



SAINT HELENA'S
CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Something Beautiful for God

2020 AGM
Principal's Report

It gives me great pleasure to present the 2020 Principal's Report to the St Helena's Catholic Primary School community. It is a report built from a deep sense of pride and gratitude for all that has been accomplished in 2020.

As in previous years, this school year started with great enthusiasm and excitement. As a community we regathered to continue the great story that is St Helena's Catholic Primary School. No one could have predicted the challenges that were ahead of us.

The sudden loss of our much-loved Mrs Bannatee left us all shocked and devastated and questioning why. Simone was an integral part of the fabric of our school community and she showed us the true meaning of what it is to "do something beautiful for God" each day. She stands as an inspiration to each of us and will be forever loved and remembered.

The impact of COVID-19 was felt at every level across our school and, indeed, our world. Life as we knew it took on a new face. What was once certain and comfortable, became unpredictable and surreal. As we continue to negotiate our way through the disruptions and restrictions associated with COVID-19, we need to celebrate our coming together as the St Helena's Catholic Primary School community to support and strengthen not only our children but also one another throughout the pandemic.

During the year, we undertook a process to reclaim the values that lie at the core of our school community. Staff, students, parents and caregivers were united in their prioritising of respect, equality, community and care for the Earth as our underpinning values. These core values have been witnessed in so many ways throughout the year and are, in essence, the values that have sustained us through all the ups and downs of 2020.

The fact that we are Catholic remains a non-negotiable aspect of our existence. Being a Catholic, though, is more than just learning doctrine. It is about making our faith real in our interactions with one another and the local and wider communities. In so many ways, it is about doing and being "something beautiful for God". As a community, we have continued in 2020 to teach our children that Jesus is our role model and that, like him, we can all make a positive contribution to society, giving expression to our faith and bringing life to those around us.

St Helena's Catholic Primary School enjoys a strong relationship with our parish. Despite the parish having also experienced considerable disruption due to COVID-19, collaborative efforts with our priests, parish team and Holy Cross College have ensured our Yr 3, 4 and 6 students were able to celebrate the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Confirmation respectively in 2020. I take this opportunity to thank Fr Bona and Fr Kenneth, our Sacramental Parish Co-ordinator, Hannah Wager, parish musicians and administration staff for their support of our school this year. I also thank each of the class teachers involved in the 2020 Sacramental Program as well as the members of the Leadership Team for their work in this area. Thank you to families for your support, especially when last minute changes were needed!

Quality early childhood and primary education is the foundation of a child's journey. Every stage of education that follows relies on its success. Teachers at St Helena's seek to equip students with a clear understanding of who they are as individuals and what they can contribute to the world by developing learning and teaching programs designed to develop children's cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Students are encouraged to become self-motivated learners who can work independently, cooperatively and happily to gain all they need to be their best possible self.

At the heart of teachers' everyday practice is a focus on building relationships with each other, their students and families. Teachers recognise the significant influence they have in

creating safe and supportive learning environments to maximise the learning potential of all students and understand the importance of being explicit with their teaching and in developing students' creativity and achievement.

Implications of COVID-19 have seen us move rapidly into a new era. In 2020, each staff member at St Helena's demonstrated true professionalism as they faced the enormous task of adapting to teaching and learning in a world where educational norms as we know them were changing. Together, our staff transformed learning, almost overnight. They adapted to working and learning from home and then back at school again. They ensured that every student was provided with meaningful learning experiences that facilitated their continued growth while also supporting their wellbeing. At school, they adhered to new levels of hygiene and cleanliness. They maintained strong relationships with students, families and one another when physical distancing made things all the more difficult.

Our support and extension programs have provided differentiated learning for students across the school, including during the period of remote learning. These programs provide targeted learning opportunities for those students requiring additional learning support and those requiring challenge beyond the regular classroom learning program. St Helena's has established a positive reputation in both these spheres, and we are very proud of our Learning Support and ExACT programs.

Despite the challenges of 2020, our students learning has progressed admirably, as reflected in their work output and assessment results. Teacher generated and standardised data indicate that the impact of COVID-19 has been limited and "learning gaps" minimal in most areas.

We've learned this year that life can be challenging and as in previous years, the mental health and well-being of our students and staff remains our highest priority. We know that building resilience ensures long term success and is critical on both a personal and community level. The level of care, concern and genuine love members of the community show towards one another inspires me each day. Together, we give visible expression to Gospel values and are true witnesses of Jesus in our world.

I thank our St Helena's parents and caregivers for supporting your children and staff during the time when children were learning from home. While home learning was not without its challenges, you showed enormous commitment to working in partnership with staff to ensure our children continued to flourish. You are amazing!

Nothing that 2020 has thrown at us could stop us in our endeavours and accomplishments. To highlight just a few:

- Live streaming of several liturgies and prayer services
- Successful implementation of the first year of our 1:1 iPad program from Year 4
- Ongoing work of staff to explore, develop and implement an inquiry approach to learning and teaching
- Implementation of the Keeping Safe Curriculum across the school
- Significant success of the National Quality Standard Audit and the affirmation that was for our Early Childhood staff
- Outstanding success of the Registration Audit and external validation of the excellence of St Helena's
- Positive review of remote learning and the leveraging of feedback from the process
- Collaboration by staff to develop a charter for professional learning at St Helena's

- Implementation of the revised Religious Education Units of Work across all year levels
- Successful roll-out of the new CEWA administrative package, Administration of Schools (AoS)
- Upgrades to our playgrounds and facilities
- Successful community building and fundraising activities by the P&F, including the very successful Run for Fun Colour Explosion and Student Discos
- Regular sharing of wellbeing calendars for students, families and staff
- Approval of a Capital Development Plan for significant upgrades and additions to our current facilities
- Combined School Board Dinner with Holy Cross College
- Launch of our 2020 to 2022 Strategic Plan
- Introduction of a specialist art group for senior students
- Entry into the Angelico Art Exhibition for Catholic Schools
- Participation in a CEWA coordinated marketing campaign

