

Matthew Gibney Catholic Primary School

Principal's Report 2019

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all here this evening for our annual community meeting. 2019 has been another busy year with our school participating in a variety of events and experiences. This will also be the last time that I present a report to this community of Matthew Gibney Catholic Primary School. I believe that I have been privileged to lead this community over the last 6 years. This year I would like to take this opportunity to reflect a little on my time here as well as outline what has taken place during the 2019 academic year.

My Principalship at this school has certainly been a time of change for the system in general. As I reflect on this period of time our system is certainly in a state of flux. Data tells us that enrolments in Catholic Primary Schools across the state have arrested their decline and are now holding steady. The reality is that this is because of new schools that have been recently opened which have resulted in large enrolments. Established schools, such as Matthew Gibney, continue to struggle to maintain manageable enrolments. Our marketing committee, under the leadership of Karen Keddie, is working hard to implement initiatives that will make our school more known in the wider community. We advertise our school in South Guildford and this year we organised a letter drop to raise awareness around the residences in High Wycombe. We will begin 2020 with a slightly larger kindy class than we did in 2019 and we will hopefully build on that during the year. The school board decided to reintroduce our pre-kindy class for 2020. We currently have an enrolment of 9 for this group with two further expressions of interest that may bring this number up to 11 for the start of the year. It is our hope that this will boost our kindy enrolments for 2021 as half of this enrolment are new families. We will continue to work hard to promote our school as the school of choice in this area however, we know that the challenge will remain. With less and less people committed to their Catholic faith, it is a known fact that families are not primarily choosing our school for a Catholic Education, rather an education that teaches values and not necessarily in a Catholic context. We need to remain true to our calling and carry out the work of evangelisation. The Catholic church has experienced challenges over the many years of its existence and survived. I am sure that it will survive this current challenge – as will our school.

We can not shy away from the fact that we are a Catholic school and we need to stand firm with this. Our Catholicity extends beyond the realm of learning doctrine and embraces social outreach and living a life that reflects the teachings of Jesus. Making Jesus Real is a practical programme that literally makes the teachings of Jesus real in our school. Our common language around this along with constant reminders to the children help them to realise what needs to be done to make Jesus real helps this programme to have real impact in their relationships with each other. I would like to thank Mrs Keddie for her work in this area.

As mentioned previously, social outreach is a non-negotiable aspect of our school life. Our fundraising activities, along with food drives, helps to reach out to those in need. Our 'Mini Vinnies' lead the way with this and we have raised significant amounts of money along with large amounts of food and non-perishable items for our local St Vincent de Paul chapter to assist those in need. We are also reaching out to those in need beyond our own community. After my visit to schools in Port Moresby in New Guinea, the school is exploring ways to assist young people in that country with support. This year, for the first time, we are instigating a

stationery drive, with left over stationery donated to schools for the students to use. We are also looking at assisting a school in Zambia, Africa, that is part of the missionary work of Deacon Trevor and his wife, Diedre. We are encouraging the students to look locally and then globally and reach out the hand of service to those who are far less fortunate than ourselves. To make a small contribution to the life of someone who has very little can make such a big difference to them.

At the beginning of the year we welcomed Fr Joseph to our Parish and to our school. Fr Joseph has been warmly welcomed by the school community and he enjoys coming to our school to celebrate Masses and Liturgies of the Word and socialising with students and parents. We thank him for his commitment to our school and look forward to our continued association with him. Deacon Trevor has experienced some significant health issues during the year and has not been able to spend as much time at the school as he had hoped. It was great to see him at our Matthew Gibney Day celebrations and we look forward to him spending more time with the community in 2020.

