

A *final* WORD FROM OUR CEO/PRINCIPAL

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our final Mater Dei Matters for 2009. Since our last edition we have held our Multi-cultural Day, prepared for and held our Country Fair and Ex-students reunion, held some very special assemblies including our End of Year Assembly, held our end of year mass and celebrated the success of our 2009 Peace Prize winner, Shae Smith (*pictured right*). We have hosted visitors from other schools, celebrated International Day of People with a Disability, launched our new movie (see below), held our Annual Cocktail Party and commenced the redevelopment of our school. We have also farewelled our Year 12's, a kinder student who has successfully transitioned to a mainstream school, and staff members Ann Earle, Janelle Barlow and Helen McDonald.

As you may be aware, I too will leave Mater Dei at the end of the year to take up the position of Principal at St Mary's Star of the Sea College in Wollongong. As I reflect on my time at Mater Dei, I can very clearly remember my first day as CEO/Principal. This memory is dominated by the long drive down, what I thought was, the most beautiful driveway, to a little school that educated children with disabilities. I now realise how naïve I was on that first day on a number of levels. I came to realise that the real beauty of Mater Dei is not in the physical surrounds,

though they are beautiful, rather it is in the children who attend Mater Dei. Their beauty may not be immediately evident, however, one has only to spend a little time with them to realise that their beauty goes well beyond physical attractiveness. It is a beauty of heart and spirit.

I will be forever touched by this beauty and the many lessons that the children of Mater Dei have taught me. These include the value of accepting people just as they are regardless of their appearance, abilities or challenges. I have learned that life is not always fair; however, the most productive path is simply to get on with life and make the best of what you have. Our children have taught me the gift of humility, as one must earn their respect, it doesn't come with the title of Principal or anything else for that matter. This requires patience, a capacity to 'go with the flow' and the ability to laugh at yourself on occasion, because at Mater Dei there is often no other choice.

I have been taught the true meaning of unconditional love by the parents of Mater Dei and they are the people who really 'walk the talk'. Our parents have every reason to complain, to give up or to simply say that this job is too hard, and yet they never do. They simply love their kids and they fight daily to provide them with the same opportunities and benefits that the rest of us take for granted.



Our parents ask only for acceptance of their children and a little understanding on occasion. They are doing the best that they can under really difficult circumstances and they need to be acclaimed and applauded for their efforts.

The Mater Dei experience is one that will stay with me for a lifetime. It is the most enriching professional development opportunity that anyone could wish to have. Yet, it is so much more; it is the privilege of sharing in the triumphs and sorrows of children and families who take the smallest of steps as major victories. It is working with a staff who are committed to the children in their care in ways that I have never encountered in any other school, and it is about a wider community of businesses and individuals that offer their support willingly and generously. I feel very blessed to have been a part of this community and I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to be a part of this very rich tradition.

Yours sincerely

Frank Pitt