



# Mater Dei School



## ANNUAL REPORT

2008



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#### INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

##### ◆ VISION STATEMENT

Our vision at Mater Dei School is to create a multi dimensional, family centred organisation that focuses on the education of students with mild to moderate intellectual disability, to maximize their potential for participation in their communities.

##### ◆ SCHOOL PROFILE

The Sisters of the Good Samaritan established Mater Dei in 1910 as an orphanage and school for the poor and disadvantaged of inner city Sydney. In 1957, the Catholic Bishop of Wollongong, Bishop Thomas McCabe, approached the sisters to commence a school for girls with intellectual disability. For over fifty years Mater Dei has been educating students with mild to moderate intellectual disability in the tradition of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan and we have much to thank the sisters for in this wonderful ministry.

Mater Dei is a co-educational school offering programs of study for students ranging from 5 years old through to 18. Programs offered include a School Starters Transition to School Program, a primary program, a junior secondary program, and a senior secondary program. Throughout their secondary schooling, students have the opportunity to attain both the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate (Life Skills), take part in the Mater Dei Structured Work Placement Program, undertake the Business Services Course (VET) and be part of the Mater Dei/ John Therry Satellite Class.

Mater Dei School has a fine reputation as an educational facility that offers high quality education and services for all students. The underpinning philosophy for all that we do is "Inclusion for All" and at Mater Dei each of our programs is aimed at developing the skills and competencies that will allow our students to take their rightful place in their communities.

##### ◆ MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD – Mr. Rob Burns

##### **The Rule of St Benedict 53.1**

*"All guests who arrive should be received as Christ"*

The Mater Dei school community has grown in 2008 with student enrolments increasing to 134 and increased staff numbers. However, this has not diminished in any way the close community that is Mater Dei. It has been wonderful to see so many parents attending the end of year assemblies, Masses & Liturgies and all of the exciting events that happen at Mater Dei during the school year. More and more parents are experiencing some 'Mater Dei Magic' when they come to these celebrations. The way the staff and students conduct themselves during these events is inspiring and gives new meaning to the words "all guests who arrive should be received as Christ".

The Board has worked very hard this year planning for the redevelopment of the Mater Dei site and working with the Wollongong Diocese as they discuss and plan for a Secondary school on the Mater Dei Property. The generosity of time and energy from the Directors is much appreciated as together with the CEO/Principal, Leadership Team and staff, we lay the foundations for a new and revitalised Mater Dei. We hope that this project will provide a learning environment where classes are conducted in purpose built and innovatively designed buildings constructed in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive way.

There are currently 9 directors on the Mater Dei Board after the resignation of Theresa Testoni who has served the Mater Dei Board for many years. Theresa brought great experience in business and community development to the Board and she shared this knowledge and experience very generously. She will be greatly missed and on behalf of my fellow Board members I acknowledge Theresa's wonderful contribution and thank her for her many years of service to Mater Dei.

This is my third year as Chair and during 2008 I have met regularly with the CEO/Principal to provide support, plan our meetings and review the progress of our organisation. I am continually impressed by the professionalism of the staff and the great work that they do with and on behalf of the students and families in their care.

**The Year's Highlights include:**

- ❖ Continuing discussions with the Diocese of Wollongong regarding the possibility of a Diocesan Catholic Secondary School being established on the site
- ❖ Development of a vision for the redevelopment of the Mater Dei School Buildings.
- ❖ A very successful Foundation Dinner, Golf Day and Race Day.
- ❖ A truly memorable World Youth Day liturgy and procession.

Finally, would like to thank the Sisters of the Good Samaritan for the privilege of serving on the Board and to thank the staff, the families and the many supporters who work so hard to assist those in most need, children with intellectual disabilities. I look forward to reporting on the progress of our new project throughout the course of the 2009 school year.

Robert Burns

Chair of the Mater Dei Board

## Principal's Message

Mater Dei has had a very exciting and very productive year as we continue to work with the Wollongong Diocese to investigate the possibility of locating a diocesan secondary school on the Mater Dei site. We have also been working with the board to assess the future needs of Mater Dei School and how best to meet these needs. This has resulted in a year of planning and consultation with educators, architects and funding bodies to move this project forward and to provide clarity and direction on the possibilities for Mater Dei. Highlights of this year included the arrival of the World Youth Day Cross and Icon on the Mater Dei property, another wonderful Foundation Dinner, the trial of a secondary model of education for our older students, the establishment of staff working parties in the areas of ICT, Healthy Lifestyles, Positive Culture and Educational Innovation and increased inclusion opportunities for our students in local schools and in the community.

