

# A WORD FROM OUR CEO/PRINCIPAL

Welcome to this final edition of *Matters* for 2010. Perhaps it is a measure of how busy life is, certainly at Mater Dei, that this final edition has come around so quickly.

In the October Journal of the Australian Institute on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (Interaction), Richard Bruggemann writes of the struggle faced by many parents of children with intellectual disability against *systems* that relentlessly grind away at their aspirations for their children and steer them towards pre-ordained pathways that better accommodate process than they do people; *“there is the risk that many issues in the lives of people with intellectual disability will be defined more by the professionals than by the individuals and families themselves, and more in terms of services required than around the aspirations of the person..... Unfortunately, over the years, I have met hundreds of families so subjugated by the system that their dreams for their sons and daughters no longer exist and who have been taught to see only the solutions that the system wants them to see”*. Most poignantly, he describes the importance of *hope* as an empowering principle in the lives of families of children with intellectual disability. How true! And what a worthy aspiration for all of us who live and work with the students and families at Mater Dei.

But for everyone, the capacity to dream, to imagine and to hope is important in sustaining us in our daily lives. Joan Chittister O.S.B. puts it this way; *“The dream is everything you can imagine about your own life and then, little by little, set out to make real. A person who does nothing to reimagine his or her own life is a person who has given up on life halfway through it”*. Part of our responsibility at Mater Dei is to do what we can to sustain our community in such a way that we nurture their dreams.

For me, 2010 has been somewhat of a whirlwind experience. There are so many dimensions to life at Mater Dei that it seems impossible to be adequately prepared for the challenges of each. Ironically however, it is the nature of these challenges that is the source of energy for the work. It is impossible not to be captivated by the students, not to be inspired by the parents and staff and not to be overwhelmed by the extent of the generosity of spirit and support from an extraordinarily large group of friends of Mater Dei. This is a blessed community. And while it would be unrealistic to suggest that every day at Mater Dei is a *good* day, it is true, for me at least, that every day at Mater Dei I learn something; about myself, about disability, about community, about priorities and about the presence of God in a very tangible way in

the relationships that permeate our community.

The busy-ness of the year has been thoroughly and adequately captured in this and other editions of *Matters*. My focus and that of our staff remains the future and how best we discharge our obligation to provide the best possible learning opportunities for students across our various programs. We look forward to occupying our new school in 2011, itself a manifestation of the vision of our Board and previous CEO/Principal Frank Pitt, as well as the good will and generosity of so many supporters, all of who will be appropriately acknowledged at an official opening in 2011. I continue to encourage our staff to have high expectations of themselves and of our students and to be innovative and creative in the delivery of their programs. We at least have that responsibility, primarily to our students and their families, but also to the very many friends of Mater Dei who continue to be so generous in their interest and support.

Thank you to all members of our community for all that you have done and invested in Mater Dei throughout 2010. I hope you enjoy the peace of the Christmas season and I look forward to continuing to build our community with you throughout 2011.

**Tony Fitzgerald**