

Marvellous moments in the life of a CEO/Principal



As this is the final edition of Matters with Frank Pitt, we asked him to share some of the “marvellous moments” he has experienced in his 9 years at Mater Dei.

I have spoken of the importance of a sense of humour at Mater Dei as it really does make life so much easier if you can simply see the funny side of a situation.

A New Nickname

I often find myself in a position of being disciplinarian at Mater Dei and many of my funniest moments have been in the midst of one of these very serious sessions. I acquired the nickname “Curly” during just such a session. A young chap who had been creating havoc for a few days straight found himself in my office for a serious conversation. However, the situation rapidly deteriorated into a farce when after a serious blast from the Principal the young man replied ‘Okay Curly’. Anyone who has seen me knows that I am far from curly and if I ever have had curls, they departed with the rest of my hair many years ago. Needless to say, I could not contain a smile that developed into a fit of laughter and the discipline session was over.

My Mater Dei Nemesis

I like to think that I have a very good relationship with each and every student and, generally speaking, I can pretty much get them to respond positively in most situations. However, I do have one student who definitely has my measure and I usually resort to an honourable retreat when problems arise. This young lady has a wonderful nature and can be a real sweet heart and I do believe that she is genuinely quite fond of me. It’s just that

she expresses this fondness in ways that tend to find me short of an adequate response. She will try to attract my attention by throwing sticks or dirt generally in my direction. She may also come up and make a few interesting gestures, share her thoughts with me in language generally unsuitable for the playground, and then take off. This leaves me with the choice of ignoring the behaviour (the sensible approach in these circumstances) or chasing after the culprit and bringing her to justice. Unfortunately, I often go with option 2 and in every circumstance I find myself calling for back-up and being rescued by one of our female members of staff. I have left the school for important meetings covered in dust, endlessly chased my nemesis around the playground in a suit immediately before functions, and generally lost the battle of wits and my dignity. I believe the score sits at about young lady 27, Frank nil.

The Triple O Routine

At Mater Dei we do a wonderful job of teaching life skills to our students and, generally speaking, such skills are of great benefit. We have, however, found ourselves caught in hilarious situations as a result of such skills being used at inappropriate times or in inappropriate ways. We have had phone calls from Camden Police after emergency calls were made by students because someone was ‘being mean to them’ or ‘because they were frightened by the noise a student was making’. I am sure that such phone calls have also been made because students have been a



little bored and they wanted to break the monotony of the school day. The following incident seems to have been just such a case.

I received a call one afternoon from a parent informing me that her son had not handed his mobile phone into the office on arrival at school. When I offered to check with our receptionist she assured me that there was no need. She had been contacted by her elderly Italian mother who was in a very distressed state as a number of police constables were at her door responding to what seemed to be a very violent event. Not only was “Nonna” distressed, but so were her elderly friends who had arrived for afternoon tea. After a quick investigation it was found that the young man in question did indeed have his phone on him and he had made three 000 calls.

It would seem that the young man had taken his phone out into the playground and while fiddling with it had dialled 000. Our playground can be a very noisy place and one could be forgiven if one did think violence was being enacted. Apparently the operator asked for instructions and the young man panicked and hung up. However, the temptation was too great and he rang the number again. The response was the same and he quickly hung up again. It was the third phone call that really clinched it for the operator as she could hear screaming, panting and what sounded like pushing and shoving. The young man was playing with his phone in the middle of a unisex soccer game and so all is explainable after the event. It was a simple step for the operator to trace the phone to his home, where “Nonna” also lives, and a visit from the local police was the result!

