



MATER DEI
INCLUSION FOR ALL

Mater Dei School



ANNUAL REPORT

2016



MATER DEI SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2016

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

◆ VISION STATEMENT

The vision of Mater Dei School is to create a family centred school that focuses on the education of students with mild to moderate intellectual disability, to maximize their potential for participation in their communities.

◆ SCHOOL PROFILE

Mater Dei is a co-educational school offering programs of study for students ranging from 5 years through to 18 years. Programs offered include a primary program, a junior secondary program, and a senior secondary program. Throughout their secondary schooling, students have the opportunity to attain both the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate (Life Skills), take part in the Mater Dei Structured Work Placement Program and be part of the Mater Dei/ John Therry Satellite Class.

Mater Dei School has a fine reputation as an educational facility that offers high quality education and services for all students. The underpinning philosophy for all that we do is "Inclusion for All" and at Mater Dei each of our programs is aimed at developing the skills and competencies that will allow our students to take their rightful place in their communities.

◆ MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD – Mr John Adam

The last twelve months have been an extremely challenging yet exciting time for the Mater Dei community. The challenge has been how the new funding under the NDIS will affect Mater Dei now and into the future and the excitement has been how we have continued to grow and develop our School and we are certainly looking forward to the next few years as we embark upon some very significant projects.

Firstly I will comment on the NDIS. The Scheme was scheduled to be rolled out on 1 July 2016 however this did not eventuate. Consequently, some 6-9 months later we are still coming to terms with how the full roll out of the NDIS will affect Mater Dei. This has certainly impacted many of our parents and it has also made budgeting for our various programs extremely difficult. The first casualty was our Living Skills Program which has had to be closed at the end of 2016. Regrettably, the new funding model under the NDIS was unlikely to be able to provide the certainty that was provided by the block funding that the program relied upon prior to the introduction of the NDIS. The decision to close the program was indeed a difficult one but with limited funds to manage all our various programs, the Board was forced to make that tough decision. The other program which is affected is our Early Intervention Program. Although the future viability of the early intervention program is not completely bedded down we are forecasting that we will have sufficient participants to continue the service and so we are proceeding on that basis and are confident that it will continue in its current form. It has therefore been a very uncertain environment over the last 12 months as a consequence of the intended roll out of the NDIS.

Aside from the NDIS issues the School itself has continued to develop strongly. Perhaps our most significant and exciting development has been our association with Dr Bree Jimenez from the University of North Carolina who has been working with our School for the last five years but has now agreed to relocate to Australia and directly consult to Mater Dei for the next two and a half years. That is extremely exciting as Bree is one of the world's leading experts in the delivery of education to children with disabilities and we are confident that with Bree's assistance we will be able to develop Mater Dei into the centre of excellence for the teaching of children with disabilities and our goal of becoming a leader in this field in Australia is perhaps within our grasp.

In 2016 we also saw the completion of our hospitality facility and our students are now learning every aspect of hospitality including planning, buying, preparing, cooking and cleaning. For our students this provides them with the necessary skills to be optimistic about their future employment which is something that all of us sincerely aim to achieve.

Another program that has grown significantly this last year is our Structured Work Placement Program with more and more employers coming on board and providing our students a chance to demonstrate what abilities they have. To give our students the opportunity of meaningful engagement in work and community after their compulsory schooling is something that not so long ago would have seemed a futile hope. Now it is becoming a reality.

In 2016 we also started a new partnership with Magdalene Catholic High School for our inclusion program. What began as a program for Year 7 students will grow each year and this association gives our students a real opportunity to join mainstream students in the classroom and at play.

We have also formed an association with the Australian Catholic University where students from their Allied Health and Special Education courses undertake work experience at Mater Dei. There are many benefits in this program. Our students meet new people on a regular basis which energises them, the ACU students benefit from first class opportunities to engage with a contemporary and innovative setting for students with disability and Mater Dei will be the beneficiary of the research that flows from the ACU's involvement with us.

I would like to particularly thank our many supporters in the Macarthur area for their continued support, both in a financial sense and also their general involvement with the school. I cannot imagine any other community could be as generous as the people in the Macarthur area and we are extremely grateful to them. This year we particularly saw a significant increase in regular donors to our Foundation and it is with this support our future growth can be guaranteed. Simone Wilson and her team as well as all our event committees have done a great job so thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge the Sisters of the Good Samaritans for their continued support. The charism of the Good Samaritans is so important to the culture of our School and the Sisters witness to this each and every time we see them.

Our leadership and executive teams led by our Principal Tony Fitzgerald need to be congratulated for their achievements this year. They continue raising the bar and their determination for Mater Dei to continuously improve is impressive to say the least.

