



AMSSA

Australasian Mercy Secondary Schools Association

Email: msea@mercy.org.au

Web: <http://msea.mercy.org.au>

NEWSLETTER 02/07 MAY 2007

Welcome to the MSEA Newsletter.

Scroll down to find these features:

- 1. President's Report**
- 2. Letter from Mary Cook, of St Mary's College Wellington NZ asking for responses to her questionnaire (attached with this newsletter)**
- 3. Feature Article: Academic Results at St Mary's College Auckland, by Sandy Pasley**
- 4. Ninth Biennial MSEA Conference details**
- 5. Prayer for Pentecost**
- 6. World Youth Day update**
- 7. MSEA website redevelopment**
- 8. Resources**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Following the resignation of Margaret Lee from the Executive earlier this year, Jan Neumann has kindly accepted to represent Queensland on the group until the Annual General Meeting in August. Thanks to Jan for stepping into the breach. Thanks also to Margaret for all her work for Mercy education during her time at St Saviour's College Toowoomba, and for her great contribution to MSEA through her membership on the executive.

The present MSEA executive members are:

Myself, Lee-Anne Perry, President, from All Hallows School Brisbane.

Ph: (07) 3831 3100, Fax: (07) 3832 6140.

Email: perryl@allhallows.qld.edu.au Web: www.allhallows.qld.edu.au

Kitty Guerin (NSW) – Secretary/Treasurer, from OLMC Parramatta.

Ph: (02) 9683 3300, Fax: (02) 9890 1466

Email : kguerin@olmc.nsw.edu.au Web: www.olmc.nsw.edu.au

Jane Holloway (NZ) from St Catherine's College Kilburnie, Wellington
Ph: 64 4 939 8988, Fax: 64 4 939 8985
Email: janeh@stcatherinescollege.school.nz Web:
www.stcatherinescollege.school.nz

Jan Neumann, (QLD) from St Monica's College Cairns
Ph: (07) 4042 4800, Fax: (07) 4031 5087
Email: office@stmonicas.qld.edu.au Web: www.stmonicas.qld.edu.au

Sr Mary Moloney rsm (VIC), from Academy of Mary Immaculate, Fitzroy.
Ph: (03) 9419 3044, Fax: (03) 9419 3885
Email: principal@academy.vic.edu.au Web: www.academy.vic.edu.au

Christine Simpson (SA), from St Aloysius College, Adelaide.
Ph: (08) 8217 3200, Fax: (08) 8212 4908
Email: csimpson@sac.sa.edu.au Web: www.sac.sa.edu.au

Loretta Wholley (WA), from Santa Maria College, Attadale.
Ph: (08) 6330 0200, Fax: (08) 9317 2838
Email: whol@santamaria.wa.edu.au Web: www.santamaria.wa.edu.au

Our Conference in Brisbane in August promises to be stimulating and rewarding, and an opportunity to deepen our commitment and nourish our energy for the task of Mercy secondary education. You will have already received your copy of the Conference registration brochure in the mail. The brochure is also an attachment to this newsletter in case you need extra copies. Registrations need to reach the Conference Secretary by Friday July 6 2007 (Mrs Christine Carmichael, at All Hallows School, email carmichaelc@allhallows.qld.edu.au).

Lee-Anne Perry (President) perry1@allhallows.qld.edu.au

St Mary's College, Wellington

Email: principal@stmaryswellington.school.nz
Website: www.st-marys-wellington.school.nz
11 December 2007

Dear Colleague

I am the Principal of St Mary's College in Wellington, New Zealand and have been given a one term sabbatical. As part of the sabbatical I am expected to undertake some study/research. As you are well aware being the Principal of a Catholic Secondary School brings an added dimension and set of responsibilities. I am especially interested in the role of the lay principal in a religious order school as I believe that this adds a further set

of responsibilities. This is the area that I intend to research during my sabbatical.

The research will result in a report. A copy of this report will be forwarded to the Sisters of Mercy, New Zealand, Proprietors of St Mary's. The report will also be presented for publication in the magazine of the NZ Catholic Schools Board.

Attached with this newsletter is a short questionnaire which I would appreciate you completing and returning to me by email, or fax to 64 4 4 473 1244 or mail to Mary Cook, St Mary's College, Guildford Tce, Thorndon Wellington New Zealand. Individual schools and Principals will not be named in the final report. I have sent the questionnaire to New Zealand secondary principals and would like to broaden the research to include other countries.