The students again worked very hard throughout the 2008 school year and attained very pleasing outcomes. Highlights of the year included the purchase of 33 new laptop computers as a result of the Commonwealth Government's Computers in Schools Program, increased subject offerings for our secondary school students, the establishment of a very productive veggie garden, the continuation of MultiLit throughout the school, the ongoing success of the multi age literacy and numeracy groups for students in our primary and secondary programs and the very successful inclusion programs and social skills programs that our students participated in throughout the year.

The staff of Mater Dei has worked very hard this year and they continue to provide excellent education for the students in their care. The educational outcomes achieved by our students were excellent, with students making excellent progress in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, social development and personal care. The staff has embraced the development of new facilities and they are working hard to make sure that the students needs are considered in any new development. The response by staff to the working parties has been outstanding and they have contributed greatly to the initial stages of planning for the new school and for the Mater Dei redevelopment. We look forward to their continued contribution as we move forward to the design and implementation stages of our planning. The staff are again to be congratulated for the great work that they do and for the care and attention they provide to the students of Mater Dei. They do an outstanding job and they deserve recognition and congratulations for their effort.

Mater Dei has a wonderful board of Directors who are dedicated to supporting the staff of Mater Dei in achieving the best outcomes possible for our students. They give very generously of their time and their expertise and we all benefit from their great contribution. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all members of our board and particularly our Chair, Mr Rob Burns, for the work that they do for and on behalf of the students of Mater Dei. We are blessed to have such people on our board and we greatly appreciate their contribution.

Finally I would like to thank and acknowledge our wonderful parents who really are an inspiration to the staff and supporters of Mater Dei. Their energy, their enthusiasm and their advocacy on behalf of their children is almost beyond comprehension. The parents of our school are tremendously motivating to our school community as they provide the support, the inspiration and the hard work required to gain the best outcomes for their children. The kindness they show, the acknowledgement and appreciation they demonstrate and the lengths that they are prepared to go to in achieving even the smallest of successes for their children is a great example to us all. The 2008 school year has been a time of great challenge and significant change at Mater Dei and we look forward to continuing to pursue our vision of 'inclusion for all' as we work to provide new and exciting opportunities for our students.

**STUDENT DATA****Mater Dei's Student Population for 2008 was 134**

Kindergarten	15
Year One	9
Year Two	3
Year Three	8
Year Four	12
Year Five	10
Year Six	12

Year Seven	13
Year Eight	8
Year Nine	7
Year Ten	10
Year Eleven	13
Year Twelve	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>

In the 2008 school year, there were eleven class groups, matching as much as possible student's chronological age and ability level to form ability groups that best met student needs. The average class size in 2008 was 11, with classes containing higher ability students having slightly higher numbers and classes in which students needed higher levels of support containing fewer students. Each class was allocated a teaching assistant for the majority of the day, with the lower ability classes having a teacher assistant for the entire day.

**Student attendance** in 2008 was 91%. This is a positive figure considering the complex medical needs and physical capacities of a number of our students. We believe these figures indicate enthusiasm and a joy for learning as students are very positive with regard to school attendance.

**Student retention rates** at Mater Dei are excellent with very little student turnover. The retention figure for students moving from Year Ten to Years Eleven and Twelve is 100%, again indicating high satisfaction with our programs.

All programs of study offered at Mater Dei are based on the Board of Studies mandated courses and are modified to meet the individual needs of students. At Mater Dei each student has an Individual Education Program (IEP) and an Individual Service Plan (ISP) or an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). It is essential that parents and students are a part of all education plans and that they are involved in the education process as equal partners to ensure the best outcomes for all students.

Mater Dei has a satellite class in partnership with the Wollongong Catholic Education Office. This class is located at John Therry Catholic High School for 3 days per week and Mater Dei campus for 2 days per week. It is hoped that by providing students with access to a mainstream campus we can increase opportunities for participation and inclusion with regular students and regular classes.

Inclusion is a very important aspect of the education program at Mater Dei. Students are involved in Inclusive Schooling programs, Community Access Programs and Leisure and Life Skills Programs. Students in Years 11 and 12 are involved in our Work Placement Program, providing students with access to work opportunities in both open and supported employment situations.

