



SCHOOL BOARD 2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Principal's Report

There is an old African proverb that says sometimes you need to stop, turn around and allow your soul to catch up. 2018 brought with it the promise of a new three-year strategic plan and an opportunity to look back and reflect on the previous one. Looking back on the work achieved from the 2015-2017 Strategic Plan was significant and very little was rolled over into the current one. The Annual Improvement Plan looks at the detail of how a Strategic Plan might be realised. It covers all manner of school life and incorporates the seven domains of the Living Learning Leading Framework as launched by Director McGorran earlier in the year.

The appointment of Alison Uren as Curriculum Coordinator is a direct response to the aforementioned framework. It is all well and good to aspire to have *Literate, Numerate and Effective Communicators* but in what ways can this be measured? Ali has slowly begun the process of collecting and analysing data from a range of sources to help track student progress and identify those who are not reaching benchmark standards. Part of her allocation of time - along with our Literacy Coordinator, teaching and support staff - is to work closely with students at risk. This is a long process of course, there is no quick fix, and the good work continues.

Over the course of the year, all teaching staff attended training around the Seven Steps Writing program. Seven Steps to Writing Success is a writing program that empowers teachers to inspire their students to rapidly improve their writing skills, and most importantly, learn to love writing! It creates engaging classrooms where students learn to love writing and become lifelong communicators. We think of the seven steps as the building blocks to great writing. Isolating writing skills into individual steps ensures students don't get 'bogged down' with writing the whole piece. Students gain confidence in each building block, and then they pull it all together to become creative and engaging writers. I was fortunate to be invited into the 6/7 classroom by Melissa Leach to personally see the dramatic change in students' attitude and aptitude when using the Seven Steps to respond to what conditions must have been liked during bombing raids in London in WWII. There was a confidence and boldness in the writing and the expressive language was highly

emotive. I look forward to seeing the Seven Steps effect throughout the school next year as the program unfolds.

As a cluster of Catholic Schools, all staff participated in the NESLI Staff Wellbeing Toolkit over the course of the year. Supported by Catholic Education Port Pirie, the Toolkit is designed to help schools create a professional climate which is conducive to the optimal health and wellbeing of all staff. The only program of its kind in Australia, the Staff Wellbeing Toolkit assists individuals to proactively manage their own wellbeing and provides strategies for professional communities to better understand and support each other. There were many modules to complete, each ably lead by Principal Consultant, Terissa Shepherd. I know that each staff member took away something which they could use or adapt to self-monitor their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their colleagues and friends. The Toolkit was also a significant contributor to the many hours of professional learning teachers are required to undertake each year.

A key domain of the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) for Catholic Schools in South Australia is *Enhancing Catholic Identity*. St Albert's was able to express this in a unique way by offering a spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Lands in October. In a press release leading up to the event, I wrote...Pilgrimage is an ancient tradition of many religions. It is something deeply personal, an opportunity to leave behind worldly possessions and "walk humbly with our God." The inner spirit drives the pilgrim, to set out on a journey of self-discovery and deepen one's relationship with God. It is quite apart from being a tourist in that way. An important aspect of the pilgrimage was to link specific passages of Scripture to the sites we visited. These passages would take on new meaning when placed in their historic, political and cultural context. It was an opportunity to 're-imagine' key moments of the New Testament. Scripture readings were selected specifically to match the personal characteristics or interests of the person reading it. This idea of having a focus on scripture was especially important for our group as we were unable to source a priest to accompany us. The result for us as a faith community, in my opinion, has been quite profound as reported in the media generally and through our own internal communication channels.

Parish masses have also taken on new meaning, and sometimes a life of their own, thanks to our Liturgy ensemble lead by Mrs Cash. Hosting the 11am Parish Mass twice per term has for many students, been the highlight of their faith experience. It would not be an unreasonable estimate to say attendance at these masses are almost triple what we might ordinarily expect. Granted there may be a blurring of the line between congregation and audience but I feel strongly about students being able to contribute to the Sunday liturgy in their own way. It is, after all, a church for

all and the voice of children is important to both be seen and heard if the next generation is to evangelise Her mission.