And lastly to my Board I thank you for your talent, personal support, dedication and commitment to the School. I have enjoyed working with you this year and look forward to what we will achieve in 2017.

John Adam
Chair – Mater Dei Board

Principal's Message – Mr Tony Fitzgerald

Mater Dei School in 2016, continued to provide a contemporary and innovative education to students with high support needs in a nurturing and secure environment. A thoroughly dedicated staff across the whole organisation focused its commitment and professional energy on delivering high quality educational programs within the formal curriculum laid out by the New South Wales Board of Studies and a rich and engaging extra curricular program.

Mater Dei prides itself on its strong focus on and commitment to inclusion. In 2016, we continued to initiate opportunities to bring this aspiration to life. Specifically, there was a significant expansion in the structured work placement and work experience program. We also began a new relationship with our colleague school; Magdalene Catholic High School. This relationship provided the weekly opportunity for our Year Seven students to engage with their age and stage peers at Magdalene in Tuesday afternoon sport. In the second half of the year, this was extended to provide an opportunity for two Mater Dei students to engage with their mainstream peers in class immediately prior to sport. This initiative was a wonderful opportunity for students of both schools and we look forward to growing the initiative in 2017.

Throughout 2017, we continued to build on the opportunities available to our students to engage them in the wider community to which they belong and in so doing, to build in them a capacity and skills to better facilitate full participation in those communities. In addition to our structured work placement program, our work experience program and our partnerships with colleague schools, further opportunities were sought and provided for community access for students across all stages. We also continued our relationship working with visiting students on practicum experience from the University of Western Sydney's Medicine faculty and from the Australian Catholic University.

Fostering a love of teaching and learning among *both* staff and students continues to be a priority at Mater Dei. Strategies and initiatives currently in place to foster this include:

- Designing Personalised Learning Plans, including individual SMART goals for all students in collaboration with parents, students, staff and specialist support personnel.
- Building a culture of success in which students are recognised for their positive achievements and where all students feel that they have the capacity to learn.
- Weekly award assemblies that recognise academic achievement, citizenship, stewardship and safe travelling. This is an opportunity for all students throughout the course of the year to have their efforts positively recognised.
- Continuing to encourage and facilitate positive relationships between students, teachers and families, with the rationale being that positive relationships result in positive educational and social outcomes.
- Creating opportunities throughout the school week to recognise the many good things that happen in our school. At staff level, we use our weekly communication meetings as opportunities to share good news. At student level we use the weekly and monthly assemblies to share good news and to build positive culture.

In 2016, we continued to build on our relationship with Assistant Professor Bree Jiminez from the special education department of the University of North Carolina Greensboro campus. Professor Jiminez is internationally recognised as a leader in the field of building access to the general curriculum via age and stage appropriate curricular and underpinned by evidence based teaching strategies for students with high support needs. This pioneering relationship expressed itself in 2016 through a pilot coaching/mentoring relationship facilitated by Professor Jiminez with four teachers from Mater Dei school. This ultimately developed to the point where Professor Jiminez and her colleague were conducting *live real time* coaching to our teachers via blue tooth ear pieces and SKYPE from their University offices in North Carolina. Mater Dei is immensely proud of this pioneering relationship and initiative and plans are well advanced to build on this significantly in 2017. Professor Jiminez and her colleague travelled to Mater Dei

in November to facilitate four days of professional development with the whole of the Mater Dei teaching and assistant staff.

Our school timetable remains compliant with Board of Studies mandatory requirements. The timetable also continues to be structured in such a way as to endeavour to meet the particular learning needs of our students. Classes are arranged to minimise transitions for students least able to cope while those students with the capacity to be *challenged* and *extended* are finding more opportunities available to them.

The school's commitment to build the capacity to integrate technology into teaching and learning across K to 12 continued with the acquisition of further iPads for student use within classes, as well as interactive whiteboards. Each classroom also has a desktop computer that both students and staff can access. The up-skilling of all school staff with professional development in the effective use of technology in the classroom continues to remain a priority, with a scheduled session in each fortnightly school staff meeting. In 2016 a new position was created on staff to be responsible for and lead these initiatives in integrating technology in to the classroom and upskilling teachers in the potential of the technology.

Also in 2016, we continued to work with staff, engaging with the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers, to better equip teachers for their work with students and to better prepare them for the transition to certification of all teachers in 2018. This work continues and is bearing fruit in the delivery of the curriculum and the relationships that teachers build in their learning environment and with other stakeholders in the lives of their students.