**Post School Destinations** Mater Dei students all qualify for Post School Programs in either Community Participation or Transition to Work. Generally all students take up the option of Post School Programs unless paid work is an option. In 2008, 100% of graduates undertook Post School Programs.

## TEACHING STAFF

In 2008, Mater Dei employed 12 F/T teachers and 5 P/T teachers (16.4 FTE) and the equivalent of 10.6 FTE teacher assistants. The majority of the Mater Dei teaching staff has 4 year training and a number of staff are working toward postgraduate qualifications in Special Education.

Teacher qualifications fall into 1 of 3 categories for all teaching staff responsible for delivering the curriculum.

1. Teacher qualifications from a higher education institution from within Australia or as recognised by AEI-NOOSR \*  
(100%)
2. Have qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution from within Australia within AEI-NOOSR \* guidelines but lack formal teacher qualifications.  
(0%)
3. Do not have qualifications as above but have relevant successful teaching experience or appropriate knowledge relevant to the teaching context.  
(0%)

\*Australian Education Institution – National Office of Overseas Skill Recognition

### Teacher Attendance & Retention Rates

The average Teacher Attendance rate in 2008 was 92% and the average Teacher Retention Rate was 100%.

## LEARNING AND TEACHING

The students and teachers of Mater Dei work consistently to improve outcomes and provide a stimulating and challenging learning environment. Student progress in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy was reviewed throughout 2008 and much work was done to improve outcomes. Students were placed in multi age ability groups for part of each day and the excellent work that had been undertaken in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy in 2007 was continued. At the beginning of 2007 we introduced the MultiLit program in a number of grades and this has been a successful initiative for all students involved. We have also continued to work in the areas of nutrition and physical education, with ongoing work taking place on student fitness levels and healthy eating habits. We are delighted with the improvements shown by our students in the areas of social skill development, personal care and independent living skills. It is in these areas that we make a real difference in the lives of our students and in the support of our families.

Mater Dei students in the appropriate age categories for NAPLAN testing were exempt due to their level of cognitive disability. In an attempt to quantify student progress in the literacy and numeracy areas using an objective measure, Mater Dei will continue to explore relevant mechanisms for assessing literacy and numeracy outcomes that are meaningful for families and provide a positive direction for further skill development and future planning to meet each student's individual needs.

## **Learning and Teaching cont.**

The analysis of collected data showed that 92% of priority outcomes from ISP and ITP's were achieved, with significant progress again measured in the areas of literacy, personal hygiene, personal care and social development. We continue to be delighted by the effort that children make in skills development and their determination to succeed in all areas of education. We will continue to work closely with families to further develop the potential of each of our students, particularly in the areas of literacy, numeracy and personal development.

Throughout the course of the 2008 school year, Mater Dei staff continued to review program formats, analyse and update scope and sequence charts and focus on further development of appropriate assessment strategies. The staff continues to be involved in professional development activities in Behaviour Management, OHS, Child Protection, designing Individual Education Plans and in reviewing the various disabilities and syndromes of our students. The Mater Dei staff members have also developed their own Professional Development Plans, with staff undertaking training in areas that will increase expertise and further enhance the learning and teaching taking place at Mater Dei. Mater Dei staff have also spent time reflecting on their mission as Christian educators and on how they build living faith communities in their classrooms.

A highlight of our year for staff was the Mater Dei Special Education Conference held in November. This conference focused on the areas of Behaviour management and Autism. The conference attracted over 200 delegates from across NSW and provided opportunities for staff to attend lectures by high quality national and international speakers and to participate in workshops conducted by excellent educators in their field. This was an excellent professional development for the staff of Mater Dei and a wonderful opportunity for our school to showcase the work that we do in the field of special education.

## **Significant Programs and Initiatives**

### **Aboriginal Education**

Mater Dei has a number of indigenous students enrolled and every effort is made to create an environment that is inclusive and respectful of cultural heritage for all students and their families. Every class undertakes study in Aboriginal culture and history, with students creating art works, cooking 'bush tucker' and gaining an appreciation of Aboriginal music and dance through various school programs and cultural visits. As a school for students with intellectual disability, we have a community that is accepting of all cultures and our students proudly embrace all aspects of our Aboriginal as well as our European history.