A copy of the report will be emailed to you if your email address is sent to me with your completed questionnaire

Thank-you in anticipation.

Kind regards

Mary Cook

Principal

Direct email address mary.cook@stmaryswellington.school.nz

ACADEMIC RESULTS AT ST MARY'S COLLEGE, AUCKLAND **from Sandy Pasley, Principal principal@stmaryak.school.nz**

Background – Special Character

St Mary's College is a Catholic girl's college that was established in 1850 by the Mercy Sisters who arrived from Ireland at the request of Bishop Pompallier, the then Catholic Bishop of Auckland. The College was established on its present site in the 1860's overlooking the city and the Waitemata Harbour.

New Zealand categorises schools according to a decile rating of 1 to 10 in order to allocate funding to the neediest schools. At decile one schools students come from families who have lower income and conversely decile ten schools draw their students from more wealthy families. St Mary's is a decile five school. We have a range of students from both ends of the socio economic spectrum. This diversity in the student population provides excellent learning opportunities.

Buses arrive from all over Auckland bringing students to St. Mary's. These students come from as far south as Pukekohe and west and east and also from places like Waiheke Island. Parents tell us that they choose St Mary's

because they see our school; as traditional, having strong Catholic character and Mercy values, with good discipline, structured in approach but with modern and innovative teaching programmes.

In recent years we have seen an increase in the number of students coming from all areas of Auckland and this we attribute to the fact that parents are want a Catholic education for their daughters and also an education that will give them the opportunity to obtain excellent academic results.

The Sisters of Mercy have long had a commitment to excellence. It is our responsibility to provide an excellent education at St Mary's catering for the spiritual, intellectual, physical and social development of students so they reach their potential. We feel strongly about the right to all students to a high quality education as a means of promoting social justice. We continually look at our practice to ensure that we are improving the opportunities we have for our students regardless of the level of privilege they experience in their lives.

Culture of Learning

To improve our academic results we have focused on establishing within the College a culture of learning. We have adopted a many faceted approach to encourage this culture of learning. Teachers are involved in professional development programmes to enhance teaching and learning and are encouraged to be innovative and to try new strategies in their classrooms. Students are encouraged to achieve to their potential in class, assemblies and through promotion in newsletters. Parents' evenings are held to educate parents on how to support their student's learning. It has been interesting to see the change in attitude of the students in that learning is important to them and they have conversations about their learning when you speak to them in the playground. When considering change we always look through the lens of what is best for their learning. We continually articulate high expectations for student achievement.

Structures

Over the last few years we have worked on various changes to the structure of the school to facilitate and improve academic achievement. All students in Years 11 and 12 study seven subjects. In Year 11 students study Religious Education, English, Maths, Science and three option subjects and in Year 12 students study Religious Education, English and five other option subjects. This is unusual as in the majority of schools the average number of subjects a student would study at these levels would be six in a Catholic school and five in a state school. With the increased number of subjects, students have greater choice of options in their last year at school, Year 13. There are raised expectations in terms of student workload and students have risen to the challenge and been very successful in taking on the extra subject. In the last five years the roll at St Mary's has nearly doubled, this has given the school the opportunity to offer more subjects and greater opportunity for students to multi level. Flexibility has allowed students to study subjects at different levels if it's appropriate for their learning.

Classroom teachers have adopted consistent approaches to lessons. All teachers have the following format on the board for consistency, a 'do now' which is an activity for the students to do when they come into the room, learning objectives are outlined on the board, homework clearly defined on the board and a plenary is given at the end of the lesson to recap on what the lesson has been about or to introduce what will happen in the following lesson. Simple structures such as these provide security and consistency within the classroom. Time is used efficiently.