In 2016 we continued to build on the initiative of lunch time groups with the aim of engaging students more meaningfully in activities during breaks. Students of Mater Dei often encounter difficulties in initiating play and engaging successfully with peers. The aim of lunch time groups is to provide more structured opportunities for learning based play in areas of interest for the students such as choir, dance, soccer, art, gardening, walking, bikes, music and reading. Thanks to the support of the Mater Dei staff, these groups have proven to be very successful not only in engaging students but in significantly reducing the incidence of first aid reports during breaks. We continue to search for opportunities to keep these groups 'fresh'.

The staff of Mater Dei has worked very hard again this year and they continue to provide excellent education for the students in their care. The educational outcomes achieved by our students were excellent, with students making very good progress in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, social development and personal care. The staff is again to be congratulated for the great work that they do and for the care and attention they provide to the students of Mater Dei. They do an outstanding job and they deserve recognition and congratulations for their effort.

Mater Dei's Board of Directors is dedicated to supporting the staff of Mater Dei in achieving the best outcomes possible for our students. The Directors give very generously of their time and their expertise and we all benefit from their great contribution. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all members of our Board and particularly our Chair, Mr John Adam, for the work that they do for and on behalf of the students of Mater Dei. We are blessed to have such people on our Board and we greatly appreciate their contribution.

Finally I would like to thank and acknowledge our wonderful parents who really are an inspiration to the staff and supporters of Mater Dei. Their energy, their enthusiasm and their advocacy on behalf of their children is quite inspiring. The parents of our school are tremendously motivating to our school community, as they provide the support, the inspiration and the hard work required to gain the best outcomes for their children. The kindness they show, the acknowledgement and appreciation they demonstrate and the lengths that they are prepared to go to in achieving even the smallest of successes for their children is a great example to us all.

Tony Fitzgerald
CEO/Principal

STUDENT DATA – Mater Dei’s Student Population for 2016 was 143

Kindergarten	12	Year 7	14
Year 1	8	Year 8	12
Year 2	6	Year 9	12
Year 3	14	Year 10	9
Year 4	10	Year 11	12
Year 5	13	Year 12	14
Year 6	7	Total	143

In the 2016 school year, there were 12 class groups, matching as much as possible each student’s chronological age and ability level to form ability groups that best met student needs. The average class size in 2016 was 12 students, with classes containing higher ability students having slightly higher numbers and classes in which students needed higher levels of support containing fewer students. Each class was allocated a teaching assistant for the majority of the day, with the lower ability classes having a teacher assistant for the entire day.

Student attendance in 2016 was 94.75%. This is a positive figure considering the complex medical needs and physical capacities of a number of our students. We believe these figures indicate enthusiasm and a joy for learning as students are very positive with regard to school attendance.

Year	% Attendance	Year	% Attendance
Year 1	94.59	Year 6	97.25
Year 2	93.75	Year 7	95.26
Year 3	94.71	Year 8	93.33
Year 4	94.57	Year 9	95.40
Year 5	94.42	Year 10	94.62

Supporting the Regular Attendance of Students at School and Managing Non Attendance

It is the responsibility of the CEO/Principal and nominated staff members of Mater Dei to remind parents/guardians of their legal obligations under the Education Act (1990) to ensure the regular attendance of their child at school.

The CEO/Principal is responsible for the identification of students who display poor attendance patterns and in determining whether their lack of attendance raises safety, welfare or wellbeing concerns requiring a report to be made to Community Services or contact with the Child Wellbeing Unit.

As a means of restoring and maintaining regular school attendance Mater Dei implements sound attendance monitoring practices and the regular follow-up of unexplained absences by contacting parents/guardians promptly. Other school based interventions that Mater Dei may use to assist in the resolution of attendance difficulties include:

- advising parents/guardians in writing of the attendance concerns (see Mater Dei Habitual Absence or Mater Dei Habitual Lateness letters);
- parent/guardian interviews;
- devising and implementing Compulsory School Undertakings;
- reviewing the appropriateness of the student’s educational program;
- development of a school-based attendance improvement plan;
- referral to the school psychologist or outside agency; or
- support from school based personnel.

If a range of school-based interventions proves unsuccessful, Mater Dei may gain support by referring individual cases of unsatisfactory attendance to the Catholic Education Commission, NSW. The CEC, NSW manages the process of informing NSW DET. Police officers are authorised to act as attendance officers under Section 122 of the Education Act (1990).

In situations where all attempts at resolving poor school attendance have failed to rectify the problem the CEO/Principal will give consideration to the legal recourse by way of either prosecution in the Local Court or by seeking legal redress through legal processes in the Children's Court.

Student retention rates at Mater Dei are excellent with very little student turnover. The retention figure for students moving from Year Ten to Years Eleven and Twelve is 100%, again indicating high satisfaction with our programs.