### **Multicultural Education**

Mater Dei has a strong focus on Multicultural Education with a Multicultural Day being held every year as a culmination activity of the units studied as part of the multicultural programs in place. Students are genuinely interested in other cultures and this is evident in our cooking programs, our art works and in the literature studied in our classrooms. The diverse mix of cultures that make up our school population provides a rich source of knowledge and a valuable resource, with parents contributing to our programs by supporting staff with resources, information and assisting in the organisation of our special celebrations.

### **Vocational Education Program**

Students with special needs can access Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses under the NSW Board of Studies guidelines. Individual Transition plans are used to identify students who are interested and able to do VET courses.

In 2008, 4 students in Year 12 and 8 students in Year 11 enrolled in the VET Business Services Course offered at Mater Dei School. The teacher used strategies to ensure understanding of course content and mastery of skills such as giving the student's additional time to learn, allowing hands-on learning to occur, explicitly teaching organisation and self-help strategies and adjusting the worksheets. In 2008, 2 students in Year 12 were accredited with Certificate II.

There is a mandatory work placement of 70 hours over the two years. Mater Dei School and Macarthur Workplace Learning Program (MWLP) have worked collaboratively to coordinate work placements. All students completed the mandatory hours of work placement in 2008, with 1 of these students gaining part time employment at the site of their work placement.

### **SCHOOL POLICIES:**

In 2008, Mater Dei further refined policy statements in the key areas of education, administration, welfare and safety. Policies reviewed throughout 2008 included; Behaviour Management, Enrolment, Child Protection, Bullying and Harassment and Responsible Use of Email and Internet. We also reviewed our Orientation Programs and we continue to update our Staff Handbook. Policies are developed and then forwarded to the Mater Dei Board for comment and adoption. All policies are available from Mater Dei and may be accessed by contacting the school.

Policies are regularly reviewed with staff to ensure that all staff members are aware of their rights and obligations. There are also opportunities for staff discussion around policies and procedures to ensure that policies are still relevant and procedures are still appropriate. O.H.S. is a very important issue at Mater Dei and this is an area that a great deal of work has been done over the course of the last six years. In an effort to keep all members of the Mater Dei community safe, regular meetings of the O.H.S. committee are conducted to review accidents and injuries, to conduct risk assessments and to raise concerns with regard to the safety of our practises, environment and plant.

### **CATHOLIC IDENTITY**

The staff and students of Mater Dei are part of a community of faith with a very long and proud tradition. As a Catholic School, we follow the teachings of the Catholic Church and endeavour to live out the values inherent in the Gospels. We are very closely aligned to the principles and charism of the Good Samaritan Order. It is from this foundation that our ministry to the poor, the marginalised and the disadvantaged has its basis. We are very much committed to working with families and children who have an intellectual disability and supporting them in ways that reflect the teachings and the actions of Jesus.

Students at Mater Dei have formal religion lessons each week. They also have opportunities for formal and individual prayer and reflection each day. Liturgies and school masses are a part of our school routine and we assist parents in preparing children for the sacraments as part of our mission in sharing our faith. The liturgical ceremonies that are part of life at Mater Dei are occasions of great celebration and enthusiastic prayer. Our students are most respectful and reverent in our chapel and the faith that we teach is an important part of life for students of Mater Dei and their families.

## PASTORAL CARE

Mater Dei has a strong commitment to pastoral care and this commitment extends to our students, their families and our staff. An essential part of our pastoral work as a school community is to treat people with dignity and compassion. Therefore, we promote very actively the rights and the responsibilities of all members of the Mater Dei community. In 2008 Mater Dei was very fortunate to gain the services of Sr Jeanie Heininger to work as a school chaplain for 3 days each week. Jeanie has worked with students and families to build resilience and provide pastoral support across a variety of settings. The Nurturing Independence Program developed and presented by Jeanie was an outstanding success and provides parents with an opportunity to explore issues of grief, faith and the future possibilities for their children. Sr Jeanie has been a great gift to Mater Dei and we look forward to Jeanie working further with students and families in areas of need.