In addition to the above, St Helena's has recently celebrated two very significant achievements. On 13 November, we were externally audited for our implementation of the National Quality Standard (NQS) in our early years, Pre-Kindergarten to Year 2. Our early years staff were affirmed for their outstanding practice and commitment to ensuring our students early years of schooling were of the highest standard. Positive acknowledgement was also given of the leadership shown by Victoria Rowland (Assistant Principal) in her oversight of the implementation of the NQS at St Helena's as well as the internal audit and improvement processes. I am very grateful to Victoria and our early years team for their passionate commitment to this area of our school's operation.

On 24 November, we were also externally audited for our compliance with the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools in Western Australia as well as other specific requirements of the Catholic Education Commission of WA. While an official summary of the audit is not yet available to us, early feedback is that St Helena's is executing all requirements very well and operating to a high standard. Coordination of our audit was conducted by Sascha Saulsman (Assistant Principal) and the auditor yesterday strongly affirmed Sascha's pre-audit preparation and overall coordination. I thank her most sincerely for her outstanding efforts.

I sincerely thank those parents and caregivers who completed the anonymous survey that was part of the Registration Audit process. Their responses contributed to our success and will provide us with valuable insight into areas for improvement.

As Principal, I have never been prouder than I have been in 2020. I want to state very clearly that our staff team is extraordinary. They always go above and beyond, but never more so than in 2020. I have said it many times and in many arenas, St Helena's "did" COVID-19 as well if not better than any other school, in large part due to our staff; and they did it all while balancing considerations for their own family and personal needs. We owe them a great debt of gratitude.

I especially want to acknowledge our Assistant Principals, Peter Merry, Sascha Saulsman and Victoria Rowland. Their commitment and unwavering support in 2020 have been truly remarkable. Our passage through 2020 has been made easier and smoother because of them.

Together with the School Board, we continue to work through the financial implications of COVID-19, especially in regard to financial support for our school families. Many have

experienced hardship as the result of COVID-19 and we will endeavour to provide ongoing support and relief as needed.

It is with appreciation that I thank each Board member for their efforts in planning for the growth and sustainability of our school. In these challenging financial times, the Board has worked hard to ensure that our families are fully supported and that our educational program is funded appropriately and our facilities remain up to standard. I especially acknowledge our Chair, Melinda Webb, who has given direction and focus to the work of the Board. She has also been a source of wise counsel for me on many occasions throughout the year and I thank her for that.

Throughout the year, the P&F Committee has worked tirelessly to support our school and families. I extend thanks and appreciation to the St Helena's P & F Executive for the amazing work they have undertaken in 2020 to raise funds and build community. I acknowledge the challenges thrown at them during this remarkable year and affirm them for their initiative and creativity. I also congratulate the P&F on making the final repayment towards the Nature Play loan in early January 2021.

I acknowledge all those who help our school in whatever way they can. St Helena's is very much a community school and many people help to build our community. Your generosity in assisting in a myriad of different ways has not gone unnoticed nor is it not appreciated.

In looking to 2021, I highlight the following priorities that will take our focus:

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES IN 2021

CATHOLIC IDENTITY:

- Create a new Evangelisation Plan that complements strategic directions and reflects faith formation, religious knowledge and understanding, and Christian witness across St Helena's.
- Define, enrich and embed the St Helena's core values of respect, equality, community and care for the Earth within all elements of school life.

EDUCATION:

- Explore, articulate and embed the St Helena's Vision for Learning.
- Develop a rich data culture that fosters student learning, enhances teacher capacity and builds school improvement.

COMMUNITY:

- Embed specific teaching and learning opportunities that will assist staff and students to develop an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community cultures, values and traditions.
- Establish the *BE You* program as a means to supporting the safety, wellbeing and mental health of students, staff and families.

STEWARDSHIP:

- Develop and implement a targeted marketing strategy that promotes St Helena's as a 'good school' to the local and wider community.
- Review and grow processes for communication with parents to further enhance parents' connection to the school and its community.

As we draw close to the end of the current year, we prepare to farewell many members of our community. To those families who will leave us, we wish you the very best as you journey on from St Helena's. To our departing students, my hope is that they will take our school motto with them wherever they go and that they will heed the words of St Teresa of Calcutta and do 'Something beautiful for God' every day. To our departing staff, Peter Merry, Victoria Rowland (for 2021), Rae Haywood, Kelly Fraser, Nicole Kirry, Heather MacDonald-Rudez, Maddie Ciullo, Aine Walsh (for 2021), Tegan Back, Wendy Jacques and Sonia Truini, in the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament, Ruth says to her mother-in-law, Naomi, "Wherever you go, I shall go". As you depart St Helena's, remember these words for, indeed, wherever each of you may go in the years ahead the spirit of St Helena's will go with you. This community will always be grateful to you for all you have contributed.

The road travelled this year has certainly been challenging. Without doubt, the year has seen the St Helena's Catholic Primary School community at its strongest, rallying together to carry one another through deep sadness and supporting one another to stay connected during a time of physical disconnection – a time of cancellations, postponements and restricted access to school. As Principal, I continue to be incredibly proud to lead this great school and feel so very grateful to do so alongside our wonderful students, staff, parents, caregivers and community members.

As the year draws to a close, I extend blessings to all and wish each member of this special school community a joyous, safe and holy Christmas.

Lina Bertolini
Principal