

## **Principal's Report - 2016**

*Only the brave should teach....Teaching is a vocation. It is as sacred as priesthood; as innate a desire, as inescapable as the genius which compels a great artist. If he has not the concern for humanity, the love of living creatures, the vision of the priest and the artist, he must not teach. (Pearl S. Buck)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a Catholic school, we have the rewarding task of educating the mind, body, spirit and hearts of our students. This report will focus on the faith dimension, teaching and learning and community engagement that is an integral part of what we do at St Stephen's Catholic College.

### **WHAT MAKES A GOOD SCHOOL?**

For the past ten years, our college community has devoted its energy to developing a solid foundation and strong ties with our stakeholders. It is now timely to reflect on what makes a good school and how our focus on faith formation, teaching and learning and connections with our community enhances the product we offer to students. Good schools share these characteristics:

- Care for the individual
- An inclusive nature which is multi-cultural, multi-social and multi-intellectual
- Spiritual growth experience
- Community focus
- Respected and respectful teachers
- Experience for growth through service to others

### **FAITH DIMENSION**

The presence of our very own chapel on college grounds has played a significant role this year in the faith formation of both staff and students. All teaching staff participated in a retreat at the start of the year which strengthened our Catholic identity and reinforced the holistic approach to teaching students, rather than just being teachers of particular disciplines. From a student perspective, there have been many opportunities to strengthen the relationship with God. These have included the Wednesday morning prayer session and class masses in the chapel and the Youth Rally based on the Year of Mercy. In addition, the National Evangelisation Team visit and the annual Year 12 Retreat at Genazzano have provided our students with spiritual reflection and faith formation activities. While in its infancy, the Sacramental Programme which Mrs Gilbert, the college's Assistant Principal, Religious Education has instigated, has resulted in several students taking the sacraments this year.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The core business of any school is teaching and learning. While modern, well-resourced classrooms and a beautiful environment such as the one we enjoy at St Stephen's are desirable features of any school, research has shown that the greatest impact on student learning is the quality of its teachers. This year, as part of a Diocesan initiative, we embarked on a visible learning project which aims to improve student results through a greater awareness of the importance of intensive mentoring, coaching and feedback to both teachers and students. We also participated in an external review of the college by the office of non-state schools, which provided us with an opportunity to review our practices, including how student outcomes can be improved. In 2015, the year 12 cohort achieved outstanding results. Not only did all students receive a Queensland Certificate of Education, but St Stephen's was once again in the Queensland University of Technology's Blue Group for consistently having 97% of students receiving an OP between one and fifteen. We were also the only school north of Hervey Bay to acquire this status and I would like to extend my appreciation to our teachers, the year 12 students of 2015 and their parents for the manner in which all parties worked together to achieve this great result. The other standardised test, NAPLAN, also produced above average scores, while also informing us of areas which require improvement.

As our school population grows, so do our curriculum offerings. In a rural environment such as the one we enjoy, it is important that we offer both academic and vocational pathways. In 2016, the academic curriculum has been enriched

with the extension of Music to years 9 and 10, Robotics to year 8 and the addition of the French and Italian languages at year 9 level, to Japanese. The strength of vocational education and training is evidenced in the productivity that occurs in our Trade Training Centre and the diversity of the School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships which senior students undertake.

The educational field is dynamic in nature and it is important that a school is proactive in embracing new initiatives. In preparation for the changes to the senior landscape in 2019, when students will be required to undertake three internal assessments, and one external assessment, our college is part of a trial for external assessment in Geography, as well as having internal assessments endorsed in Mathematics B and Drama. Opportunities for students to engage in multi-cultural, multi-intellectual and multi-social activities exist in the form of the chess programme, as well as competitions such as Mooting, Readers Cup, the Lions Youth of the Year and Optiminds. With the very popular, Combined Saints Band, Liturgy Band, College Choir and Jam Sessions, students are able to excel outside of the traditional classroom. While there is a plethora of recreational activities for students to enjoy at recess time, I would like to sincerely thank the devoted parents who coach our students for futsal in their free time.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

These and many other parents make up the strong St Stephen's community which has the welfare of our students as its top priority. As we encourage our students to grow through service to others, both within the college community and beyond, involvement in Anzac Day commemorations, Seniors Day, Multi-Cultural Festival, Clean-up Australia, Relay for Life and the Biggest Morning Tea provide our students with a greater awareness of the world around them. The sister school agreement which was signed with Sano Nihon Daigaku Secondary School in Sano City, Japan, in 2015 has exposed our students to another culture and the importance of forming global networks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A sense of community is one of the cornerstones of the St Stephen's Catholic College culture. Never was this more evident in term three when our college community extended its support to the family and friends of Elyse Miller-Kennedy, the year 12 student who was seriously injured in a car accident near Dimbulah and then lost her battle for life a week later. We are very appreciative of the support provided to our students and staff from the broader community. As we continue to keep Elyse's family in our thoughts and prayers, we turn to God for comfort and strength. The year 12 cohort is to be commended for the manner in which students have conducted themselves during this challenging time.

### **CONCLUSION**

The success of a school is very much influenced by the quality of its teaching staff and the support it receives from the wider school community. We are very fortunate to have hard-working, dedicated and innovative educators who challenge our students to be the best they can be. Without the support of all the staff at St Stephen's, my role would be more challenging—thank you for your faith and trust. The assistance of the College Board, the Parents and Friends Association, Catholic Education Services and the support of parents during 2016 is also greatly appreciated. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the 540 students from year 7 to year 12 who make up our college. You are the reason we are here and I am extremely proud of each one of you. You respond positively and wholeheartedly to all that we ask of you in every aspect of college life. Most importantly, to be the best you can be, requires you to embrace our values in all that you do—this is the St Stephen's way.

**Mrs Ida Pinese**  
**Principal**