Mater Dei implements the Australian Curriculum through mandated guidelines as stipulated by the NSW Board of Studies in each Key Learning Area with courses modified to meet the individual needs of students. An Individual Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) is written for each student from Kindergarten to Year 12 and involves a collaborative process with the student, parents, guardians, Pastoral Teacher and advocates directly concerned, to meet and determine relevant, achievable outcomes for the student to work towards during the following months at school. The PLP is a written plan of action specifying agreed priority measurable goals (usually 2 to 3) that are set against syllabus outcomes, with at least one goal focusing on a literacy or numeracy syllabus outcome. For the subsequent months, staff will provide consistent support, education and training across all areas of the student's life to measure success of each goal. PLP meetings take place twice during the school year at Parent-Teacher Interviews and any additional times as required based on student needs and supports.

Inclusion is a very important aspect of the education program at Mater Dei. Students are involved in Shared Learning Programs, Community Access Programs and Leisure and Life Skills Programs. In 2016, all students in Year Seven at Mater Dei joined the Year Seven students from Magdalene Catholic High School (MCHS) for sport each Tuesday afternoon. This particular shared learning opportunity has been extended beyond participating in sport to some students participating in some classes and other whole school events. Students in Years 10, 11 and 12 are involved in our Work Placement Program, providing students with access to work opportunities in both open and supported employment situations. The skills developed during this regular work placement will be recognised as part of the student's school report at the end of each semester. Ongoing assessments address the issues of work skills, attitudes and self-esteem as well as interpersonal, leisure, recreational, decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Post School Destinations: Mater Dei students all qualify for Post School Programs in either Community Participation or Transition to Work. Generally all students take up the option of Post School Programs unless paid work is an option. In 2016, 100% of graduates undertook Post School Programs. With the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the process and eligibility for accessing Post School Programs has changed. Information on the programs that graduating students now access under NDIS is not available to schools.

TEACHING STAFF

In 2016, Mater Dei employed 14 F/T teachers and 7 P/T teachers (17.4 FTE). The majority of the Mater Dei teaching staff have 4 year training and a number of staff are working toward postgraduate qualifications in Special Education.

Teacher qualifications fall into 1 of 3 categories for all teaching staff responsible for delivering the curriculum.

Teacher qualifications from a higher education institution from within Australia or as recognised by AEI-NOOSR * (100%)

Have qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution from within Australia within AEI-NOOSR * guidelines but lack formal teacher qualifications.(0%)

*Australian Education Institution – National Office of Overseas Skill Recognition

LEARNING AND TEACHING

The students and teachers of Mater Dei work consistently to improve outcomes and provide a stimulating and challenging learning environment. In 2016 student progress in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy has been able to be very closely monitored and tracked with the implementation of the NESA Literacy and Numeracy Continuum. All students from K-10 have now been assessed and placed upon the continuums, with all students showing progress along each cluster group. Mater Dei students in the appropriate age categories for NAPLAN testing were once again exempt due to their level of cognitive disability.

The priority outcomes from individual student SMART goals in 2016 were literacy and numeracy focused to enhance the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Continuums. We continue to be delighted by the effort that students make in skills development and their determination to succeed in all areas of education. Each year we work closely with families to further develop the potential of each of our students, continually adjusting and reviewing individual SMART goals to be more challenging whilst allowing student success. These goals are reviewed twice yearly.

Health and physical education also remain areas of priority with our students, with ongoing work taking place on student fitness levels and healthy choices. Our lunch time groups continue to facilitate some of these objectives with the walking club, bike riding club and the inclusion of organised group sports and dance club. Our K-12 PDHPE curriculum also has specific teaching and learning activities and outcomes that address this priority. The diverse range of sports that are offered in our School Sport Program such as yoga, gymnastics, group team sports and cross training and our Swimming Program contribute to student gross motor and fine motor development as well as health and well-being. The continuation of over the counter sales in our healthy choices school canteen each week has had a very positive impact on not only facilitating opportunities for students to engage with others appropriately but to also consolidate basic numeracy and literacy skills.

The work undertaken in the Living Skills Program continues to contribute significantly to the development of particular student's life skills and enhances the work undertaken in our school pastoral program. Students have continued to show improvements in the areas of social skill development, personal care and independent living skills in 2016, including a particular emphasis on self advocacy skills for identifying and reporting unsafe and inappropriate conduct. The NSW Ombudsman came and held a number of workshops for our older students with a focus on these very important skills and our regular pastoral lessons allowed these skills to be reinforced on a regular basis. Our students also participate in individual, small or large group work each week on a range of other issues such as school rules, values and attitudes, bullying, resilience, conflict resolution, positive relationships, communication, social and play skills and friendship skills.