We have continued to collaborate with the Parish in order to prepare students for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. We offer the use of our facilities to the Parish for the parent/student workshops. The students have again joined the children from the Parish for retreats for each of the Sacraments. The Confirmation candidates participated in a retreat at the Redemptorist Monastery in North Perth. The First Eucharist and Reconciliation candidates participated in their retreat at Good Shepherd, Lockridge. All three retreats helped the candidates to understand the practical applications of the sacrament they were receiving and how it could make a difference in their lives. I would like to thank each of the classroom teachers, Miss Zurzolo, Mrs Brescacin and Ms Martinz for the work they did in preparing the students and to Mrs Keddie and Mrs Scriven for their work in the overall coordination. Each of the ceremonies were beautiful and memorable occasions.

This year saw Catholic Education WA release new units of work in order to cover Religious Education. RE is the first learning area in a Catholic school and I thank each of the staff for working hard to make RE a dynamic and relevant part of the student's learning.

The liturgical life of our school is central in what we do. We are reminded of the Liturgical season whenever we enter the school office, the Sacred Space or any of the classrooms. As a school community we travel to the Church at least once a term to celebrate the Eucharist. Each class celebrates a Liturgy of the Word or a Mass once a semester. We gather as a whole school to recognise significant Feast Days. These have to remain important aspects of school life if we are to remain true to our Vision as a Catholic School.

Each year our school submits a school improvement plan which guides our work in order to improve teaching and learning in our school. This year we have continued our focus on improving literacy outcomes for students. The staff have spent considerable time analysing student performance and specifically where individual student's strengths and weaknesses lie. As a staff, we feel that we are far better informed in both these areas and are well placed to assist students to show growth. This year the staff worked with members of the Aboriginal Education team to begin work on an Aboriginal Education Plan. This is a mandated plan that needs to be implemented by all Catholic schools across the state. Working with the team was very productive and we are now well on the way to producing a plan that is relevant and meaningful.

Late in 2018 and continuing into 2019, the staff began a process on improving the standard of writing across the school in all the genres the students are exposed to. The 'Brightpath' programme was selected as the vehicle to aid this improvement and is now well implemented. The programme is used to assess the standard of writing and pin point areas of strength and weakness that can then be focused upon to improve the standard of writing across all year levels. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff for their commitment and their professionalism.

This commitment by all staff to the teaching of literacy and numeracy are imperative as these are core elements of education and have to have a strong emphasis in any school. Our whole school coordinated focus on the teaching and learning of reading and spelling has seen students' show consistent improvement. Our school uses data to inform our teaching and learning and helps us to become more focussed on where students' needs are and what needs to be done in order to satisfy those needs. We have an excellent support programme and students are identified earlier so that those areas of weakness can be addressed. Students who achieve higher academic results are being challenged through STEM programmes. Our students learn Italian and are developing their skills in the area of digital technology. Our school offers a diverse academic programme without losing sight of what the core business is – assisting students to be literate and numerate in a Catholic environment. Students only experience success in this when they are taught and assisted by highly dedicated and professional staff members, which is what we have at this school. I thank them for their dedication and recognise how blessed we are to have them in our school working with our students in order to help them reach their potential.

This year saw our school achieve a number of awards across different areas of the curriculum. For the first time in the history of our school our Year 5 and 6 students won the soccer trophy and the AFL trophy in the annual winter sports lightning carnival. We also won, for the first time, the interschool athletics carnival. These results are a culmination of the hard work carried out by Miss Shannon Andersen who has worked tirelessly to improve the skills of our students in Physical Education lessons. She has also exposed the students to a number of lesser known sports in order for the students to experience a wider variety of options other than the traditional sports that they are familiar with. I thank her for her commitment and we look forward to further successes in 2020.

We have also had success in the performing arts, both individually and collectively. This year we saw the students again win the shield for Christian Drama with our performance of the Easter Play and for a Musical Excerpt with our performance of 'My Fair Lady'. As a school community we were privileged to see both items and they were fantastic. I would like to thank Mrs Aldred for her expertise and commitment to ensure that the students in our school are exposed to the Arts in a meaningful way.

The school board launched the new strategic plan at the beginning of this year. We have already begun working on specific aspects of the plan. As I mentioned earlier, the staff are constantly exploring ways to improve teaching and learning across the school. The Marketing sub committee are continuing to explore ways to promote our school. As each of the components are realised, these will help to make our school a better place.