Our students are the focus of all that we do at Mater Dei and their interests are placed before any other administrative or logistical consideration. We have a positive approach to behaviour management that provides students with a safe and secure environment in which they are able to be themselves and to face challenges and make mistakes. Our approach is very much based on actively acknowledging positive behaviours and treating negative behaviours by offering 'good choices' or ignoring the behaviour. This provides students with opportunities to gain positive attention and removes the opportunity for students to gain negative attention. In cases where behaviour becomes an issue, staff and parents work together to formulate individual behaviour management plans that are collaborative and consider all aspects of a child's life situation and disability. We have found this positive and cooperative approach to be both successful and inclusive as it focuses on all areas of a child's life and builds positive partnerships between school and home.

Mater Dei works to build positive relationships with families and to care for them as much as is possible. We provide child and family counselling as part of our service, we organise in-service opportunities for families and we take an active interest in ensuring that families have the advice and support required to negotiate often difficult life situations. Mater Dei also provides opportunities for families to network and we attempt to foster on-going connections with our organisation through our work with the Mater Dei Ex Students Reunions. Mater Dei links and brings families into contact with various community services and supports them in negotiating what can be difficult or confusing situations with both government and non government agencies. We recognise that caring for and educating a child or children with disabilities is a tremendous emotional and financial strain and we endeavour to do all that we can in supporting families in this very difficult work.

The staff of Mater Dei is its greatest asset and as such we recognise the need to care for and nurture our staff. In an effort to support our staff we have an Employee Assistance Scheme (EAP) to provide support and counselling in times of stress or crisis. All staff and their families have access to this program and we actively encourage staff to take advantage of this service as needed. Mater Dei staff work very closely in ensuring that the needs of students and families are met as effectively as we can, however, we are aware that staff can often become quite emotionally fatigued in this environment. In an effort to care for staff, Mater Dei has an on-going commitment to provide opportunities for staff care through professional development days that focus on nurturing staff and providing opportunities for self care. It is hoped that by maintaining a healthy staff we will be able to provide the best outcomes for our students.

## **STUDENT WELFARE AND DISCIPLINE**

Mater Dei is a place of peace, belonging, respect, justice, hope and celebration. Our values are based on the dignity of the whole person and through living out these values we provide witness to Gospel values as a way of living out daily life.

Our values are captured in many of our policies and procedures. We have a Behaviour Management Policy in place at Mater Dei that is based on this values system and very much reflects our focus on human dignity and compassion. Our approach to pastoral care and safety is reflected in the Mater Dei Staff Handbook, the Mater Dei Code of Conduct and the Mater Dei O.H.S policies, giving witness and structure to our commitment to the welfare and safety of our students.

Mater Dei has a member of the school executive whose designation is that of Religious Education and Student Welfare Coordinator. This person's role is to work with parents and students to ensure that the rights of students and families is respected, that welfare matters are dealt with confidentially and sensitively, and to act as a bridge between families and the school in matters where sensitivity and compassion are required.

The staff of Mater Dei is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all students. They are further committed to providing support and assistance to families and care givers in any areas that they can be of assistance. The staff is supported by the Mater Dei Board in this commitment and this is very much at the centre of the Board's agenda in providing each student at Mater Dei with opportunities to achieve their full potential and to take their rightful place in their communities.

## **ENROLMENT POLICY**

Mater Dei is a co-educational K-12 Special School, catering for students with a mild to moderate intellectual disability. While Mater Dei is a Catholic School, our enrolment policy is inclusive of all students regardless of religious orientation or culture. Our enrolment policy is non denominational in nature and our criteria is that students must have a diagnosed intellectual disability falling in the mild to moderate range.

Before a place is offered at Mater Dei, there is a process of consultation, interview and visits to current educational settings in order to determine whether Mater Dei is the most appropriate educational placement. If a placement is offered and accepted, a period of transition is organised and students and parents are provided with a thorough orientation to Mater Dei.

## **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

Mater Dei School is committed to a safe and supportive environment that is characterised by fairness, mutual trust, and reconciliation. Parents and caregivers, or indeed any member of our community who has a complaint or grievance, has the right to have this issue addressed.

Mater Dei has a comprehensive Complaints Handling Policy and an accompanying brochure that provides an outline of the process and a mechanism for making complaints or airing grievances in a safe and confidential manner. Copies of the Mater Dei Complaints Handling Brochure are available at the Mater Dei reception desk or may be posted to parents or carers on request

It is a commitment of the Mater Dei Board to provide a learning and pastoral environment that promotes the dignity and development of each individual in a fair and just manner. To this end, the Chair of the Mater Dei Board, Mr Rob Burns can be contacted directly to work through issues of concern or situations in which conflict may arise.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Mater Dei has a number of partnerships with community groups throughout the Macarthur region. Mater Dei works closely with local schools, providing inclusive schooling opportunities for our students and visits to Mater Dei for students in mainstream schools. The benefit to Mater Dei students and students from mainstream schools is the provision of opportunities for sharing of experiences, building relationships and fostering partnerships in a supported and nurturing environment.