In 2016 we expanded our inclusive schooling program into Year 7 with all Year 7 students immersed in mainstream sport across at Magdalene Catholic High School. Towards the end of the year, a select number of students also began to join in classes for one teaching session (90 minutes) with their same aged Year 7 peers. This has been quite successful in particular in minimising disruption to students who had previously not been included in the experience and in facilitating a more comprehensive inclusion of more students with the support of both their pastoral teacher and a teacher's assistant. Our Stage 3 students also continued their shared learning program with their similar aged cohort across at St Clare's Primary School for one session a fortnight over six months.

Mater Dei Executive have modelled the importance of a life long learner in 2016 by each Executive member currently undertaking postgraduate studies which include: Graduate Certificate of Religious Education; Masters of Education (Special Education); Masters of Theology (Religious Education); Masters of Educational Leadership and the Learning for Leadership – Wollongong CEO Mentoring Course. In addition, facilitation of Good Samaritan Staff Faith Formation has occurred through participation in various

Good Samaritan Education conferences and pilgrimages.

Throughout 2016, teaching and support staff participated in regular, weekly professional learning sessions that prioritised areas such as (but were not limited to) focusing on the different elements of the Assessment Cycle; strengthening the school-wide use of positive behaviour management strategies to reflect current evidence and research and up skilling of all staff across areas of technology implementation. Teachers were also responsible for leading their peers in one professional learning session of their choice/strength/interest each this year and showcased an amazing variety of expertise and skill across very diverse areas. All staff also undertook training in Non-Violent Crisis Intervention strategies, First Aid response and incorporating evidence based practices such as time delay, least to most intrusive prompting, choral response and task analysis during each pupil free day this year.

Another significant professional learning agenda for our teaching staff in 2016 has been the implementation of a platform for professional coaching and mentoring of three teachers with external professionals from the University of North Carolina, Greensborough, USA. The three teachers were mentored on effectively implementing evidence-based practices within teaching to significantly affect the potential of meaningful, positive change in education and pedagogy. What initially started out as videoed lessons, quickly and excitingly progressed to live coaching sessions in class time through utilizing SKYPE and Bluetooth technology.

Significant Programs and Initiatives

Structured Work Placement Program

Expanding our existing Structured Work Placement Program to accommodate more senior students, more frequently, within an increasing number of host employers in our community, has been a huge success this year. Coupled with the opening of our new Hospitality Space for on-site trade-based learning and further investigation into VET courses and competencies for Stage Six students creates an exciting agenda for our senior students going into 2017.

Sensory Verandah and Music Therapy Program

In 2016 the timetabling of referral based music therapy sessions for students with our Music Therapist commenced with priority goals for those students focused upon the communication, interaction and engagement with others. The opening of our new Sensory Verandah Space for students with Sensory Diet plans has also creatively increased the strategies that are now available for meeting diverse student needs.

SCHOOL POLICIES:

All policies are available from Mater Dei and may be accessed by contacting the school.

Mater Dei policies are reviewed on a cyclical basis with policies being reviewed every three years. Implementation of policies and practices is part of a process involving information sessions, staff training, staff discussion and signing off on major policies and procedures.

CATHOLIC IDENTITY

The staff and students of Mater Dei are part of a community of faith with a very long and proud tradition. As a Catholic School, we follow the teachings of the Catholic Church and endeavour to live out the values inherent in the Gospels. We are very closely aligned to the principles and charism of the Good Samaritan Order. It is from this foundation that our ministry to the poor, the marginalised and the disadvantaged has its basis. We are also very much committed to working with children who have an intellectual disability and their families and supporting them in ways that reflect the teachings and the actions of Jesus.

Mater Dei School's Religious Education Program underpins all teaching and learning at Mater Dei and we

celebrate important occasions in the Church calendar with Masses and Liturgies including our annual Opening Mass and Ash Wednesday, Stations of the Cross, Mother's Day Mass, St Benedict's Day Mass, Feast Day Mass, Living Skills Program Mass and End of Year Mass. Each class grouping is involved in a Religious Education Program, 'To Know, Worship & Love' throughout their school week, and on a daily basis with prayer, spirituality and Bible stories incorporated into the students' teaching and learning. We also prepare students for their First Eucharist and Confirmation in alternate years. Our students are most respectful and reverent in our chapel and the faith that we teach is an important part of life for students of Mater Dei and their families.