I am grateful to Brogan Whitelaw who assumed the mantle of leadership on many occasions during 2018. Brogan has also been attending leadership training courses in Adelaide which complemented his experience as Acting Principal while I was away. Succession planning in Catholic Education is fast becoming a critical issue as the current generation of Principals retire and the number of lead-teachers wanting to move into senior leadership decline. As a cluster of Catholic Schools in the Riverland, we are each very fortunate to have staff who are willing to respond to the call and for that, our respective boards are most grateful.

In the lead-up to last year's State Election, Catholic Education SA invested a tremendous amount of time and energy to generate a Political Strategy to rival most minor parties. It was a thoroughly impressive campaign which involved open communication and advocacy of principals, staff and parents. The net result was a favourable commitment to what we as a sector deemed to be reasonable and fair. Unfortunately the political party who promised so much was not elected. This news came as a bitter blow but we learned a lot about how to successfully campaign for better funding and a better deal for Catholic Education in South Australia. Political advocacy is now a strong feature of principalship, something relatively new for me and my colleagues. On behalf of our community, I wrote to local member Tim Whetstone to bring to his attention ongoing matters of concern. We are still seeking a commitment from the Marshall Government that non-government school students have fair access to school buses in regional areas. We are also seeking a commitment to increase state funding to 22% of the Schooling Resource Standard and the provision of capital funding to be commensurate with the Commonwealth Governments \$5.5m as South Australia is the only state or territory not to receive capital funding by its State Government. A new government triggers a new strategy and a new round of negotiations to secure the best deal for our children. The Marshall Government is on notice...we will prevail.

Our steady increase in enrolments has enabled many capital works and recurrent projects to be quoted and in some cases completed. The oval was due for significant upgrade but in the end refurbishment was the most affordable option and as it turns out, the most effective. Creative Pools and Landscaping did an amazing job in scarifying and applying the right amount of TLC to restore our humble oval. In doing this work, they also discovered the irrigation system itself was not functioning as it should, indeed it later failed as a result of a water pump issue. Despite these setbacks, the oval was prepared well enough to withstand the lack of water and subsequent mistreatment. It has bounced back well and I know Steve often pops in on the weekend to apply extra water if the rain water tanks are in good supply.

Other projects included the renovation of the old media room to a STEM laboratory and breakout space for upper primary, new data projectors for each classroom, heavy investment in classroom resources such as text books to support our literacy and numeracy programs, new seatbelts for the school bus, financially supporting staff to attend the Holy Lands and a new telephone system which included a handset for each classroom.

Marianne Rowe has stepped into the deep to volunteer her time to manage elements of our school library. She has trained herself to use the cataloguing system – which comes with a shared frustration that we have all experienced with computer technology – she has read to almost all of our students and conducted many complimentary art & craft activities. The library has never looked cleaner and is positively sparking! On behalf of the school board, I thank Marianne for giving new life to a facility which we love to use and are so very proud.

Our Marketing and Communication strategy in 2018 brought to conclusion a major investment in the school brand over the past 3 years. Highlights this year included the Year 7 Graduation Certificate, new School Prospectus, Stickers & Key Rings, electronic and print media Enrolment Advertisements, Signage (Front Office Administration Desk, Window Frosting, Administration Wall & Geraldton St), production of a handmade Ceremonial Banner, new Staff Name Badges and the Winter Jumper Embroidery. I could not be happier with the results and the way it connects to previous work on the school website, stationery, certificate range and our corporate identity within the Loxton community.

With growth in enrolments projected into the immediate future, we are able to continue with small projects as outlined in our Strategic and Annual Improvement Plans. The question and planning around our Year 7s transitioning to High School will be a major point of discussion for the incoming board. The State Government has given us no fixed date but a general indication that all DECD schools would have transitioned by 2022. There is a great deal of preparation required as St Albert's prepares for this event which will include broad consultation from staff, parents, Loxton High School and Catholic Education.

In the meantime, I thank my fellow board members for their counsel, wisdom, and support this past year. Our meetings are always a time of fellowship and thoughtful discussion as we put aside our own wants and carefully consider the needs of our community both now and in the years to come. Thank you.

Brett Czechowski
Principal