development and support of further working parties. We are currently drafting profiles for working committees. This will provide guidance to anyone who wishes to join a working party, the purpose and intended outcome of the working committee. Skill-sets will also be included ensuring those who wish to join can contribute in an area for which they have an interest and the relevant skill set. One of the new committees in 2015 will be the 175th Anniversary committee to start planning for this important event in 2017.

Action which has been taken to manage future funding and balance budgets

- School fee increases in line with recommended CEO increases next year.
- Promotion of St Mary's Williamstown Parish Voluntary School Building Fund
- Parish School Building Fund Committee establishing strategic plan
- Architect selected to work with Capital Committee to implement master plan.
- Investigating taking on a significant loan for capital works.

School Profile and Community Education

Achievements in this area include the following:

- After a successful quadrennial planning review in 2013, 2014 represented the second year of our new strategic plan. The Board reviewed the Annual action plan with the key emphasis this year being on intense maths, spelling and restorative justice.
- Therese Sheedy (a leading psychologist in restorative practices) hosted 2 parent sessions on Restorative Practices. These sessions gave parents an introduction to the concept and an understanding of the professional development being undertaken with teachers in this area. Therese spoke of how and why restorative is being taught and practiced in the classroom. The sessions were run in the interest of supporting parents increased knowledge and understanding to extend its application outside of the classroom and school playground environment. Restorative Practices will be an ongoing program in our school.
- Hosted a parent information evening on the topic "Gifted & Talented Children in the West". The evening was an opportunity to explore research and developments in the area of gifted education and how schools could cater for this in their curriculums.
- Reviewed the SRC Insight survey with the randomly selected participants. The anonymous survey is completed by staff, students and a random selection of parents. The use of the opinion data as a measure of the schools performance is used to determine where improvements can be made. The information gained from the survey is used to inform and direct plans for the school. Parents who undertook the survey this year were invited back to discuss the results. The constructive feedback from this session was documented. Due to the success of this process and the quality feedback, it has been decided that a parents evening for all future participants will be scheduled each year. Thank you to all those who participated. Your input is highly valued.

- Enrolment forecast – opted to stay with composite in 5/6 area. Class sizes and total school size at St Marys will remain constant for the next 4 years. Current structure ensures we maintain literacy, special needs and numeracy programs with our current resources.

Conclusion

As Chairman of the Board this year, it has been rewarding working with Mr Jim Sheedy, Father Greg and the Parent representatives.

I wish departing teachers Ms Kelly Noonan, Ms Anita Fewster and Ms Vanessa Simiele all the best on their new appointments and know all will be sadly missed for all the effort, enthusiasm, positiveness and achievements they have contributed to our school over the years. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Ms Brittany Rickman, Ms Rebecca Middleton and Ms Ellie Counihan who will be joining our teaching staff in 2015.

Welcome to the 22 new prep families and an additional 2 new families in other year levels to our school next year.

Thank you to all the departing families. Your support and generosity to the school over the years has been much appreciated. Even though your child's primary education at St Mary's has come to an end, I hope you and your child can cherish many happy memories. You are still part of our parish and always welcome.

Yours Sincerely,

Charles Attard
School Board Chair
St Mary's Parish Primary School Williamstown