PASTORAL CARE

Mater Dei has a strong commitment to pastoral care and this commitment extends to our students, their families and our staff. An essential part of our pastoral work as a school community is to treat people with dignity and compassion. Therefore, we promote very actively the rights and the responsibilities of all members of the Mater Dei community. Mater Dei is very fortunate to have the services of Sr Jeanie Heiningner to work as a school chaplain for 3 days each week. Jeanie continued to work with students and families to build resilience and provide pastoral support across a variety of settings in 2016. The Nurturing Independence Program developed and presented by Jeanie and is warmly embraced and provides parents with an opportunity to explore issues of grief, faith and the future possibilities for their children. Sr Jeanie has been a great gift to Mater Dei and we look forward to Jeanie working further with students and families in areas of need.

Our students are the focus of all that we do at Mater Dei and their interests are placed before any other administrative or logistical consideration. We have a positive approach to behaviour management that provides students with a safe and secure environment in which they are able to be themselves and to face challenges and make mistakes. Our approach is very much based on actively acknowledging positive behaviours. The Mater Dei School rules are fair, simple, enforceable, positively stated and owned. All rules are based on key areas that include safety, treatment, peace, stewardship and communication so that students may be good learners in each of the different school physical environments that they encounter each day – classroom, playground, community access, break out areas, masses/liturgies and assemblies in the Hall etc.

Mater Dei School Rules are explicitly taught and modelled around school wide positive behaviour expectations of: Be kind. Be safe. Be respectful.

All students have their own individual Student Support Plan that outlines various information regarding their diagnosis, family, behaviour supports, social skills, sensory supports, health issues and communication supports. Staff regularly refer to these plans to meet the diverse needs of students in their care. In cases where behaviour becomes an issue, staff and parents work together to formulate individual Intervention Response Plans that are collaborative and consider all aspects of a child's life situation and disability. We have found this positive and cooperative approach to be both successful and inclusive as it focuses on all areas of a child's life and builds positive partnerships between school and home.

Mater Dei works to build positive relationships with families and to care for them as much as is possible with our School Psychologist being instrumental in this process. We provide support and assistance to families to access various support services, we organise in-service opportunities for families and we take an active interest in ensuring that families have the advice and support required to negotiate often difficult life situations. Mater Dei also provides opportunities for families to network and we attempt to foster on-going connections with our organisation through our work with the Mater Dei Ex Students Reunions. Mater Dei links families with various community services and supports them in negotiating what can be difficult or confusing situations with both government and non-government agencies. We

recognise that caring for and educating a child or children with disabilities is a tremendous emotional and financial strain and we endeavour to do all that we can in supporting families in this very difficult work.

The staff of Mater Dei is its greatest asset and as such we recognise the need to care for and nurture our staff. In an effort to support our staff we have an Employee Assistance Scheme (EAP) to provide support and counselling in times of stress or crisis. All staff and their families have access to this program and we actively encourage staff to take advantage of this service as needed. Mater Dei staff work very closely in ensuring that the needs of students and families are met as effectively as possible, however, we are aware that staff can often become quite emotionally fatigued in this environment. In an effort to care for staff, Mater Dei has an on-going commitment to providing opportunities for staff care through professional development days that focus on nurturing staff and providing opportunities for self-care. It is hoped that by maintaining a healthy staff we will be able to provide the best outcomes for our students.

STUDENT WELFARE AND DISCIPLINE

Mater Dei is a place of peace, belonging, respect, justice, hope and celebration. Our values are based on the dignity of the whole person and through living out these values we provide witness to Gospel values as a way of living out daily life.

Our values are captured in many of our policies and procedures. Our Behaviour Management Policy in place at Mater Dei is based on this values system and very much reflects our focus on dignity and compassion. A set of Behaviour Management Guidelines has been created that staff follow to use a guide for the action, recording and monitoring of student behaviour. Our approach to pastoral care and safety is reflected in the Mater Dei Staff Handbook, the Mater Dei Code of Conduct and the Mater Dei WHS policies, giving witness and structure to our commitment to the welfare and safety of our students.

Mater Dei's Leader of Pastoral Care is responsible for student welfare. Their role is to work with parents and students to ensure that the rights of students and families are respected, that welfare matters are dealt with confidentially and sensitively, and to act as a bridge between families and the school in matters where sensitivity and compassion are required.

The Staff of Mater Dei is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all students. Every student has an Individual Risk Assessment that is checked and updated if need be once a term. This allows safe and successful planning of class based and school based events. They are further committed to providing support and assistance to families and caregivers in any areas where they can be of assistance. The staff are supported by the Mater Dei Board in this commitment and this is very much at the centre of the Board's agenda in providing each student at Mater Dei with opportunities to achieve their full potential and to take their rightful place in their communities.