Mater Dei has a partnership with the Wollongong Catholic Education Office and John Therry Catholic High School, Rosemeadow, resulting in the Stage 6 Mater Dei Satellite Class. This class is a joint venture between John Therry High School and Mater Dei in the provision of a Stage 6 program for students that provides opportunities for an inclusive education and the expertise and networks of the Mater Dei community. This program is structured in a way that allows the students to attend school on the John Therry campus three days per week and the Mater Dei campus two days per week. During their time at John Therry students are provided with access to a diverse range of academic and social opportunities available only on a mainstream campus. While at Mater Dei, students are able to take part in the Mater Dei Work Placement Program, the Business Studies VET Course and various community access opportunities.

Mater Dei also has a partnership with St Clare's Primary School Narellan, St John's Primary School Campbelltown and St Paul's School Camden, with students working on a mainstream class one day per week. As a result of this program we have seen our students grow in self esteem and confidence and we are very happy to further develop this relationship. Mater Dei began to work with Magdalene Catholic High School in Narellan in 2007, with students from Years 11/12 joining their peers in Magdalene High for creative and practical arts sessions. The Magdalene students were wonderful mentors and friends for the students of Mater Dei and this program will continue throughout 2008.

Mater Dei has excellent relationships with our local community and this has allowed the Mater Dei Work Placement Program to flourish. Students in Years 11&12 are provided with opportunities to undertake a work placement one day per week as part of their regular school program. The opportunity to work in a safe and well-supervised environment allows students to gain on the job training. It also allows students to learn the social skills that are a vital part of the workplace. This program also provides Mater Dei with the opportunity to build understanding and educate our community on the talents and capacities of Mater Dei students.

## **PARENTS AND FRIENDS**

Mater Dei has a small but active Parents and Friends Association that provides support and assistance to Mater Dei School. Through the running of our Annual Country Fair, assistance with our Easter fundraiser and assistance with the Mater Dei Christmas Cards, our parents play a vital role in building community at Mater Dei. A number of wonderful initiatives were undertaken by our parents in 2008, with the Mater Dei tuckshop opening one day per week and our Mother's Day and Father's Day stalls being organised.

The Mater Dei P&F does much more than raise funds. Its most important work is in providing a network of support and advice for new families and families who may be suffering hardship or difficulty. Through the hosting of information evenings, organising guest speakers and simply sharing wisdom, the Mater Dei P&F provides a vital source of support and information for the Mater Dei community.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Mater Dei has spent the 2008 school year undertaking a process of reflection on our future and the place that we hold in the education community generally. This year we have spent a great deal of time reviewing the possibilities for the future and we have targeted the areas of school structure, inclusion opportunities, health and fitness and ICT as areas for development. If the new Diocesan Secondary school is to become a reality, we have the responsibility of preparing our students for the opportunities that this innovation may offer. It is for this reason that we have developed a model of schooling for our secondary students that better reflects life in a mainstream secondary school, we have committed to providing laptops for our students with the support of government and private funding, and we have consulted widely with parents to ascertain their hopes and aspirations for their children during their time at Mater Dei. We have had a challenging year in 2008 as we try to identify strategic directions for our school and we believe 2009 will also be a time of great challenge and great opportunity.

## PROGRESS ON 2008 TARGETS

### Target 1.

*The introduction of a secondary school structure for students in the Mater Dei Secondary School to provide a more authentic experience of secondary education and to build confidence in dealing with a range of teachers.*

Our achievements included:

- The development of a model and the implementation of a six period day for students from Years 7 – 12
- The introduction of a greater range of subjects for students and the fuller utilisation of secondary teachers' skills teaching in the subject areas they were trained in.
- The opportunity for students to work with a range of teachers and develop social networks beyond their own classroom.
- Greater satisfaction levels enjoyed by students, parents and teachers as evidenced by a small research project to investigate the effectiveness of the new model.