I would like to thank the School Board, under the Chairmanship of Gavin Hogg, for the work they do in assisting with the Financial and Capital work in our school. In these challenging times, financially, the Board has worked hard to ensure that our facilities remain up to standard

and that they are well maintained. The Board Chair and Treasurer have already outlined the capital expenditure for 2019. All these improvements help to keep our school attractive and welcoming to the students and well resourced for the staff. I would like to make special mention of those members of the Board who will be retiring at the end of this year. Gareth Healy's first year on the Board coincided with me starting here in 2014. Gareth was our Treasurer for 4 years and we thank him for his contribution. Keith McCarron has been a member of the Board for 4 years. He was able to share his expertise in assisting us with being compliant around fire safety and is always one of the first to put his hand up to help with the construction of the stage. His sense of humour and willingness to help out in any capacity will be missed. Amber David leaves the Board as the Parish representative. Amber has carried out a fantastic job keeping the Board and P&F informed of Parish events. Amber leaves our school after many years and we will wish her well as her youngest child, Diana, moves to Secondary school. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Clare Arnold, our new Parish Representative, Jaime Smith, Paul Kaciuba and Katie Pillera to the Board for 2020.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Parents and Friends. Jodie Capobianco became the new President in 2019 and she and the P&F committee continued to do all they can do to build community and raise funds to resource our school. The generosity of this community never ceases to amaze me and all of the school's requests for finances have always been met with an affirming response. I would like to acknowledge Michelle Steward, Natasha Alleway and Esther Robertson for their generosity in giving their time on the P&F Executive. I would also like to thank the class representatives for always being there at school Masses as well as organising P&F events for the whole school community. All of these help to make our school what it is.

I would like to acknowledge all those who help our school in whatever way they can. This is very much a community school and many people help to build our community. Your generosity in assisting in lots of different ways help to make our school a place of growth as well as providing students with opportunities that they might not otherwise experience. Your help has not gone unnoticed nor is it not appreciated.

I would like to thank Diane Scriven and Karen Keddie for their expertise, advice and support in helping to lead our school. Both ladies are outstanding educators who are a gift to this community. I am very lucky to have them as part of our leadership team. I would also like to thank Krista Gregory and Tania Kays for the work they do in the administrative and financial areas of our school. The varying layers of compliance that are now part and parcel of school life make running a school a complex and complicated task. Both do a great job in untangling the bureaucratic mess that we often find ourselves in and they are an invaluable part of our school. They are also great helpers to our families and they always do this with a smile.

As a school, we will continue to strive for excellence, understanding that we are a Catholic school. As a staff, we are committed to assisting each child to achieve their potential and also learn how to make a positive contribution to the wider community. We are fully aware that we don't always get this right and we apologise for the mistakes that we invariably make, but there is a strong commitment that we will always try to be better at getting better. We will continue to work hard to ensure that our school reflects the teachings of Jesus and, at the same time, assist students to be the best that they can.

As my time as Principal of Matthew Gibney draws to a close, I look back and hope that I have made a difference to the lives of the families who have chosen our school for their child's

education. The students at our school are wonderful young people. On the whole, they are enthusiastic learners, good young citizens and great contributors to our community. Their willingness to give on some many different levels are a credit to their parents who are their first educators. As I said at the start of this report, it has been a privilege to not only lead this community, but be a part of it. A gauge of the effectiveness of a Principalship is to look back to see if the school is better now than it was at the start. History will be the judge of whether that is true. I hope that it is better. I was very happy to hear of the appointment of Therese Hussey as the new Principal. Therese is an experienced educator and leader and I am sure she will be a great addition to this community. I will always be a part of this school, now as a parent, with Imogen and Saroya both staying here. I look forward to catching up with many of you next year at social functions.

I wish this school community every success as it moves into the future. May all our families experience a positive ending to the school year, a joy filled and happy Christmas and a relaxing and rewarding break from school routine.

Mark Powell
Principal