ENROLMENT POLICY

Mater Dei is a co-educational K-12 School, catering for students with a mild to moderate intellectual disability. While Mater Dei is a Catholic School, our enrolment policy is inclusive of all students regardless of religious orientation or culture. Our enrolment policy is non-denominational in nature and our criteria is that students must have a diagnosed intellectual disability falling in the mild to moderate range as their primary disability.

Before a place is offered at Mater Dei, there is a process of consultation, interview and visits to current educational settings in order to determine whether Mater Dei is the most appropriate educational placement. If a placement is offered and accepted, a period of transition is organised and students and parents are provided with a thorough orientation to Mater Dei.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Mater Dei School is committed to a safe and supportive environment that is characterised by fairness, mutual trust, and reconciliation. Parents and caregivers, or indeed any member of our community who has a complaint or grievance, has the right to have this issue addressed.

Mater Dei has a comprehensive Grievance Procedure Statement and an accompanying brochure that provides an outline of the process and a mechanism for making complaints or airing grievances in a safe and confidential manner. Copies of the Mater Dei Grievance Handling Process brochure are available at the Mater Dei reception desk or may be posted to parents or carers on request

It is a commitment of the Mater Dei Board to provide a learning and pastoral environment that promotes the dignity and development of each individual in a fair and just manner. To this end, the Chair of the Mater Dei Board, Mr John Adam, can be contacted directly to work through issues of concern or situations in which conflict may arise.

PARTNERSHIPS

Mater Dei has a number of partnerships with community groups throughout the Macarthur region. Mater Dei works closely with local schools, providing inclusive schooling opportunities for our students and visits to Mater Dei for students in mainstream schools. The benefit to Mater Dei students and students from mainstream schools is the provision of opportunities for sharing of experiences, building relationships and fostering partnerships in a supported and nurturing environment.

Mater Dei has a partnership with the Wollongong Catholic Education Office and Magdalene Catholic High School and St Clare's Parish Primary School. This joint venture between both schools and Mater Dei is in the provision of a shared learning program for students that provides opportunities for inclusive experiences and the expertise and networks of the Mater Dei community. This program is structured in a way that allows the students to attend these mainstream settings with the safety and security of their own peers and Mater Dei staff whilst interacting with their mainstream cohort and staff school. During their time at John Therry students are provided with access to a diverse range of academic and social opportunities available only on a mainstream campus.

Mater Dei has excellent relationships with our local community and this has allowed the Mater Dei Work Placement Program to flourish. Students in Years 10, 11 and 12 are provided with opportunities to undertake a work placement one day per week as part of their regular school program. The opportunity to work in a safe and well-supervised environment allows students to gain on the job training. It also allows students to learn the social skills that are a vital part of the workplace. This program also provides Mater Dei with the opportunity to build understanding and educate our community on the talents and capacities of Mater Dei students.

PARENTS AND FRIENDS

Mater Dei has a small but active Parents and Friends Association that provides support and assistance to Mater Dei School. Through the running of our Annual Country Fair, assistance with our Easter fundraiser and assistance with the Mater Dei Christmas Cards, our parents play a vital role in building community at Mater Dei. A number of wonderful initiatives were continued by our parents in 2016, including very successful Mother's Day and Father's Day stalls, as well as a cake stall at our annual Athletics Carnival. The Mater Dei Canteen continues to thrive as an important service and support and now includes over the counter sales at recess.

The Mater Dei P&F does much more than raise funds. It's most important work is in providing a network of support and advice for new families and families who may be suffering hardship or difficulty. Through the hosting of information evenings, organising guest speakers and simply sharing wisdom, the Mater Dei P&F provides a vital source of support and information for the Mater Dei community.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

In 2016, we commenced our next cycle of Future Directions. A number of key areas have been prioritised for development over the next 5 years including: Strengthening Catholic and Good Samaritan values and charism; revisiting the shared understanding of "Inclusion"; improving student learning outcomes; closer alignment between programming, assessing, tracking and reporting student learning outcomes; meeting the diverse support needs of all students; equipping students and their families for success outside of Mater Dei; nurturing an effective professional learning culture.

PROGRESS ON 2016 TARGETS

1. Target - Animate the Catholic and Good Samaritan charism in the daily life of the school

Progress - The spirituality of our students has been further enhanced this year through more regular attendance and participation in school masses and liturgies, with "buddy" classes this year hosting prayer at each Principal Assembly each term. Staff faith formation has expanded to include regular prayer gatherings and opportunities for reflection based on Benedictine virtues of Community, Humility, Justice and Peace and Love of Christ and Neighbour.