### Target 2.

*A strong focus on ICT and its use in the special education environment. This will involve planning, budgeting for hardware and software, staff PD and the development of a three year implementation and renewal plan.*

Our achievements included:

- The formation of an ICT Working Party and the development of a three year plan.
- The purchase of laptops, laptop banks, a portable and a fixed interactive whiteboard.
- A comprehensive PD plan has been undertaken by staff that was begun in 2008 and will continue throughout 2009. This has involved the introduction of guest speakers, interest groups and whole staff PD sessions.
- The budgeting for staff laptops in the 2009 budget as well as the budgeting for a fibre optic connection to the school site.
- The purchase of appropriate software and its installation on students and staff laptops.

### Target 3.

*A continuing focus on health and fitness at Mater Dei to provide students with the opportunity to develop their own fitness, learn about appropriate eating habits and gain positive education in the areas of nutrition and personal hygiene.*

Our achievements included:

- The continuation of a program to test the health and fitness of all Mater Dei students and the implementation of strategies aimed at improving health outcomes through regular exercise and

education in nutrition for students, residential staff and families.

- A commitment to continue this program in order to monitor the on-going benefits to students of education and testing in this area.
- The establishment of a Healthy Lifestyles Working Party to evaluate outcomes in this area.
- The first Mater Dei Walkathon was held and was an outstanding success.
- The distribution of a healthy lifestyles newsletter informing parents of healthy initiatives at school and health tips for home.

#### **Target 4.**

*A major review of facilities and the development of a project plan to commence a major refurbishment program on the Mater Dei site.*

Our achievements included:

- An extensive process of review of current facilities and the planning of a significant renovation of the Mater Dei site by staff and board.
- Working closely with the Diocese of Wollongong investigating the possibility of a mainstream secondary school being constructed in close proximity to Mater Dei.
- The contracting of a concept architect to work with the staff and the board in the design of a new campus for Mater Dei and the refurbishment of the secondary school.
- The formation of joint venture committee with the Diocese of Wollongong to work on the architectural and educational framework of the new secondary school and the formation of an educational innovations committee to investigate possible designs for a new school for Mater Dei.

### **IMPROVEMENT TARGETS FOR 2009**

Improvement targets for 2009 include:

- The planning and funding applications for the development of a new school campus at Mater Dei will be undertaken and lodged in the 2009 school year, with the building of a new campus to be commenced in 2010.
- An on-going focus on the area of ICT will be a high priority, with staff being issued with laptops, extensive PD being undertaken and the use of technology in the classrooms being a high priority.
- A continued focus on healthy lifestyles, with education programs focusing on nutrition, physical activity and making safe and healthy choices in the school and the community.
- To focus on literacy and numeracy as key areas for development in the 2009 school year.

### **RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Mater Dei promotes a respectful and caring environment through its focus on its motto of Peace and on the Rule of Benedict. Respect and responsibility at Mater Dei are promoted and worked toward in the following ways:

- Mater Dei has a clearly articulated set of positive behaviour guidelines that are displayed throughout the school.
- Mater Dei promotes respectful and responsible behaviour through the various awards presented at the weekly and monthly assemblies.
- The focus for all that we do is ‘Love of neighbour’ and we regularly discuss and demonstrate the concept of neighbour at assemblies and liturgies.
- Stewardship is a strong focus area at Mater Dei and there is a particular emphasis on care and protection of our environment.
- Mater Dei students are proud of their school and their country and this is demonstrated in the way they wear their school uniform and sing the National Anthem at our weekly assemblies.

## SCHOOL SATISFACTION LEVELS

Mater Dei is a special school that educates students with significant intellectual difficulties. This can lead to quite a stressful learning environment for students and staff. However, it would seem that Mater Dei scores very highly on the issue of satisfaction in terms of student, parent and staff experience.

**Student satisfaction:** In terms of student satisfaction, Mater Dei scores very highly, with students expressing great satisfaction with regard to their education and the school itself. Interviews with Year 11 & 12 students indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the education programs, the work opportunities, community access programs and the social aspects of school life. We are currently in the process of following up ex students to gain an insight into whether the skills gained at Mater Dei have been of assistance in life after school.

**Parent Satisfaction:** Parent questionnaires have been distributed to measure parent satisfaction with our academic programs and our social skills programs. The feedback has been very positive with over 90% of respondents expressing high or very high satisfaction ratings with the education programs in place at Mater Dei. One area that emerged as an issue was that of communication, particularly in families where children had little or no capacity to share their experiences of school in the home. This issue has been addressed through the use of email and regular diary communication.