Academic Programme

The curriculum that is taught at St Mary's has been enhanced by a number of initiatives over the last few years. The College has been lucky enough to have had an ICT contract from the Ministry of Education in New Zealand. This ran over three years finishing in 2006 and the money granted was spent on professional development of teachers. This had very positive spin-offs in the classroom where ICT is being used to enhance teaching and learning. As part of this contract we were also able to establish an intranet within the school and this has seen a more ready access to information for both students and parents. Other initiatives in literacy and numeracy have up skilled the staff in different learning strategies to enhance academic achievement. Two years ago the school also instigated a creative and critical thinking programme under the umbrella of Art Clusters 'Habits of Mind'. Students are explicitly taught thinking strategies and this has enhanced quality of student work. More recently the school has won a contract (Extending High Standards Across Schools) to be the lead school with two other local state schools to implement a consistent approach to information literacy in the three schools. This allows us to combine our ICT, literacy strategies and thinking skills in the one initiative.

Pastoral Care

It is important that along with our higher expectations of student achievement to have a supportive pastoral care system. The pastoral care system is critical to our success. We have established a learning support department that currently tests students on entry to the College and identifies students with learning needs. Learning needs identified may be at both ends of the spectrum, both gifted students and students who have learning difficulties. All students are very closely monitored by the learning support department, with special programmes put in place to improve their achievement. The deans of the year levels closely monitor the students in their year level that are in danger of not achieving. Students regularly meet with the dean, set goals and those goals are monitored closely throughout the year. Deans write regularly to parents informing on progress to date and students who fail to achieve are picked up and communication occurs with the parents and strategies put in place to prevent it happening again. We have six weekly monitoring of students. This means besides our normal written reports home to parents three times a year, every six weeks parents are alerted formally by letter of any student whose progress is causing concern. The students who achieve highly in external examinations are rewarded with top scholar badges at academic assemblies. Top scholar badges are well sought after in the

school and provide an incentive for students who are able to achieve at the highest levels. Teachers are encouraged to recognise differences in student abilities and to cater for these differences with differentiated learning programmes.

Music Programme

St Mary's has a unique music programme. Every student in Year 7, 8 and 9 learns a musical instrument. This is a compulsory part of the curriculum. There is great correlation between learning music at a young age and academic success. At the University of Auckland in the research centre for cognitive neuroscience they have discovered that in the brains of most people the transfer from right brain to left brain is faster than from left to right. In people with musical training transfer was equal in both directions.

Their conclusion is that early musical training may result in more balanced brain activity and perhaps better usage of resources across the whole brain. This research is in line with findings in a Californian study, music students in a high school in California were shown to have a much high grade point average than non musicians of similar IQ. There is no doubt that learning is an instrument has superb benefits, socially and intellectually.

Conclusion

The progress the school has made in improving academic achievement is seen in the percentage of students gaining University Entrance. It is very difficult to point specifically to one or two things that have made a difference to the academic achievement of students at St Mary's in the last few years. It is the impact of many initiatives, the cohesive team work among teachers, parents and students, that have all worked together to promote improvement in achievement. In 2004 43.3% of St Mary's College students gained University Entrance against a national average of 41.5%. The percentage of students gaining University Entrance at St Mary's for 2006 was 81.9% against a National Average of 48.5% and an average for decile 10 schools of 62.1%.

The key to improving achievement is the appointment of staff who share our vision and who believe in the importance of a values based education. Our staff are significant role models for students and notwithstanding all of the innovation, professional development and structural changes, we know that unless their motivation is grounded in a belief in upholding and developing the dignity of each young person in their care that we will never fulfil our original and everlasting mission.

The vision we have is that our students will leave St Mary's College empowered with an excellent education, so as to take their place in society to work in the Mercy tradition of social justice and compassion for others.

Sandy Pasley, Principal principal@stmaryak.school.nz

Our theme: "MERCY IN ACTION"

Catherine McAuley could have been insulated and isolated against the miserable poverty of Dublin. Instead she recognized the call of the Spirit, and accepted it with a grateful love and a willingness to put it at the service of others. As recipient of God's mercy, she saw herself as a steward. Gifts were gifts for others. Direct and practical in her response, she went out into the gutter and garret to teach, to soothe and to shelter. She had discovered that her charism, her gift for others, was mercy, a charism to the cutting edge of brokenness and imbalance.

From **Tender Courage: A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine McAuley, First Sister of Mercy**, by Isabelle Keiss rsm and Joanna Regan rsm, p.47

Our Hope

...is that each participant will leave the conference with renewed energy and commitment to the dimension of the work of educators which lies in the fostering of the spirit of compassion for the most poor; with deeper understanding about what this means for us today, with renewed strategies as to how this might be done locally and in wider forums; and with stronger networks with other likeminded educators.