2. Target - Investigate more authentic opportunities for Inclusion for students and staff with other catholic schools and the wider community

Progress - A change from our previous long existing "Inclusion" model to a "Shared Learning Experience" model has created more authentic opportunities for our students and staff with other catholic schools in 2016. Our Stage 3 students "Shared Learning Experience" at St Clare's Catholic Primary School has seen them participate in creative KLA learning experiences on a fortnightly basis. Our Year 7 students attend Magdalene Catholic High School on a regular basis every Tuesday for sport, with some students now attending for longer periods of shared learning in some KLA subjects. Attendance at community events at Magdalene, including peer support opportunities has established a dynamic model that will expand to include both Year 7 and Year 8 Mater Dei students in 2017.

3. Target - Link individual student SMART goals with teaching and learning syllabus outcomes

Progress - A successful link individual student SMART goals with teaching and learning syllabus outcomes, in particular literacy and numeracy outcomes, emphasised a closer focus on individual student progress within the parameters of a daily lesson structure.

4. Target - Investigate different types of tracking records and continuums to ensure our documents are applicable and specific for the learning needs of our students

Progress - Teachers investigated (and some in cases created) more specific and diverse tracking records that are applicable and specific for the individual learning needs of our students which has allowed more accurate tracking and determination of student progress. The introduction of an assessment week each term (usually week four) directed teacher focus to appropriate and timely assessments. All students K-10 now have been plotted and their progress tracked and monitored upon the NESA Literacy Continuum.

IMPROVEMENT TARGETS FOR 2017

1. Incorporate Gospel values into programming across all Key Learning Areas from K-12, including reviewing K-12 RE programs and scope and sequences
2. Continue to implement evidenced based, researched instructional practices into daily pedagogical practices
3. Implement the syllabus and a scope and sequence for Stage Six students for VET/Hospitality course
4. Strengthen and diversify options for augmented communication (visual, non-verbal, facial, signing)
5. Implement a Professional Development and Professional Review (PDPR) cycle for all teachers

RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY

Mater Dei promotes a respectful and caring environment through its focus on its motto of Peace and on the Rule of Benedict. Respect and responsibility at Mater Dei are promoted and worked toward in the following ways:

- Mater Dei has a clearly articulated set of positive behaviour guidelines that are displayed throughout the school.
- Mater Dei promotes respectful and responsible behaviour through the various awards presented at the weekly and monthly assemblies.
- The focus for all that we do is "Love of neighbour" and we regularly discuss and demonstrate the concept of neighbour at assemblies and liturgies.
- Stewardship is a strong focus area at Mater Dei and there is a particular emphasis on care and protection of our environment.

Mater Dei students are proud of their school and their country and this is demonstrated in the way they wear their school uniform and sing the National Anthem at our weekly assemblies.

SCHOOL SATISFACTION LEVELS

Mater Dei is a school that educates students with significant intellectual difficulties. This can lead to quite a stressful learning environment for students and staff. However, it continues to be the case that staff and parents rate highly their experience of Mater Dei. Equally, we are enriched by the support of a generous and caring extended community who readily and willingly engage with our community throughout the year.

Student satisfaction: In terms of student satisfaction, Mater Dei scores very highly, with students expressing great satisfaction with regard to their education and the school itself. Discussions with Year 11 & 12 students again indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the education programs, the work opportunities, community access programs and the social aspects of school life. These findings were replicated when we discussed the success of these programs with parents of graduating students.

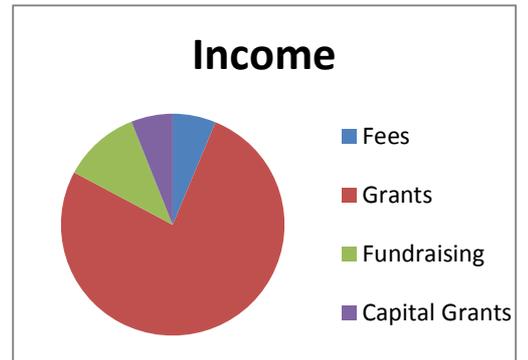
Staff Satisfaction: Mater Dei staff engage in planning meetings each year and the general view one gains is that staff are happy in their work. We work in a high stress environment and staff can often feel quite pressured when behaviours are problematic. However, our staff are a very committed and hard working group who put the students' needs before all others. In terms of the accepted indicators of work satisfaction, staff retention rates and levels of sick leave, Mater Dei has excellent retention rates and reasonably good attendance figures for work.

Financial Report for the Year Ended 31 December 2016

Income

Fees	\$ 519,593
Grants	\$6,370,589
Fundraising/Other	\$ 927,196
Capital Grants	\$ 500,492

Total **\$8,317,870**



Expenses

Employment Costs	\$5,708,468
Other Overheads	\$1,789,194

Total **\$7,497,662**

NET PROFIT **\$ 820,208**