A second parent survey addressed the area of satisfaction with our social skills programs. Parents rated this as a very high priority, and in most cases, the highest priority in the education of their child. The satisfaction rating in this area was very high with all parents who responded expressing their great satisfaction and thanks for the education offered in this area.

Parent surveys were also undertaken in the areas of inclusion and the future development of Mater Dei. The response by parents was overwhelmingly positive, with high levels of satisfaction being expressed and excellent recommendations made. A parent forum was held to feed back responses and to discuss future directions and this was also a positive experience.

**Staff Satisfaction:** Mater Dei staff undertake appraisals each year and the general view one gains from reading appraisals is that staff are generally happy in their work. We work in a high stress environment and staff can often feel quite pressured when behaviours are problematic. However, our staff are a very committed and hard working group who put the students needs before all others. In terms of the accepted indicators of work satisfaction, staff retention rates and levels of sick leave, Mater Dei has excellent retention rates and reasonably good attendance figures for work.

Throughout the course of 2008, staff have met with the CEO/Principal to discuss their perceptions of life at Mater Dei and how we can improve the education programs, communication with families, internal communication and the work environment in which we work.

**FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2008**

Mater Dei remains significantly dependent upon government funding with 76% of total revenue coming from recurrent funding. Fees generated from students makes up 7% of the total revenue. The remaining 17% of income is derived from fundraising and other activities.

Government grants and fees can cover our basic services however our children need much more than these basic services. It is only with the generous and significant support of our community that we are able to provide the services that our children really need.

Our employment costs at almost 70% are our biggest ticket item however I marvel at just how wonderful a job our staff do. They do not regard their position at Mater Dei as a job but rather it is their mission and their dedication to the School and the children is extraordinary.

Our accounts did run at a small loss this year due to unbudgeted expenses being incurred on the redevelopment of the School. Nearly all of these expenses will be reimbursed this year so our financial position is very stable and it is in keeping with our goal to spend responsibly as much money as we can on our kids each year. We do not try to make money, we try to make a difference and we know we do.

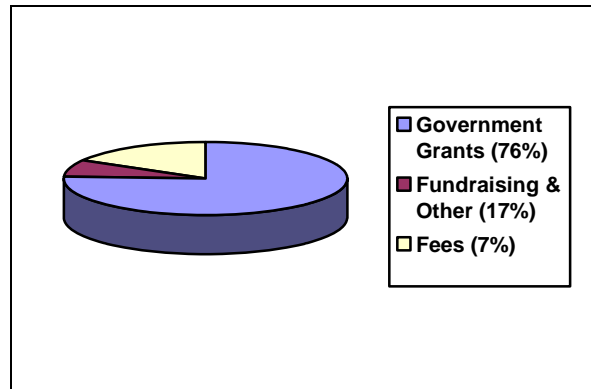
So thanks to my tireless committee of Anne Lauder, Frank Pitt and Daniel Kutcha and thanks also to all the wonderful supporters of Mater Dei as without you our dreams could never come true.

John Adam Chairman Audit & Finance Committee

**INCOME & EXPENDITURE  
FOR YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER  
2008**

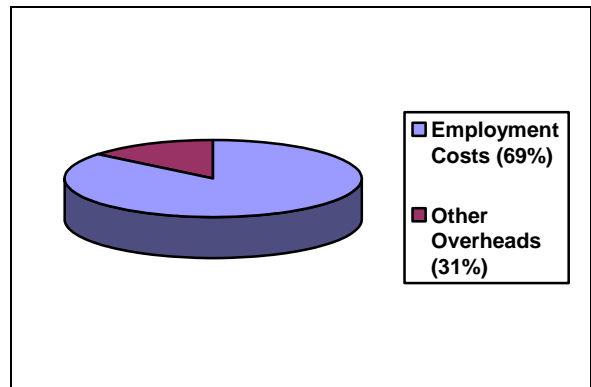
**Recurrent Income**

Government Grants	3,558,671
Fees	345,894
Fundraising/Other	788,234
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 4,692,799</b>



**Recurrent Expenses**

Employment Costs	3,318,424
Other Overheads	1,475,613
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 4,794,037</b>



FRANK PITT  
**Mater Dei**  
CEO/Principal