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30<sup>th</sup> August 2024

## **Response to Government Inquiry into Discrimination and Bullying in Tasmanian Schools**

*This submission addresses the particular areas of (b) and (d) of the terms of reference:  
(b) inquire into and report upon the measures necessary to prevent and remedy discrimination and bullying in Tasmanian schools in regard to students and staff;  
(d) examine and recommend what efforts are being made and should be made towards meeting those obligations by Tasmanian schools in regard to students and staff.*

Star of the Sea Catholic College is a small, Kinder to Year 10 Catholic school in George Town. We have around 180 students. Our school is a first choice for some, and a last chance for others. A large proportion of our students have spent time at other schools before coming to Star of the Sea Catholic College, both in George Town and outside of George Town. For example, out of our current Year 10 cohort of 14 students, just two have been at our school since Kindergarten. This reflects the transient nature of George Town and the attraction of our school.

Bullying is a word which we use very sparingly around Star of the Sea. There are two reasons for this:

1. It is a very misunderstood term, with parents/carers and students using it to cover a wide range of behaviours;
2. In the true sense of the word, we have very little bullying.

Our school is a safe place for students because we have built, and need to continually build, a culture of being welcome. Because families come to us having had a wide range of experiences in schools, it is important for us to model being welcoming and to teach the students what this looks like.

We always welcome families who seek the education we provide. Families give different reasons for wanting to come to Star of the Sea. However, having listened to the various

reasons over the years, it usually comes down to families wanting children to feel safe and to feel like they belong. In a small school, where not much escapes us, we can provide this.

Students are informed that if they are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school, they need to speak to a teacher and we will do something about it. We then make sure we have good processes in place so we can follow things through, along with good communication channels with parents/carers.

We welcome families from the margins. We have an ICSEA value of 946 with 52% of our students in the bottom quarter. We have fee relief for parents/carers, and we say that, if you really want your children to be at Star of the Sea Catholic College, we won't let fees be a blocker for that occurring. So we have families paying a range of fees, from full fees to almost nothing.

We believe that student well-being comes from being accepted and welcomed and from experiencing success in learning. All of our education programs are aimed at these goals. Specifically, we try to ensure all of our students with disabilities are included in all classes, and for those who are disengaged with school we run alternative programs to attempt to keep them engaged.

The messages we give around God, religion and spirituality is that everyone is loved by God, no matter what. However the other important message is that we shouldn't be focussed on ourselves but on others. We look for our students to have opportunities to serve the community (e.g through supporting St Vincent de Paul with their Dining With Friends program) and, when behaviour is not what we would expect, the conversations with the students are around how their behaviour has affected others. We keep referring to the spirituality and story of Nano Nagle (the founder of the Presentation Sisters, who started Star of the Sea Catholic College) and how her life was about serving others, not about herself. It is an effort in building empathy for students, as part of negative behaviour towards others comes from a lack of empathy.

We support pastoral care in our school by having good communication channels between staff and students, and staff and parents/carers. Students know they have the option of speaking with an adult should things not be going well, and we try to find opportunities to listen to the voice of the students. The school "belongs" to the students, not to the staff, so we look for ways to encourage them to have a say in what goes on.

Creating an environment where students feel safe and welcomed is achieved by building a welcoming culture, and by having good, clear processes for when things don't go as they should. This is what we continually aim for.



Richard Chapman  
**Principal**