



Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School

26 August 2024

Response to State Government Inquiry into bullying and discrimination in Tasmanian Schools

Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School is a Kindergarten to Grade 6 school in Deloraine that educates 92 students.

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

"It is a small community where everyone is included and everyone looks out for each other".
- (parent)

Our Lady of Mercy is a safe place for students because our processes are proactive and reviewed regularly. These reviews happen at all levels of the school - leadership, pastoral care team, class teacher, and support staff level. There is an expectation that we are all here for students and families and that all staff are encouraged to be proactive in their thinking and actions in support of this.

We welcome families who seek the education we provide. Our documentation: website, advertising materials and information packs, openly state that we welcome **all** families in the Meander Valley region who wish to attend our Catholic school. On enrolment, parents/guardians are informed that we are a Catholic school and their children will be exposed to our faith, our teachings and practices. We expect parents/guardians to respect our traditions and beliefs, as we will respect theirs.

"The teachers at my school are really heartfull, care for us and really help". (student)

We have zero tolerance for bullying. Our school expectations: We are safe, We are thoughtful, We are Learners, are non negotiables. At the start of every term classes and their teachers do a school walk where our behaviour expectations in every area of the school are explicitly taught and reviewed. A weekly focus is promoted through staff briefings, classrooms and school assemblies. Infringements are recorded and correct behaviours explicitly retaught. Parents/guardians are also notified of major infringements. Behaviour data collected is reviewed termly and more frequently if required. Adjustments are put in place to support and improve behaviours of children. Eg. in 2020 we reviewed whole school data. We made the decision to have two lunch breaks of the same length. This resulted in fewer behaviour incidents in the playground as games went on. Our data tracking means that this change remains to this day. Tier three students have explicit behaviour plans that are non negotiable for everyone in the school. They are followed with a strict adherence.

We teach and upskill everyone in the school including other students, teacher assistants, staff and parents/guardians. Our expectations around these children are clear, and all in the school are held accountable. We have achieved great success through this methodology. We have a student watch list which is discussed at weekly staff meetings for any students we may have any concerns about in terms of pastoral, wellbeing, behaviour etc.

I feel safe at school because....

“There are plans and controls if someone comes to hurt us”. -(student)

We are a diverse community that welcomes families from the margins.

Within our school population:

3% English as a second language background

14% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

33% of families are on Healthcare Cards and attract automatic fee reductions

42% of our children are on the NCCD count - 8% Substantial, 29% Supplementary, 6% Quality Differentiated Programs

“Students are always kind and accepting of other kids' differences”. - (parent)

We provide fee assistance for families in genuine need, by promoting and requesting, at enrolment, concession/health care cards, so that fee reductions are automatic. We are proactive in asking if parents/guardians need support - liaising and linking families with Deloraine House and St Vincent de Paul in Deloraine to assist with food, clothing, housing items etc. We know our families well, and fill out forms for those who struggle with literacy. Our office staff support families if they have difficulties accessing documentation electronically, and will provide hard copies or make phone calls to any families who need support. There are 12 families that the office staff provide significant support to, so they can keep abreast of school happenings and ensure that children do not miss out. This includes hard copies of information, phone calls, filling in forms etc. The school also provides breakfast club two mornings a week, new pieces of uniform (through an annual \$500 Mercy grant) to families who cannot afford new uniforms. Second hand uniforms are provided at \$5 per piece to families and many pieces are given free.

“I am incredibly happy with the staff and the support we have received”. - (parent)

Our religion classes teach everyone about God's plan for our happiness and the importance of every person. The statistics of our school community indicate that we welcome families of all faiths and backgrounds:

19% Catholics

19% Other Christian faiths

3% Other major world religions

59% Not stated / no religious affiliation

We actively support pastoral care in our school through a variety of well researched and evidenced based programs. These are actively used according to the situational needs of individuals, groups, classes or even school wide needs as reflected by behaviour (PBS) data tracking and teacher observations. These include,

but are not limited to, class programs run weekly by teachers who have been trained in Peaceful Classrooms and Circle Time. Our Wellbeing Officer is trained and facilitates Peaceful Kids. This is conducted termly via small groups across the school (as per students identified from classroom teachers). We also have a Rainbows program, specifically designed for children experiencing grief and loss. We facilitate two groups per year, a lower primary and upper primary group. Rhythm to Recovery is our newest program as is facilitated by our Well Being Officer. We provide lunchtime activities for students, specifically targeting those who need support making and keeping friends, interest groups, developing social skills such as being a good loser. We have 38% of staff in the school who have completed and support a trauma-aware approach to teaching and learning.

We offer and promote peer supported activities within the school to develop understanding between all students and continue to build community. These include daily PE run by senior students. Our Mercy Crew (senior volunteer group) organise fundraising activities across the school and assist with Breakfast Club two mornings a week. We offer and promote regular peer support/ buddy class activities co-ordinated by classroom teachers.

“I feel like my children are safe here. If there has ever been an issue I have been notified immediately “ - (parent)

As a school, we believe that we are committed to educating the whole student (intellectually, physically, morally, and spiritually) at Our Lady of Mercy, in what are challenging circumstances. Our attitude and approach is that we enrol, not only the student, but the whole family. In this manner we are partners in the journey of the students in our care at any time. We have regular review mechanisms in place that allow us to be reflective, to learn, to grow and to improve, ensuring the needs of our students are first and foremost.

I feel happy at school because....

People look out for you.

I have friends and I am appreciated.

My teacher and my friends make me happy.

- (student responses)



Mary Bennett
Principal
Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School, Deloraine
olom.catholic.tas.edu.au
Ph 03 63 622 323