Who will be there

The conference will draw over 100 delegates from across Australia and New Zealand. About half the MSEA members are in schools for girls only and half in co-educational schools (the latter typically the result of an amalgamation of a girls' school run by the Sisters and a boys' school run by the Brothers some 30 years ago). Some schools are in the cities and others are in rural areas. Some schools are large; others are small. In addition to the conference delegates, the entire teaching and support staff of All Hallows' School, which is hosting the conference, will join us on the Thursday.

Registering

The registration brochure has been mailed to you. Be sure to return your registration ASAP. There is an extra copy of the brochure attached to this newsletter.

Registrations need to reach the Conference Secretary by Friday July 6 2007 (Mrs Christine Carmichael, at All Hallows School, email carmichaelc@allhallows.qld.edu.au).

PRAYER FOR PENTECOST

O God, we believe that in the bursting forth of your spirit the face of the earth is renewed. As we prepare for the Feast of Pentecost, help us to recognize the working of the Spirit among us so that we may be open to transformation. May we use our gifts for the empowerment of others. We ask this in the name of Jesus whose promises never fail. Amen.

(Adapted from Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy)

WORLD YOUTH DAY

Thanks to those who have expressed interest in joining in the Mercy Gathering which we hope to hold at Monte San' Angelo on Monday July 14. Planning for our part in WYD at this stage hinges on the applications for funding which the Mercy Congregations around Australia have submitted to Catholic Church Insurances.

Kitty Guerin, our MSEA Executive member, attends the WYD Education committee meetings on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy, and will report to MSEA during our conference in Brisbane, at the AGM.

By that time we may be in a better position to begin some preparation.

In the meantime, it is important for you to be watching the WYD website: www.wyd2008.org.

- **Your group needs to register through the site**
- Check out prices for the three registration packages
- There is price discounting for some overseas pilgrims

MSEA WEBSITE REDEVELOPMENT

The MSEA website is about to be rebuilt after over ten years of use. The homepage will feature a flash animation made up of some eight to ten images representing the member schools from each Australian state and the New Zealand schools. Thank you to all the schools who sent photos in to Frances. The MSEA Executive members have made a selection from your photos so that they are representative of the Australian and New Zealand areas where we have MSEA member schools, and these photos will be used on the site.

The new home page will still have bookmarks as at present, but all the material will be brought up to date. Under "Schools List" there will be an alphabetical list of schools for each Australian State and for New Zealand. The list will give the school name and its web address only, so the visitor to our website can connect to yours and access up-to-date information and contact details about you from your own site.

The MSEA newsletters, which we have been publishing since 2005, will be archived on the website. Another feature of the website will be links to the Mercy websites where the most material on Catherine McAuley and on the Sisters of Mercy past and present can be found.

RESOURCES

DVD Circle of Mercy

A reflection on the works of the Sisters of Mercy throughout the world based on Jeannette Goglia's song Circle of Mercy, and produced to support **Mercy and Justice Shall Meet**. Available from Fraynetwork. Email contact@fraynetwork.com.au

The Little Book of Catherine of Dublin

In 1978 an Irish postage stamp featured Catherine McAuley (1778-1841). In 1994 her portrait was printed on the Irish five-pound note. The two milestones honour publicly a woman whose love and care for the poor inspires many thousands of Mercy Sisters and their associates to undertake works of mercy in all parts of the globe. The quotations in The Little Book, compiled by Don Mullan, provide a profound insight into the thinking and spirituality of this remarkable woman, thus offering the reader food for thought and substance for prayerful reflection.

Sisters of Mercy purchase The Little Book at a special price of €3.00. Mercy ministries may sell the book as a Mercy fundraiser. Recommended retail price €4.00. Price: 3.00Euro

Available from Mercy International Association
71 Senior House,
All Hallows College Grace Park Road,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9, Ireland
Phone/Fax: +353 1 8844443
E-mail: miaexec@eircom.net

USA orders (\$3.50 includes post and package)

Sister Deirdre Mullan rsm,
Mercy Global Concern
777 United Nations Plaza
6-H New York NY 10017
Ph: +1 646 227 1878
Fax: +1 646 227 1879
email: mercyun@aol.com